SHAPING THEIR LIVES:
ACCOMMODATING CAREER AND MOTHERHOOD

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

Although women all function within the same societal constraints, they find their own paths and shape their own lives. This research explores the experiences of eight managerial or professional women who are mothers of young children and whose stories attest to women’s abilities to take the many components of their lives and manipulate them in response to the seasons of their lives. In challenging the status quo, the examples of such women provide us with a vision for a future in which women and men could live in a more equitable society, with the constraints of gendered roles slackened.

In order to increase our understanding of the choices the women make and how their lives unfold, I have used a life history approach. The research is located in a social constructivist perspective and situated within a feminist framework. Data for the research were gathered through twenty-one in-depth loosely structured interviews with the eight participants. From the transcribed material, I created profiles of each of the women and then engaged in a thematic analysis. I categorized the data under the broad themes of early influences, women’s career choices, their marital partnership, motherhood, the dilemmas they face, and accommodating work and family life. In the presentation, the stories of the individual women weave through the themes so that the reader has some insight into the phenomenological experience of each of the women at home and at work. Broader implications are explored in the context of existing theory and counseling implications are discussed.
The women were both career and family salient and so they looked creatively for ways in which they could actualize career goals as well as nurturing their children. In seeking to accommodate roles that have traditionally been discrete orientations in our culture, they have challenged stereotypes and created scripts that are based on their own realities.
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There were times when I wondered if I would reach the point of writing this page. My thesis explores what it means to be a mother and a career woman. It looks at how women have to adapt to the many changing circumstances of their lives. I have lived the discontinuities that are typical of women's experience. My thesis has had to take its place among the myriad other demands on my time. It has been my companion for nearly five years. It has often been a difficult companion, challenging me on many fronts and at times overwhelming me. I have learned to rely on some very special support.

I would first like to express my most sincere thanks to the eight women who participated in my study. Thank you for giving so generously of your time. Thank you for sharing your personal and professional experiences and insights. You made this thesis possible and I feel privileged to have known you.

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My academic career has spanned a period of twelve years from the time when I first entered university as a mature undergraduate student. It is possible that I would never have gone beyond my undergraduate degree had it not been for the encouragement of Dr. John Lavery, Professor Emeritus, Brock University. He helped to develop my academic thinking and he opened my mind to possibilities of reaching further in my academic pursuits. He has been my mentor and my friend through the years.

My family remains central in my life. They have supported me through my journey of establishing a career of my own. I have watched my three children become responsible and successful adults through this period. They have always been interested in their Mum’s progress through school and Jeremy. Tim and Suzy you are great human beings and I am so proud of you.

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in an era of changing gender roles in North America and with those changes come uncertainties but also opportunities for moving towards a more equitable society. Our changing gender roles mean that individuals are faced with simultaneously being “producers of goods and services and caretakers of children” (Moen, 1989, p. 3). Our lives are full of ambiguities as concepts of what it means to be a family and a parent are being questioned. Mothers who are employed are caught between the still predominant image of the ever-giving mother (Bassin, Honey, & Kaplan, 1994) and the image of the professional woman fulfilling her potential in the work place. The superwoman who could successfully combine home and job was extolled, but this did not represent the reality of women’s experience (Hochschild, 1989). Bateson (1989) provides a different image, that of women who craft their lives. She conceptualizes women as manipulating the many components of their lives in response to changing situations and conflicting elements, so that their lives evolve and take shape.

There is a tendency in our society to hearken back nostalgically to the times of traditional gendered roles when mother was idealized as caring for home and family. I have fragmented memories of my own childhood in the late forties and fifties. I remember my mother looking worn and harassed, not because she was employed outside the home, but because she spent so much effort in trying to maintain a model home and model children. She would reminisce about other times when she worked amongst powerful men and played an important role in a large shipping company. She frequently uttered the phrase, “Next time I come to this world it will be as a man,” hardly the words of a woman who was happy in her domestic roles. We frequently hear about the
depression and anxiety that women of that era experienced (Barnet & Rivers, 1996), yet there is still a call to return to the family values of the fifties. Today’s women are trying to show us a different way and a different set of family values as they challenge the conventional wisdom of yesterday. We need to listen to their voices.

It was this desire to hear the voices of today’s women that prompted me to use the opportunity of a doctoral dissertation to explore how they shape their lives as they seek ways of accommodating and balancing career and family. I have a personal interest in that my life too is evolving in an untraditional way. In my fifties, I am pursuing a career that I did not even know existed when I was considering the narrow range of options open to me forty years ago. I sometimes wonder if my quest to pursue a different career at this stage in my life is foolish, but at the same time I am aware of my good fortune in having this opportunity to do what I have wanted to do for a long time. When I went back to university, I also had three children and a home to care for. There are no role models, but as I strive to find my niche in life I am not alone. Women everywhere are seeking to shape their lives, adjusting and adapting to their changing circumstances. Their lived experience is rich in the information it can provide about what really happens in their lives and the lives of their families. We have much to learn from the attempts of others to achieve the difficult balance between family life and work.

As women’s and men’s roles become more similar, there is an image of men and women working side by side, both in the workplace and in the home (Gilbert, Hallett, & Eldridge, 1994). The relationship would be “characterized by role-sharing and mutuality and by an interdependency that is free from the constraints of gender” (p. 136). Women would actualize their possibilities in a career as well as sharing in the nurturing of
children. Clearly, there is a gap between this image and reality. Today, we are situated between the past and the future, between the frustrations of our mothers and extravagant hopes for the future. Women of today are searching for a path between the two. They are experimenting with different life styles, but with the gender role constraints of the past that as yet can not be discounted.

I am choosing to work with women for whom career is salient. Women have always been in the work force, but have almost always been in either low income jobs or jobs that have capitalized on their nurturing, caring, and helping qualities; occupations that parallel their family functions. Nowadays, many women have moved beyond traditional occupations to ones that tap into their capabilities and which provide opportunities for achievement and developing potential. These women have worked hard to get where they are, and so they have more at stake in their careers than women who are working because they need a job. For this reason, I have chosen to work with women who are currently engaged in professional or managerial jobs and are mothers who have or have recently had young children.

Maternity is the time in the life course when divisions between men and women are most marked. For women who seek to achieve in their careers, childbirth is an interruption that immediately places them at a disadvantage to their male counterparts. It is also a time when they incorporate a new aspect into their identity, profoundly changing the way they see the world. As a person who was not particularly fond of children, I was not ready for the strength of feeling that my own small baby evoked in me, and the desire I felt to do the best I could for the child. In a society that continues to dichotemize work and family. I wanted to know how women, whose career is important to them and who
also want to play a meaningful role in their children's lives, integrate these two important aspects.

Although there is a trend towards more egalitarian attitudes in North America (Twenge, 1997), there is still significant support for the traditional division of labour between men and women (Moen, 1989). Women are the ones who tend to juggle their work and family obligations and so it would seem to be harder for them to perform optimally in both roles. The lack of agreement about gender roles has slowed down the adoption of institutional supports for working parents. Furthermore, there is resistance to altering the structure of professional work to accommodate women and men who wish to be involved in family work (Gilbert et al., 1994). It is against this kind of resistance that women in particular are pressing to make changes. It is not unusual for men who have wives and young children to achieve senior levels in their occupation, yet the same is not true for women. The playing field is not level. It is at this intersection in our history, when change is taking place in gender roles and our understanding of what it means to be a family, that my study is located.

To understand how women shape their lives, a life history perspective guides this study. This orientation allows us to focus on how lives are shaped by the contexts and contingencies of life. We can follow people's occupational careers and parenting careers as they unfold. Feminist perspectives and purposes inform the methodology. The feminist goal of making life more equitable for women underlies the study and the concluding recommendations will therefore have this goal in mind.

The study focuses on the lives of eight women who hold professional or managerial positions and are mothers. Over a period of two years, I spoke in-depth with
the women on two or three occasions and in total, I conducted twenty-one two-hour interviews. I chose these particular women because they were all interesting people. I was impressed by their openness as they told their stories. These are stories of lives that are in progress, capturing a particular segment of the life. The stories are about current struggles and achievements that the women are going through at a particular time, and also about their reflections on their lives. There are similarities because they are all mothers in paid employment but there are differences because they are very different people. In resonating with aspects of people's stories as they touch on our own experiences, we may find meaning and belonging in our own lives. Hearing about how others cope in similar situations enlarges our own repertoire of coping.

In organizing this dissertation, I have divided it into two parts. The first part consists of the literature context and the methodology (Chapters 1 and 2), and the second part is devoted to the findings and analysis of the study (Chapters 3-8).

In the first chapter, I will explore the various bodies of literature as they apply to the study. The literature provides a context and a frame for the study and it raises theoretical issues against which the findings from the study can be evaluated. The second chapter is the methodology chapter. This chapter details the perspective of the study as well as the process. Issues of ethics, validity, and subjectivity will be discussed, and the chapter will conclude with a profile of each of the eight participants in the study.

Chapters 3 to 8 present the findings from the study that will be introduced at the beginning of the second part of the dissertation. Each of these chapters represents a broad theme that will be developed through the chapter under sub-themes. Through these themes, the stories of the women unfold both through the words of the women themselves
and through my narrative. Each chapter will conclude with some reflective comments that constitute a second level of analysis. The purpose for this is to highlight elements from the chapter that help to answer the question of how professional and managerial women shape their lives when they have children.
PART 1

THE RESEARCH PROCESS
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to situate my research topic in a theoretical context. My intention is not to confine my study within a narrow theoretical framework (Richardson, 1993), but rather to open up the various bodies of literature as they relate to the complexities of women’s lives and help us to understand factors that contribute to how career women shape their lives. The reality of work and love being intertwined in the everyday lives of women has been acknowledged in the literature on women’s career development (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995). Understanding some of the social and psychological forces that influence women as they seek ways of balancing work and family provides a backcloth for my study.

In this chapter, I will first explore ways in which the vocational literature addresses the work and family interface in terms of women’s career development. I will highlight some of the limitations and values of existing theories in addressing the realities of women’s lives. I will then turn to the broad societal structures that affect women as they try to make choices around career and family. Next, I examine the workplace culture and its limitations in accommodating women. I will then address the issue of the multiplicity of women’s roles with their intrinsic conflicts and women’s attempts to achieve balance. In the last section, I will explore the resources that women need to help facilitate the work and family balance and will finish this chapter with some concluding comments regarding situating my research. Because this research is embedded in feminist philosophy, there will be an emphasis on the sociocultural aspects that affect women’s choices.
THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO WOMEN'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Research on women's world of work, according to Fitzgerald et al. (1995) in their comprehensive review of the literature on women's career development, "represents arguably the most active and vibrant area of research and theory in all vocational psychology" (p. 67). Snyder (1994) points out that research on the career development of women is relatively new since, until recently, career roles have been considered secondary by most women; career theory mostly assumes a male norm of professional development against which women are compared. The diversity of topics in the field and the attempts to integrate a variety of theories reflects the complexity of women's career behaviour and creates problems in establishing a sense of coherence in the research. Other writers share this impression, for example, Hackett, Lent, and Greenhaus (1991) in their summary of advances in vocational theory and research state:

The volume and diversity of research, coupled with the tendency of the studies to be divorced from theory, create a situation in which it is difficult to integrate findings across studies, thereby impeding the accumulation of a coherent knowledge base. (p. 13)

Historically, vocational research has been embedded in theoretical formulations such as person-environment fit approaches, developmental approaches, and social learning approaches (Fitzgerald et al., 1995), none of which alone adequately explains women's career behaviour, but each of which has some merit. As Hackett (1997) summarizes, "[T]heories of women's career development are, at best, in their early adolescence. and researchers are still grappling with measurement problems" (p. 186). It would seem, as stated by O'Brien and Fassinger (1993), that "[A]lthough women and
men may share commonalities with regard to career development, the career process for women remains inherently more complex than that of men” (p. 456). Theorists and researchers frequently echo this sentiment.

Although women’s work role has been demonstrated to be important in terms of fulfilling potential and life satisfaction, family roles also tend to be salient in their lives. Therefore, the interface between women’s work and family roles is generally more of an issue for women than for men. One of the problems is that historically these two roles have been perceived as dichotomous (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). Since the industrial revolution, as Fitzgerald and Weitzman point out, the public sphere of working outside the home has traditionally been associated with the man’s world, while the private sphere of nurturing children and taking care of the home has traditionally been associated with the woman’s world. Despite the fact that this has been a false dichotomy in that women have always been working outside the home, nevertheless, it is entrenched in our culture. Furthermore, the public world of work, in which money is made, is generally seen to be of greater value than the private world of the home (Johnson, 1988).

With women entering the paid work force in increasing numbers in the last twenty five years and representing 45% of all paid workers and 63% of those with children under 16 (Statistics Canada, 1995), the separation between the two spheres has become blurred. Indications are that women are still doing the majority of the work at home while also being in the paid work force. Their careers are subject to interruptions if they choose to have children. Snyder (1994) highlighted the issue that women are at a competitive disadvantage in terms of career advancement because the childbearing and child rearing years are also key years for advancing their careers. Added to the challenge of research
into women’s occupational behaviour is the fact that women are not a homogeneous
group (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Fitzgerald et al. make the point that “what we are studying
is not only women per se but also gender and its differential influences on the career
development of both sexes” (p. 102). It is not surprising that theories that were originally
based on an assumption of specific gender roles, even in an expanded form, do not
adequately explain women’s career behaviour.

I will briefly summarize the major theories in terms of their limitations and values
in explaining women’s career behaviour, concluding this section with a brief reference to
the constructivist approach.

**The person-environment fit approach**

Updated from the trait and factor theory, this model describes satisfactory
vocational choice as one that results in a fit between the person and the environment
(Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). “Typically, the worker brings certain types of
knowledge, competencies, skills, and abilities to her job or occupation, which in turn
provides certain rewards” (Fitzgerald & Rounds, 1994, p. 331). The writers explain that
the work environment can be defined broadly to be the career or occupation in which the
person is engaged, or narrowly to include day to day working conditions. According to
the theory, it is assumed that individuals will have a high level of job satisfaction and will
perform well on the job when their occupational environment is congruent with their
personality traits (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Perhaps the most well known use of the person and environment fit theory is the
Holland Self Directed Search, used widely in vocational counseling, through which an
individual can match interests and abilities to occupations (Fitzgerald & Weitzman,
1992). A further use of the theory is in assessing adjustment to a work setting. Fitzgerald and Rounds (1994), in summarizing Dawes and Lofquist's (1984) Theory of Work Adjustment, describe adjustment as the process that workers go through in attempting to meet the expectations that are required for an adequate performance on the job, and which the employer goes through in evaluating their performance on the job. "Satisfactoriness and satisfaction are key indicators of the correspondence between the worker and the environment" (p. 331).

In terms of the person-environment fit theory's usefulness in describing women's career decisions, Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992), in their critique of the Holland categories, make the point that essentially the theory was based on the traditional dichotomy of work and family responsibilities. For example, in matching personal characteristics to jobs, although it is well demonstrated that there is no difference between women and men with respect to intelligence, women are still limited in their real job choices and as Fitzgerald et al. (1995) explain, "[T]he pervasive impact of gender role socialization is reflected in women's continuing concentration in low-level jobs and their (apparent) self-selection out of attractive jobs, particularly those involving math and science" (p. 83). This means that their career choices are not necessarily congruent with personal characteristics, and that other role demands are not accounted for. Fitzgerald and Rounds (1994) critique the theory of work adjustment on similar grounds. that it focuses on individual characteristics and not on the cultural and structural factors that are so influential in shaping people's working experience.

While the traditional use of the person-environment fit theory has merit, especially for women who have come a long way in overcoming cultural barriers
(Fitzgerald et al., 1995), it is reflective of the shortcomings of theories that were built on the basis of the distinctive and gendered role of breadwinner. As a concept it has value in that clearly a job that is congruent with one’s self-concept is likely to be satisfactory and fulfilling. However, its traditional usage does not take into account the person’s life of which the occupation is one aspect, particularly for women and men for whom family life is also salient.

The theory has recently been broadened to include the congruence between the values of organizations and the values of the person. Judge and Bretz (1992) found that a fit between individual work values and organizational values is more important in terms of job choice than either pay or promotional opportunities. This result would indicate that people are likely to seek out employment opportunities that match their values even over the pay that is offered. With changes in the work force to include increasing numbers of women and couples who are both parenting their children, it may be expected that organizational policies that support the family will become increasingly important in job selection.

On this basis, Honeycutt and Rosen (1997), in their study of 263 MBA alumni and executive MBA students (students who are managers and professionals pursuing an MBA in the evenings), predicted that individuals would be most attracted to organizations that offer policies that support their salient identity. Salient identity refers to the way people categorize themselves. For example, career identity may be most salient for one person and family identity may be most salient for another. A third category of balance identity is also used in the study for individuals who describe work and family as being of equal importance. It was thought that people who are family
oriented or balance salient would be most attracted to companies that offer good family policies such as flexible scheduling, childcare support and leave policies with a variety of options. The researchers found that all categories of people (including those who were career salient) were attracted to organizations that offered flexibility and this included working fathers as well as working mothers. Honeycutt and Rosen speculated that salary did not significantly influence attraction because the participants already had a high household income ($70,000-$85,000) and there may well be a cut off in terms of the significance of salary. Nevertheless, a shift in workplace attitudes towards increased flexibility is indicated.

While the findings from this study indicate a strong preference for flexible work conditions by all individuals, it was based on hypothetical situations and so reflected people’s intentions, or how they would like things to be. In reality, employees are often reluctant to take advantage of family friendly policies because in doing so, they might jeopardize their careers (Hochschild, 1997). Further, the lure of a high paying job potential cannot be denied. Nevertheless, this study at least indicates a change in the way people think about their jobs, and a shift in thinking from the traditional career path in which employees are expected to put their work first in order to advance their careers. The use of the person-organization fit approach to assess ideological shifts shows promise and opens up possibilities of exploring the responsiveness of organizations to the needs of a diversified working population.

**Developmental and life-span approaches**

Expanding from earlier developmental models, these approaches focus on the process aspect of career development, in contrast to the point-in-time occurrence of the
previous model (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). While acknowledging the importance of person-environment congruence, developmental theories focus on the stages people go through to arrive at career decisions. As described by Fitzgerald and Weitzman, individuals first base career preference on interests, then abilities and lastly, values. It is an exploratory process that starts in adolescence and concludes with the implementation of the choice. People may circle back through these stages more than once as they change occupations through the course of their lives.

Attempts have been made to expand the theory to include a "latitudinal" dimension (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992) which takes into consideration the different life-roles that a person might play, or the multiple roles that characterize most women's lives. However, because the assumptions in which the theory is embedded are based on traditional lifestyles of man as provider and woman as homemaker, and because these traditional views continue to have influence on women's development, the theory still inevitably falls short of explaining women's process of career development in a changing society. This progression through stages was well and good so long as the goal was simply to finish in a vocation of choice and thus latitudinal roles seem to be merely an interruption to the real goal.

The developmental approach to career decisions has been broadened to incorporate factors such as biological, parental, societal and various life-stage influences on women's career orientation (O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993). Particular characteristics that have been found to predict women's career choice are liberal gender role attitudes, including a feminist bias; ability; and agentic or efficacious characteristics, particularly with respect to math (O'Brien, 1990; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993). Following the finding
by Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) that the mother’s positive attitude towards the pursuit of a career is likely to influence the career development of the daughter, the relationship of young women with their mothers has been a topic for investigation. Aspects found to be influential are the positive role model that a working mother provides (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), a combination of attachment to and individuation from mother (O’Brien & Fassinger, 1993), and mothers who are well educated and who have liberal gender role attitudes (Rainey & Borders 1997). Gender role attitude was measured by respondent’s attitudes towards women’s roles and their attitude towards feminism.

To further explore factors that influence gender role attitudes, Levinson’s (1996) qualitative study of women who are homemakers and women who are in careers provides some insight into some fundamental differences between women for whom a career is salient and their process, and women for whom a career is not salient. Taking gender as a central issue. Levinson explored the extent to which the sample of 45 women maintained or modified the gender splitting in society and in themselves. Gender splitting was defined by Levinson as “a sharp division between feminine and masculine that permeates every aspect of human life” (p. 6), in the culture as well as in the individual psyche. Levinson saw the division between the domestic world and the public occupational world as being symbolized by “the Traditional Marriage Enterprise.” He described this concept as being the “distinction between male husband/father/provisioner and the female wife/mother/homemaker; the linkage between masculinity and authority, which makes it "natural" that the man be head of household, executive and leader within the occupational domain, and predominant in a patriarchal social structure” (p. 6). Levinson concluded that all women are faced with the basic issue of maintaining or modifying the gender splitting
in society. Women who are in careers, however, make a stronger effort to overcome the splitting of feminine and masculine. They attempt to develop alternatives to the Traditional Marriage Enterprise and to achieve a more even balance of occupation and family. The career women struggled to find a sense of self and to find new answers in their effort to seek fuller lives. They wanted to be independent and to be free of traditional feminine/masculine divisions but with few alternative models available, they felt some vulnerability and at risk of losing their source of satisfaction in motherhood and family life.

As a qualitative study, Levinson’s (1996) work reflects some of the internal conflicts and struggles that career women experience as they seek to define themselves. The major career theories do not capture this aspect. In dealing with the opposing internal figures of Traditional Homemaker Figure and the Anti-Traditional dream, as Levinson said, “the career women attempted to have more equal relationships with men, a caring family life, and a satisfying career” (p. 232). Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992) made the point that the description of career stages is often problematic in predicting women’s career behaviour. Clearly, there is more involved than simply a progression through stages. Levinson’s work provides some insights into the internal conflict that women experience as they seek to branch away from traditionally defined roles.

Social learning and cognitive frameworks

In recognizing the importance of early influences in career development, several theorists have embedded their work in social learning theory. Farmer (1985), for example, framed her model of career and achievement motivation for men and women on Bandura’s social learning theory in which an individual’s learning behaviour is proposed
to be affected by three sets of interacting influences: 1. Given factors such as gender and ability. 2. Psychological factors such as attitudes, beliefs and previous experience. 3. Environmental or social factors. This study by Farmer and colleagues is longitudinal and tracks the progression of 97 women and 76 men who were in high school at the start of the study in 1980 (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Farmer (1985) found all of the factors of the theory influenced career motivation, but she noted that environmental factors as a mediating variable were stronger for young women than for young men. She concluded that career motivation for women is more vulnerable to competing role priorities than for men. She also noted that the changing social context plays a powerful role that may well effect change in aspects of career motivation in the future. Indeed, in the 1990 phase of data collection, Fitzgerald et al. (1995) note an increasing salience in the work role for women. Farmer's theoretical model was criticized on the grounds of it being a better fit for men than women, accounting for 97% of the variance for men and 34% for women. These figures are a further indication of the difficulty in trying to capture women's career behaviour in even a seemingly comprehensive model.

Applying to career development Bandura's notion that behaviour is mediated by expectations of self-efficacy (Betz & Fitzgerald 1987). Betz and colleagues have tried to explain why women are underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated careers (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Betz and colleagues proposed that expectations of self-efficacy would mediate the effects of gender-role socialization on women's career choices in non-traditional careers (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). As explained by Fitzgerald et al., efficacy expectations are developed through background experiences around performance, learning (including role models), and encouragement. Fitzgerald et al., in summarizing
the research, stated that self-efficacy is indeed a factor which influences the degree to which a person may utilize her abilities and develop her interests. Thus, a woman who has high self-efficacy beliefs is more likely to expand her career options to include careers that have been male-dominated. However, they note that a woman might indeed have high self-efficacy expectations regarding a career in science but may still reject it because of negative outcomes, such as it being too demanding on other roles. Again, this ambivalence reinforces the notion that women's career behaviour is not straightforward.

**A social constructivist perspective**

Many studies have been conducted that have identified motives and patterns that typify women's working lives and are responsive to gender differences. Chester and Grossman (1990) suggest, however, that less attention has been given to the phenomenological experience of work for women, and that research is needed “that looks for a deeper understanding of women workers' realities by including the meaning women make of their own experiences” (p. 5). This is a sentiment that has been echoed by a number of feminist researchers and theorists (e.g., Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1996; Nielsen, 1990) who call for theories that acknowledge the diversity of women's experience.

Richardson (1993) suggested a social constructivist location for the study of work in people's lives. Rather than a belief in a single reality, social constructivism promotes a belief in multiple truths and multiple realities. It pays attention to the stories of individuals whose lives are shaped by their social locations and would therefore allow for both commonalities and also differences in the stories. Some stories or parts of stories
could be explained by broader theory but implicit in the theory is that there is not a single knowledge.

Because qualitative work is embedded in a social constructivist perspective, the application of the theory to research will be indicated in the next chapter on methodology. However, in summing up the theories that have been described, clearly there are gaps to understanding women's career behaviour which positivistic theories can only partially speculate on and explain. In echoing Grossman and Chester (1990), more attention to the phenomenological experiences of women is needed in order to bridge the gap between experience and theory. There are also broader issues, in society and in the culture of the workplace, which need to be taken into account when considering women's career development.

**SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S CAREER PARTICIPATION**

Women who are trying to combine work and family contend with a deeply entrenched ideology that the mother must be the one responsible for the hearth and home (Ehrensaft, 1987). Ehrensaft talks about “the gnawing internal script” (p. 7) to the effect that women should be home with their children, which is reinforced by subtle and not so subtle propaganda touting the importance of the mother for the well-being of her child. Internalized emotions and deeply entrenched patterns of behaviour conflict with ideals about gender equality (Rosenbluff, Steil, & Whitcomb, 1998). The negotiation of gendered meanings and behaviours in families takes place within an existing system of gender inequality in which, according to Potuchek (1997), men and women adopt strategies to protect their prerogatives within the system.
Women and men are not just biological creatures; they are social actors who play, indeed live, many roles connecting with the differing groups in which they interact and with which they identify. The patterning of relations between women, men, and children is not fixed by biology; rather, it is socially organized by institutions and roles. (Johnson, 1988, p. 3)

Johnson defines *role* as being "the system of expectations shared to some degree within a given group for the behaviour of a person in a particular status" (p.5). She also suggests that we attach a cultural image to a status. We therefore, for example, have images of mothers and notions of what mothers' roles are. Roles, thus, are social constructions on which society places a value. Johnson makes the point that whatever roles in a society are most prestigious are those that men tend to do. Social structures are shaped by value hierarchies and any changes include shifts in traditions and norms so that in time "deviant" behaviour becomes acceptable (Hall, 1990).

Set against this backcloth of societal systems, in this section I will explore from the literature the role of breadwinner, the division of labour in the home, and the meaning of motherhood.

**The bread winning role**

The American economy became industrialized in the 1830s and as the production of goods moved out of the home, home and work came to be defined as separate spheres and women and men developed responsibility for these spheres (Potuchek, 1997). Potuchek goes on to explain that the idea of breadwinner emerged as a male responsibility, though often it was more of an ideal than a reality because male wages had to be supplemented. However, she noted that the bread-winning role seems to have
remarkable staying power. Potuchek found from her sample that even in dual-earner families, bread winning is still an implicit gender boundary in the North American culture. Whereas when women’s labour force participation increased it was thought that men would be happy to escape this responsibility, she found this was not the case. The men in her sample saw their work as something they do primarily to support their families and so it is central to their existence. Only 12% of her sample of dual earner families agreed that bread winning should be a shared responsibility in a marriage, and the majority thought that it should be the primary responsibility of the man.

Although the bread-winning role continues to be seen as a male prerogative, it does not negate the financial contribution that women make to the family income, but it does affect the meaning given to paid employment. Spade (1994) found that for the majority of husbands and wives, traditional gender expectations are intertwined in the ways they think about family roles. She saw a reluctance on the part of both husbands and wives to view wives’ employment outside the home as that of co-provider. From a sample of 186 dual-worker families, both men and women placed more importance on wives working to provide extras than to pay bills and when the husband’s income is high, she works to keep busy. Potuchek (1997) concluded that the institutionalizing of bread winning has come to demand an enormous commitment of time and energy that cannot be combined easily with domestic responsibilities. The result is that one partner tends to give higher priority to employment responsibilities and the other to domestic responsibilities, a distinction perpetuated by the gender wage gap which still gives women 70% of the dollar.
Potuchek (1997) also made the point that the male breadwinner role is more salient as a boundary when the couple has young children. Rosenbluth et al. (1998) found, in their study on the meaning of marital equality, that indeed the presence of young children creates increased demands and is often accompanied by the reactivation of traditional gender roles (cited by 60% of the women in the sample and 33% of the men). The researchers found from the responses of their participants, of 41 business and professional husbands and wives (none of whom were married to each other), that almost a third commented that wives were the primary beneficiaries of an equal relationship. None of the respondents said the husbands were beneficiaries, citing the disadvantages and costs to their husbands. The main disadvantages stated by the respondents, male and female, were that an equal relationship may decrease his power in the marriage, increase his share of household responsibilities, interfere with career demands, and require his participation in family life. Overall, these respondents felt that men’s equal participation in the marriage might threaten their masculinity. The bread winning role, it would seem, is imbued with meaning that is central to the male identity (Loscocco, 1997). As Silverstein (1996) stated: “Limiting the definition of fathering to the provider role has been central to the problem of male privilege” (p.4).

**Division of labour in the home**

Despite the large influx of women into the labour market in the past few decades, which has challenged the conventional division of labour by sex (Ghalam, 1997), it would seem that traditional attitudes still persist regarding the division of labour. Ghalem concluded that traditional sex roles for women and men fade slowly. Silverstein (1996) made the point that the failure of men to assume equal responsibility in the family
remains a barrier to women’s full and equal participation in the public world. Despite the perception that men are participating more in family roles, research continues to show that women do the majority of childcare and housework (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Feree, 1991; Gunter & Gunter, 1990; Hochschild, 1989; Vannoy-Hiller & Phillibet, 1989).

Silverstein asserts that given our gender ideology, mothers are more responsive to infants than fathers are and that when the couple has children, the power relations between the spouses changes. The mother is more likely to limit her commitment to paid work, and since the man usually earns more, this makes economic sense but also reinforces gender divisions.

The reinforcement of gender divisions is demonstrated in a study by Burke (1998) based on a survey of 422 employees who were in dual career relationships and both of whom were either managers or members of a professional field. He found that significantly more women than men had spouses who worked more hours than they themselves did, and that the spouses of women with children worked more hours than those without children. Burke’s interpretation of this finding was that women may receive less support from their spouses because of the spouse’s involvement in his own job and consequently, this would mean the women had fewer hours to commit to their own jobs.

The point was made that in terms of careers, it is not a level playing field for men and women.

Women’s tendency to take greater responsibility in the home has been attributed to women believing that it was their responsibility or the task would not get done (Gunter & Gunter, 1990). Gunter and Gunter found that while it is true that women who work outside the home spend less time on tasks than their non-employed counterparts, the
number of tasks for which they are responsible does not reduce. It seems that husbands spend about a third of the time their wives spend on household tasks, in a “helping out” capacity, and that they were more likely to spend time on jobs with definable boundaries (Berardo, Shehan, & Lesley, 1987). Vannoy-Hiller and Phillibet (1989) in their Work and Family study found that over half of the men and women in the study felt that primarily the wife should do housework. However, they concluded that the quality of the marriage is higher when the husband performs or shares more tasks. Johnson (1988) points out that assumptions of male dominance tend to undermine our different perceptions of the work done by husband and wife. Because a wife works, there is not the expectation that he will assume “a wife’s” duties. Entrenched patterns of behaviour are slow to change because change has to take place on a macro as well as a micro level.

Hochschild (1989) also noted that women tend to be more deeply torn between the demands of work and family than are their husbands. She speculated that this was because even when there was good participation by their husbands, the wife felt a greater sense of responsibility for the home and the children. In her much cited study of dual income families, Hochschild suggested that women tend to be very forgiving of their husbands’ participation in the home, preferring to keep harmony in the relationship rather than acknowledge a lack of equality.

Levinson’s (1996) research, mentioned earlier relating to the conflict that career women experience between the “Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure” and the “Anti-Traditional Homemaker Figure,” provides some explanation for women’s internal struggle. The women were pulled by inner aims and external social pressures created by a society that still expects women to be primarily responsible for raising children. Indeed.
Hochschild (1989) found from her study of dual-income couples that the women felt more stressed than men. She described the women as feeling responsible for "the second shift" and so they would do more of the routine jobs in the home where the men tended to do the jobs for which they could choose their time. Women might do two jobs at once, while men focused on one thing at a time. According to Hall (1990), women frequently react "to the relentless sequence of everyday situations" (p. 21).

In a more recent qualitative study of dual income couples, Gager (1998) sought to understand why full-time employed wives, despite doing more household chores than their full-time employed husbands, fail to report on the unfairness of the unequal division of labour. She found, like Hochschild (1989), that wives in her sample frequently performed tasks to avoid conflict with their husbands. If they perceived that the division of labour in the household created a happy and harmonious family life, they were less likely to view the extra tasks they took on as being unfair. A common theme noticed by Gager was that wives justified their greater role in household responsibilities by stating that they were just more efficient than their husbands were. Wives could multitask with ease, where husbands had difficulty in paying attention to more than one thing at a time. They did not question the fact that their husbands seemed to be able to multitask at their paid jobs. In terms of their attitudes towards the division of labour, Gager found that most wives did not feel entitled to avoid chores they disliked, whereas this was not the case for many men. Keeping a clean house reflected positively on their self-esteem and so on that basis, they would justify the unequal distribution of tasks. Gager noted that although these were dual-earner couples, many of whom had egalitarian ideals. "the traditional idea of sex-differentiated responsibilities characterized by provider husband and domestic
wives continued to influence spouses’ attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately how they
organized the division of labour” (p. 637). Gager concluded that the use of justifications
helps to explain the maintenance of inequality in dual-earner couples.

Rosenbluth et al. (1998) explained the work/home conflict in the following way:
“‘For men and women, deeply internalized emotions and entrenched patterns of behavior
are often in conflict with conscious ideals about gender equality” (p. 241). Their study
was founded on observations that while marital inequality continues to be the norm,
surveys indicate that the majority of adults endorse the idea of a marriage in which
husband and wife share responsibilities for parenting and caring for the home. Rosenbluth
et al. were interested in the gap between what people do and what they say. They asked
questions directed towards understanding people’s conceptualizations of marital equality.
Their respondents were all partners in relationships in which both are employed in high
status jobs because they thought that this group would be most likely to hold egalitarian
views. Interestingly, when evaluating the marriages of couples they knew, the majority
based equality on the division of labour in the home. When they were self-referential,
however, characteristics such as feelings of mutual respect, supportiveness, commitment
and reciprocity over time were considered to be important factors. Since fewer than 28% of
their respondents were in relationships in which there was equality in terms of
homemaking tasks and value placed on careers. the writers saw this shift from
behavioural criteria to subjective indices as a means of preventing individuals from
incongruence due to the discrepancy between their ideals of equality and entrenched
traditional expectations. Hochschild (1989) termed this thinking as “family myths” which
she explained as versions of reality that obscured discrepancies in values both within
individuals and between the couple. Potuchek (1997) also noted that men in particular tend to adopt gender ideologies assumed to please the wife that did not necessarily manifest in behaviour. Thus there is evidence of conflict between models of the past and feminist influenced ideals of the present.

**The role of mother**

"Among the most powerful images that culture has elaborated both to represent and to govern women, is, without doubt, that of motherhood" (Finzi. 1996, p. 146). Women's part in the reproduction of human beings is both idealized and denigrated. Finzi makes the point that "social expectations and family structures tend to fix and hold women in the position of mothers, regardless of their deepest intentions and their conscious convictions" (p. 164). Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan (1994) make the point that in contemporary North American society, women face the pressures of having a successful career and being "the fully available, need-satisfying maternal figure" (p. 4). Maternity provokes a crisis in the life of a woman, changing the balance of her life. It represents new possibilities and it redefines the sense of self.

With motherhood, women are confronted with strong ideological expectations. Pope, Quinn, and Wyer (1990) state, "the fantasy of the perfect mother is a product of the Western ideal of the nuclear family, wherein the mother is the sole provider for her children's emotional needs" (p.443). They also make the point that the cultural expectations of mothering speak louder than the individual's experience of being a mother, and that behind the mythology that shapes what is understood about being a mother are political and patriarchal constructions.
Ruddick (1994) makes the distinction between mothering and birthgiving. She argues that mothering is a complex project that involves a number of people over time, whereas pregnancy and birthgiving are physical events. The task of mothering is to see children as being in need of protection, nurturance, and training and to commit to trying to meet those demands. Ruddick acknowledges that mothering is relational work entrenched in a mix of many feelings. However, she also argues that in constructing mothering as a kind of work rather than as an identity means that, "A child is mothered by whoever protects, nurtures, and trains her" (p.35). In other words, men could take up the task of mothering as easily as women.

In a different vein, in drawing on her own experience as a mother, Gleve (1987) writes about the uniqueness of the mother child relationship. She describes her experiences of ambivalent feelings in the following words. “The unexpected passion and joy and physical attachment on the one side, and on the other side the relentless obligation and the necessity to respond” (p. 39). She describes her struggle between her desire for autonomy and her desire to satisfy the baby. Later, as the child became two or three, and began to assert his own independence, she had to shift from being the responsive, acquiescent mother. She said, “He elicited from me both my greatest love and generosity and my darkest anger and frustration” (p.43). She experienced mothering as a transforming experience in which differing and sometimes opposing aspects of herself emerged. She recalls a relinquishing of her identity to the needs of the child, and constantly finding herself giving without counting the cost. Gleve suggests that this giving aspect of motherhood can have repercussions for women who are expected to mirror the qualities of motherhood beyond the role of being a mother.
In turning to the empirical literature on mothering, there is an emphasis on the psychological toll. Barnett (1993) asserts that the role of mother does not predict self-esteem or pleasure. In fact, as she points out, mothers with children under the age of six years are particularly at risk for depression; this risk increasing with the number of children at home. She explained these findings in terms of the traditional aspects of the role of mother, central to which is being ready to respond to the needs of others. She added that the situation is compounded for mothers by the cultural expectation that this is a natural role for women, which makes them very vulnerable to feelings of guilt.

Other writers, such as Johnson (1988), argue that it is the wife role with its "femininity" component that organizes women's secondary status and not the mother role in which women experience their power. Similar to Ruddick (1994), she separates the experience of being a mother from the task of mothering. She argues that embedded in the construct of "mothering" is the assignment of early childcare, whereas the term "fathering" may mean no more that to impregnate a woman. According to Johnson, even in families where the husband does not play a dominant role, we live in a society in which there is a tendency to place the highest value on roles played by men, and in which men hold more legitimate power. She sees the solution as being not so much that women give up the "mothering" role in order to attain equality but that:

We should accept the fact that women are going to have babies and that women will tend to be more responsible for early childcare than men. and, by deliberate social policy, we should keep these facts from being the impediment to women's equality that they have been made to be in this society. (p. 10)
Oberman and Josselson (1996) draw attention to the issue that most studies on the mother-child relationship have been centred on the child. They see a need for a shift in focus “from the impact of the mother on the child to the impact of the child on the mother” (p. 342). Their study examines the experience of motherhood as being a “matrix of tensions” (p. 344) whereby motherhood takes place somewhere in the midst of a complex web of bipolarities of tensions. A particular tension that they discuss is the loss of self versus the expansion of self that the mother must negotiate. They view the interplay between this growth of self and loss of self as being one of the central dynamics of mothering.

Ross (1995) also highlighted the fact that little has been written about the phenomenology of motherhood, to learn about:

...the quality of their feelings for their children; about changes mothering brings in relationships with jobs, men, friends, and lovers; about the public activities and political positions stimulated by women’s experiences as caretakers of children; about the survival and nurturing skills...” (p. 399)

As Rich (1976) stated so many years ago, there is a gap between the institution of mothering with its expectations and structures determining women’s secondary status in society and women’s experience of mothering. Women’s experience as mothers has tended to be subsumed by the experience of the child as well as broader societal issues.

We need more knowledge about mothers’ subjective experience.

THE CULTURE OF THE WORKPLACE

In entering the work force, women enter an environment created for men (Schwartz, 1992) within which there are power structures which are not easily overturned
While there are women who are still exceptions in the upper echelons of power, Segal makes the point that essentially the workplace "operates through definitions of authority and everyday practices designed to exclude or ignore the situation of most women" (p. 235). Reardon (1995) states, "The idea that men would let women into the game and accept them as equal players has proven false, especially at senior levels" (p. 11). In this section, the particular barriers to women achieving equality in the workplace that I will explore are the communication differences between men and women, the issue of women tending to find personal solutions, and problems around maternity. I will then go on to explore the ambivalence towards women's work role and finally, attempts by work places to initiate family-friendly policies.

**Communication differences**

Reardon (1995), an organizational researcher and specialist in negotiation, persuasion and inter-personal communication, concludes from her research that a barrier for women in achieving success in the workplace is the different way in which women communicate job commitment and managerial expertise. She makes the point that expectations regarding communication at work have been developed by men for men. She provides the example that women tend to understate their achievements where men create the impression of competence and success, "they can make the mundane sound important and their role seem pivotal" (p. 8). She noticed particularly in law firms that women mostly do not promote themselves in the way that men do. Attempts by women to outsmart men at their own game tend not to be effective, and women feel that they have to be twice as good as men to be considered competent and even then their work may go unnoticed. She found that many men are not particularly comfortable with women at
senior levels and even though they might agree that women should be treated as equals, they draw the line where it might affect them personally. A male CEO, for example, shared with her his discomfort around women being voted to join his all-male club. Important business decisions continue to be made in informal settings in which women are not necessarily included. Men have learned to network together and yet, as Reardon pointed out, when women network together they are eyed with suspicion as if when women get together they discuss non-work related topics.

Gilbert, Hallett, and Eldridge (1994), from their summary of the literature on gender process, concluded that in interpersonal relationships in the workplace, men and women frequently engage in behaviours that are prompted by gender-related beliefs and constraints, which are manifest in the different patterning of both verbal and nonverbal communication. Tannen (1990) argued that men are likely to operate from a hierarchical perspective and so in conversations will either try to achieve the upper hand or protect themselves from allowing others to achieve the upper hand. Women, on the other hand, see conversations as negotiations towards consensus.

Reardon (1995) observed that the relationship between men and women at work is often quite strained. While women are becoming more vocal about the offensive behaviour, indifference and disregard that they experience daily, even sympathetic males are getting tired of what they see as vague attacks by women; they feel themselves being lumped in the category of white males. Downsizing has exacerbated the problem and the tendency in companies has been to revert to male-defined ways of leading and managing. Reardon concluded that while the path for women is still uphill, women are gaining power because of their increasing numbers in the work force. They are also becoming less
willing to continue to be unnoticed and individually; they are finding ways to be heard and heeded.

**Looking for personal solutions**

From a large research project on women and careers, a group of researchers saw as a barrier the tendency for women to find their own solutions rather than to address the issues as a collective. In an extensive study on the issues that career women face, Konek and Kitch (1994) and their colleagues found that an overwhelming pattern in the responses of their participants was their devotion to individual effort and self-reliance.

Approximately 500 women in white-collar jobs, drawn from the population in Wichita, Kansas, took part in a longitudinal study. It consisted of a detailed survey followed by a series of in-depth interviews designed to discover how women themselves feel about key issues that they experience in the workplace. The researchers were so struck by the patterns of individualism that emerged from their analysis that they added three questions. They asked respondents to rank solutions to the problems of balancing work and childcare, of achieving occupational success, and of creating a better future for women. Konek, Kitch and Shore (1994) found that at the top of each list were individual efforts and responsibility. Respondents saw parents as being primarily responsible for their own childcare, with employers second and governments being well down the list. In ranking occupational success, women's personal motivation to succeed was at the top of the list, with changes in laws and policies being near the bottom. In terms of factors that might make the future better for women, the respondents ranked individual hard work at the top of the list, with changes in the law and structural changes in the workplace being halfway down, and changes in men's attitudes at the bottom of the list. The researchers
noted that the political atmosphere would influence respondents in the 1980s in the United States when there was more focus on individual success over collective consciousness. While admiring the adaptability, the agency, and the optimism of their participants, the researchers expressed their concern over women looking for their own solutions rather than looking for collective solutions in the following words:

The individualism of career women is a caution to us all. If each of us thinks she must work hard and adapt to systemic injustice in order to achieve success, then every woman who struggles by our sides must struggle alone. If we do not work to change a system that includes structural inequities, every woman who follows us, including our own daughters, must start over, alone. If we do not work to make our professions, organizations, and society more responsive to the needs of women, we may be unwittingly complicit with a system that underestimates women's worth and undervalues women's work. (p. 246)

The overall impression was that career women felt they must be prepared to compete on the same terms as men. Although they recognized the structural difficulties for women in the workplace, they "imagined transcending obstacles with individual effort" (p. 235).

**The issue of maternity**

A third barrier in the workplace that is talked about to a limited extent is that the corporate community has not satisfactorily resolved the issue of maternity. Following her discussions with executives in large companies, Schwartz (1992) observed that women join their employers in denying the impact of maternity, knowing it would be suicidal in terms of their career to do otherwise. In so doing, they collude in the conspiracy of silence while at the same time, struggling to balance work and family. Marshall (1993) suggests that by not speaking out, women contribute to their oppression by allowing
employers to think that having children in no way affects their ability to compete. However, there are risk factors associated with short maternity leaves. Hyde, Klein, Essex, and Clark (1995) demonstrated that women who take a short maternity leave (six weeks or less) are at greater risk for depression, particularly if they have marital concerns or if they find their work unrewarding.

Schwartz (1992) explained the paradox that results in the issue of maternity being largely unresolved in companies in the following way, “In many employers’ minds, women are natural mothers who don’t belong in business at all, or they are managers who have no maternal identity” (p. 41). Companies are slow to respond in creative ways to the need for business and maternity to co-exist productively. Schwartz points out that companies like clear plans from women taking time off to have children. However, childbirth is an exhausting experience emotionally as well as physically and so it is often hard for women to meet a specific commitment date for returning to work. Frequently women return to work before they are physically and emotionally ready and companies quickly interpret leaving early and/or arriving late for work as being less committed. Seldom do companies, according to Schwartz, examine their own inflexible policies.

An advocate for women’s advancement in the workplace, Schwartz became best known for an article she published highlighting the substantial barriers that female managers face regarding their advancement, and the cost to companies for not having the flexibility to encourage women’s career growth (Schwartz, 1989). She classed women as either being “career-primary” or “career-and-family.” Developing from her article, “mommy track” became a pejorative catchphrase for the second group of women who were discounted for advancement if they chose to cut back or drop out of work for a time.
to raise children. The result was that women themselves and their employers saw women in an either/or track (Schwartz, 1992). If they were committed to their families, their commitment to the company was in doubt. Creating such polarizations feeds the ambivalence felt by women and men towards working mothers and undermines women's efforts to succeed in their careers while also being responsible and caring parents.

Rather than a dual system, as proposed by Schwartz (1989), Vogel (1990) supported the notion that since nowadays both men and women are seeking to balance career and family, organizations should accommodate to many situations, of which pregnancy is one, on an individual basis. Hall (1990) argued that a dual system, which is divisive, is not necessary and suggested that management relook at criteria for career advancement. Vogel and Hall and other advocates for family friendly organizations are challenging the culture of the workplace and suggesting ways it might change to meet the needs of a diverse workforce.

**Ambivalence towards mothers' employment**

The lack of resolution in the workplace regarding maternity and career advancement is reflected in the ambivalence in women themselves and in society in general towards mothers being employed outside the home. Schwartz (1992) found, from her interviews with young female executives, that the woman who is dedicated to her career and is willing to have other people care for her children is nevertheless internally ambivalent about her choices. Influenced by traditional values, she is concerned about not being a "good" mother. Again, as proposed by Reardon (1995), the implication of polarization (the good and bad mother) is quick to catch on and is damaging to women. Marshall (1993), a journalist and social commentator, suggests, from her interviews with
a large number of working mothers, that what limits working mothers is the tendency to regard all roles as morally or ideologically critical and therefore equally important, rather than assigning realistic performance expectations to each role. She expressed the importance of a woman daring to act according to what she believes is right, rather than looking to society for approval.

The belief that the involvement of women in the work force is detrimental to the family system is reflected in forms of discrimination in the workplace (Gilbert et al., 1994). A form of discrimination described by Gilbert et al. is statistical discrimination. An assumption behind this form of discrimination is that men will likely give organizations a better return for their investment in that they will work more continuously, more effectively, and be more committed to their work than women because of their primary role as "provider." In fact this has never been demonstrated to be the case (Gilbert et al., 1994) and perhaps the assumption is an artifact of gender role stereotyping (Betz, 1994).

The ambivalence of society towards working mothers is reflected in what Marshall (1993) terms "the patchwork quilt" (p. 143) of childcare. Women established themselves in the workplace faster than society has responded to the need for good quality childcare. Marshall poses the question as to whether the childcare issue undermines women's commitment to the workplace, or whether it is the ambivalence towards employed motherhood that accounts for the patchy system of childcare.

Shpancer (1993) suggests that the lack of government involvement in childcare policy is embedded in the social ideology concerning the way children, and the responsibility they entail, are viewed by society. She compares North American society
with western European societies that have more comprehensive childcare policies. According to Shpancer, "the unique mythology of rugged individualism and independence, combined with an ethos of greed and immediate gratification" (p. 693) distinguishes America from other industrial nations. Together with the myths, are attitudes of hostility towards children who, according to Shpancer, are seen as a financial burden which hinder striving towards the top. The myths and hostilities, together with beliefs about women's roles and the importance of children's early experiences, lead to an absence of childcare policies. Ambivalence towards childcare, according to Silverstein (1993), is more about conflicts over adult roles than the needs of children. Although understandings from research are that day-to-day social experiences of children are probably more important than the type of care (Shpancer, 1993), childcare is a very complex issue at the heart of which are strongly held beliefs and ideologies. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are feelings of ambivalence towards childcare and mothers who work outside the home. The ambivalence is experienced as guilt in mothers themselves, which again creates a barrier to women's career advancement.

**Family friendly policies in the workplace as the solution?**

Many companies that are keen to encourage good female employees are developing family friendly policies. Hochschild (1997) performed a study in a large American corporation that purports to have family-friendly policies. In fact, the study found that the reverse is the case. By providing an attractive working environment, employees found work less stressful than home. Long working hours were encouraged which led to greater tensions at home, which in turn led to spending more time at work. Hochschild concluded that the ultimate losers are the children whose small amount of
time spent at home is rife with the tension of over-worked parents. She felt that the job culture had expanded at the expense of the family culture and that the family-friendly policies were a mask for a workaholic company.

The company that Hochschild (1997) studied had in place a comprehensive list of family friendly policies. Policies such as working part time, job sharing, work some hours at home, take parental leave or flexible working hours were offered, all at the discretion of the supervisor. Of all these possibilities, only flexible hours, which does not cut the total working hours, had a significant number of takers (approximately a third of the working parents in the company she studied). Hochschild cited an earlier study conducted by the Families and Work Institute of 188 companies in which it was also found that a very low percentage of employees made use of family friendly policies. Possible explanations, according to Hochschild, are that working parents cannot afford to work shorter hours, that workers do not ask for time off because it would make them vulnerable to being laid off at times of downsizing, or that rigid middle managers stood in the way of workers using these policies. While all of these explanations were given by small percentages of people, overwhelmingly employees themselves found the workplace less stressful than being at home.

Attitudes in the workplace reflect the social ideology. The notion of role sharing families seemed to be catching on about ten years ago and policies were being put in place to make parental leave an option for men. Silverstein (1996) found that whereas large numbers of fathers report that they want to spend more time with their children, very few take up the options of parental leave. The figure used from a national survey is that approximately 1% of fathers use formal paternity leave. Silverstein cites Swedish
studies in which the results are not much better. She points out that it is particularly disheartening to learn how little fathering behaviour has changed in a country that has extensive government policies that are supportive of role-sharing families. She speculates that "other societal forces discourage men from participating fully in the care of infants" (p. 23). The reasons she suggests are: that the workplace distrusts men who want to stay at home with their children, that the fathers themselves find being home with their children isolating and stressful, and underlying beliefs that employment success should be a man's goal. Silverstein speculates that perhaps employers provide leave policies for fathers to give the appearance of family friendly policies and not because they intend them to be used.

Family friendly policies may be politically correct, but if behind the policies are ambivalent social attitudes towards working mothers and self-serving intentions, then mixed messages will be conveyed. There are clearly no simple solutions. Indeed Hochschild (1997) found that as economic pressures increased in the company, the family friendly policies were given a back seat.

**MULTIPLE ROLES**

When women began entering the work force in large numbers, it was assumed that the added role (added to their responsibilities in the home) would create conflict and subsequently produce mental and physical symptoms. This notion was based on the scarcity hypothesis (Goode, 1960) which states that the more roles one accumulates, the more one is likely to exhaust one's supply of time and energy, resulting in role strain. When the scarcity hypothesis was applied to women, it was thought that the work role was the added role that would be detrimental to health.
In contrast to the traditional scarcity hypothesis, the role expansion hypothesis (Sieber, 1974) focused on the beneficial effects of multiple roles. The idea is that multiple role involvement may benefit women by providing them with more than one source in which to obtain role-related rewards. When applied to women’s roles of working and mothering, indeed studies have consistently shown the beneficial effects of the work role in terms of women’s health and well-being (e.g., Barnett & Baruch, 1985; Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Kessler & McRae, 1981; Verbrugge, 1982; Waldron & Jacobs, 1988). Evidence suggests that this is true for women in all kinds of jobs, but especially so for women in high status jobs who benefit from the intrinsic as well as the extrinsic aspects of the job (Aston & Lavery, 1993). Even with the addition of children, the depression rate for women who were employed was shown to be considerably lower than for women who were not employed outside the home (Kandel, Davies, & Raveis, 1985).

There was much research through the 1980’s in support of the expansion hypothesis. For example, Barnett, Marshall, and Singer (1992) examined the effect of multiple roles on women’s psychological health. The researchers found that for women who were parents, changes in job role quality did not affect their mental health. whereas among single women and women without children, if the quality of the job declined, they had an increase in psychological distress. They concluded that women with family roles have several potential sources for rewards and so are perhaps less invested in their jobs. This finding was also supported in a study by Long, Kahn, and Schutz (1992).

In a later work, Barnett, Brennan, Raudenbush, and Marshall (1994) modified the notion that the more roles a woman occupies, the better her mental health. They found instead that the combination of the work role with one family role was the most
advantageous situation and that additional family roles do not provide additional protection. As expressed by Williams, Suls, Allinger, Learner, and Wan (1991), the effects of maternal employment is equivocal and being involved in multiple roles likely has both positive and negative effects on the mother’s psychological well-being. Rather than taking a stand on one side or the other of the debate, researchers more recently have tended to focus on the characteristics of women’s work and non-work roles that affect their psychological health. Two aspects that stand out are role conflict and role overload. Another issue that has received attention is the balancing of multiple roles.

**Role conflict**

Role conflict and role overload are two distinct constructs. According to Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992), role conflict occurs when there are simultaneous expectations in two or more roles and complying with one would make complying with the other more difficult. Role overload, on the other hand, refers to the inability to satisfy the demands of all the roles in the available time.

Role conflict is psychological in nature and may stem from perceived incompatibilities of combining the roles of worker and mother (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). Internalized standards and expectations concerning being a “good mother” and guilt over not adequately fulfilling that role may create role conflict (Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Role conflict may also be caused by behavioural expectations. At work, a professional woman “is expected to be aggressive, competitive, and committed to her work” (Paden & Buehler, 1995, p. 101), while at home she is supposed to be compassionate, caring and nurturing towards her children and husband. Trying to be these two different people can create conflict.
Expectations to fulfil the traditional mother role has considerable staying power (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Childcare is a particularly sensitive issue for women. Women feel guilty about not being with their children and they worry about the cost to their children (Hertz, 1997). Ross and Mirowsky (1998) found that the roles of mother and employee can be incompatible (causing role conflict) or they can be integrated. They found that employed mothers who have difficulty in arranging childcare have extremely high levels of depression. This was not the case for husbands. On the other hand, when husbands participated in childcare and when there were good resources available, the employed mothers had very low levels of depression. Tingey, Kiger, and Riley (1996) point out that child-care concerns are associated with stress for working mothers in the face of resistance from their male partners because they are an inflexible demand for which women, according to cultural understandings, are primarily responsible.

Women’s beliefs about their role as mothers and being able to arrange their lives in a way that is consistent with those beliefs affect the conflict they experience over childcare. Hertz (1997) identified three parenting approaches. The mothering approach assumes that the mother is the one who is best suited to raise the children and so having a work schedule that means she is not available to young children may present difficulties. In the parenting approach, both parents fully participate in the children’s lives and couples who believe in this approach creatively look for ways of combining work and family. The extent to which they are successful determines the conflict they experience. The third approach is the market approach in which other people are hired to care for the children and the mother does the work of finding the care. Hertz noted the frequency with which women in this group changed childcare arrangements as they sought to provide
their children with enriching experiences. She also stressed the guilt that women in all three approaches feel when they are unable to match their conception of motherhood.

Role conflict is a gendered issue. As Bielby and Bielby (1989) explain, even though women may seek a balance of commitments across work and family, their behaviour in these areas is shaped by a sex-based division of labour and by the values placed on those behaviours. These values are prescribed by sex role norms. To resolve the conflict, women tend to pay more attention to the home than to work, even though, as some research has shown, they are more likely to be happy in the public sphere (Larson, Richards, & Perry-Jenkins, 1994).

Role overload

Role overload has been found to be the most frequently experienced stress on a day to day basis, which, over time, depletes resources for meeting subsequent demands (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wetherington, 1989). It exists when a person is trying to handle more role-related tasks than she has time or energy for (Paden & Buehler, 1995). Paden and Buehler suggested that when overload is evident in a variety of domains, spillover effects can occur. According to Tingey et al. (1996), women’s continuing primary responsibility for domestic labour is a salient factor in work-family spillover. The more responsibility the woman has for housework and childcare, the less she will benefit from her employment status (Ross & Mirowsky, 1992).

Embedded in perceptions of spillover are deeply ingrained gender norms that underlie decision-making (Losocco, 1997). Losocco found that a woman’s attachment to the parent role determines the extent to which work must accommodate family, and it affects her perception of her partner’s contribution. She might feel that her partner’s work
was intruding on family time where he might have a different perspective. This might explain findings that women experience stress when their partner’s work spills over into family life and she cannot depend on him to meet family responsibilities (Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Tinger et al., 1996). From the partner’s perspective, Duxbury and Higgins (1991) make the point that career-oriented men are expected to manage their home life so that it does not interfere with their work. Bielby and Bielby (1989) concluded that women tend to give precedence to family in balancing work and family roles, where men would tend not to make the same trade-off. Women may interpret his orientation towards work as being resistant (Tinger et al., 1996).

Juggling work and family responsibilities can lead to spillover from work to family or from family to work, particularly when the level of involvement in the one domain is perceived as interfering with the other domain (Watkins & Subich, 1995). Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, and Beutell (1989) identified role overload in the workplace as being consistently related to work-family conflict. The more autonomous the woman’s work setting was, the less she felt conflicted in terms of time, with flexibility being a critical factor (Losocco, 1997).

As explained by Gutek et al. (1991), the rational view of role overload would be related to the time spent in each role. Indeed, they found a high correspondence between the time spent in a domain and conflict experienced in that domain, with these relationships being stronger for women than for men. However, the researchers also found support for the gender role perspective whereby people interpret their time spent in each domain in accordance with sex role expectations. Although, as has been noted, men are participating more in household tasks, the overall management of the home still falls
on women despite comparable work force participation (Mederer, 1993). Women’s primary concern for the home might account for women continuing to shoulder the greater burden of juggling the demands of work and family.

**Balancing multiple roles**

Barnett (1993) points out that the negative effects of multiple role involvement, such as role strain and role conflict, have centred on women. She reasons that this is because theoretical formulations about men’s lives have tended to assume the centrality of the paid employment role for men, with little mention of their family roles. It was assumed that if men fulfilled the role of provider, they discharged other family responsibilities and so issues of conflict between roles were not seen as a factor. Similarly, balancing roles is viewed as less of a factor for men.

Williams et al. (1991) noted gender differences in the ways in which men and women deal with demands on their time and specifically, they examined the consequences of managing work and family roles simultaneously. They found that where men tend to deal with different demands sequentially, women seem to have the ability to juggle different demands. Their research indicated that although attending to the demands of multiple roles does result in immediate negative effects on mood, there is a resilience and mothers appeared to recover quickly from role juggling episodes.

That women seem to have a greater ability than men to accommodate work to family is explained by Loscocco (1997) again in terms of “deeply embedded gender norms” (p. 213). Motherhood is viewed and experienced as an important and sanctioned identity for women, therefore “women can fulfil gender norms, and their own sense of
themselves as women, by accommodating work to family” (p. 213). Men, on the other hand, especially as fathers, fulfil their gender norms by putting the provider role first.

Through her interviews with self-employed women and men, Loscocco (1997) found that for women in particular, creating their own jobs gave them the flexibility and control needed to balance work and family. Interestingly, she found that most of the women interpreted flexibility in terms of enabling them to balance work and family, where most of the men saw the advantages of flexibility from the perspective of being their own boss.

The importance of social support in helping employed women to balance work and family is well documented. Lee and Duxbury (1998), for example, explored a variety of sources of support. They found that having supportive partners and friends and a supportive work environment were a considerable asset. Supportive environments will be explored further under resources, but important to mention here are the difficulties that women who are single mothers experience due to a lack of support. Whereas married parents count on their partners to provide instrumental and emotional support, the lack of a partner increases their responsibilities (Lee & Duxbury, 1998). They take on the dual roles of “good provider” and “good mother” and as Loscocco (1997) pointed out, they need supportive networks to help out with “the extraordinary commitment of time and energy required” (p. 223). Although she was referring particularly to starting a business, her words can also relate to any women who are in demanding jobs and caring for children single handedly. From an interview with a single mother, Loscocco quoted, “the stress is unbelievable” (p. 212).
Evidence suggests that employed women who are also mothers derive psychological benefits from being involved in multiple roles, or at least a work role and a home role (Barnett et al., 1994). The fact that they do find themselves under stress because they have to juggle roles is not, according to Williams et al. (1991), always bad. Undoubtedly role overload is frequently an issue for women, and especially for women who are single mothers but, as pointed out by Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992), this can be due to the lack of social and emotional support for working, the nature of the marital relationship and especially the participation of the husband in childcare. Traditionally, men have been able to dedicate themselves to something outside the family and the family has provided support. Women, on the other hand, have tended to live with ambiguity and multiplicity (Marshall, 1993).

In sum, multiple roles are a barrier for women inasmuch as there is a lack of will (social and political) to make structural changes that would facilitate a more positive experience of multiple role participation. Resolution would mean changes in workplace policies that would be more favourable to women, as well as attitudes and beliefs in terms of egalitarian divisions of labour in the home, and social policies that would be supportive in providing good childcare facilities. Women are still expected to give way to demands made upon them that are defined by society and so they continue to lead multiple lives.

**WOMEN’S RESOURCES AS WORKING MOTHERS**

I will categorize resources that help women to combine work and family under the headings of personal resources, family resources, and societal sources of support. categories suggested by Gilbert, Hallett, and Eldridge (1994). Under personal resources, I
will focus on coping and personal characteristics that seem to help ameliorate the strain of balancing work and family. When considering family resources, the focus will be on partner support and specifically on sharing roles. In terms of societal support, because it is haphazard, I will explore the kinds of support that women would like to have to help them to balance work and family life.

**Personal resources**

Combining paid employment with family responsibilities is more of a problem for women than for men (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). According to these researchers, regardless of their employment status, the sociocultural expectations that women will retain primary responsibility for the home has changed little over the years that women have been actively engaged in the work force. There is also evidence that women themselves expect to be actively involved in the work force and still retain their involvement in family roles (McCracken & Weitzman, 1997). Attempts to integrate several roles, as has already been noted, may result in role conflict, when there is interference between work and family life; and role overload, when the number of tasks seems overwhelming. Polasky and Holahan (1998) summarized stressful experiences as being "perceptions of uncontrollability, unpredictability, and overload of life circumstances" (p. 390). Are there personal characteristics and coping strategies that may ameliorate the negative effects of the stress that women experience when they are trying to balance work and family?

Psychological stress is experienced when a person appraises an event as taxing or exceeding his or her resources (Long, Kahn, & Schutz, 1992). Coping is defined as a person's cognitive and behavioural attempts to manage stressful demands (Folkman.
Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). According to the theoretical framework of psychological stress and coping proposed by Richard Lazarus and colleagues, the two major functions of coping are: to reduce emotional distress, and to seek to control some conditions that are responsible for the incongruence between the person-environment by problem solving (Folkman et al., 1986; Lazarus, 1993). Folkman and Lazarus (1988) found that in fact successful planful problem solving strategies significantly improve the person’s emotional state. Folkman et al. (1986) speculate that in work settings, because people are more likely to regulate their emotional responses, problem solving strategies are more frequently used, whereas in situations in which one is less likely to be emotionally detached, such as when a loved one is involved, there is less amenability to rational problem-solving.

Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) further propose that in ambiguous situations, such as in social or personal problems, there is a filtering process that distorts reality and impedes access to knowledge. Heppner and Krauskopf view ways of coping with problems as highly intertwined activities in which individual differences interact with the personal problem-solving process. Also, people learn over time to depend on a style of coping with which they have become comfortable.

Long, Kahn, and Schutz (1992) included aspects of career theory such as sex role attitudes, a sense of agency or efficacy, and the use of problem-focused coping in their investigation of coping by women in management positions. Environmental constraints and resources (work demands, level of control, and supportive resources) were also taken into account. They found that, in terms of personal characteristics, in fact profeminist attitudes towards women’s roles led to more distressing appraisals of stress. It was
thought that egalitarian managers may experience conflict between their expectations and male-dominated policies and discriminatory practices, thus feeling they were less in control. The researchers also found that the extent to which women’s appraisals were influenced by agentic traits was dependent on their work environment. In environments where there were high demands and a lack of support, the women negatively appraised work-related stressful situations. Because positive appraisals are related to planful problem solving and emotional self-control, even women with strong agentic traits become worn down in the face of chronically stressful situations.

Some researchers were interested in whether high achieving women cope with multiple role involvement by planning ahead. Interestingly, McCracken and Weitzman (1997), from a sample of 131 college women who desired to be engaged in both career and family roles in the future, found that these women were not motivated to plan too far ahead of when they might actually be in a multiple role situation. The researchers speculated that this result might be attributed to an overly optimistic attitude about their ability to do it all. The result might also be interpreted in terms of the women at this stage being primarily involved in developing their careers. This finding is consistent with the finding in the Wicheta project in which some of the women interviewed suggested that there is no good preparation for combining roles. They stated that “the advantages and disadvantages are learned only in process” (Carlisle, 1994, p. 148). However, although women may not give too much thought to child rearing when they are in the earlier stages of planning their careers, the women in McCracken and Weitzman’s (1997) study who were closer to multiple role involvement did make more plans. Especially they gave thought to the choice of a partner who would support their goals.
In trying to combine paid employment and family activities, I have already noted that women frequently find themselves in ambiguous situations. There are mixed societal messages regarding their roles as mothers, and women themselves are uncertain as to whether they are performing their roles adequately. Polasky and Holahan (1998), in their study investigating coping strategies used by professional women with young children, compared role-restructuring strategies (involving active attempts to renegotiate role demands and to involve others in fulfilling role demands) and the superwoman strategy (which attempts to satisfy all demands). The researchers expected the first strategy to be used more. In fact they found that most women used the superwoman coping strategy more than structural role redefinition, although the latter was associated with less depression and thus more perceived control. Those who did use the structural role-redefinition style of coping believed themselves to be in supportive home and work environments and so were more likely to delegate some of their role responsibilities. The researchers explained the continuing saliency of the superwoman coping strategy in terms of societal expectations that they fulfil the maternal role adequately. Based on the findings of Folkman et al. (1986), the result could also be explained in terms of their problem-solving abilities being impeded by their emotional attachment to the issue and by the ambiguities of the situation (Heppner & Krauskorf, 1987). Also, Heppner and Krauskorf's observation that people become comfortable with their habitual style of coping may be relevant. Women who are used to being self-sufficient are less likely to enlist the help of others.

The notion of perceived control being beneficial to women who are responding to demands of work and family roles has frequently found a place in the literature (e.g.,
Duxbury et al., 1994; Ross & Mirowsky, 1992; Tingey, Kiger, & Riley, 1996). Ross and Mirowsky (1992) posited that factors such as status, power, and economic independence that are associated with the work role would be associated with a sense of control. Family work, however, such as housework and childcare are associated with role overload and feelings of depression. Ross and Mirowsky found that the lower one’s responsibility for housework and the more importance that was given to one’s earnings, the greater the sense of control over one’s life. Similarly, Duxbury et al. (1994), in their large survey of 20,836 respondents of men and women in full time employment with children between the ages of six and twelve years of age, reported that the ability of women to cope with multiple roles was significantly affected by their perceived level of control over work and family demands.

In a different vein, the anthropologist, Catherine Bateson (1990) proposed that when faced with multiple role planning, women’s ability to improvise in new circumstances becomes their resource. Although women’s lives “no longer need to be dominated by the rhythms of procreation and the dependencies these created” (p.2), they nevertheless live with the discontinuities of reproduction and nursing and still must balance conflicting demands. Bateson pointed out that women have gained the ability to shift from one preoccupation to another because in their traditional role, they have always been pulled simultaneously by different tasks. “Women have not been permitted to focus on single goals but have tended to live with ambiguity and multiplicity” (p. 184). She found that the women whose lives she examined, in their struggle to find ways to combine commitments, crafted their own lives and found their personal path.
Family resources

Women’s likelihood of benefiting from multiple roles is enhanced if they have supportive partners (Lee & Duxbury, 1998; Silverstein, 1996). The literature addresses two categories of support in a relationship. In the one, the spouse “helps out” but she retains responsibility for managing and orchestrating family life (Mederer, 1993). In the second, the couple genuinely attempt to share roles (Hallett & Gilbert, 1997). Since the second represents a shift from socially prescribed roles and therefore a different social arrangement, in this section I will focus on the second category.

Role sharing couples, with whom there is a meshing of home life and employment for both partners, challenge traditional notions of what it means to be male and what it means to be female. As Gilbert et al. (1994) wrote, “[W]omen and men as equal partners provides a dramatically different view of work and family, one that assumes certain changes in women’s and men’s self-concepts as well as in societal norms and structures” (p. 135). In equally sharing the roles of earning income, domestic chores and childcare, these couples experiment with roles that are free of the constraints of gender. Although, as Gilbert et al. point out, this situation is still closer to being an ideal than a reality, there are increasing numbers of couples that are seeking to forge relationships that are based on equality, equal in the sense of sameness of function, rights and obligations (Smith & Reid, 1986). Percentages of dual career couples who claim to have an egalitarian relationship are approximately between 26% and 33% (Carlisle, 1994; Gilbert et al., 1994).

From an objective perspective, role sharing relationships tend to favour men and women disproportionately (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). They give wives greater freedom to
pursue careers (Smith & Reid, 1986), and men more opportunity to participate in family life, but at the cost to their careers. Women who are committed to a role-sharing, dual-career marriage tend to believe that their career is a crucial aspect of their identity. They have a higher self-esteem, higher agentic traits, and more liberal attitudes than their peers who plan for a more conventional dual-income relationship (Hallett & Gilbert, 1997). They also tend to give importance to choosing a spouse who is willing to participate in role sharing. Gilbert et al. (1994) argue that men in role-sharing dual-career families differ from husbands in conventional dual-income families in that they tend to report lower dominance needs, higher needs for closeness and inclusion, and more comparable spouse salaries. These men appreciate the value of their involvement in family life, and their family role is as important to them as their work role (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).

Restructuring has meant that the workplace is unpredictable and so for men to focus on their work role as their source of rewards is no longer safe. Pleck (1985) suggests that men derive greater satisfaction from their family role than from their work role. Silverstein (1996) reports that fathers who increased their involvement with their children increased in their overall self-esteem in addition to their confidence in parenting. Silverstein calls for traditional notions of “fathering” and “mothering” to be transformed so that both include nurturing and providing economic resources.

The appearance of children changes the status of the role-sharing couple in that when the wife leaves the labour force for a time their roles might resemble those of traditional or quasi traditional divisions of labour (Smith & Reid, 1986). As Smith and Reid state, having children represents the biological cornerstone of the traditional differentiation of roles and often couples slip from role-sharing at this time (Rosenbluth,
1998). However, those who are committed to role-sharing see this interruption as a temporary situation and both partners may cut back on their work role so that they can share the parent role (Smith & Reid, 1986). This adaptation often demands creativity on the part of both the spouses because of the constraints of marketplace realities and social pressures. However, because of their commitment to family roles, they will look for flexibility in their work role (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997).

Parents who choose to share roles do so because that is what they believe is best for themselves and their children (Ehrensaft, 1987). From her in-depth interviews of 40 shared parenting families, Ehrensaft found that parents who choose this style do so for a variety of reasons. They believe in egalitarianism between sexes, they are both interested in pursuing a career, they believe in giving men a greater role in parenting, and they believe that the children benefit from having a mother and father who are fully available to them. Ehrensaft noted that shared parenting adds a level of communication that would not occur in traditional marriages. Articulating parenting behaviour requires considerable soul searching and delving into one’s childhood to understand the personal meanings of parenting, and so there is a need to discuss and accept mutual differences of experience and perception. Although differences in parenting philosophies could potentially lead to conflict, Schwartz (1994) found that these couples take the time to work out a mutually desirable philosophy.

Good communication is an important characteristic of role-sharing couples. Different from couples in Paden and Buehler’s (1995) study in which men found that coping with their busy lifestyle by talking exacerbated problems because they felt that more was being asked of them, couples who share roles communicate intensively. In a
role-sharing relationship, Gilbert et al. (1994) argue that in the interpersonal process there must be both giving and receiving and mutual empowerment and strength. As couples create a joint life that is based on fairness, mutuality, and respect they develop what has been termed a "deep friendship" (Schwartz, 1994). Each spouse has an investment in the same issues and activities of the family. This includes the emotional work in the family, which again traditionally has been associated with women (Erickson, 1993). The relationship is characterised by an absence of hierarchy and so neither partner, according to Schwartz, consistently controls activities or decision making. The division of labour is based on ability and desire rather than on authority and tradition, and flexibility is an important component.

Schwartz's work was based on interviews with peer couples. The people in her study struggled with new understandings and values about marital relationships, and especially values that often run counter to long held traditions about the institution of marriage. Carlisle (1994), reporting on dual-career couples from the Wichita study, found that people felt that the advantages of a role-sharing relationship far outweighed the disadvantages that were listed such as role strain and too little time for the relationship. From their study of role sharing couples, Barnett and Rivers (1996) concluded that marriage is "a partnership in which both men and women are very busy and work hard, but find that the rewards of sharing are many, and worth the work" (p. 204).

**Societal sources of support**

Societal sources of support include organizational policies that take into account the needs of families as well as community support to provide resources needed to take care of children. Support is not only desired by mothers but, as has recently been noted,
also by fathers who wish to be more involved with their children’s lives (Lee & Duxbury, 1998). The focus in this section will be on the kinds of support that employees wish for to help facilitate the work and family balance.

In terms of organizational support, the key word that comes up time and again in the literature is flexibility. Honeycutt and Rosen (1997), in their study of 263 MBA alumni and students, found that overwhelmingly people are attracted to companies that offer flexible career paths and policies. It seems that working fathers, as well as working mothers, prefer to work for companies that provide opportunities to balance work and family. Interesting, also, was the finding that in these higher income families, members are willing to trade-off salary to meet flexibility needs, perhaps indicating a shift in values towards balancing work with other interests.

Flexible work hours have long since been a source of contention in organizations. The underlying assumption that employees must be present at work or to put in “face time” (Barnett & Rivers, 1996) to be successful needs to be challenged (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). Barnett and Rivers note that research is pointing to the fact that employees who have some control over where, when, and for how long they work tend to be more productive than employees who work a standard day at the office. Indeed, though research since the 70s has been demonstrating that the combination of high work demands and little control increases the risk for burn out and heart disease (Karasek, 1979), the work culture is slow to respond to the needs of workers. Women and men with families appreciate flexible family leave as well as flexible scheduling that allows them to respond to family-oriented concerns (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Lee & Duxbury, 1998).
Inasmuch as people have choices, they will tend towards employment that is consistent with their values (Judge & Bretz, 1992).

Lee and Duxbury (1998) found from their survey of civil servants that supportive supervisors and understanding colleagues are appreciated. Even with family friendly company policies, without the approval of supervisors and co-workers they were reluctant to make use of the benefits. The researchers suggested that family friendly policies need to be supplemented by changes in the culture of the organization and in the behaviour of managers for people to benefit from the policies. As Barnett and Rivers (1996) commented, “Having a boss who is open to flexibility is one of the big pluses of the job” (p. 91).

Although parents with children of all ages desire flexibility towards time and family responsibility leave, Lee and Duxbury (1998) noted that parents with children under 6 years of age also tended to like benefits like workplace day-care and day-care subsidies. The benefits of adequate resources for childcare in relieving stress among parents has been well documented (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). The more affluent the parents, the more resources are available to them (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997) but, as stated by Lee and Duxbury (1998), organizations need to offer a wide range of supports to address the various needs of employees.

Corporations seem slow to respond to the needs of their employees. Barnett and Rivers (1996) concluded that “we must reinvent the corporate culture that still operates under the outdated notion that workers are men who have wives at home to handle all the family issues” (p. 239). Rigid policies cause added stress to employees who are already leading complicated lives and may in fact be costly to the company in the long run. Work
and family roles no longer occupy separate spheres, but men’s and women’s roles at work and at home are converging. Moen (1989) made the point, “Although the workplace and the home typically are both physically and temporally separate, work and family roles have become inextricably intertwined” (p. 5). Parents are required to meet the needs of their children and their employment at the same time and so without flexibility, this becomes increasingly problematic and a supportive working environment becomes essential.

**CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Women no longer follow paths that have been prescribed for them by previous generations (Bateson, 1989). Although, in one sense, their lives are no longer dominated by their biological and social roles of giving birth and nurturing children, they continue to live with discontinuities as they try to balance the conflicting demands of family life and work. The point has been made a number of times in the literature that women’s lives are complex, and so although there are commonalities, each woman steers a unique path through a landscape that is constantly changing.

Although for many women it would be true to say that they would like to have equal opportunities in the workplace as men, the sociological and developmental literature is also pointing out that a deeply entrenched ideology regarding gender roles has an enormous effect on women. On the one hand, highly educated women see that they have the potential to expand their horizons and challenge the structures and norms that prevent women from participating in the work force on an equal basis to men (Hall, 1990). On the other hand women, particularly if they are also mothers, are constrained by strong psychological and ideological forces that leave them confused over role
responsibilities, and place them in a position of trying to maintain an impossible balance. Within the role of motherhood are contradictions concerning the mother's desire to meet the needs of the baby, and societal expectations that she should be the one caring for the child. At the same time, her job is demanding her full commitment, so that overall, women frequently find themselves being pulled in many directions.

The confusion in women towards their roles is illustrated in examples cited from the literature. For example, although women may have an ideal of equality, what they actually do in their own lives is influenced by deeply held beliefs concerning their roles as women (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). They tend to give priority to home responsibilities, even though they may be happier in their work role than in their home role (Larson et al., 1994). In the workplace, they might seek to assert themselves (Long et al., 1992), but come across behaviours that are prompted by gender-related beliefs about women (Gilbert et al., 1994; Reardon, 1995). Whereas mostly women cope with role overload without being affected negatively, it is not surprising that role conflict, in which they feel torn in different directions, is more problematic to women's psychological health (Coverman, 1989).

Women's protection from the negative effects of multiple role demands is largely dependent on the level of support that they have, and also on the extent to which they find themselves in a situation that is congruent with their values. Women who are in role-sharing relationships experience equality in the home. Their relationships are based on a sense of fairness and mutual respect in their responsibilities as income earners, parents, and in domestic responsibilities (Gilbert et al., 1994). These women feel supported, not only instrumentally, but also emotionally (Erickson, 1993), as well as in their career
aspirations (Gilbert et al., 1994). However, these couples also fare better when they are in a workplace that supports their values of family, offering flexible career paths and schedules which help them to balance their work and family lives (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997).

Clearly, many factors contribute to the complexity of women's lives. Theorists have struggled to find a model that fits women's career development. Although sensitive to the diversity of women's experience, existing models still fall short of accounting for the majority of working women. Farmer's (1985) model, for example, is one of the most comprehensive but does not account for even half of women who have careers (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Some important variables such as self-efficacy, instrumentalism, and liberal sex role attitudes have been isolated, but these are characteristics that would be expected of women who successfully compete in the public world of the workplace. There have been calls for more qualitative work on women's career experiences (e.g., Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992).

Some of the traditional models are promising in their applications. For example, the person-environment fit model is being used to address the need for structural change in the workplace to accommodate the values held by many people with families. The developmental approach, in its broader application, is useful in understanding some of the beliefs and attitudes that affect women's experience of their work role. Although theorists are attempting to accommodate and describe women's multiple roles, a gap remains between theory and experience.

While women all function within the same societal constraints, Bateson (1990) makes the point that they find their personal paths and shape their own lives. Implicit in
this thinking is the notion that women no longer wish to be constrained by an occupational world that assumes that families must accommodate to the demands of occupational work. In this study, I intend to explore the paths of eight women with children, looking out for common themes as well as the unique ways in which they attempt to shape their lives. The literature will serve as a backcloth to the study and a reference point for interpreting the experiences of the women.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of high achieving women who are attempting to combine career and motherhood. My goals were firstly to gather experiential information through conversational interviews, secondly to present life stories expressed largely in women’s own words, and thirdly to gain some insight from the material about ways in which career women shape their lives to accommodate children.

In this chapter, I will first address the issue of finding the methodological frame that I felt was appropriate for my research question. I will explain my choice of a qualitative methodology and then move on to discuss the life history approach. Secondly, under the heading of “method,” I will explore my personal connection with the research topic. I will then go on to discuss how I identified participants and collected and analysed the data. Lastly, I will introduce the reader to the participants in the study by providing a brief profile of each of the women.

A QUALITATIVE FRAME

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state, “We are attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world” (p. 9). Qualitative research is embedded in a Social Constructivist perspective, which values the experience of the individual, acknowledging that we gain from the multiple truths that emerge from the stories people tell about their lives (Richardson, 1993). The formulation of a research question and the way in which the research is conducted are linked. Van Manen (1992) conceptualizes question and method as a dialectic in that one tends to articulate questions in ways that fit with the method that one identifies with. Since my
interest is in women's experiences, a qualitative methodology was an obvious choice. I decided to use a life history approach to address my topic because of its emphasis on in-depth interviewing and the contextualization of people's lives. Hunt (1992) stresses that one should conduct research that is consistent with one's own beliefs and values, so I am approaching my research with a feminist perspective.

In this section, I will discuss firstly my choice of a qualitative methodology, and secondly, a life history approach with a feminist overlay, including the assumptions and implications of each as they relate to my inquiry.

**Why a qualitative paradigm**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) state, "Some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover persons' experiences with a phenomenon" (p. 19). They went on to suggest that qualitative methods can provide fresh understandings by giving "intricate details of a phenomenon that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods" (p.19). While acknowledging the value of quantitative methodologies, my interest in researching women's lived experience and gaining fresh understandings of their lives lends itself to a qualitative approach.

Bruner (1984) conceptualized the difference between quantitative and qualitative research by identifying two modes of thought, each providing a way of constructing reality and understanding the world, which he labeled "paradigmatic" and "narrative."

The paradigmatic mode is theory driven and truth is established through formal verification procedures and empirical proof. The aim is to have a well-designed research with a good sample so that results are generalizable. It seeks explications "that are
context free and universal" (Bruner, 1984, P. 97). The role of the researcher is to be objective and to avoid contaminating the data through personal involvement with the subjects. The assumption is that the world is made up of observable, measurable facts and that there is an objective reality (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The narrative approach, according to Bruner (1984), seeks explications that are sensitive to context and rather than seeking a particular truth, it is more interested in the meaning of experience. My intention in this research is to explore the experiences of the women in the study and to learn from their experiences.

The purpose here is not to be critical of the paradigmatic approach, or the positivist approach as it is more frequently termed, as I recognize its huge and valuable place in psychological theory. Rather, I wish to make the point that my interest in this project is to utilize the fund of knowledge that can be gained through the study of experience. Howe (1992), in fact, suggests that we have tended to polarize these two modes of inquiry and that people are neither passive and determined by causal explanations nor are they wholly active and self-creating. He goes on to say: “The degree to which an individual is one or the other depends on a host of social factors, such as economic and political structures, and a host of individual factors, such as age and education” (p. 244). The group of women whom I have chosen to study would tend towards the active and self-creating direction and the expectation is that there will be a richness in their stories that will inform us about ways in which women shape their lives.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state that the open, emergent nature of qualitative inquiry “sets the stage for discovery” (p. 6). The openness of qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexities that are so much a part of being
human. Rather than being deductive, qualitative research is essentially inductive in that it negotiates meanings and interpretations with the people who have provided the data, the "insider's perspective" (Howe, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through personal involvement with the participants, the researcher seeks to understand the heart of the experience and to present it in all its richness.

**A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH**

Life history research aims to understand life as lived in the present and as influenced by personal and social histories (Cole, 1994). It reveals daily life at home and at work - "the very stuff that rarely gets into any public record" (Yow, 1994, p. 13). The raw material of the research is experiential narrative, people's stories. Implicit in life history methodology are three assumptions. The first assumption is that the stories that people tell about their lives are embedded in a social context (Goodson, 1995). The second assumption is that life stories are in need of interpretation (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). The third assumption is that events of people's lives are linked, that "the past is alive in the present" (Rosenwald, 1992, p. 272). Life history research is embedded in a relationship in which the researcher and the researched work together to co-create meanings.

In this section, I will discuss the "storied nature" of people's lives, the three assumptions of life history research as they relate to my research, the centrality of the relationship between the researcher and the participants in the research, and lastly, questions of validity in life history research. Firstly, though, because I have chosen to work with a feminist overlay, I will briefly describe its implications for research in
general. Its implications for life history research in particular will be commented on throughout the discourse on life history methodology.

**A feminist perspective**

A feminist perspective, according to Nielsen (1990), provides a framework rather than a specific methodology. In other words, the methodology is informed by feminist perspectives and purposes with a focus on the distinctive experiences of women. Interviewing is consistent with many women’s interests in developing a sense of connectedness with people (Reinharz, 1992) and it offers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. It involves developing relationships of trust that facilitate deeper understandings of meanings (Measor & Sykes, 1992) through collaborating with the participants.

Gorelick (1996) explains that when both the researcher and the researched are women, the dynamic of the research changes. There is a resonance through their gender, and the researcher can find herself mirrored in those she is researching. At the same time, she needs to be able to step back from the words she is hearing and to frame them in a larger social context. In recognizing that there is diversity amongst women themselves, we need to hear the multiple voices of women. Thus, the purposes of feminist research are two-fold. Firstly, to increase knowledge by giving voice to women and secondly, to uncover underlying causes of women’s oppression with the goal of contributing towards women’s lives being more equitable. Nowadays, because research is sometimes with women who are in positions of power, the research may be with an active subject. Nevertheless, Acker et al. (1996) recommend that the social location and issues regarding women’s emancipation remain a focus.
The storied nature of people's lives

A number of writers discuss the storied nature of people's lives. Ochberg (1994) explains that it is not that people continually talk about their lives but rather that we all "are continually living out sequences of purposeful action" (p. 117). Widdershoven (1993), drawing on hermeneutic philosophy, suggests that life and story are internally related, that life informs and is formed by stories. He goes on to explain that stories (which people tell about their lives) are interpretations of life which tell us in a meaningful way what life is about, and that the implicit meaning of life is made explicit in stories. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) propose that in telling their stories, people are also fashioning their identities. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) summarize the narrative and action components of story in the following way: "People are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others" (p. 4). Stories provide us with a sense of meaning and belonging in our lives. "They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with the threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1).

People tend to have a stack of narratives which they draw on to fit a particular situation (Hollway, 1989) and a range of factors influences how they tell the story in a situation. A story about a particular experience, then, can be told in different ways and each story is, as Holloway says, "one production among an infinite set of possibilities" (p. 41). She also points out that even though the story might improve with telling, it does not give the person fresh insight unless the person she is talking to helps her to produce
something new. The researcher needs to facilitate the search for new insights and deeper meanings.

The perspective of the teller also limits the stories that people tell. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) state that “all stories are told and that all self-understanding is realized within the narrative frames each culture provides its members” (p. 2). They go on to make the point that although social influences shape people’s understandings, a tension exists between an individual’s desire to conform and a desire to push beyond the limits of the culture. In listening to people’s stories, it is important to pay attention to the desire to strain against social conventions because by doing so, the story moves beyond the subjective and into the realm of social change.

In my research, the women who are participating are experimenting with lifestyles that stretch the social conventions. They are both committed to their careers and to being good mothers. Although the stories will be shaped by the culture, it will be important to attend to desires to deviate from cultural norms.

The assumptions of life history research
a) The importance of context

The emphasis on context separates life history research from many other kinds of qualitative methodologies. For example, at one extreme phenomenological research attempts to strip away context so that it can arrive at the essence of the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakis, 1994) and at the other extreme, critical thinking focuses on the context and particularly on social structures that oppress. Life history research should be distinguished from narrative as method. Cole (1995) explains the difference in the following way: “Narrative focuses on making meaning out of
individuals’ experiences; life history draws on individuals’ experience to make broader contextual meaning” (p. 124). In other words, the focus of life history is less on providing biographical material and more on drawing on the experiences that people share and the possibilities they give for wider implications, with the assumption that there is much that we share with others on a contextual level.

The influence of the context in which we live is reflected in the way in which we talk about and make sense of our lives. Our stories are shaped by prevailing discourses and social conventions (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Acker et al. (1996) make the point that although people are active agents in their own lives, individual experience is located in a particular social context and “embedded within a set of social relations that produce both the possibilities and limitations of that experience” (p. 62). Taking the root meaning of context as being “to weave together,” the Personal Narratives Group (1989) conceptualize context as “the webs of meaning within which humans act” (p. 19). The individual is connected to the world, for example, through social groups and structures, through inter-personal relationships and through identities. Taking this metaphor for context further, the Personal Narratives Group understand context as a dynamic process “through which the individual simultaneously shapes and is shaped by her environment” (p. 19). Context seen in this way is, therefore, not destiny but instead has built in room for change and growth. Life history research focuses on ways in which people shape their lives thus providing models for others to move beyond the limiting aspects of their environment, an important aspect of my study.

When studying the lives of women, gender is a crucial aspect of context. Using life history methodology means that the subject matter of my research is the everyday
lives of women, lives that are embedded in their gender, culture, beliefs, and life history (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Through the stories that women tell, we have the opportunity to examine the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). As women shape and are shaped by their environment, their experiences inform our own realities and allow us to learn from them.

b) The need for interpretation

While my intention in this research is to use the words of the women themselves as far as possible, interpretation is intrinsic to the research process. The statement by Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) that interpretation enters every moment of the inquiry is well taken. As researchers, it is important to acknowledge our interpretive role and to be responsible in that role to ensure the integrity of the research (Cole, 1994). Part of the inter-subjective nature of life history methods is to work with the participants to co-create meanings, and in that way we can explain the lives of others without violating their reality (Acker et al., 1996).

The stories that people tell about their lives are interpretations themselves. They seek to capture, in a condensed form, the essence of experiences and as Carter (1993) states: “Story accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes” (p. 6). Attempting to put into words the sequences of actions that make up their lives means that stories are complex because lives are complex, and they give rise to possibilities of many different meanings. The Personal Narratives Group (1989) explain that although people do not reveal the past as it actually was from an objective stance, they give the truths of their experiences. As we hear their stories, we make our own interpretations and the
meanings we derive from them are shaped according to our own place in the world. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings and the multiplicity of influences that are intrinsic to a life story (Carter, 1993). "Interpreting life history narratives is a process that increases the understanding of the lives examined" (Bloom & Munro, 1995, p. 109).

In the feminist literature, there is a debate about the role of the researcher in interpretation. Whereas some of the earlier feminist work emphasized the primacy of "voice," the voices of the participants in the research (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), recent feminist researchers are more cautious and express that although giving voice is important, it is not enough. The issue, as expressed by Gorelick (1996), is that oral history describes the world from the perspective of the people being studied and so the contribution of the study, both to the participants themselves and to feminist research, may be limited by being "confined within their perceptions" (p. 26). Gorelick uses the phrase "hidden determinants" to describe the hidden underlying structures of women's oppression which are not necessarily apparent because they are a part of our cultural context. Nielsen (1990) made the point that unless women reinterpret reality from their own experiences, they are likely to accept the dominant world-view. Bearing in mind the limitations of "the insider's perspective" (Howe, 1992, p.249), it is the responsibility of the researcher to bring a perspective that illuminates social structures that are oppressive to women, and also to provide explanations of women's lives that are useful to them to improve their situations (Edwards, 1993).

In reporting on a study they conducted on women who returned to work after raising their families (Acker et al., 1996), the researchers noted that despite their
commitment to egalitarian relations with their participants and their desire to have the participants give voice, the participants themselves wanted some interpretive explanations. The solution of the researchers was to present life histories expressed mainly in the women’s own words and then to have their own analysis which provided deeper understandings of the women’s lives. I decided to take that approach as the model for presenting my research. It has the further advantage of allowing the reader to participate in the interpretive process.

c) Elements that link

This third assumption of life history methodology refers to the fact that although people often tell their stories in disjointed ways, there are links between the elements of a story. Polkinghorne (1995) made the point that to make a person’s story understandable to the reader, there needs to be historic continuity. According to Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992): “Life stories ought to illuminate connections among the series of narratives that any informant might construct” (p. 7). Although there are links between past experiences and present and future actions, often the person’s story is about struggles to change their social learning experiences. Rosenwald (1992) would add that it is not “historical truth that is at stake but historicism in the sense that “any event, any experience, any action - can be better understood if we recognize earlier moments surviving and resonating within it” (p. 272).

Each life is worked out in a particular life situation. Through the person’s story, effects of the constraints of her family and social system are illuminated and the logic of individual courses of action becomes clear (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). In some narratives, there is an apparent acceptance of social norms while in others, those norms
are challenged. Linking elements of a life allows us, according to the Personal Narratives Group, "to see lives as simultaneously individual and social creations, and to see individuals simultaneously the changers and the changed" (p. 6).

**The centrality of the relationship between researcher and researched**

One of the purposes of life history research is to capture the life stories of participants, and generally this occurs in the context of face-to-face conversational interviews. Cole (1991) describes the interview in the following way, "A life-experience interview is a reflective dialogue that results in or contributes to increased understanding of self, or self in relation to some person, place, or thing" (p. 196). She sees the interview as being a "grounded conversation" (p. 197) in which the perspectives of the "insider," who has the first hand knowledge of her experience, and the perspective of the "outsider," who can bring theoretical and contextual understandings, are brought to bear on the topic.

In this section, I would like to discuss the collaborative nature of the relationship, the issue of control over the process, subjectivities, and the ethical implications of collaborative research.

a) **The collaborative nature of the research relationship**

The in-depth interview is a specific research method of life history methodology. In Seidman's (1991) words, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.3). Yow (1993) describes the interview as a "collaboration in a mutually interesting endeavour" (p. 133). This collaborative nature of the research process represents a shift from more traditional research styles where the participants generally assume a passive role and merely provide the data. The newer model is more akin to a
partnership where each contributes important expertise (Cole & Knowles, 1993). The participant is the expert in her own life and the researcher facilitates the exploration and provides some outside knowledge of the subject matter being discussed. Seidman (1991) explains, “Each interviewing relationship is individually crafted. It is a reflection of the personalities of the participant and the interviewer and the ways they interact” (p. 72).

Cole (1991) states, “The purpose of life-history research is to gain insight into the lives of individuals through a reconstruction of past events” (p. 201). In the context of the interaction between researcher and researched, the researcher facilitates the telling and the explorations of life stories through appropriate promptings, and through communicating interest, understanding, and empathy (Cole, 1991). Often, as Reinharz (1992) comments, a strong connection develops between the researcher and the participants during the course of the study as together researcher and participant reinterpret and reconstruct life experiences through exploring deeper meanings.

It has already been mentioned that several feminist researchers feel that research is enhanced when women interview women. Acker et al. (1996) state: “There is a potential connection of experience between women and an ability to be self-revelatory about shared life events that is less likely to be present with a male interviewer” (p. 82). Yow (1994) reports on research findings that show different conversational styles between men and women. Generally, women have learned to develop an ambience of thinking things through together and as Yow states: “In conversation, women often establish a quality of sharing. They exchange personal information and expressions of feeling as a way of creating a friendship bond” (p. 133). Women researchers, then, tend to be connected not only with the subject matter being studied but also with the people
studied. As women give insights into their own lives, the researcher not only learns about other women but also from other women (Reinharz, 1992). The conversational style of interview, which encourages interviewees to express and explore their own meanings, reflects my own preference.

b) The issue of control: Whose voice?

Feminist researchers have taken issue with the traditional hierarchical approach to research in which there is a power differential in favour of the knower (Acker et al., 1996). They struggle to find ways of reducing the unequal power in the research relationship, however, this itself may be fraught with difficulties. Acker et al., whose study was mentioned earlier, provide an example of setting out to design a methodology with a particular emphasis on an egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant. In conducting interviews where the women in their study took the lead in deciding what to talk about, they found that they had collected data that were difficult to analyze. In establishing reciprocity in the relationship and sometimes friendship, the researchers found that expectations were set up on the part of the interviewee that the researcher could not meet. Where they shared written material with the women, they found potential conflict between their feminist frame of reference and people's interpretation of their own lives. On looking back at this research fifteen years later, although it still represents their views on problems in doing feminist research, some of their thinking has changed. They would emphasize as feminist researchers the importance of explicating the connection between the researcher's experience and the research project. They also reiterated that there is no single woman's perspective but that there are "multiple diversities of women's experience" (p.81). The viewpoints of the researcher
and the participants are not necessarily compatible but both should be recognized (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). In allowing multiple truths to emerge, the researcher is relinquishing control of what constitutes knowledge and acknowledging a more complex reality that is expressed through people’s histories, experiences and understandings (Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

The assumption of multiple truths, as opposed to one objective “Truth,” has implications regarding the place of theory in the research process and the researcher’s own academic interests. By trying to interpret narratives through particular theoretical frames, the researcher can be limited in her attempts to uncover meaningful connections. Sacks (1989), in her study of the relationship between family values and women’s organized activism, explained how her own intellectual framework of feminist, Freudian, and Marxist explanations prevented her from asking questions that would have shown positive links between family life and social rebellion. Her focus had been on looking for oppressive aspects. The Personal Narratives Group (1989) summarized how the dilemma was resolved in the following way: “Sacks finally realized that she would be able to make sense out of this connection only when she put aside her own framework and allowed the connections to emerge from the context in which the women saw their own lives” (p. 23).

Both the narrator and the researcher bring certain expectations and understandings to the interaction and there needs to be sufficient flexibility to allow for both voices.

c) Two subjectivities

A life history interview is an interaction between one who tells and the other who listens. However, the listener also asks, responds, and ultimately tells. In the activity of listening, responding and telling, a life can be assimilated into the listener’s own life story
and may resonate with her experiences and perceptions so that the subjectivity of the one merges with the subjectivity of the other through the research process. The effect can spread to a wider audience of readers and as Prell (1989) suggested, "the stories of others could comment on all lives" (p. 254).

Drawing on the work of Gadamer (cited in Nielsen, 1990), the dialectic process between researcher and researched is characterized as the "fusion of horizons" (p. 29). As Nielsen explains, the "fusion" results from being open to new knowledge, while also being grounded in one's own perspective (or horizon) that cannot be bracketed. "[O]ne's horizon is described as necessarily limited and finite. At the same time, however, it is open to relating or connecting with horizons other than one's own" (p. 29). Through the fusion of horizons, one's viewpoint is transcended.

The view of fusion of horizons, where one takes into the research process a particular standpoint, is different from the views of phenomenologists who advocate bracketing. In their view, the researcher needs to clear the mind of whatever might colour the experience with the other person so that we might come to know things as they are for the participant (Moustakis, 1994). Hershusius (1994), on the other hand, sees bracketing as being "an alien state of consciousness" (p. 15). Rather than trying to manage our subjectivity, she recommends a need to engage in "participatory consciousness" which is focusing complete attention on the other while at the same time being aware of personal reactions and of any personal relationship with the subject matter (Lieblich, 1994).

Managing two subjectivities is one of the challenges of life history research. While being eager to allow women's voices to emerge in their own terms, as Edwards (1993) pointed out, "the researcher is not simply a straightforward receptacle for the
views of others” (p. 185). Not only is she bringing her own experiences into the interaction but she is also bringing her hopes and aspirations for the research itself. On top of that, she has provided the occasion for telling the stories. How the women tell their stories will be influenced by the interaction with the researcher. Several feminist researchers suggest that some appropriate self-disclosure is recommended as it reduces power imbalances and shows solidarity between women. Edwards suggests that, “such double subjectivities can be used and understood as part of the research process” (p.185).

d) Ethical implications

Perhaps the key words of ethical research are sensitivity, honesty and respect. The researcher needs to be sensitive to what it is like being researched. Although it is possible for any topic being researched to be sensitive, research that “intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience” (Renzetti & Lee, 1993, p. 6) may touch on aspects of a person’s life that are particularly sensitive. Because the material may be intimate, the possibility for harm is greater (Measor & Sykes, 1992). Riddell (1989) points out the risk of raising issues that might be very emotional for the participant. In her desire to obtain more information, the researcher needs to honour the personal boundaries of the participant. The caution that the researcher should err on the side of the well-being of the person is well emphasized in qualitative research literature (e.g., Cole, 1991; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Measor, 1985; Riddell, 1989).

Honesty with participants means, according to Yow (1994), clearly explaining the purpose of the research and the expectations regarding their participation so that they can judge for themselves whether or not they feel comfortable in participating. However, because of the emergent nature of qualitative research, the researcher herself is not
necessarily fully aware of how the research will unfold. Renzetti and Lee (1993) sum up the solution to this dilemma by stating that informed consent means communicating openly and honestly throughout the research.

Many writings on qualitative research quote Kant’s notion that respect for persons is at the root of thinking since it is a fundamental value (e.g., Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Yow, 1994). Included in respect for the person is protecting her or his anonymity. Researchers may use fictitious names, but they do not necessarily protect a person’s privacy. It is important to discuss with participants ways in which their identity may be disguised.

If the researcher is working in a collaborative way with the participants, the research process becomes a dialogue as researcher and researched explore and clarify the topic under discussion (Acker et al., 1996). Under these circumstances, according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), the participant is no longer an object needing protection but rather empowered to determine the level of her participation. Acker et al. (1996) make the point that researchers sometimes work with people who are in positions of power and they suggest that, “the powerful subject has no difficulty in being active and determining the parameters of the interview” (p. 82). While this may be so, the researcher still needs to be aware of the possibility of touching on sensitive areas. Sensitivity, honesty and respect are key to responsible research.

Questions of validity: The truths of experience

The Personal Narratives Group make the point: “Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narrative are neither open to proof nor self-evident” (p. 261). Scientific Truths have to conform to established criteria of validity and reliability.
Generalizations and predictions can be made based on outcomes. Thus, these Truths come to constitute knowledge. People’s life stories that are based on experience and perceptions cannot stand up to the scientific tests of validity.

One of the beauties of qualitative research is to look beyond generalizations and to explore the truths of lived experience. The Personal Narratives Group (1989) would argue that concepts of Truth that are embodied in generalization assume a partial reality and are therefore deceptive. Generalizations discount experience that does not fall within the statistical average and so fail to acknowledge the complexities of human life. The Personal Narratives Group also argue for the case of “plural truths” that are rooted in people’s histories, experiences, and perceptions. They make the case that we absorb knowledge, consciously and unconsciously, when we hear people’s stories. In resonating with such stories, we test our own reality and sometimes modify or change our perceptions. From a feminist perspective, stories can bring to light oppressive social realities and force us to look at our own situations in society. Thus stories illuminate and give meaning to our own experience.

Because stories are reconstructions of an episode of life, they are interpretations of that experience. As researchers recording the stories, in order to be true to the story we need to pay careful attention to the context that shapes the story and also to the context that informs us as we listen to the story. Acker et al. (1996) understand validity, or truth, in qualitative research as being the adequate reconstruction of the story. They place emphasis on understanding reality from the perspective of the person relating her experience so that the voice of the participant is heard accurately. They also point out that it is important that the recorder of the story should locate herself so that biases are clear.
Not only should the research be viewed in terms of adequacy of interpretation, according to Acker et al., but also in terms of adequacy of findings. That means situating the findings in terms of their broader implications.

Addressing the question of validity in narrative research, Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) distinguishes between Truth, which is objective, and fidelity, which is what the story means to the teller of the tale. He states: "Fidelity becomes an obligation towards preserving the bonds between the teller and the receiver by honouring the self-report of the teller and the obligation of the original teller to be as honest as possible in the telling" (p. 28). He goes on to say that the researcher must also act with fidelity by being true to the situation of the teller. A study is valid, then, if it is a trustworthy representation of the experience of the person being studied and if the subjectivity of the researcher is acknowledged. In a collaborative research relationship, obtaining positive responses of participants to written material verifies that the researcher has accurately captured their experiences and perspectives.

METHOD

My purpose in this section is firstly, to address the issue of how I as researcher connect with the research process. This includes describing the process of choosing the topic, and also the beliefs and understandings that I bring into the research process that are likely to influence and bias my interpretations at all levels. My second purpose is to explain how I conducted the research, which includes choosing the participants, gathering data through interviews, and analyzing the findings.
Research as a reflexive activity

To acknowledge that as researchers we need to accept our own personhood and its influence on research at every level means that our perceptions and our capacity to make meaning are fundamental to the research process (Hunt, 1992). Rather than attempting to be objective, we make explicit our subjectivity and it becomes a tool in the research process.

In a sense, it is comfortable to hide behind the facade of the “objective experimenter,” and yet I would argue that researchers cannot be completely objective. In this section, the tone will become personal as I seek to respond to the need to articulate what I as researcher bring to the research process. I propose to do so by attempting to answer three questions that I will pose to myself. Firstly, what is the story behind my choice of this research topic? Secondly, what is my relationship to the research topic? Thirdly, what are the perspectives (beliefs and values) that I bring to the research process?

a) The story behind my choice of research topic

Central to a doctoral program is the dissertation. If the choice is to conduct qualitative research, it can be very demanding on the person of the researcher. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) emphasize the importance of choosing a topic for which one feels a passion because it is that passion that will be the motivating factor through the various stages of the research. I had been warned that the process would be long and sometimes lonely, and that it would likely absorb my time and my energy so that much of my life would be on hold for extended periods. It was daunting and clearly the choice of topic was crucial to surviving the process.
The inspiration for my topic came from a particular conference address. The sentence that struck a chord in me I will reconstruct as follows, “It is with the birth of the first child that women nowadays experience inequality” (Silverstein, 1993). The address was on the relationship between work and family life in women. My interest in women in the workplace is rooted in my own experience of returning to work after being at home with my children for seventeen years. That interest led me to conduct a piece of research for my honours degree on the rewards and concerns of women’s workplace experience which was later adapted for publication as a journal article (Aston & Lavery, 1993). It also motivated me to try my first qualitative research for my Master’s thesis on the qualities that women bring into the workforce. The idea of including the dimension of motherhood in research on women’s workplace experiences excited me. It is an important role in my life and a role that cannot be discounted when exploring women’s experience as workers.

My interest in a feminist perspective has developed as I have grown in confidence in myself as a woman. As women are beginning to move out of their oppressed status, I see tremendous potential for their influence in making our world a better place. Much has changed and evolved in the lives of women over the past thirty years. Women’s position in the workforce is an undeniable reality and albeit slowly, they are gaining positions of power. At the same time, children are very much a reality in women’s lives. My topic on the experiences of career women who are also mothers reflects an interest in how women continue in a career after motherhood. I both envy their position of having both career and family and am awed by their ability to cope in both roles.
b) What is my relationship to my research

Unlike me, the women I wanted to study expected to continue with their careers when they had children. Being of an earlier cohort, I came with different expectations. Yes, I was encouraged to have a career, but the societal expectations were that it would be secondary to my roles as wife and mother. Interestingly, my career was as a teacher of domestic science, as it was then called. This was not my choice, but it was thought that it would be more useful to me in my future life than my choice of history would be. I stopped work when I had my first child and was out of the workforce for seventeen years while I raised our three children. The expectation was that my husband would provide for us all, which he did.

In the mid eighties, circumstances changed for our family. There was a long distance move, then a job loss, and debt resulting from the move. Our youngest child was eight years old and I felt that the responsibility of providing sufficient income for the family was too great a burden for one person to have to shoulder. I picked up a temporary job as well as returning to university, shifting my focus from teaching to perhaps a career in psychology. With so many years out of the classroom, too much had changed and I had lost the nerve for teaching. Time in university helped me to regain my confidence and to make the transition to the work world. I saw myself as a mother and needing to balance that with being a student and also having a job. Our family had grown because we had taken in a lodger to help make ends meet and as it turned out, he was a wonderful big brother to our teenage boys. All of the family had to make huge adjustments.

In trying to make sense out of my own situation, I was interested in how other women coped with multiple roles and ambiguous feelings. I loved the challenge of this
other world and wished that I could have embarked on my career much earlier in my life. At the same time, I loved being home with my children and I loved being a mother to them. I would not have missed that for anything. Do other women experience these pulls and how do they cope with them?

Changes are occurring with each new cohort of women. My interest in this research is also in terms of what we can pass on to the next generation of women. My daughter, now twenty-one years old, expects to move into the workforce. She will be highly qualified, she is self assured, and expecting to at least be on equal terms with her male counterparts. What will happen if she has children? How can the current generation of women in the workforce help to pave the way for the next generation of women? Are there some things that they can learn from the present generation of career women who have young children? What are the characteristics of successfully accommodating career and family? These are some of the questions that I hoped my research would address.

c) What are the perspectives that I bring to the research process?

My perspective is the subjectivity that I as researcher bring to the research process. I am a mother of three adult children and I am in a well functioning heterosexual relationship. I am developing a career that has involved many years of commitment to reach this stage of an all-but-dissertation doctoral degree. I also have been working in the practice of psychotherapy throughout my doctoral program. I come to the research process holding all of these identities.

Although I come to the research process as researcher and not as therapist, the characteristics of caring, empathy and understanding that I bring to a therapy session I also bring to the research relationship. Although there are similarities between a
nondirective style of interviewing and the explorative nature of psychotherapy, essentially the goals are different. As Seidman (1991) states, "the researcher is there to learn, not to treat the participant" (p. 81). I bring to the process an enormous curiosity in the subject matter and so I come with an open mind as a learner and I am willing to engage in what Hershusius (1994) terms "participatory consciousness."

While acknowledging the difference between researcher and therapist, I nevertheless bring to the research relationship skills that I use in psychotherapy. My empathic listening skills are well honed. I conceptualize people’s issues according to their context, their motivations and beliefs. I am a feminist therapist and as such, am open to indications of women's oppression and social structures that perpetuate women's disadvantage on the one hand, but also I am open to women's strengths and desires to help bring about changes on the other hand.

Motherhood brought a new dimension of caring and understanding into my life. How has it impacted upon other women and does that effect transfer to the workplace and to broader societal issues? Particularly, I am also sensitive to the fact that as a society we do not cherish our children. I place great value on the well being of children. I am disturbed by the direction we are going in as a society in relation to our children and the implications of blame that are being tossed at women who are in the workforce. Changes tend to start at a micro level. I hope in my research to illuminate ways in which women struggle in their own worlds to shape their lives and the lives of their children, so that we might learn from them.
Finding participants

I set out with three essential criteria for women who participated in the study. Firstly, that my participants should be women in careers in which they had expended considerable time and energy to attain some success. Secondly, that they should also be mothers of at least one child. Thirdly, that they had returned to their employment when their children were infants, so that at the time of the study they were working mothers. I chose to work with eight women. I felt that with this number there would be a variety of experiences and that practically it would be sufficient given the in-depth interviewing of the life history methodology. According to Seidman (1991): “The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (p. 45).

All of the women met the essential criteria. Six of the women were living with the father of their children. One had divorced the children’s father and had remarried, and the other was raising her children as a single mother. Of the eight women in the study, five were recommended to me by friends, two were suggested to me by the participants, and one I found by contacting the local legal registry. In all cases, I asked the referee to explain the study very broadly to the prospective participant, and if the person was interested, she should contact me. That way I felt I was putting less pressure on people to participate. When they contacted me, I would verbally provide them with further details, including their time commitment, and I would follow up the conversation with a letter of information (see Appendix 1). If I felt they met the essential criteria and if they were still
willing to participate. then we would set a time and place that would be convenient for us to meet.

At the first meeting, they would sign a form of consent (see Appendix 2), which would give me permission to record our sessions, would assure them of their anonymity. and would give them permission to drop out of the study at any time. Generally, we would spend about half an hour getting to know each other and I would tell them again about the sort of information that would be useful to the study. Because all of the people are incredibly busy and because in most cases I had to travel a distance to see people, we would then proceed into the taped part of the interview.

The women in the study come from a variety of occupations. Five are in a profession and three are in business. Of the five in professions, one is a teacher who furthered her training and became a special resources specialist and she has two children. One is a lawyer in private practice in a small town and another is a lawyer in a large city specializing in human rights, each with two children. The fourth woman is a doctor in a small town practice with two children, and the fifth is an emergency doctor in a large city and she has three children. Of the women in business, two work as managers in large multi national companies. One has two children and another has one and was pregnant with her second child at the time when we were meeting. The last participant directs a large rehabilitation facility. She has twins and is a single mother. At the end of the chapter, there is a profile of each of the participants so that the reader can become better acquainted with the women.

There is approximately an eight-year span in the ages of the women, ranging from mid thirties to early forties. Four were in their early forties and four were in their mid to
late thirties. In terms of cultural history, like me they are white, well educated, and with the one exception, married. I felt that they were people who are capable of exploring themselves and reflecting on their lives in the kind of way that would be helpful for the study. Overall, they seemed to be very interesting people. There is a certain self-selection process in that people who felt they were not doing well in their lives likely would not volunteer. However, from a feminist perspective, I thought that it would be interesting to find out whether women who are successful in their jobs have in fact “made it” in terms of gender parity. I also thought that if there is something to be learned about how women shape their lives, these women would provide examples.

THE INTERVIEWS

In all, I conducted twenty-one interviews with the eight participants. I had three meetings with the first five participants and two meetings with the last three. Of the last three women, it was difficult to find times to meet with one participant because of time constraints, and another had gone on maternity leave. In the case of the last participant, perhaps because I was more proficient in interviewing, we agreed that we would meet a third time only if it was needed. I taped all of the interviews.

We met in places that were convenient to the participants. Sometimes it would be in their homes, sometimes in their offices, and sometimes in a restaurant over a meal. I tried to limit the restaurant meetings as much as possible because of the difficulty of transcribing a tape where there was the background noise of music, the clatter of dishes, and conversations going on at adjacent tables. Sometimes though, especially in the case of the emergency doctor, the only available time was during a mealtime and I had to respect that.
I more or less followed Seidman’s (1991) model of interviewing for life history research. His model involves conducting a series of three separate 90-minute interviews with each participant. He states “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (p. 10). In the first interview, according to Seidman, the task of the interviewer is to put the person’s experience in context by asking the participant to tell as much as possible about herself in the light of the topic. I differed from Seidman in that the women in the study all gave me a two-hour time slot for this interview. In that time, they told me about early influences in their lives, about their choice of career, and about their experiences as mothers. Some of the material in the first interview overlapped with the content that Seidman recommended for the second interview, which was to inquire about the details of their present experience as related to the topic. He said that even if a participant starts to tell an interesting story in the first interview about her present work situation, her lead should not be pursued. I, on the other hand, went more with the lead of the participant. I felt that an interesting story was more important than trying to maintain an interview structure. As I interviewed people, I found that some liked to have more structure than others. I tried to be attuned to the needs of the participant and to facilitate the sharing of experiences with promptings and with an attitude of caring and empathy.

Seidman (1991) placed the interviews at three day to one-week intervals. Instead, I wanted time to reflect on the first meeting and to write a summary of that meeting while it was fresh in my mind. My plan was to give the summary to the participant before the second meeting so that she could comment on my understanding of her material and also have an idea of how I might use her material in the thesis. Logistically it was not possible
for either them or me to schedule meetings so close together. My idea was to conduct an interview with each of four participants before moving into the next round of interviews. That way, I felt that I could gain a broader idea of the kind of information that people could give me before moving into the second round of interviews.

I organized my interviewing by meeting individually once with four women. In between I transcribed and worked on the summary of each interview. I then met with each of these women a second time and transcribed the interview and modified the summary. I felt that if I limited the number I worked with at a time I would be in a better position to retain the material. I followed the same pattern with the next four and then came back with the third interview with the first group. I questioned the usefulness of the third interview and with the one exception, I decided against conducting third interviews with the remainder of the second group.

As well as the summary, the participants also received a transcript of the first interview. I thought this would give them an opportunity to reflect on what they had said. They were asked to prepare for the second interview by going through the summary with the transcript. I asked for their comments on whether it accurately reflected their experience and if there were aspects of their stories they would like to enlarge upon in the second interview (see Appendix 3 for sample letter). I felt it was important to allow them to highlight the experiences that were most significant to them. The second interview was also an opportunity for me to ask them to fill in the contextual gaps that I thought were missing from the first interview. They all went through the summaries but not all had time to go through the transcripts.
Seidman (1991) uses the third interview to ask the respondents to reflect on the meanings of their experience. I found that people were reflecting on meanings as they went along. In the process of selecting an experience to talk about and reconstructing that experience, they were imparting meaning. They saw connections that made sense to them as they related experiences. However, when there was an opportunity for a third interview, sometimes there was a progression in their thinking and reflecting but sometimes there was repetition which indicated that in fact they had gone as far as they could go.

All of the participants expressed that they were very comfortable with our meetings. Several commented on the fact that their lives are so busy that there is little time for reflection. They valued the opportunity to focus on the way they live their lives and on themselves as women. It meant something to them that their experiences had value and that they were not alone in their struggle to try and balance work and family. Our conversations led some of the women to evaluate their lives further as to whether they could do things differently. The indications that our conversations had both validated their experiences and helped them to be more attuned to themselves was unanticipated and gratifying.

ANALYZING AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

Analysis and interpretation goes on in qualitative research right from the first meeting with the first participant. The purpose of this section, however, is to describe my process of formal analysis. Following Seidman’s (1991) model, I firstly developed profiles of individual participants and then I worked with themes across all participants. I will describe each of these stages.
a) Profiles and themes

The analysis and interpretation formally began with the transcribing of the interviews. Although this was a very laborious process it was nevertheless valuable. I could listen again to the voices and jot down some reflections on the interview. I could also see gaps in the material where I might direct a question at the next interview. Themes started to stand out at this point and I could begin to make connections.

Seidman's point that "[t]he interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself" (p. 89) was well taken. I recognized the importance of maintaining an open attitude. not looking to match the data to a particular theory but allowing the data to inform me.

Although I basically followed the model of working with the text that was proposed by Seidman (1991), I did do some things differently. Instead of initially reducing the text by marking what is of interest in a transcript, I first worked with the whole of the transcript. Although it was very time-consuming, I thought that it was important at this stage not to separate any pieces of text from their context.

Following the first interview, I went through the transcript making a line break between any thought changes. I then went through each chunk of text and identified the central thought and gave it a descriptor and a colour code. When I had worked through a transcript in this fashion, I would then list the descriptors and move them around until they formed clusters under broader headings. Then, following Seidman's (1991) model, I formed a separate file on my computer and moved the chunks of text under their broad headings. using the descriptors as sub headings. I did not include superfluous text and if
two descriptors had the same meaning, I eliminated one of them. In this way, I finished up with the text of the first interview organized under themes and sub themes.

I worked with this document of themes to create a profile of the participant. The profile was mostly in the words of the participant because, as Seidman said, “By crafting a profile in the participant’s own words the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person’s consciousness” (p. 91). I used my words to introduce topics and to make transitions between passages. The profiles were approximately 10 pages long. I shared the profile with the participant and used it as the basis for the second interview.

I went through the same process with the second and third interviews, colour coding each chunk of text and adding new descriptors where needed. I then integrated the new material into a Themes document and modified the first profile. I also gave this profile to the participant with a request to comment (see appendix 3 for sample letter).

The sharing of information is important in terms of the validity of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) term this “member checking.” The participants were all pleased with their profiles, and one person saw it as her gift. There was just one person who felt that her profile did not quite represent her experience in one area. She thought that this was indicative of the fact that she had some confusion in herself on this matter. With the third interview, we together worked through this aspect, feeling that her confusion was itself valid.

The profiles were a stepping stone. They were a means of reducing the interview data into an accessible form that could be shared. In going through this process, I immersed myself in the transcripts, finding myself responding to what people were saying. I was mindful of the necessity of allowing themes to emerge from the text and not
to find text that would fit my own ideas. By repeatedly going through the transcripts, I became aware of any pre-conceived notions. I found at the beginning, and not purposefully, that I was picking out pieces that seemed to fit into my question. It was then that I decided that I needed to code the whole transcript so that the analysis could be a truly emergent process. In fact, as I will talk about later, I needed to shift the focus of my research because the material that the participants were giving me did not directly answer my question. I found that I had to constantly challenge myself to keep an open mind.

b) Working with themes

The profiles per se are not part of the thesis but were more like working documents. I wrote the profiles under broad thematic headings and with some modification. These became the broad themes that I decided to use to present the data. Whereas the profiles were about each individual participant, I wanted to present the findings under themes that included all of the participants. The descriptor labels that I had for each participant I then clustered together. Any labels at this stage were very tentative. The process was long and arduous, but ultimately I categorized the material I wanted to present under the broad themes with sub themes and sub sub themes. I frequently used the women’s own words as metaphors for a sub theme.

Because I had chosen to work with a life history methodology, I wanted the stories of the individual women to weave in and out of the themes so that the reader would have a picture of the individuals as well as the whole. We can all resonate with parts of people’s stories and it is in identifying with the experiences of others that we can look again at our own lives and perhaps make revisions. I also wanted each life to be seen
in its context so that the reader could make his or her own judgements regarding motivation and other dynamic factors that have their role in shaping lives.

Out of the approximately 480 pages of single spaced transcripts it was hard to decide what to include and what to leave out. It was a judgement call, but I feel an informed call. I had spent many hours working with and internalizing the interview material and I felt right about what I had included. According to Seidman (1991), judgement may be the most important ingredient the researcher brings to the study.

My initial research question had been to ask about career women’s experience of equality at home and at work when they had children. In talking to the women, they did not conceptualize their lives in terms of equality but saw their lives more in terms of accommodating career and motherhood. They gave me wonderful insights about striving for some balance in their lives, about career adjustments, and the ups and downs of coping with career and motherhood. I felt that the focus they were giving me was about how they shape their lives. Because of the contextual emphasis of the methodology and because of the feminist overlay, there was ample opportunity to highlight aspects related to women’s equality.

Seidman (1991) talks about the “dark side” of the research process: “[Y]ou lose confidence in your ability to sort out what is important. you wonder if you are making it all up. and you feel considerable doubt about what you are doing” (p. 90). I experienced the dark side for several months. In looking back, it was partly because my material was not exactly fitting my research question. When a committee member suggested that a shift in focus was all right, I experienced considerable relief. Although I had been allowing themes to emerge from the women’s words, I then tried to fit them to my
question. I did not need to. In the kind of methodology I had chosen, with unstructured interviews, the focus for the research could in fact also emerge.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question that I finally worked with is: "How do professional and managerial women accommodate work and family life?"

PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

PAIGE

"I sometimes feel like my life has been too hard"

This quotation from one of the conversations I had with Paige summarizes very poignantly her life experience and her struggles through difficult circumstances. She also spoke of an inner strength that found its expression in motherhood. Triggered by strong protective feelings for her children, she shed her shyness, her insecurity, and her dependency on the affirmation of others. She became self-confident and self-assured, and in standing up for her children, she learned to stand up for herself.

At the time of our first conversation, Paige was forty-three years old. In her family of origin, she is the oldest of five siblings. Following her parents' separation when she was ten years old, Paige and one of her sisters moved to Ontario with their mother to live with her maternal grandmother. Her father and other siblings remained in British Columbia. She married at twenty-two and her two boys were aged sixteen and thirteen when we first met. She is a learning resource teacher, having been a grade 2 teacher for twelve years prior to that. She had been a teacher for six years before her first child was born. The father of her children left her when her youngest was three years old and she remarried six years ago.
On each occasion, we met at her home. It is an older home, and it was neat but had a lived in feel about it. There were some crafts around and she had her sewing out on the dining room table. She explained that her mother-in-law was teaching her to machine quilt. Her younger son, a very small child for thirteen, busied himself with helping me to set up the tape recorder and then he went off to do his homework.

As she shared her story, she commented on how much she appreciated being able to put together the pieces of her life. There was a lot of sadness in her story. She found the break-up of her family very hard and her teenage years in her grandmother’s home were difficult years. She married when she was quite young and after she had the children, it turned out to be a disastrous marriage. She raised her boys as a single mother and she also took her special education specialist qualification so that she could move on in her career. She remarried a man who is very supportive of her and who can be more of a partner to her than her first husband was.

The central theme of our conversations was that she saw her life as a difficult journey. In coping with the hard times, she found a strength within herself. She challenged the early messages of hard work and self-sacrifice and found some balance in her life. In her work and in her life she now feels that she is at a good place.

SALLY

"We bring into our marriage and career a very strong sense of family"

The ideal of a strong family unit has guided and informed the way in which Sally and her husband plan their lives. As lawyers, they decided when they married to move away from the hustle and bustle of city practices to find jobs in a smaller town, and eventually to set up practice together. Work and home were both, therefore, shared
domains. Two small boys aged four and two years complete their family picture. The independence that Sally enjoys in her work gives her some flexibility to spend time with her boys.

Sally is a thirty-five year old family lawyer. She had been practising law for two years before her first son was born. In her family of origin, she has an older brother and a younger sister. Her father is a businessman and her mother stayed home until the youngest was thirteen. She described their family life style as being quite modest but a strong family unit. Education was encouraged and there were high expectations in terms of achievement.

On each occasion we met in Sally’s office. It had a relaxed and friendly feel about it. On the wall was a picture of the family grouping that her elder son had done at nursery school. Sally noted that on the picture, each of the family members he drew had a smile on his or her face. She thought the smiles were an indication that they were doing all right. As she chatted over a cup of coffee, I had the impression of someone who knew what she wanted in life and she organized her life to make sure it happened. She carefully thinks through her priorities on a daily basis as well as over the longer term and that helps her to maintain some control in her life, an aspect that I felt was important to her.

Behind her friendly manner, I perceived that she is a woman with strength and determination. In her story, she took me through some of the challenges she encountered to meet her goals. She made many references to the position of women in society. She views her own struggles in the context of the struggles of all women in a gendered society.
SUSAN

"I am one of these people that wants to experience everything."

Often feeling an outsider and a misfit, Susan has chosen a life that does not fit in with social norms and yet she feels constrained to live up to social expectations. As a single mother of twin girls, Susan is the founder and director of a government sponsored facility for the treatment of drug and alcohol abusers. Although very successful at her job, she feels vulnerable as a mother. Susan is an enthusiastic and effusive person who is full of ideas for ways that she could improve the centre. Particularly, she empathizes with and would like to do more for the women who come to the facility who are real misfits in society.

Susan is the oldest in her family of origin, having a younger brother and a younger sister. Their father was alcoholic and her relationship with her father was a central theme in Susan’s story. Her alliance with him caused her to feel apart from the rest of the family and through her teen years, she felt she was always searching. Her affirmation came from groups outside the family where her group skills and her leadership skills were acknowledged and appreciated. She was thirty-one years old when she had her twins nine years ago and at that time, she had to leave the world of academia and settle into providing for her children.

On each occasion, we met in her office. It was always a sunny day, and the office was bright and looking through the large window, there was a view of the lake. She had a round table as well as her desk, and that is where we would sit and talk. There were pictures of her two girls on her desk, which she showed me with a real sense of pride. It
was clearly a very busy establishment and I felt privileged that she could give me the time.

Her story was sad in some ways. Coping as a single mother was very hard and at times overwhelming. The central point that I felt she wanted to come across was the unfairness of society. Women had to be good mothers. They were expected to be caring and to fulfil all that is demanded of mothers. There was also some joy. Through her girls, she has learned to love deeply and they have given her a purpose and meaning to her life.

ANN

"Things may be tough but you just keep going"

As an immigrant to Canada from her native Germany at twelve years of age, Ann learned to be tough and independent, as had her mother before her. These characteristics served her well in developing her career and attaining a management position in a large corporation. Work was always important to Ann, however, her role as mother caused her to rethink priorities and become more attuned to deeper wishes and desires for a meaningful family life.

At the time of our first meeting, Ann was forty-three years old. Her two boys were aged six and three years. Before her children were born, she worked hard to develop her career. With a Bachelor's degree in a company weighted with very qualified people, competition was tough. She feels that she has now gone as far as she can in the company. In her family of origin, Ann is the older of two girls. When the family first came to Canada, with her two months of English, Ann was the translator for the family. The family's money had been lost in the wars and so when they came to Canada, it was to
restart. Ann left her childhood in Germany and from then on, she took very responsible roles.

We met on two occasions in a restaurant for dinner after work because she felt there would be less interruption. On the third occasion, we met at her home. Their house is situated in a quiet cul-de-sac in the city. Ann said that they were mostly young families on the street and the gardens being very small, the street was a popular location for the children to play. While we were doing the interview, her husband was taking care of the children’s bedtime activities.

Ann’s main concern was over childcare. She felt strongly that it should not only be the concern of individual parents but that companies and governments should take more responsibility. During our second conversation, her sister came by briefly and she talked a little about the difficulties she has as a single mother working at a downtown job and finding after-school care for her child. Clearly, Ann was very disturbed about this situation and she felt it exemplified the lack of care we have for children as a society.

In the eighteen months between our second and third meetings, Ann had made some changes in her life. Realizing that her life as a busy working mother could slip by without experiencing the kind of family life she longed for, she decided to focus more on the quality of their family life. She started involving her husband more and rethought her home-work balance. Instead of always trying to accommodate other people, she started doing some things that were for herself.
"You can lead your life to a wonderful place"

Jan added to this phrase that to get to this wonderful place, it was a long and hard journey. She came through difficult family circumstances, and a very bitter experience in her first job as a lawyer. She found meaningful work in the field of human rights, a cause with which she strongly identifies. She and her husband have a marriage that is based on sharing equally in all responsibilities and being mutually supportive of each other's career. Although they deal on a daily basis with the stress of working at demanding jobs and parenting two young children, she feels that they have created a good quality of life.

When we first met, Jan was aged thirty-eight. She had been practising law for eight years. Her son was aged two and her daughter was a seven-month-old baby. She had been back at work for seven weeks after her daughter was born. Her husband, also a lawyer, had been on parental leave for four weeks and so it was just three weeks into both being back at work and coping with childcare. She was still feeling that she would have liked longer with the children but she was working a compressed week so that Mondays were as she said “protected time.” Jan is the younger sister of Susan and the youngest of the three. Her experience in their family was different. She was close to her mother while she was growing up and she has inherited some of her mother's determination. However, perhaps because of her background, she finds herself identifying with the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

On the first two occasions, we met on her Monday off at her home. In the year between, her daughter grew from being a small baby to a busy toddler. She would be asleep at the beginning of our meeting but would stir and join us after the first hour. A
beautiful large and friendly dog was part of the family scene. On both occasions, her son had chosen to go to nursery school. On the third occasion, we met at her office in the city. She was feeling the after effects of coping with chicken pox. She and her husband had both taken time off and sometimes she had to bring a child into the office. It had been a stressful time and she was looking tired.

Jan emphasized that it is very important to her to live her life privately and professionally in a way that is true to herself. At our third meeting, she commented on the dissonance she felt in talking with me because of the support she has in her relationship. Most women do not receive similar support. She felt she is an exception and seemed to feel almost guilty about the quality of the life she and her husband have created together.

LORNA

"I need to know that I make a difference"

Lorna went into a career in medicine because she likes to make things better for people. She is very comfortable with taking responsibility for their care and has realized that she can take this to the point of having trouble with letting go. She went into emergency medicine because in that specialty she can help people, but also there is the limitation of the end of the shift, which she felt was important if she was also going to have a personal life.

Lorna was forty years of age when we first met. Her three children were aged two, five and seven years. Her daughter is the youngest. She is an emergency medicine physician with a Fellowship in clinical research and holds a senior position in the Faculty of Emergency Medicine. Her husband, with whom she has been married for thirteen years, is a radiologist. In her family of origin, she is the eldest of three. Mother was a
teacher and was very influential in the family. Lorna can see that she takes after her mother in many ways.

We met on two occasions and each time in a busy restaurant near the hospital where she was working. Any telephone conversations were via her secretary. She was clearly on a tight schedule and so we were careful to keep limits on our time together and to be very focused. She seemed to be a person who was high in emotional energy. She described herself as being pro-active, and as enjoying being involved in a variety of projects. She also is becoming more aware that she has to limit herself.

Striving for balance was the dominant theme in our conversations. This has always been a struggle for her but she is now finding ways of compartmentalizing her life so that she can keep a check on the amount of time she is spending in the different areas of her life. She explained that recently her little girl was going through an insecure time so it was all right to tip the balance for a while so that she could spend extra time with her daughter.

NORA

“I think women in the workforce who are mothers are very powerful”

As the newest mother of the group of women I spoke to, Nora was very in tune with the differences she felt in herself as a mother. In her work, she found that the skills she used with her little daughter of encouraging and motivating were useful in her capacity as a divisional manager in a large corporation. She noticed that since having her daughter she felt that she was more effective in her job. She also noted that her job was no longer the be-all and end-all of who she was. Being a mother was just as important in terms of her self-identity.
Nora was thirty-five years old at the time of our meetings. Her daughter was seventeen months old. She pointed out that she and her husband had a 50-50 relationship. He is a lawyer and they see neither career as being on top but each contributing equally to the relationship. They take equal responsibility as parents and so they try to keep a careful balance of career needs. In her family of origin, she is the older of two girls. The family emigrated from England when she was seventeen. Although education was strongly encouraged, the family held quite traditional views leaving Nora in a position of feeling she had to prove herself to the family.

We met on two occasions at her place of work over some lunch. We would get our lunch from the cafeteria and then she organized the use of a conference room for our meeting where we would have quiet. She was pregnant with her second child on both occasions. The second time was just ten days before she was to go on maternity leave. Nora is a university friend of Sally and I could see how they would get along.

Nora mainly wanted to talk about what it is like to be pregnant while working in a responsible position in a corporation. She talked about the subtle and not so subtle inequities she encountered. She was also interested in how, in her senior position, she might mentor young women coming up in the organization. Her relationship with her husband and their partnership as parents was also something that meant a lot to her and which she wanted to share.

TRACY

"I never thought anything would occupy me in such a total way as children"

As a medical doctor practising in family medicine, Tracy has seen many patients become mothers. It still came as a total surprise to her that children could take on so
much importance in her life and that medicine was no longer everything to her. This realization caused her to change her life. She cut down on the hours she practised and decided to devote an equal time to her children as to medicine. She and her husband both believe in balance in life and that a good family life is more important than esteem in the workplace. She sees our society as being so wrapped up in economics that the important things in life are being missed. They have settled for a more modest life style that includes good family time.

Tracy was thirty-eight years old when we first met and her oldest child, a boy, was three and a half and her daughter was two. Her husband is in computers. When they married, he moved from California to join her in Canada where she was part of a practice in family medicine. When she had children, Tracy reduced her working hours to a forty-hour week.

In her family of origin, Tracy is the oldest of three, having a younger sister and younger brother. She is a person with a diversity of interests and in choosing a career, it was hard to decide whether to be a doctor, an artist or to go into the church. She chose medicine because she thought she could make a difference and help people. An interesting part of her story is that her brother also is a doctor and although they graduated in the same year, and they are in practice together, their lives have taken different paths. Seeing the possibilities in medicine that are open to her brother causes Tracy to constantly re-think and evaluate her choices.

We met on both occasions at Tracy’s home. It is a town house in a new area with a pleasing outlook. She and her husband are both artists and so there was some of their work around in the room. There was a picture of the island of Bali on one of the walls and
Tracy explained that she and her husband talk about it frequently. It reminds them that there are places such as Bali where there is more integration and where the people are happier people. Religion, art, and community are integral in their lives and are far more important than economics. She mourns that in western society we have lost our inner voice as individuals and as a society as a whole.
PART 2

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS
INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The profiles show that the women in the study are all in a professional or managerial position. They all hold jobs that are demanding and carry considerable responsibility and except for one, whose children are young teenagers, they are mothers of young children. One of the women has three children, six have two children and the eighth was pregnant with her second child when I met with her. The women’s ages range between mid thirties and early forties. One is a single mother, and each of the other women is in a heterosexual relationship.

Very interestingly, another feature that the women have in common is that they are all equally committed both to being mothers and to their careers. This feature was not looked for at the time when I was selecting my participants. In the general population of working women, one would expect to find those whose occupation is secondary to their role as mother and also those who are more career oriented. A third category of balance salient (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997) for those people who describe work and family as equally important would better describe this group of women. Attaining a measure of balance between the major roles in their lives seemed to be important for all of the women. As their stories unfold, we will see the efforts they made to shape their lives in a way that allowed them to accommodate the important elements in their lives.

Because of the centrality of the narrative in my methodology, in reporting the findings from the study I am using the women’s words as far as possible. As they talk about their lives, their stories often speak for themselves. Interpretations that I make are as a result of dialoguing with the data and are based on excerpts that are quoted verbatim. The stories of the eight women are woven into the various themes of the findings. In
representing the words of the women, I am very mindful of my responsibility as researcher to be true to the meanings that they intended to convey. However, sometimes it was noted by the women that when they saw their conversations in printed form, they recognized that the spoken word does not always accurately convey the thoughts. One of the women noted “I am too enthusiastic and too dramatic in my speech, and sometimes the perception I create is one of isn’t everything wonderful.” I tried to capture the meanings behind the words.

To answer my research question of how career women shape their lives when they have children, I first asked the women to tell me about themselves. I probed with questions about early influences, their choices in career and partner, and their experiences as mothers. I attempted not to be specific as I wanted to allow meaningful themes to emerge in the context of their life stories. They were aware of my research question, and I believe that the stories they gave me and the opinions they expressed were those which, from their perspective, best answered the question.

In a life history approach, the cultural context in which a person’s life unfolds helps to give meaning to actions. Significant others play a part in the way our lives unfold, and particularly those who were involved in our social learning. The stories of the women are introduced under the major theme of “early influences” with the emphasis on the roles their mothers and fathers played in their lives, and also the influence of friends. Although there were huge differences in the childhood experiences that were described, a unifying aspect is that they were raised in a time when roles were more clearly defined. Their mothers, although strong women themselves, would have been influenced by the values of the dominant culture of that time. The women in the study are leading lives that
are very different from their mothers.' They are taking from their past and modifying those influences in the light of their present realities and then integrating them into a new context.

The next three chapters are devoted to the different aspects of women's lives: their career, their partnership, and motherhood. Chapter 4, on careers, looks first at their process of developing a career that fits well with personal needs and characteristics. Because feeling fulfilled in their work is important to these women, career satisfaction is the next theme to be discussed. Flexibility is crucial to successfully accommodating career and family, and under this theme I explore how women created some flexibility in their jobs.

The women's choice of partners seemed less straightforward than their choice of career. Some had a failed first relationship or marriage before finding a good partnership. One of the women chooses not to be in a relationship, which makes for an interesting comparison with those whose successful relationship is fundamental to combining career and family. Chapter 5 develops the themes of choosing a partner, nurturing the relationship, and then the theme of relationships that did not work out. This chapter concludes with exploring experiences of shared parenting.

Motherhood represents a crisis, particularly in the lives of career women. In Chapter 6, I will start by exploring the phenomenological experience of being a mother, and ways in which motherhood has an impact on women's work lives. I will then explore the myth of the "good mother" and how it plays out in the lives of these mothers, including feelings of guilt that seem to be embedded in the institution of motherhood.
The seventh chapter is about dilemmas encountered by the women as they redefine themselves as mothers. The conflicting needs of the workplace and the home, and the conflicts within the role of mother are explored. The tendency of workplaces to ignore the fact that their employees have children is discussed, and the compromises that mothers often have to make in their jobs. Expectations of the role of mother, guilt, lack of time, and sometimes lack of support are some of the factors that continue to be problematic to mothers who are in paid work.

The last chapter highlights ways in which women cope with the challenges of being mothers and career women. The stories illustrate how women act to create their lives to accommodate work and family and other elements that help to bring balance to their lives. Through a process of improvisation, the women create their own script on mothering as they negotiate new ways of being mothers and also having a fulfilling job.

I conclude all of the chapters with reflective comments. In stepping back from the data, I look for broader implications that are embedded in the stories. I seek to integrate the findings from the study with relevant literature, drawing together elements which help to answer my question of how professional and managerial women shape their lives when they have children.
CHAPTER 3: EARLY INFLUENCES

Memories provide us with snap shots of lives. As people recall and share vignettes from their histories, they allow us some insight into ways in which they were shaped by their environment and from a dynamic perspective, how they in turn shape their own lives. When I asked my participants the broad question about influences in their lives, they primarily gave me stories about their mothers. Their fathers also featured, but to a lesser extent, and friends less than fathers. There was no mention made of mentors, unless the mentor happened to be her father. This absence is interesting in and of itself as the literature also draws attention to the fact that professional women are short of mentors and role models (Betz, 1994). For now, though, I will look at the women’s recollections concerning influential people in their lives, which I shall discuss under the themes of strong and capable mothers, the fathers role, and peer influences.

STRONG AND CAPABLE MOTHERS

"Mothers are the back-bone for the most part in the family"

I was interested in the references that the participants made to their mothers. From the literature reviewed, it is clear that mothers influence the paths that their daughters’ lives take, but the statements about that influence are vague and general. Intuitively, my sense is that mothers play an unconscious as well as conscious role in the lives of their daughters. In response to my very general question about influences in their lives, all of the participants made particular mention of their mothers. They gave the impression that their mothers are strong and capable people. In this section, I will provide some examples that the women gave when they spoke about their mothers’ influences. I will pick up again on the influence of their mothers in the chapter on motherhood that explores their
own role as mother. The thread of the evolution of women from generation to generation is interesting to follow as women in each generation respond in different ways to a male-dominant world.

Their mothers belong to the cohort of women who, forty to fifty years ago, typically would have an education and a job, but the job would be seen as a filler-in until they had children (e.g., Swartz, 1992). When the children were older, they may have gone back to work, or resumed their own education. Mostly this generation of women, if they worked at all, just supplemented income, and their energies were mainly directed towards the family. In contrast, the women participating in the study are not only highly committed to their families, as were their mothers, but are also highly committed to their careers. I was interested in finding, from their descriptions, ways in which they identified with their mothers through their teaching and through their example.

Particular themes related to the influence of their mothers that emerged from the data are: her emphasis on education, the importance she placed on financial independence, her model of hard work and efficiency, and some reflections on the perceived differences between the two generations of women.

**Emphasis on education**

All of the women referred to the value placed on education while they were growing up, and particularly by their mothers. Education would provide opportunities to make choices in their lives as more and more possibilities were opening up for women.

Lorna’s mother was a teacher and she described her mother’s influence in the following way:
My mother's intellectually driven, and she was a role model to all of us, and we all did something in higher education. She sort of believed that knowledge is power, and she influenced us in that way. So we all went on to post-secondary school education. I think my mother was the greatest role model, and a person who encouraged me to do what I liked, and to do it the best I possibly could so that I would get as much satisfaction out of it as I could. And she always encouraged me to keep learning. She's the biggest influence in my whole life.

Not only did her mother influence her in her attitude towards education, but also in many ways Lorna became as her mother. Her mother was the one in the family who made things better and who rushed to the aid of others, a style that Lorna adopted as we will see as we pick up her story later. In terms of education, despite being a physician working long hours, on-going learning is still very important to Lorna. At the time of our conversations, she was working on a Master's degree.

Sally spoke of the emphasis placed on further education in her family by both of her parents:

There was never any discussion, are you going to university? It was always which one are you going to? And that was the expectation for all of us. The expectation was that you got good marks in high school. We were bright kids and so we did well and if we didn't do well, there was an expectation that we would do better next time, because my parents never settled for anything less than they thought we could do.

There was also mention made of the fact that in terms of education, there were no gender stereotypes. I will address this topic more fully under the role of the father.

In these two examples, the belief was that education would open up opportunities in their lives and help them to develop their potential. In the next examples, education had a different imperative.
The importance of financial independence

Two of the women’s mothers went through challenging life circumstances, which were perhaps more difficult because they had neither the means nor the qualifications to be self-supportive. Their mothers’ trying circumstances had ramifications in terms of their daughters’ emotional development, but also in terms of the emphasis that was placed on financial independence. Ann tells the story of her mother’s wartime experiences, and Paige of the difficult circumstances after her mother and father separated.

Ann’s mother came from an aristocratic German family. She survived two world wars, but in the process lost her wealth and her status. Her home was occupied by soldiers, and she and others were marched across the border thirty miles away without their possessions and with only enough food and clothes for two or three days. In telling the story of her mother’s wartime experiences, Ann recognized its impact on her own life:

She was the one who said you have to be independent. If you survived things like that it was toughening. I think from that day on her whole world changed from being a young aristocrat with potential for a good marriage and all of that to being you survived by your skills. And I think that was what was being passed on to us.

Ann sets great value on not needing to depend on others. She worked hard to attain her current position in her career in a tough competitive field, and she acknowledges that it has been through sheer hard work as well as having ability.

However, when she had young children, her staunch independence became problematic. She took the role of mother and tried to add it on to an already busy life. It has only been
recently that Ann has tried to involve her husband more in the responsibilities of the family.

Ann described some particular characteristics of her mother in the following way:

My mother was always a young person. She was really quite a character in her own way, really very capable. She was undauntable and just kept going. She had a positive attitude towards many things.

She says of herself:

You know things may be tough, but you just keep going, and so far I've always kept going. Life's not so bad you know. Everything that we have we have worked for ourselves. Our parents haven't given us a washing machine or something. We have worked for what we have and you can do it, you can do it, you don't need to depend on people.

Ann tries to model her mother's undauntable and positive approach to life, but sometimes as a manager in a large corporation, and as the mother of two young children she does become daunted. She struggles with a negative evaluation of herself. She said of her growing up, "I grew up very much learning that you do as you are told, and stay out of trouble, and stay out of the way." She still finds it hard to ask anything of anyone. As a child, she learnt to accommodate others, a characteristic she still has, "I still try to be accommodating to other people." However, she would like people to reach out to her more, and her appearance of capability perhaps conceals personal needs.

The story that Paige tells of the early years of her life is one of considerable hardship. Paige's parents were married in their late teens, and Paige was born early on in the marriage: the oldest of five children. When she was young, her father was training to be in the ministry, but by the time Paige was 10 years old the marriage had broken up; he
had been involved in an affair with another woman. Two years later, because money was short, she moved with her mother and one of her sisters from British Columbia to Ontario to live with her grandmother, leaving her father and three other siblings in British Columbia. Life was hard financially because her father was unable to provide any support, and emotionally because she missed her father, her brothers and sister. She spoke of that time in the following way:

I had a lot of rough knocks as a teen-ager. I pined for my father and my siblings cause we had been split. And my Mom, I don't remember her being nurturing. It was my Dad that was the nurturing one. And I think that was partly why I was so lonely in those teen-age years because I don't remember being hugged and kissed by my mother, whereas my Dad's a hugger. As a teenager, I felt very weak and very fragile. I was hurting all the time inside. I didn't feel that people liked me and didn't value who I was.

Paige described how she tried to live up to being a "good" girl, an image that concealed deeper emotional needs.

My mother always talks about me being such a good little girl, and maybe I didn't get much from my mother because I was such a good little girl. She was always encouraging me, but I don't remember a lot of warmth, or those nurturing kinds of things happening. Mum is very controlling, and always had an ulterior motive for something, and always made us put on a good front for company.

Perhaps because she felt she always had to present this "good" front. Paige did not feel valued as a child. Ruddick (1984) talks about the "inauthenticity" in maternal practice whereby, in a non conscious way, one takes in values of the dominant culture and is blind to the implications to the child. In fact, Paige went through a very rebellious stage as a
teenager, which led to considerable pain in her life. She continues to value recognition and validation as a person.

Paige’s mother returned to work to help provide for the family, but with no qualifications, the jobs were low paying. Paige’s mother saw education as being the ticket to independence and better jobs. She herself went back to school when she was financially able, something she had wanted to do from the early days of her marriage. Instead, she had raised children while her husband went through his education. Paige described the influence of her mother in the following way:

I had very strong role models in my life. It’s my Mom who has always said, ‘You need to do this for yourself, you need to be independent and self-sufficient. You can never rely on anybody else, you need to take care of you.’ My mother always encouraged me to work, and always encouraged me to have an education so that I had something to fall back on that was totally independent.

As it turned out, Paige too had a first marriage that failed, but as a teacher, she was able to provide for herself and her children as a single mother. She commented that that was the very sort of event for which her mother had done the years of groundwork.

From their mothers’ difficult experiences, the women picked up that as women it is important that they assume financial independence. They learned to be self-reliant at the expense of their emotional development. Hard work was both modeled and expected of them, and education was the insurance against needing to be dependent.

The model of hard work and efficiency.

Hard work or “the work ethic” was both talked about and modeled by the mothers of the women in the study. Already, phrases such as “You need to be independent and self-sufficient.” with their implication of hard work as the basis, have been mentioned in the
stories of Ann and Paige. “Productive children are happy children” is a phrase that Susan remembers her mother reciting many times. She described her mother in the following way:

She was a power house, an organizer. She had very strong values and everybody had to adhere to them. Her strongest value, BE PRODUCTIVE. She abhorred relaxation. When you were sick, you went out for a walk, you didn't lie in bed. That kind of person.

Susan said. “We were brought up very much in the work ethic.” She believes that her rapid promotion into a management position can partly be attributed to her positive attitude towards work. She reflects the values of her mother in her words, “I believe that if you are going to do something, put your best foot forward.” She finds the unenthusiastic attitude of some of her staff hard to understand.

Susan’s sister, Jan, is also part of the study. Jan explained their family circumstances in the following way, “As a family there was lots of family dysfunction that resulted in survival.” Their father was alcoholic. She was close to her mother while growing up. She described her mother as being a very strong woman whose primary job was to keep the family together, “She had a very big and a very difficult job.” Jan speculated that her mother had no choice but to stay in her situation because financially she could not have made it without their father; a situation she vowed never to find herself in. “There is lots in my life in reaction to that,” and being financially independent was an aspect. Her mother was not, however, a woman to be victimized by her situation, but rather was the driving force in the family.
In Paige's grandmother's household, there was a very strong work ethic. Paige described her experience in the following way, "Work, work, work, work, work. You don't rest you work all the time, and I remember always working, doing something. Even sitting watching TV we would be crocheting or knitting." She said of her grandmother, "She was very strong and very driven, very hard-working." With both her mother and her grandmother being so focused on hard work and survival, there is little wonder that the emotional work in the family was neglected. However, with her own children, Paige struggles to balance her perfectionistic tendencies with being a mother to her children. She said that although she still obtains satisfaction from hard work, it is very difficult for her to just sit and relax, "I feel I should be doing something." Letting go of the more compulsive aspects of trying to be a "super-mom" will be discussed in the final chapter under the theme of "letting go."

Sally gave the impression that she came from a family that functioned well, and she brings from her childhood a strong sense of family. There was a lot of love and support in the family and mother was very much the focal point of family life. Sally said of her mother, "She can organize, gets involved in things. They have moved a couple of times. She steps into the new community and just organizes things, organizes their social life. and just gets things done."

Sally's mother is efficient. She experienced first hand her mother's organizing abilities after her first child was born. Sally, who likes to keep tight control of her life, felt all of her control slipping away as she tried to deal with a colicky baby. She is a lawyer. and she spoke about her experience in the following words, "I've been in every court in Ontario. I've had judges yell at me, I've had lawyers yell at me. And this little
baby, he’s reduced me to this mess!” She went on to describe how her mother stepped in and brought order to the situation:

But when my mother came in she took over. She showed up with a cooler full of food. It was interesting how she just came in and just took over. She got the organization done, you go upstairs and sleep now, and when the baby’s hungry I’ll wake you up. She brought the control back. You want me to do your laundry? and here’s when we are going to go for a walk. So I just handed over.

In this excerpt from our conversations, it is interesting to note the frequency of the use of the word “just.” She uses it to express the ease with which her mother seemed to be able to organize and bring order back, something that she always did for the family. Mother “just came” and “just took over” and speaking of herself. “I just handed over.” It was as if what her mother did was so simple and so important but hard to emulate. As a mother, Sally tries to model herself after her own mother, but she also has a career. We will track the conflicts she experiences in later chapters. Her mother’s efficiency and ability to have the household running smoothly is the standard that Sally set for herself, an impossible standard, given her added responsibilities.

Hand-in-hand with the work ethic and being encouraged to be independent is being placed in responsible roles. Susan questioned whether being in a responsible role as a child had something to do with being a high achiever in terms of career. As a child, Susan was acutely aware of the care she had to take around her father, as we shall see later. She wondered whether this early responsibility affected her choices in terms of the emphasis she places on career. Her sense is that the mothers who are “naturally at-home mothers” had childhoods that were more advantaged than hers. Ann too was placed in a responsible role as a child when she had to make her way in a new country with a new language. Paige had
to take on responsibility early when she had to cope with family separation. Lorna helped to nurse her father through cancer as a young woman. These factors are clearly formative in the lives of these women.

**Attitudes toward differences**

In concluding this section on the ways the women talked to me about their mothers, I would like to explore generational differences from two perspectives. The one is the daughters' perspective of the generational differences, and the other is their mothers' attitudes towards their different life-styles.

In referring to her mother and her mother-in-law, Tracy made the point that they had many opportunities open to them because they did not have the pressures of bread winning:

*They are very dynamic in their 60s and 70s, and actually ironically more enterprising and more outgoing and more likely to travel than the husbands in their lives. And they would never have to think about being the main bread-winner in the family. They would never have to worry about the office surviving so that they can take care of the kids that would never have been there, ironically that would never have been an issue.*

Tracy, as a doctor in family medicine, has a busy professional life. Some of the stress of being pulled in two directions, home and work, by very demanding and important responsibilities comes across in her words. Such pulls are something that the previous generation of women, for the most, part did not have to deal with. The other side of the issue is, as Nora pointed out about her mother who did not return to her job as a nurse after she had her children, "She did not come close to reaching her potential." They were mothers in a different social context. Although dependent financially, they were not
struggling with the same task of trying to balance family and employed work. However, there were also fewer options open to them to exercise their talents and abilities. The second perspective that arises is their mothers’ attitude towards their daughters who are doing things differently from themselves. Jan’s mother, who in her own life’s circumstances staunchly supported her husband in his career, has difficulty in understanding the way she and her husband are trying to run their lives. They are both lawyers and have both given up lucrative Bay Street jobs for jobs that allow them flexibility and time to parent their children. Jan commented on her mother’s difficulty in coming to terms with the way their family operates:

She felt that G. [husband] really wasn’t living up to his full potential, and of course the responsibility of that is mine. Why would she tell me that, as though, what am I supposed to do about that? The fact that he is actually doing what he is doing with his family and supporting me in my career... And then she thinks what he’s doing is at some level working out.

Seeing her daughter going in a different direction from the one she took creates some dissonance in the mother.

Nora’s mother had reservations regarding childcare:

I remember my mother saying to me that I have to be very conscious and very aware that in the day-care I was searching for that I was looking for a surrogate mother. And I explained to her, “I am my daughter’s mother. I am not looking for a mother.” And she said, “You have to be very aware that L. will love those people more than she loves you because she is with them longer than she’s with you during the day.”

It would seem that these mothers experience conflict between the way they lived their lives, and the ways they see their daughters shaping their lives. To reduce the
dissonance requires an attitude change, which is hard because of the need to justify their own lives. At the same time, as Jan implied, mothers are perhaps a little envious of the choices their daughters have made since they can see that indeed their lives are working out. Nora’s mother too began to see day care in a more favourable light.

The women who did things very differently from their mothers seemed more likely to experience negative comments than were those whose mothers worked. Paige and Lorna had working mothers who tended to be encouraging and would offer useful advice. They would not question their daughters’ decision to be working mothers. As Paige said, “She knew how at risk my marriage was so when I was choosing to go back to work, she was very supportive.” Lorna, who tries to balance her life as an emergency doctor working up to 60 hours a week with being the mother of three young children, values her mother’s advice regarding coping with children’s activities:

You can learn an awful lot from the generation that came before you, even though the pressures are very different. I go to my mother a lot for advice. Even the issue of trying to be available to drive the children to extra-curricular events. And you know Mum gave me very good advice about putting them on the same nights. It was my mother who said, ‘Listen, get in a car pool, do it this way, put them on the same night.’ She gave me very good advice.

Their mothers’ supportiveness made it easier to take advice from them.

This section explored what the women had to say about the influence of their mothers in their lives. Despite moving in different directions from their mothers, they were very much influenced by the strengths they saw in them, which consciously and unconsciously they tried to emulate. Mothers may have had a direct influence on their education, but their influences went beyond that. In their complex lives of trying to balance
work and family, they carried the image of the strong and capable mother. They had a model of a woman who could undauntingly take on a huge diversity of tasks. This often led them to question their own efficacy, particularly as mothers, because they could not do as their mothers did since they also work at a demanding job.

**FATHER'S ROLE IN WOMEN'S LIVES**

The women in the study spoke about their fathers much less than they spoke about their mothers. He was a role model for some of the women. Since their mothers mostly were not in the work force, they looked for that model to their father. Mostly his role was a supportive one. When they talked about him playing a significant role in their lives, it would tend to be in a directive manner and related to their career. Since, generally, it was the father who was knowledgeable about the business world, he would be the one the women would tend to look to for advice related to their work. Father as a role model can be illustrated from the stories of Nora and of Jan. His more directive role is mentioned by both Jan and Sally, and his ongoing mentoring by Sally. Fathers' influences on their daughters can be both direct and indirect. The stories of two of the women who are sisters, at the end of this section, illustrate the very different influence their father had on the path their lives took.

**Father as a role model.**

Nora's father has a job in sales and marketing. His job took him to various places in the world, and his family generally accompanied him. He would bring colleagues from different parts of the world to their home, and so Nora was exposed to some exciting aspects of her father's business life from a young age. As she explained, her criteria in terms of a career were, "I wanted to wear a suit to work like my dad did and have that kind of level of
a job...and international exposure and things like that I really wanted.” As a project
manager in a large multi-national corporation, she has realized this ambition.

Jan’s father was a criminal lawyer and a judge. As a child, she was fascinated by
the work he did: “I have always loved to speak, and even as a child, I would go and visit
my Dad with a friend and we would get up on the bench and I would be delivering a
judgement.” He modeled a love for the law and Jan says of herself:

The law is very interesting. I am actually probably one of those few lawyers that
really likes the law, and not in a theoretical way. I like being a lawyer. I think you
can accomplish a fair bit of change through the legal system. I believe in it. I
believe in justice, and I believe in justice through the judicial system. But my
father was a very big influence.

2. Father’s intervention

Jan recalled a period in her life when she felt unsure about going into law, and her
father, who was generally a quiet man who kept to himself, intervened in an uncustomary
manner:

I think a period in my life when I was waning, he was very directing. He wasn’t a
very directing person, but he was very directing about...I was even out of the
country at the time when he had arranged an interview with the ex-dean of
Western’s law school and the administration officer or whatever and had
arranged a lunch without telling me. I was furious.

He stepped in and gave active encouragement, which she can now appreciate.

Sally’s father was instrumental in her decision to go into law. After completing an
undergraduate degree in communication studies, which she did not find very challenging,
she was at a loss as to what to do next. Her father suggested that she write her law school
examinations. “I thought, well, OK, Why not?” She was accepted into law school, but
was very unhappy in her first year. She did not feel that she fitted in, and by the end of the year she was ready to give up:

After my first year and we got all my marks back, I was going to quit, I just couldn't do it. So I took the summer off and worked as a waitress at a golf club, a lot of my friends were getting into the summer schools and summer jobs in law firms and all this kind of thing. And my Father said, "You have three months here to play around with." He said, "Don't think law, go and do your work or whatever you want to do and just think about it." So I did that and it gave me the opportunity to sort of hang out and really seriously think about things which normally you don't get. So we kind of made a deal, and he said, "OK, you go back and you try it for six months and if you hate it then you go and do something else."

When she went back in the second year, instead of trying to fit in. Sally explored her options and worked out how she would get through law school. She found the things that she loved to do and she found her fit.

As successful men in their fields, these fathers took quite an authoritarian stance when it came to their daughters' careers. They encouraged their daughters to go into a field that was very tough for women. They showed their confidence in them, but they also pushed them hard. Sally’s father is around to help her out when she needs it, but Jan’s father did not live to see the success she has made out of her career.

**Father as an advisor and mentor**

Sally said of her father, "He is a business man. an accountant. and he's really supportive. He's sort of been my business mentor going through the years. and when I've had difficulties in business, he has been really super.” Clearly, this meant a great deal to Sally. Jan feels the loss of her father in this role when she said, "He died before I ever
graduated. The last eight years, there has been much hardship in the (career) path and I think his presence would have been really wonderful. He could have given a lot of advice.”

In a culture in which men are better versed in the public world than women, this sharing of knowledge helps women who are trying to make their way, particularly in non traditional careers. It is interesting that these two women were the only ones in the study to mention their fathers in this context.

**Fathers and daughters**

Fathers tended to be supportive of their daughters in their education and Sally makes the point that in her family, there were no gender stereotypes:

> I have a brother and a sister. We were all expected to take the sciences and the math and we were expected to take the top courses in high school because then you have broader options. So there was never the stereotypes that your brother's going to go this way and you girls are going to go that way.

The message that Tracy’s father gave her was:

> He has actually pretty well said you can do as much as your brother. He gave me the belief that I could do as well as a man. I think he did that more on an individual basis than on a societal perspective basis. I don't think he really realized what he was creating in his daughters when he did it.

Tracy implied that although her father supported the idea of her doing as much as her brother, it was more out of pride in her achievements than an ideology that would have been ahead of the time.
Nora described her father as being "very North of England," which, coming from the north of England myself, I interpreted as being quite blunt and forthright. Nora has a younger sister, and in referring to his support in their education she said:

My Dad's very supportive of both his girls and really helped us, pushed us through university. The kind of dad that would be walking the city with you memorising your history dates for your O-levels. That kind of person. And paid our way through university, wanted to get us out into the business world.

However, she went on to say:

I remember having this debate with him just after we got married. We have always had very interactive dinners at home, and I remember my Dad saying to me, despite all the wonderful support he had given me, [he said] that the day before I got married, I worked by necessity and the day after I got married I worked by choice. But my husband worked by necessity the day before his marriage and the day after his marriage. Really interesting. So then when it comes to children, there becomes a real issue. If I am working by choice, then I'm choosing not to be with my children at home.

This piece from my conversation with Nora is reflective of the traditional attitudes of fathers, but also illustrates the bind that women can find themselves in as working mothers. As Nora said, not only does she have to prove herself at work, but she also has to prove herself to her parents. These attitudes set women up for feeling guilty.

Jan and Susan are sisters, and from their stories that they shared with me, it would seem that they both experienced their father very differently. He had a huge influence, both direct and indirect, on the course their lives took. From the excerpts of my conversations with Jan, we have already seen that he passed on to her a real love for the law, and that he actively encouraged her in her chosen profession. She identified with the
public person who was well respected as a criminal lawyer and as a judge. She also earlier alluded to the fact that her family was dysfunctional because her father was alcoholic. In his private life, he was vulnerable and difficult to live with. The family was kept off balance trying to anticipate his moods. Susan, the oldest of three siblings, always tried to understand him. Understanding him, and later also understanding the issues that families of alcoholics have to face, became her mission in life. In connecting on a deep emotional level with the man, she also connected with his vulnerability and became aware of her own vulnerabilities. We will take the story from Susan’s perspective:

My father and I are very much alike, but he was an alcoholic and so he was unavailable to the family a great deal of the time. And he sort of put me in a position where, he was a binge drinker so if he was drinking for any length of time it was like he and I against the rest of the family. Well I didn't want to be with him because that wasn't safe. I wanted to be with them, but I was pulled because I was the only one who understood him. So I was very much pulled apart from the family. That was only when he was drinking. As soon as he sobered up, it kind of didn't matter and I felt that I was neither. So when he was drinking, I had a place. And when he wasn't drinking, I didn't have any place there.

Jan was close to her mother while growing up, a safer place in the family. However, as time went on she saw her mother as being weak for not leaving her father, and in attempting to break the bond with her, identified with a more valued masculine goal in her career choice.

The public man was well respected but, as Susan stated, nobody knew him very well. He was a quiet and withdrawn man who read a lot when he was sober. Susan said of him, “He was depressed a bit so we were kind of on eggs wondering when the next binge
was going to come about.” He wielded considerable power in the family. There was the unpredictability over when he would next go on a drinking binge, but also there seemed to be an unspoken threat that if a foot was put wrongly, he might die. Susan expressed this thought in her idea of why her mother did not leave him. “I think the main reason why she didn’t leave him was that she was afraid he would die if she left him. he wouldn’t survive without her. without us. I don’t know if that is true or not.”

The ambivalence Susan felt towards her father is reflected in her words, “But I felt an affinity towards my Dad. certainly personality-wise. We were very alike in some ways.” Other people would say that she was like him, and that scared her, “They meant it as a compliment because he was so respected. But you see in some ways it is the same for me. I'm very respected in my field, but my home life....” In identifying so closely with her father, she draws parallels in terms of her work life and her home life. In her job she is very well regarded, but she described her home life as chaotic, which she attributes to personal deficits. However, her difficulties in coping at home are perhaps more concerned with the fact that she is a single mother of twins. she has a hugely responsible job, and she has the responsibility of a house.

Susan described herself as always searching when she was growing up. She did not know what she wanted to do with her life. Her mother sent her to Malaysia for a year and it was there that she realized that she had strong leadership skills. She went through university still very unclear as to what she wanted to do with her life. As a graduate student, almost by chance, she applied for a part-time job as an activity therapist. It turned out to be at the centre where her father had been for treatment numerous times. She was placed in the alcohol treatment program where she helped with group work. There she
was confronted with the very issues that had been a part of her childhood experience. She described her experience as group leader:

I would sit in the group and my mind would be blank, absolutely blank. It's like I don't know what to say. I was absolutely paralysed. I was fine at the activity stuff, and I got along with people fine....It was like if I say the wrong thing, I'm going to have an impact. I mean that's how strongly I felt in my family, that I could never say the wrong thing because he would die or something awful would happen. Then I realized that I could learn something about alcoholism here. I didn't know anything about it. And I learnt a lot that helped me to understand my own experience.

While in that job, Susan made the decision that alcohol treatment was the area she needed to be in. As she said, “I just felt that it made sense of my whole life.” She went on to do further training in the States, and then when the opportunity came to design and manage a new facility and treatment program, she jumped at it. “A dream come true, but hugely frightening.”

Jan, while being aware of her father's weakness, protected herself from it by staying close to her mother at home while being fascinated by the public figure. Susan, on the other hand, was emotionally drawn in. In the context of her training, she was confronted with the issues, and in gaining insight, could find resolution. They are very different people. Both are exceptionally gifted in their chosen fields but whereas I experienced Jan as being quite guarded, Susan is a very aware and open person. Both are greatly influenced by their father, but in very different ways.

In summarizing this section on the role of fathers in the lives of the women in the study, it seems that although father was referred to far less than mother, nevertheless, he plays a very influential role in their lives. He can be very encouraging and supportive in
an instrumental way, but he can also be a voice that echoes traditional sentiments that put women in a bind and contribute to conflicting sentiments around work and family.

**PEER INFLUENCES**

The influence of peers in the earlier times of their lives was only mentioned by three of the women and alluded to by a fourth. Again, I did not specifically ask the question about the influence of peers, but the topic came up in the context of early influences particularly regarding career motivation. All of the references dated back to pre and early teen years. Two of the women spoke about being with a highly motivated group of girls at school. One of those women talked about the loss when she moved away from that group, as did another of the women. Another participant spoke about the importance of groups generally for support.

1. **Friends as motivators**

The two women doctors mentioned the part their friends played in their lives. The first except is from a conversation with Lorna:

> You know when I was a little girl, I wanted to be a doctor. It was something I always wanted to do, and in high school, I chummed around with two girls and we were always competing against each other for first, second, and third in our class in whatever we were doing. We were also very good friends and we all wanted to be physicians.

Motivated friends played a huge role in Lorna’s career choice.

It was much later that Tracy decided to be a doctor. However, the friendly competition and the desire for learning and participating was stimulated by the group of friends she was with while she was growing up:
I had a wonderful group of friends when we lived in the Maritimes. There were five girls, and we went through the pre teens and it was a wonderful experience because we were all quite high achievers in multiple areas. We were all up there in the same competition zone, and so there was a friendly camaraderie and an effort to keep being good at drama, student council, everything. So that was a wonderful opportunity to explore all those areas at that time.

Moving away from friends

Tracy was to move away from her group of friends when she was in her early teens. Of its impact on her development, she said “And then when we moved and I lost those resources, I had to draw on other ones and one of those was to become very reflective and very book oriented and very study oriented.” These particular skills helped her to keep her focus when she was going through medical school.

Ann moved from Germany when she was 12 years old and that move impacted on her in a different way. She left childhood behind abruptly, and this loss is reflected in her words:

Being uprooted at aged twelve, coming to Canada, I was the one who had two months of English at school, and I was the one translating for my parents. And the social upheaval you know...you have close friends and you are just doing these sort of girl things, and also I grew up with fields and cows and all sorts of things around me and came to Avenue Road and St. Clair. That was the first place we lived, in a rented apartment, a furnished apartment, a hole, just an absolute hole and I'd lived in this lovely open place, and we moved into this hole. So that alone. They sent me to school in September and that was it, sink or swim and I chose to swim.

Ann explained her ability to “swim” in difficult circumstances as being, “probably a combination of stubbornness and the right sort of training at an early age. I never grew
up expecting to be taken care of.” She learned that she had to depend on herself and her own skills and resources. Learning that had been passed on from her mother’s experience.

**Looking to friends for support**

Peer groups became very important to Susan. “Why groups are so important to me is I was basically outside of my family. I was searching for groups outside of my family, just natural preservation, you need to belong to something so I found it.” Interestingly, her leadership skills were recognized early on in her life, and she tended to have a responsible role in the groups she belonged to. She described her joy at leaving for summer camp each summer:

I was in camp all my life and spent all summers as a counsellor. I left home the minute I could in the summer and I didn’t come back till the end of August. That’s what I did, and I was very happy at camp, extremely happy.

In using the expression “all my life,” there is an implication that being away from home in the midst of a group of people with whom she found acceptance and recognition was living. Susan’s need to belong is a recurring theme in her life.

We are introduced to the women in the study through these early influences. Influential people in their lives provide a personal background that affects the current context in which these women live, work, negotiate, and try to make sense of their lives. The people in their lives, and the implicit and explicit messages they received are influences in how they shape their lives as mothers and career women.

**REFLECTIVE COMMENTS**

As the family background of the women in the study emerged, what stood out was that they were reared by women with power. In at least four of the situations, the mother
held the balance of power in the family. In no situation did the father seem to have excessive control. When the father was present, he encouraged his daughters in their education and careers and his influence was positive. Mother’s influence, on the other hand, was more complex and less direct. Both of the parents, and especially the father, might have held traditional values but these did not, it seems, directly affect career goals and aspirations. Effects were more indirect and especially in their role as mothers.

The influence of the mother of career women has been acknowledged in the empirical literature as well as in qualitative studies of career women. From a developmental perspective, adolescence is a time when significant progress is made in identity formation (Erikson. 1968). At that time, parental influence acts to balance and encourage desire to express distinctiveness (Lucas, 1997). However, it has been posited that identity development for women is not a linear movement towards autonomy, but that their development has as much to do with connection as separation (Chodrow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). This distinctive gender difference may again be due to the cultural polarization of what it means to be masculine and what it means to be feminine in our society. However, as Lucas (1997) attempted to show in her study, the interdependence of career development variables and relational variables is a factor for women. The approval, closeness, and emotional support of their parents were more important for women than for men. It was also important for women to maintain attitudes, values, and beliefs similar to parents. In focussing on the mother, O’Brien and Fassinger (1993) concluded that “a combination of attachment to mother and healthy movement towards individuation provides the basis needed for mature career development” (p. 467).
Some of the women in the study still have unresolved earlier issues towards their mothers, but mostly they are now finding at least a satisfactory relationship with them. Some of their mothers came from difficult life circumstances and so they tried to guide their daughters into a life that would be better than their own. As mentioned, some of the women were forced into independent and responsible roles early in their lives, and it was clear that they felt the lack of a close relationship with their mother. They took on values associated with hard work that had been instilled into them as children and certainly early in their careers, the drive towards financial independence and the work ethic were strong motivating factors. Richie et al. (1997), in their qualitative study of highly achieving women, also noted that the women described being strongly influenced by their families’ values, particularly regarding the value of hard work. The women in my study internalized aspects of their mothers. Ann internalized her mother’s undaunting spirit, and Paige the drive to always keep busy. Being productive is a value that Susan has always held. For all of these women, there was never a question of choosing between career and motherhood. Working mothers might well provide a role model for their daughters of combining work and family (Betz, 1994), but perhaps a more powerful predictor of their work orientation is the values that they internalize from their mothers.

Family encouragement has repeatedly been shown to be a salient factor in women’s career development (e.g., Betz, 1994; Farmer, 1985). According to Betz, high achieving women have families who believe in higher education and believe in their capabilities. From the study, the encouragement to achieve had two faces. One was a very positive form of encouragement that their daughters work to the best of their ability so that they could develop their potential, thus giving them more choices in life.
"Knowledge is power," Laura remembers her mother saying. The focus for these women was to strive to do their very best. Expectations were high. The other form of encouragement was less towards self-enhancement and more towards self-reliance and the avoidance of dependency. The one was reaching towards being the best and the other was driven by the need to be self-sufficient. Both were strong motivators and both gave rise to the women setting high standards for themselves.

According to Rainey and Borders (1997), mothers with liberal gender role attitudes contributed to the gender role attitudes of their adolescent daughters, which in turn contributed to career aspirations. The gender role attitudes of the mothers of the participants did not specifically arise from the study, but the evidence seemed to indicate quite a range of attitudes from traditional to liberal. Some of the mothers were forced out of traditional roles by their life circumstances. Paige’s mother and Lorna’s mother both supported their families. Paige’s from necessity and Lorna’s by choice. When they were in their teens, others saw their mothers stepping out of the “mother stays at home” role and branching out into further education or returning to their jobs. At this stage, they had a role model of a working mother and although some talked about the family helping out at this time, essentially it was the mother who managed the family affairs. This was not equality but at least the mothers modeled standing up for what they wanted to do. When Tracy’s mother chose to return to work when Tracy was fourteen, Tracy explained that it was not without a lot of discussion. Through her experience, her mother taught her to stand up for what she believes she can do as a woman.

The fathers influenced their daughters in a different way than the mothers. Several of the women looked to their fathers as role models and mentors, which perhaps reflects.
as suggested by Betz (1994), the lack of role models and mentors for professional
women. Sometimes their fathers involved them in their work life and both Nora and Jan
described the thrill this gave them. Betz (1994) also suggested that more highly educated
fathers tend to have more career oriented and innovative daughters. This was the case
with some of the women, but not all. The extent to which he encouraged his daughters
and was a role model had a positive influence, but not all of the women had fathers who
played this role in their lives. Traditionally, mothers were more active in the lives of their
children, but as the study illustrates, fathers who are involved in their daughters’ lives can
play a supportive role, particularly regarding their daughters’ careers.

Schools and teachers were not mentioned by the women as being influential in
their lives. However, the support of a highly motivated group of friends were clearly
factors in two of the women’s lives.

Early influences, as we will see as we work through the findings, have wider
implications in the shaping of our lives. Although coming from different backgrounds,
the unifying factor in terms of early influences seemed to be that the women in the study
had strong mothers. They passed on values and attitudes that were internalized and which
have helped them to consciously work at accommodating career aspirations and family
life. They indeed taught them to stand up for what they believe they can do as women.
CHAPTER 4: ASPECTS OF A WOMAN'S LIFE: HER CAREER

As women's lives evolve in adulthood, three aspects of living take on a particular importance. They will be discussed in the order of career, relationship and motherhood for the sake of convenience and because this was the sequence followed by most of the women.

"We tended to get into management or career positions just because we happen to be good at what we do"

The women in the study are, as Susan observed in this quotation from one of our conversations, in strong management or career positions. We saw from the last chapter that at least part of the reason is that they brought into adulthood strong values and attitudes about work. They bring to their jobs a high level of commitment, a work ethic, and an expectation of achievement. Except for Susan, all of the women in the study were well established in their careers before having their children, and none of them questioned going back to work after having children. Their reasons are partly economic, but also because they find their work intrinsically rewarding.

Tracy said of her work, "I get some quicker feedback or some experiences of competency" in contrast to her role as mother. Most of the women would echo this sentiment. Some would go further by expressing that they could not be stay-at-home mothers because they missed the challenge of their work while being home on maternity leave. For example, Ann said, "I liked being back at work. I enjoyed rejoining the challenge," and Susan made the point, "I loved work, I could never be a home-mother. I don't have the temperament for it." Sally, too, found that while she was at home when the children were babies her days were monotonous and she missed the challenge of her
work. “I decided I had to work, just had to work.” That lack of challenge and stimulation was also mentioned by Nora who made the point that when she was on maternity leave, “I just feel I don’t have the same contribution to make in our discussions.” Paige summed up her situation in the following way:

I would not have been a good stay-at-home mum. I loved being at home for my maternity leave, but there was an end to it. I knew that when Christmas time came I would be going back to work and there was a part of me that was a little bit excited about that, I needed more than just staying at home.

Despite the importance of work in their lives, the dissonance felt by some of the women regarding returning to work when they had children will be discussed in a later chapter.

The purpose of this chapter on the women’s careers is to introduce the reader to the work lives of the women. Building on the early influences, firstly, under the heading of “the career fit,” I will present each of the women in turn. By sharing from our conversations, we can gain information on how each chose a career that seemed to fit well with her personality and values. Secondly, in building on the first theme, I will highlight particular aspects of their careers that are fulfilling to the women. The third theme of “flexibility” addresses ways in which the women have sought out the workplace flexibility they need to maintain a demanding job and also to parent their children.

Although maintaining a social constructivist perspective, because I am interested in the experiences of individual women, the person-environment fit theoretical approach to careers was used as a framework for analysis, but the analysis was not limited to this framework. Under the fourth heading of “shaping their lives through their careers.” I will discuss some findings in the context of the literature.
CAREER FIT

“Being a doctor is what I always wanted to do”

Lorna’s passion for the practice of medicine was evident in our conversations. She had wanted to be a physician from when she was quite young. However, although seeming to be self-assured, at first she faltered in her belief in her abilities and went into physiotherapy as a way into the health professions. This only served to affirm her desire to be a doctor.

I became very frustrated with physiotherapy and the lack of scientific evidence and the female role models in that profession were not what I aspired to be. I could not find a niche where I could say, “Oh that’s what I want to do.” Always I could see it the other way where I like to be with the patients, seeing the patients and directing their care, and feeling the responsibility. So then it became a hunger for me and then it became “OK, I think I can do this now.” I had that passion and when you have that passion for something in the interview when you apply, they feel it.

Lorna went on to successfully complete medical school, but then she had to decide on an area of specialty. A job in the north to help pay off her student loan was a time when she realized that if she was going to have other roles in her life, she needed to set boundaries around her work.

I was working in northern Ontario where I was the only doctor for 500 miles. I loved what I was doing, and I loved the people, and I could see that I could throw my whole heart and soul into this and never live for me or my family or my husband. So I knew I was going to have to make a career choice that limited my ability to pour myself into something.

Emergency medicine was emerging as a new specialty. Lorna came home to help out when her father was very ill. In order to be around to care for him during the day
while her mother was working, she took a position as an emergency physician doing night shifts:

I decided that emergency medicine was really my cup of tea. Just the immediate gratification, the feeling that I was making a difference, and the feeling that I could leave at the end of the shift and go home and not worry that I had an obligation or duty to the public or to the shift I had left behind. That was really important to me because I'm one of these people that has trouble letting go. If I feel responsible for something, I carry it through and finish it off. And so I needed the artificiality of a shift ending in order for me to say, "I have done my duty, I can go home and still feel good about myself."

Lorna had found her fit, and as she said, "It was really coming to grips with my own insight and figuring out what would work for me." Interestingly, though, because emergency medicine is a relatively new specialty, there was less money available than for other specialties. Her husband is a radiologist and as she said, "He just comments over and over again how I continually work for nothing. I do a 60 or 70 hour work week, nights, weekends and evenings and I earn exactly a third of what he does." The fact that she earns a third of what he does is another issue, but the point here is that having a career that was right for her was more important than the remuneration.

"I could be a doctor or be a minister or be an artist"

This statement reflects the diversity of Tracy's interests. She goes on to say, "I think when I chose medicine, it wasn't for the more practical reasons, it was more because I thought I could make a difference. I could help people, and it was a continually learning situation."

Tracy described herself as being "a female model medical doctor." She explained that female doctors tend to be more interactive with their patients. "We spend more time
talking [to patients] so we tend to know more about them, so it’s not so much of a come in, here’s a pill, see you later sort of model.” Because of the fee-for-service method of paying doctors, she too has settled for a lower paid medical practice. She brings to her job some well defined values and beliefs that inform her practice. For example, she believes that as a society we have become uncaring and that, as a family doctor, she can provide an environment where people do feel listened to. In commenting about difficult decisions that people bring to her office such as whether to have an abortion she said:

A lot of the difficult decisions that they have to make are partly caused by the way our society is set up. I believe that abortion and the issues of unwed mothers are societal issues, they are not medical issues, they are not even issues that should be issues. It’s because our society does not cherish enough, they don’t cherish their people enough, their children enough. They judge the people about the decisions they’ve made when they don’t give them the money to make the decisions.

In choosing to be in family medicine, Tracy brings some of the diverse aspects of herself into her work. Qualities of empathy and caring, and values concerning social justice are evident in her language. Also, she uses her creative imagination to help break down the mystique surrounding medicine and. through simple stories, she helps patients to understand complex medical terms:

My latest favourite is the osteoporosis explanation. After having to describe countless times why you use different components, I decided to say, “I have this graphic image of someone building a wall,” and so now I simply tell people, “Calcium, bricks to build the wall. Wheelbarrow gets it to the site, that’s vitamin B. Bricklayer, oestrogen....” And ever since those funny visual images have been used, people go, “Oh, well that’s obvious, and that is helpful.”
Although her choice of career came less out of a passion for medicine than Lorna’s did, as a doctor she has the opportunity to live out deeply held values and beliefs through her work.

“*It’s a very tough system to survive in unless you are going to be like a guy*”

Jan’s desire to follow her father’s example and be a lawyer has already been described, and we will take up her story from there. It is a story of her struggle in a profession that is largely male oriented, despite the growing number of female lawyers. It is also a story about discovering her values and finding an environment to practise law in that is congruent with those values.

Her intention was to become a criminal lawyer like her father. However, once out of law school, she was advised to first experience Bay Street, and she accepted the offer of a job in the firm where she had been articled. She was hired as a corporate commercial litigator, a job that she described as “the creme de la creme.” As an articled student, she had enjoyed her work, but during the four years in corporate litigation, she became very unhappy. “There was a dominant perspective and if you didn’t fit...” She felt that she did not fit because her vision of how she wanted to practise law was very different from the way in which she saw law being practised. She said:

> *Valued is productivity and hours and no one really looks at the results. I mean doesn’t it sound ridiculous that they don’t even look to see if you win your cases or your clients are happy? I think your relationships and whether you are providing good results for your client are meaningful.*

In holding on to her ideals of a client-centred approach to law, rather than clocking the maximum hours for the company, she found herself philosophically at odds with the firm.
"I was perceived to be less committed than my peers." That was extremely hurtful to her because on the contrary, she was highly committed, but her commitment was to the practice of meaningful law. She described her experience in the following way:

It was having a tremendous effect on me, on my confidence, esteem and worth so I quit, I didn't have a job. I never appreciated how damaging it would be to me, and it has taken years to recover. I became a very successful counsel, and yet I would say that it has probably taken three or four years to realize I am smart and capable and can do it.

She had been told by one of the senior partners, "You're too nice to be a lawyer," a statement that connects with her observation that to survive in this job, you need to be "like a guy."

Jan knew that in her next job she needed to practice law that was meaningful to her and she accepted a job where she "represented the interests of complainants who complained of discrimination." In reflecting back on her time in that job, Jan said of herself:

When I started, I would have been a lawyer practising human rights, and then at some point it became me. Until then I was not political. It stopped being the kind of work that I practised and it started to be who I am and what I believe in.

Jan had found her vocation in practicing law as a human rights activist. Jan finished her contract in that position, and she has moved on to an organization with a professed feminist bias. However, her personal focus continues to be in human rights rather than confining herself to women's issues alone.

In the context of her work, Jan went through a process of self-examination in which her values became increasingly clear to her. In her work, she has been constantly
presented with personal challenges, not the least being to find a fit in a profession that is
slow to change and to adapt to more diverse perspectives.

"Once you find your own contentment things eventually fall into place"

Sally’s struggle to find her fit in law school has already been alluded to. She
described her experience in the following way:

The male personalities over-powered the female. And even though we were split
fifty fifty in our class, the women sort of took a back seat to the male
personalities which were very strong. These were young men who knew that
they wanted to do tax law on Bay Street. They all looked the same and wanted
to do the same thing, and I just didn’t feel I fit in.

She consciously set about finding what was right for her; a way for “Sally to get through
law school.” She took courses that were interesting to her, and she involved herself in
well-chosen extra-curricular activities that developed her interests in aspects such as
feminism and the law.

Once out of law school, Sally joined a Toronto firm of eight lawyers of which she
was the only woman. She found that the aggressive way in which she was expected to
practise law was very stressful. A decision to get married and hopefully to have a family
meant looking at other options. She and her partner decided to practise in a small city.
She joined a small law firm and she described how she formulated her ideas about the
kind of practice that she wanted:

I was just taking whatever came in the door. I started doing some work for the
women at the women’s shelter and then just found a niche. There was the legal
side, and there was the social work side. I think men and women approach their
matrimonial things differently and I’ve a lot of women who come to me from male
lawyers because there’s a lack of sensitivity towards that stuff.
Sally went on to set up in private practice with her husband. Her focus remains in matrimonial law and working with disadvantaged women who are referred by the Children’s Aid Society. That she has found a good fit is evident in her words, “I think I am good at it.” She went on to explain that, for example, in separation cases when there is property to be sold, she is sensitive to the feelings of women. She works with them and empowers them, “I think you have a happier separated family if they come to the realization themselves rather than a lawyer telling them or a judge ordering them.”

Sally did not come into law with the passion that Jan, for example, describes and this is reflected in the way she talks about her work.

It’s not a calling, I don’t feel passionate about my work, but I enjoy my job and if you are going to work it is a pretty good job. It’s intellectually stimulating and there have been some interesting things happen over the last while career-wise in terms of cases that I have had and done well on and that gives satisfaction. Last week I wanted to quit and next week I will love it again and so it’s not just a job, it’s not a passion, I think it’s somewhere in the middle there.

Jan chose law and so there is more of a sense of vocation for her than there is for Sally. Law was chosen for Sally, and it is possible that she could be equally good as a social worker or whatever she chose to do. More important, perhaps for Sally, is to work at a job that is worthwhile and also challenging and stimulating. She has shaped her profession to fit her interests and values.

“**Their time with me is going to be the best time it can be**”

Paige, as a teacher of children with special needs, takes this goal into her classroom. Teaching is a profession that she took up by happenstance. She had thought
she wanted to be a counsellor, but when she finished her undergraduate degree, she moved to a city with a teacher’s college. She explained:

My life took a different track and I ended up in teaching. It was never really my choice of career, though I have always enjoyed working with kids. My goal [in teaching] was to teach grades 12 and 13 math. and when I applied for teachers' college, I was told at the time that secondary was not the route to go, there were not enough jobs, and to go into elementary. So I thought, “OK I will do that.” So I went into elementary and was hired to teach grade two and I taught grade two for several years. I ended up loving the little kids because they really like their teacher and just so much respect. They can idolize their teacher and so that’s very rewarding. You’re somebody special to them and you get hugs and I liked that.

Not only did she enjoy the affirmation of the children she taught, but also Paige enjoyed her autonomy in the classroom. “That domain is your domain and you set the standards and the rules.” However, she knew that she wanted to move on from there. “I knew that I didn’t want to be a classroom teacher for ever. I knew there was something else at the end of the tunnel that I wanted to head towards, but I wasn’t sure what at that time.” She found herself being drawn towards children with behavioural problems:

I wanted to work with needy kids. They always kind of touched my heart a little bit, the ones that struggled in school because I struggled in school. School was tough for me and I wanted to do something that would help these kids a little bit more. I didn’t know that until I went into teaching.

Six years into teaching, Paige made a career shift and she took her Master’s degree, specializing as a special needs teacher.

As a resource teacher, Paige sees children in small groups and she feels that in this position, her skills as teacher and as counsellor are utilized. Perhaps because of her own
background, she finds herself particularly empathizing with children with special needs, especially those who come from difficult circumstances and uncaring homes. “These are little people that have feelings, and some of them come from lives of hell, and their time with me is going to be the best time it can be.”

“I just felt that it made sense of my whole life”

Susan’s process of finding her career has already been discussed. Having found meaning to her own life, when the opportunity came, she worked to create a place where others could find healing and meaning. To reach that place, though, Susan had to make some difficult choices.

Susan’s desire to find the best treatment for alcoholics and their families led to a decision to go to the States to an institute where the exciting new concept of co-dependency was emerging as the basis of treatment. She became immersed in the experience there, both as client (as part of the training) and as therapist. She identified with the concept and was passionate in her enthusiasm for the program. She described it as being “so seductive”:

For the first time in the addiction field it gave us a structure, we’d had none before. It gave us parameters within which to work. It recognised the family and it recognised that inter-generational stuff that nobody had recognised before.

She resonated with the pain experienced by the families of alcoholics. She also cherished being accepted by the group:

They adored me down there. They thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. Again it was the experience when I’m outside of my family, and I’m in a group, all of a sudden people keep saying to me, you are really special.
Susan received recognition for her abilities, so much so that she was singled out as being the person who could have brought the ideas of co-dependency to Canada:

Here’s something I could be tops in Canada in. And you know interestingly enough I had the opportunity to be probably a guru in Canada, and I turned it down. Thank goodness. There was something inside of me that knew that this was wrong. But at the time it was like, Wow, wow, you know? I think I knew in my heart of hearts that this was almost sick, and I believe it was....

It was during the time at the treatment centre that Susan became pregnant. She left to return to Canada. As she said, “I had a break from the field, and that was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me.” Coming back as a mother, her perspective had changed and she could look more objectively at the program. A job opportunity came up to set up a new centre and to create a treatment program for people who had abused drugs and alcohol. This happened at the very time when she was needing a stable job to provide for her new family, and at a time when she felt confident about the sort of program that she wanted to put in place. Her job brings together her skills in organizing and “being able to see the big picture.” She brings to it a passion for the work and a compassion for those who pass through the centre.

“I can’t say I planned this career. Opportunities have come up and I have been fortunate.”

However, Ann also said, “I think the level I have reached is because of my own ability.” Originally wanting to go into medicine, but feeling that her marks were not adequate. she explained how she came by her position:

I am going to be twenty years with the company, which still amazes me. I started out fresh out of university. I had a three-year Bachelor of Science degree and basically was tired of going to school and wanted to make some money. I had
been in touch with this contact with the company. Finally I got a call, went in for the interview, and lo and behold they hired me.

Ann started out in this multi-national drug company in a full-time position as a lab technician while she was also working on the honours’ year of her science degree. By successfully applying for jobs, she has moved up in the company. She was in the area of clinical research, and went on to manage clinical research teams. She is now in a senior management position in which she heads up a team of up to thirteen people in a data management department.

As a businesswoman in a highly competitive field, Ann has had to struggle with feelings of vulnerability. For example, she talked about feeling vulnerable in terms of her technical knowledge:

What’s quite frightening for me and where I have a lot of doubts is that I have absolutely no training in computers and I am managing a data management department. I’ve got thirteen people who do their stuff day in day out looking after data. That’s been quite tough for me. Either someone has the ethic of supporting you and doing a good job, or they take real advantage of you, and the first two years I was in a very difficult situation. I am beginning to get a feel now. I’m starting to learn the language, and I can feel when someone is trying to dazzle me with techno-speak you know.

Ann also feels vulnerable in terms of her education. Several times in the course of our conversations, she referred to the fact that most of the people she works with have Ph.D. degrees and seem to be quicker than she is to grasp concepts:

They understand concepts in their entirety instantly, whereas I take a while to get there. I work with a lot of highly intelligent people. And these people do a lot of different things because they are very capable, and they are quickly insightful, and they can't wait for me to take my baby steps to catch up with them.
Her third area of vulnerability she explained as follows. “The environment is very political and I could never understand what political is.” She is aware of favouritism and networking going on and distances herself from the politics, though she knows that by doing so she sometimes is disadvantaged.

However, despite her struggles with sometimes not feeling that she fits, Ann clearly makes a very important contribution. She has worked on developing a style of management whereby she creates an environment in which people work as a team in a self-directed way:

*When people are working on something together, you can feel the communication flowing more easily. It was not something that I actually made happen, I caused it to happen indirectly. That's the right way to manage. You create the environment, you set the requirements and the time lines and all of that, and then you need some people to actually do it and work together. My ultimate goal is really to have self-directed work teams because there are just too many projects for me to control everything.*

Ann said that her strength is in bringing parties together, and speaking a common language by looking for the common ground. It is in working in a setting where there is co-operation and collaboration that Ann feels a fit. She tries to create this kind of environment around her. As a self-motivated worker, she needs to have people working for her who also have a “can do attitude.”

*I think you should hire me*

As has already been noted, Nora had always wanted to follow the role of her father and go into business. Her first choice of a career was in television advertising. She took a degree in communications and intended to go on to an MBA degree. It was
suggested to her that two years in a job would be beneficial before starting a Master’s program. She described how she set about obtaining a job:

I was in the career library looking through the books, and I was applying to all these communications companies. As it turns out, I ended up running across this company called [C], and as it turns out, my mother’s name is [C]. So I wrote to them and said, I think you should hire me. So I got an interview with them, and got hired.

Apart from a brief time of working with another company, Nora has remained with her original company and has been in the industry for eleven years. On the subject of going back to do her MBA she said, “As soon as I hit the ceiling, then I’ll go back and do my MBA. I am on a roller coaster now. I am going to go with it until I run into a wall.” She has moved up in the company and she is now in a management position. She leads a team of people who are preparing to launch a new product related to women’s health, a position which she describes as being much sought after. She said, “I really feel at this point in time I have come somewhere where all my feminist and pro women ideas all kind of come together in a job that’s really very full of quality for me.”

In summing up this section on women’s career choices, a unifying factor is that all of the women have careers that are important to them, and for some, there is a sense of a real passion for their work. It is interesting to note the decisions that the women who are in the professions made regarding the direction of their careers. They had more options and some made clear decisions to side-step the career route that is based on more traditional prescriptions. Both of the lawyers, for example, deliberately rejected practising law in the way in which they saw it being practised in their respective Bay Street firms. Choosing to practise law in ways that are consistent with their values has marginalized
them in terms of the main stream, and consequently, has meant that they have settled for lower paying legal work.

Both of the doctors also made choices regarding the direction of their careers and how they practise as physicians. In her career development, Lorna has had a number of promotions within her area of specialty. However, time off to have children has placed her at a disadvantage compared with other colleagues who have wives at home taking care of the personal aspect of their lives, “their careers can soar.” Tracy’s choice was to decline the long hours that physicians traditionally work in favour of a more balanced lifestyle, a theme in itself that will be covered more fully later. The interactive approach with patients that both Tracy and Lorna talk about requires a greater output of emotional energy than the more traditional medical model style of practice, and it is not financially rewarded in a fee-for-service system.

Unlike the professions of law and medicine that are still based on a traditional male career model, teaching has tended to be a female dominated profession. Paige was able to pursue her career as a special education specialist. At the time of our conversations, she had successfully applied for a promotion to a board level job. Her organizational skills and her commitment to her work received recognition. Central to her career, is her attitude of care towards children with special needs. From her experiences of growing up, she empathizes with children in her care. Speaking from that experience she said, “It gives me the opportunity to give people hope. you can move on and make a good life for yourself.”

Similarly, central to Susan’s job and fulfilled through her job is her attitude of care for individuals and families who are suffering because of drug and alcohol abuse.
Although both Paige and Susan are essentially in jobs that require an attitude of care, we will see later from Susan’s story that care giving can also be expected of women.

The two women who are working in corporations are in a different position. They do not have the same grand decision type of choice available to them. On a daily basis, they are confronted with attitudes and situations with which they have to deal. Ann alluded to her distaste of office politics that are foreign to her way of thinking, and so she shuts them out. Both Ann and Nora are now working in an office climate that is less hierarchical, and more teamwork oriented. This approach suits the style of leadership of both of these women. Many businesses now realize that they can not afford not to hire from a pool of highly competent women for their executive positions, and so they have policies in place that are female friendly. However, it is the subtle inequities in the workplace that often leave women in a disadvantaged state, and this topic will be addressed in a later chapter.

Through the stories of the women, we can gain some insight into some of the ways in which women shape their lives through their careers. Their careers have evolved as their lives have unfolded and as their priorities changed. The direction of their careers reflects the development of themselves as individuals, and there is a consistency apparent between what they value in themselves and the work they do.

**CAREER SATISFACTION**

In examining the relationship of the women towards their careers, it is evident that they are looking for something more in their work than merely doing a job. They look for satisfaction in their jobs, both in terms of using their talents in a worthwhile manner, and from feeling that they are making a fair contribution financially.
“This is a good place, where you can make a difference”

We have already seen from the stories of several of the women that the opportunity to integrate their various talents into their jobs makes their work more meaningful to them. Tracy spoke of ways in which she brings together the artistic and the spiritual aspects of herself into her medical practice, and so she has the satisfaction that she is effectively using her diverse gifts in her work. Paige talked about bringing together the teacher and the counsellor, the organizer and the compassionate aspects of herself into her job. She spoke of the satisfaction of feeling that she has helped make the time that particularly disadvantaged children spend with her as being the best time it can be. Susan brings into her work a visionary perspective together with strong leadership skills and empathy with those whom she is helping. Nora speaks of a job that is full of quality because it integrates her ideal of a job with her feminist values. Sally, in her work in matrimonial law, feels that she has found her niche because the work she does integrates the legal with a social work aspect:

A portion of what I do is listening, and talking, and working out strategies for coping. I say to clients, 'I can tell you the law but I can also tell you how we can work out your problem within the law but within your own family unit.'

The major focus of Jan’s work is in furthering human rights. Jan is at a place in her career where her strong belief in the law and her passion for human rights merge together to further humanitarian causes. She told a story to illustrate her empathy for people who are on the margins of society:

I went through a really interesting workshop with a fascinating woman. You were asked several questions and you moved in the room according to where you were. Is there alcoholism in the family? Do you have a criminal record? Are you
a lesbian, gay or bisexual person? All of the areas in your life that you could be more vulnerable, and you moved throughout the room. For the most part I was in the predominant norm, not in a disadvantaged group, but what it made me also realize was that I empathized much more with the vulnerable and disadvantaged than I did with the dominant norm.

She said of the law, "I think you can accomplish a fair bit of change through the legal system. I believe in it, I believe in justice and I believe in justice through the judicial system." She now has a high profile job in which she leads a team of people in preparing to present sample cases to the Supreme Court of Canada. When speaking with Jan, there is a sense that she could never do enough. Nevertheless, with some successful human rights cases behind her, she knows that she is using her skills in the law to make a difference and through her work, she fulfils her need to contribute to society.

Ann has worked hard to reach the place where she can acknowledge that she is making a difference. She went on a self-assertiveness course to help her to deal with some of the more passive aspects of herself in order to become more the manager she would like to be. Satisfaction with her job is when she feels there is a team spirit in which there are good working relationships and work is being accomplished:

I want to feel in my job like we are being productive, like we are creating something useful, we are adding to the business, because after all, if the business is healthy, we are all healthy. But also it's fun. When you go in and you have a good relationship with your co-workers and your staff, and you can joke around, and feel as if you are working as a team in an intelligent way towards a positive end, I think it's very rewarding.

She has reached this place of feeling that she is making a difference as a manager, and although issues arise on an ongoing basis, there is a sense that she is gaining confidence
in herself. Perhaps an important element of feeling fulfilled is having a sense of efficacy that comes from knowing that one has done a good job.

Lorna illustrated the importance to her of feeling fulfilled by her work in a story she told comparing her way of working with that of a colleague:

There is this one guy who has no time for teaching and no time for talking, and his greatest measure of successful outcome is that the patients are moving through at an incredible rate, and everyone is on time. You see that's not my measure of outcome. My measure of outcome is I go home and I feel I've made a difference. Every person I have seen and touched, I've hopefully made a difference. I've found out what their need was and tried to meet it. And last night I was there until twenty to two in the morning still writing all these charts because I spend a lot more time talking so I don't have time to write, whereas he's gone 15 minutes after the end of his shift because he's had more time to write and less time to talk. It's just a different way of practising. Mine is not any more right than his, but it suits my need.

That the women feel fulfilled in their work is an extension of working in jobs that are a good fit. Financial rewards, although clearly important, seldom came up in our conversations.

"I think it's recognition that someone feels that what I contribute is worthwhile"

Being financially independent is an attribute that their mothers taught some of the women to value while they were growing up. Clearly, the money they make is essential for the life style they enjoy. However, only Ann directly addressed the financial aspects of the job.

Ann made the point that earning her own living has always been accepted in her mind. Being dependent on someone else would not seem right to her. "I do feel very strongly that I like to have my own money and my independence. Now we don't keep
separate bank accounts, but I know I contribute equally.” She was also the one who made the point that the positive feedback that a paycheque provides is important. However, despite the value she places on financial independence, Ann also said, “There comes a point where it doesn't really matter how much they pay you, if you are miserable it's just not worth it.”

The women’s financial contribution also came up in less direct ways. As well as Ann, Nora and Jan specifically mentioned that being able to contribute equally is a part of equality in the relationship. Some of the women were primary earners at times in their lives. When Lorna was first married, she supported her husband while he was in residency. Tracy’s husband had left his job in California when they married. When their first child was born, he was the primary caregiver while she worked in her medical practice. Paige raised her family with little support from her husband after they separated. and Susan, as a single mother, is entirely responsible for supporting her children.

Because the commitment and dedication that this group of women bring to their jobs they also bring to their parenting role, the next section examines the choices they have made to create flexibility in their work to accommodate having children.

**CAREER FLEXIBILITY**

Flexibility in the workplace is frequently mentioned in the literature as being extremely important when also parenting young children. (e.g., Hammer et al., 1997; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). From the experiences of women in the study, flexibility only happened by deliberately creating it in their own situations. This latitude was more available to women in the professions than to women working in corporations. In this section, the experiences of the women will be explored in terms of consciously creating
flexibility, of having jobs that allow some flexibility, and being in situations where there is very little flexibility.

"Flexibility that I need and want when I have children"

When Sally was pregnant with her first child, she was stunned by the attitude of her boss at that time. In a conversation over her options, essentially he told her that he did not pay women to have babies. In thinking over the implications of his statement, “I knew if he had that attitude when I was pregnant that I wouldn’t have the flexibility that I need and want when I do have children.” That hastened a move that she and her husband had already considered. They decided to go into practice together. She said of their decision:

I think ultimately we always knew that we would probably set up together, and then the final decision was, “We’ve explored all these options. What practically speaking makes the most sense? Not what is financially the best for us or what even is best for the children, but what would make us the happiest?” And we said, “Well, there is only one thing that we would both be really content with, and that is just to hang up our own shingle and work on it together.”

Between pregnancies and since, Sally has built up her practice in matrimonial law.

I’ve decided I will only take a certain number of clients, I will not work on the weekends, I don’t have my home number listed in the book. I will come into the office at seven o’clock in the morning for you, but I won’t be there at five. I think people accept that, and people adjust to what your priorities are. I think my practice is thriving, and I think people accept the differences.

She has tailored her work so that she can be home for her children at the same time each day and because it is her own practice, she can build in flexibility as required.

Since having her children, Tracy has chosen to confine her practice to a 40 hour week, working three full days and also performing some hospital work. Her rationale is,
“You can’t succeed in all areas of your life at the same time. It’s better to focus on the important ones at that season. And I learned a lot to say NO the first two years of having a child.” Working in a small city where most of the physicians were used to the traditional medical model of practising, Tracy initially found a lack of sympathy for working fewer hours:

I think they are doing a lot less of this eye rolling, but we’ve had to make choices and at first they were unpopular. I had to make a choice about how many hospitals I could realistically cover, knowing that after a work day, and after taking the kids it’s very hard to do two hospitals. So I can do one well and two in a less than perfect way and that’s not good medicine. So good medicine for me, having a family, was to choose one. And that runs into friction when you are with a group that never had to make that choice. There was always someone at home with the kids when they had to run into the hospital at 8.00 o’clock at night, or whenever, or go to a meeting. That’s what’s expected, and studies show that to be a part-time practitioner means 40 hours a week. To be a full-time is 60 plus hours. And for every 10 hours a week less you work, you’re happiness quotient level builds up, and your stress level actually drops.

At some cost. Tracy has determined her hours of working so that she also has time to parent her children. This is possible because she has chosen to be in family medicine and to work in a group setting. She recalled an old doctor saying to her years ago. “If you are thinking of raising a family, I would suggest being a family practitioner.” At the time she had felt that he was being presumptuous and questioned why she should be so limited. She chose family medicine because that is what she wanted to do. and she sees his advice as being practical:

I have watched my friends who preferred the specialties and the struggle they have with being on call, being up every fourth night around the clock for a
decade, and some of the demands they have that I don’t because more people can fill in for me, and I realise he was wise.

Because the expectations in medicine are still that people will work long hours based on having a wife at home taking care of family matters, women doctors are at a disadvantage. Tracy chose to limit her work hours and create the flexibility she wanted so that she could have time with her children. However, it has been at a cost in terms of career opportunities and this will be discussed in a later chapter.

“My job allows me to be more flexible to go”

Lorna has chosen a specialty, but although she works up to a 60-hour week, she in fact has some flexibility:

The good thing about my job is that because it is at the disadvantaged hours, the hours when my husband is at home looking after the kids, is that I am more available during the day to do things. Like today, I have to take my oldest son to his dentist appointment at two. I’m more available if the child falls and breaks his arm, pretty well I can drop everything and go. Even if I am working in the Emergency Department and it’s during the day, there is always someone that can come and cover. My job allows me to be more flexible to go.

Although her job is extremely demanding, Jan also has some control over the hours she works:

My timetable, even though it’s horrendous, is completely within my control. I took a month in the summer and I will probably take another couple of weeks at Christmas. My guess is that I will probably have seven or eight weeks of holiday this year just because I make sure that happens. And that I think is the most important part of this job. It worries me thinking about going back into private practice for somebody else because the ability to control is very important. The stress of not being able to control your workload and the hours you put in and
the hours that you have to put in, that’s what creates stress. So for the most part I can control my life and be here with my kids.

Jan also works a compressed workweek, giving herself Mondays off when she can. She is sometimes away working at weekends, and so having that day at home becomes very precious. She said, “Because nobody expects me there on Monday it’s like this sort of protected space.” At the time of our third meeting, Jan’s children had just come through a bout of the chicken pox. That put a lot of stress on her and her husband and the system they have worked out together to parent their children. There were days when she had to bring the children into work and although inconvenient, it could be done.

Being able to bring the children to work is one advantage in being the boss. As Susan said. “I work long hours and I have brought my children with me. They’re here a lot. Thank goodness I’m the boss, I’m a single mum and there is nothing else I can do.”

“There is a window of corporate time frames to come and go”

Despite having policies in place, including flextime, to help people with young families, there is only lip service paid to the flexibility that many women working in the private sector would really like. One of the problems lies around commitment. Time is still valued over productivity, and the reality is that if people are not seen to be putting in the hours at the office, they are viewed as being less committed.

At the time of speaking with Nora. she was pregnant with her second child. The idea of flexibility came up in the context of her maternity leave. She intends taking the full six months off, but she also is entitled to holidays. She is proposing that she come back part time for the first two months following her maternity leave, working four days a week. As she explained, “It’s not official policy, not really allowed.” She also said that
she would like to work four days a week on a regular basis, but quickly dismissed it as not being company policy.

Nora described how she and her husband have to play along with company policies that value time spent on the job over the end result. There has to be a careful balancing of the career needs of both, neither wanting to give the impression at work that there is a lack of commitment:

So what we do is if one of us is doing the drop off, the other one will come in a bit earlier. Or the other one may stay a little bit later because there is a window of corporate acceptable time frames to come and go so we shift it between the two of us.

Although Nora is very committed to working, she envies friends in the professions who have more flexibility and can work a shorter week, but she explained, “It’s just not feasible in a job like this.”

The teachers’ strike was a difficult time for parents with young children. As Ann explained, “childcare is not regarded as a public issue.” Although her company has flexible work hours, they are only useful when children are at school, but for times when children are off school for extended periods, it does not help. She described what happened:

During the teachers’ strike, the company said, ‘well, if you have to take off a day or two it is between you and your manager. More than that you will have to take unpaid leave And there was no provision made for children to come to the workplace.

Ann feels strongly that there should be more support by corporations for employees with children.
Because work is a part of these women’s lives and they retain their involvement in family affairs, working in a situation that allows for flexibility is very important to them. Sally’s story gives an example of moving to a situation where she could find the flexibility that she needed and thus shape her life to accommodate her priorities. They all try to build flexibility into their working lives, and because they hold senior positions, they have more options.

**REFLECTIVE COMMENTS: SHAPING LIVES THROUGH CAREERS**

The person-environment fit theoretical approach to career development in its original form was a matching of choice of job to personality characteristics or traits (Judge & Bretz, 1992). Fitzgerald et al. (1995), in their critique of the person-environment fit approach, pointed out that it is not that simple for women. There are many factors that compromise an optimal fit, and in particular the authors cite the homework interface. In this section, I will explore how women accommodate work and home responsibilities in ways that fit their personal characteristics and needs. I will first look at how the women shaped their careers in their own terms, secondly, how they bring an ethic of care into their work, and thirdly, the importance to them of accommodating their work to their home life.

**Working in their own terms**

The difficulties that women experience in trying to find their niche in a predominantly male-oriented work place are reflected in their stories. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) suggested that women tend to self-select themselves out of attractive jobs because they doubt their abilities. From the stories of the women in the study, there was some evidence of women doubting their abilities, but ultimately this did not prevent them from
going where they wanted to go in their careers. There was a reluctance sometimes to attribute their success to their own abilities. Lorna initially did not go to medical school because she doubted her abilities, and for that reason, Ann never did try medicine. Ann, although sometimes attributing her rise in the company she joined to her abilities, also attributed it to good fortune. She tended to minimize her intellectual worth and understate her achievements, which Reardon (1995) found to be a barrier to women’s workplace success. Ann also tended to attribute her success to chance events, as if reluctant to acknowledge her own achievement.

Stiver (1991) suggested that for men, work has been a means of enhancing their identities as men, but many women experience conflict between their sense of self at work and their sense of self in their personal lives. Success in the corporate world is often associated with competition and coercion and this might well represent a threat to women who value being in relationship with others. In fact, as Stiver pointed out, success in our culture can often be inhumane and destructive. Perhaps the more “feminine” qualities of co-operation, community, and personal empowerment that many women bring to the workplace can provide alternatives to patriarchal systems. We have seen from all the women’s stories how they strive to bring these characteristics into their work, thus reducing the conflicts referred to by Stiver.

There is no map to guide these women as they try to pick their way through established cultures. Sally questioned her fit as she went through law school. She was overwhelmed by the self-confidence of the males around her who, to her, all looked the same. Women struggle to compete with men who create the impression of being competent and successful. Sally made the important decision not to attempt to compete
with men on their terms but instead, to create her own path, and to shape her schooling, and later her job, in the way that was right for her.

Decisions to follow an independent career path are easier for those women in the professions than for those working for corporations. If they found that the traditional way of operating in their workplace was alien to them, they could make other choices. Sally was uncomfortable with the aggressive way others in her firm practised law and the long hours that were expected. She chose to move into a small town practice, and ultimately into a partnership with her husband. In this way, she could practise in a way that she felt suited her style, and she gained the flexibility of working hours that she wanted. Because Jan felt her sense of self being undermined through not conforming to the way her firm wanted her to practise law, she left her job and took a position in an organization that matched her values. Tracy was not prepared to work the hours expected of a family practitioner and so she too shaped her career in a way that suited her. Ann, in working for a corporation, did not have these kinds of choices available to her. Instead, she pursued a style of leadership that she felt comfortable with, taking a self-assertiveness course to improve her skills. Sometimes she felt like an “outsider” but she remained true to herself.

**Bringing an ethic of care into their work**

As we saw from the previous chapter, most of the women came into adult roles with a strong work ethic, and with a sense that they could make it in the world on their own. There was also the sense that they brought into their work strongly held values.

Judge and Bretz (1992), in expanding on the person-environment fit approach, found that values are an important determinant of person-environment fit. They looked
specifically at the values of achievement, concern for others, honesty, and fairness.

Concern and respect for others were values that stood out in our conversations.

The concern for others, or an ethic of care, which was evident in all of the stories is reminiscent of Gilligan's (1982) seminal work that implicit in women's sense of morality and of self are issues of care of, and inclusion of other people. Gilligan (1988) made the point that people with an ethic of care also have an ethic of justice, but the one tends to predominate in their thinking. The ethic of care is "the different voice." Brabeck (1993) described Gilligan's theory as "a morality of responsibility which is based on a concept of harmony and non-violence and a recognition of the need for compassion and care for self and others" (p. 36). Gilligan's theory stands in contrast to Kohlberg's morality of justice which "is based on a concept of reciprocity and fairness and a recognition that one must respect the rights of others as well as one's own" (Brabeck, 1993, p. 36). Brabeck suggested that rather than the two theories be in contrast to each other, justice and care be merged. In this way, a moral person makes choices that "reflect reasoned and deliberate judgements that ensure justice be accorded each person while maintaining a passionate concern for the well being and care of each individual" (p.48). This enlarged conception of morality would seem to fit better the beliefs in social justice to which several of the women alluded. It combines empathy and compassion with a belief in fairness and respect for self and others.

Jan found herself in conflict with the first firm she worked for when she perceived that they valued productivity over care for the client. She was harshly accused of being uncommitted because she put the clients' needs before the company's needs. Stiver (1991) would frame this as her not behaving "like a man" (p. 230). The fantasy of the
professional man that Stiver describes is one who moves “through every work situation strong, confident, self-sufficient, and clearly not emotional” (p. 230). Jan felt undermined in her work and it caused her considerable anxiety. It is a credit to her inner strength that she stuck by her principles, and moved into work that is more meaningful. However, her story illustrates some of the problems women face when they take a stand in a work world that was defined by men and for men.

The women demonstrated an ethic of care in many ways in their work. Ann in her leadership style, Sally in the way she negotiated with people in matrimonial cases, and Tracy in seeking to take the mystery out of medical terminology. Susan showed an ethic of care in helping individuals and families deal with the impact of alcohol on the family, and Paige in giving the children in her class who were from troubled homes a different experience. Lorna spends extra time with her patients to allow them to share their real concerns, and Nora identifies strongly with her work on a project that she feels is important for women’s health. Through their work, they seek to empower others. Jean Baker Miller (1991) defines power as “the capacity to produce a change” (p. 198) by using one’s power to empower another. This is a very different power from the one that exerts total influence or control and one which, she suggests, most women would be most comfortable with and most effective at. As more women and men demonstrate the effectiveness of this kind of power, far from adapting to existing conditions, they are transcending patriarchal values (Hall, 1990).

**Accommodating work and family**

The women all talked about flexibility as being an important value, especially when they have children. Work schedule flexibility and a perception of control over work
schedules reduce, according to Hammer et al. (1997), work and family conflict. Indeed, Jan made the point that when she feels that she has some control over her schedule, despite working long hours, her stress level reduces. Honeycutt and Rosen (1997) found overwhelmingly that workplace flexibility is a value that attracts people to organizations. Autonomy on the job, according to Ross and Mirowsky (1992), has great value in giving one a sense of control over one's life.

Women continue to carry a large responsibility for family tasks. Stiver (1991) asserts that women's involvement in family tasks is often not understood sufficiently and that their responsibilities go beyond the hours taken to execute the tasks. Because of the centrality of relationships in women's lives, "the intensity of the bonding with those 'at home' involves significant emotional energy" (p. 228). Consequently, there is a precarious balance between what they do at home and what they do at work and they experience enormous anxiety when anything occurs to threaten this balance. The strength of these emotional ties may explain why the conflict between work and home takes more of a toll on women than on men. Perhaps the strength of these ties plays a more important role than we give credit for in terms of our understanding of women's career development and career decisions. We will see how this notion unfolds as we look into other aspects of women's lives.

We have seen in this chapter that an environment-fit approach to careers has some usefulness, particularly in its expanded form when it takes into account the important role of values. However, we have also seen that women's careers evolve, and there is some ebb and flow, which depends on circumstances in their lives at a particular time. The developmental model, which acknowledges the process aspect and includes the role of
early influences, also has some explanatory use. Although parts of stories can be explained by broader theories, the experiences of individual women cannot be truly captured in a single knowledge (Richardson, 1993). They shape their lives, and their lives are shaped by their own realities. A social constructivist perspective acknowledges the multiple realities of women's lives and allows us to gain knowledge from the experiences of individual women.
CHAPTER 5: ASPECTS OF A WOMAN'S LIFE: HER PARTNERSHIP

Couples create their lives together. Their choice of partner and the dynamics of the relationship profoundly affect women's ability to combine work and family. The two-career lifestyle is commonplace in western society nowadays, and there is increasing attention on the changing role of men in these relationships. The support that couples give each other, particularly as parents, is important in terms of integrating the demands of occupational work with those of home and family.

In this chapter, the main focus will be on the development of the relationship as a partnership in which roles are shared. Six of the women in the study are currently with the father of their children and, as working parents, place considerable importance on role-sharing. Paige is divorced from the father of her children and is in a second marriage, and Susan chose to raise her children on her own. Firstly, under “Spouse as partner,” I will explore how the relationship developed as a partnership for the six participants. Secondly, under “Nurturing the relationship,” I will highlight the emphasis placed on keeping relationship alive when time is so scarce. In contrast, thirdly, we will gain some insight into the pressures that are placed on a more traditional style of relationship when a woman has a career. Fourthly, I will turn to the issue of shared parenting and how it is experienced in these families. The chapter will conclude with some reflections and analysis on the nature of role-sharing relationships and the crucial part they play in women’s ability to accommodate work and family life.
SPouse AS Partner

"I could not survive if he was not pulling his weight"

Jan and her husband met at work. Circumstances were difficult in that they found themselves in the unfortunate position of being compared with each other.

As a practising lawyer, I met my spouse who was an articled student and that was quite a scene. And my spouse also happened to be the star of the student program that year and, although my fit was questioned, his fit was perfect. And then we reached the point where we wondered whether or not we could both be there. Privately we made a decision that he would go because he had much less invested after ten months than I had after five years. The firm would have liked us both to stay, but we knew we would always be compared and I never would have compared as well.

Being compared was unfair since their approach to law was very different. “He’s got a more theoretical technical legal mind and mine’s much more of a human application of the law.” Ultimately, he decided to leave the firm. and a year later she too left. The episode taxed the relationship. “It has taken years that I no longer think that I am not going to be as smart as my husband.” However, this inauspicious start perhaps contributed to their understanding that behind an egalitarian relationship is considerable personal effort. Much of the resolution, in terms of their work, has been through working in entirely different jobs that tap their independent skills. Each now appreciates what the other brings to the profession.

Despite the toll that earlier events took on the relationship. Jan and her spouse have built a partnership that is based on equally sharing all of their responsibilities. Her husband was the only spouse of the women in the study who took parental leave. and so I
was very interested in the values they held about equality in a relationship. She described their strong commitment to an equal relationship the following way:

*We believe that the family energy should be created equally to the raising of our children, equally to our careers, equally to our domestic responsibilities. It's a partnership and the responsibilities that we take on we take on together and neither one of us is any more responsible for any aspect of our lives.*

Jan also points out that having a strong sense of fairness is not the only reason they strive towards equality in the relationship. “It’s also the fact that when you get into a high pressured job, you don’t have any choice but to share.” She strongly believes that even if she had wanted to go a more traditional route, she could not have had the job that she is in and had children.

*I think that I have in my family, in my relationship, much more support than most women do doing what I am trying to do. I don’t think I could do it without that. I don’t think I would be capable of doing it how most women do it and that is to assume the bulk of all the responsibilities themselves.*

Jan’s job requires her to be away sometimes at weekends and sometimes for longer periods. It is harder for a woman to just pick up and go as the man traditionally could, but her husband is very supportive of her career. “When I’m in a situation that I really do need extra help, then he’s there. He has chosen to work in a legal job where he can keep regular hours so that he’s available to take care of family responsibilities.”

Jan’s husband is considerably younger than she is. When I asked her about the differences that she felt that made, she said, “I think it makes a significant difference.” She went on to say that she attributed his openness and willingness to do things in a
different way to the fact that he is younger. When she suggested that he take parental
leave, he was willing to try it.

I think there was internal conflict. I think there has been a shift in him about being
a man and working in a different way and still achieving what he wants to
achieve, and still be valued as he is valued and be recognized.

She went on to make the point that “his father was an obstetrician and not much there at
all when he was a kid and I think part of it is very conscious.” Jan added. “If we had both
been on Bay Street right now, we would never eat dinner together, and we would never
put our children to bed at night.” They are creating for themselves a life that is different
from that of anyone else they know, which is based on a sense of fairness and a belief that
family life is more important than economic benefits.

“He is a total 50-50 partner, husband and father”

Nora’s husband also has a career in law. When Nora spoke of their relationship, it
seemed to have a special quality about it. In our second conversation, she shared that they
had both come out of very difficult previous relationships and in sharing their
vulnerabilities, are finding healing in the relationship. There is a sense that they really
appreciation each other. She said of him, “He is the way I would want to be if I was a
man.” They take up the challenge of operating as equals. They see neither career as
having priority over the other, “Neither of us is contributing more or less to this marriage.
we are equals. The only time there is an imbalance is maternity leave and after that, it’s
just he and I back to our usual.”

Again, he seemed to be a man who was willing to do things differently. Nora
described him as being very well respected at work and although he is a corporate lawyer
and involved in very high-level projects, he still wants to commit himself to a 50-50 relationship. She described him in the following way:

He's involved in really high level things and he can still manage to leave the office on time to get his daughter. He has managed it very well. He's quite a quiet man, but he is assertive too. I think he is a nice balance, very sure of himself, very together.

She talked about their communication being very good. When there is an issue to discuss.

"We spend hours discussing it and working it out. What is the best strategy and what should we do about this. And once we have got it down, we know we are right and we go forward with it."

Nora described their relationship as being one in which they could grow and develop both as individuals and together. "I think because we are the way we are, we are both growing exponentially versus one of us trying to help the other."

"Part of choosing him is that he believes like me that life does well with balance"

Tracy spoke about this aspect of her husband as one to which she was particularly drawn and which they strongly share as a value. She described the circumstances of their meeting and the initial attraction in the following way:

We had both graduated and were taking a break, him from working in computers, I was between internship and residency, and I met him in a summer school in France, both doing art. We were probably among the few professional people there at the school. I was drawn to him when I first met him for a couple of subtle reasons. He had several skills. He has an intuition about people that they don't even have to say things, so when we met in school I saw him often helping other students with skills and by listening. And when I got to know him more, I knew he was the favourite uncle among the nephews and nieces, and partly because he was wonderful and playful, but he loved kids. So I knew that
was a great skill to pull into a marriage. And so it was nothing for him to take over the kids for a half day and entertain them and give them lunch. That was nothing for him as a single man. And I thought that was a unique and positive skill.

They share an interest in art, but neither career is in art. He is in computers and she in medicine. However, they bring to the relationship a love of diverse interests and an ability to meld different interests so that their lives are not restricted but are dynamic and creative.

For their partnership to evolve, Tracy and her husband had to go through some difficult negotiations. He was working in computers in California before they were married, and she had purchased a house and a medical practice in Canada. She described how they worked through the situation in the following way:

We had often talked about taking turns. Five years it's your job and five years it's my job so that both partners get a choice. So we've started off with me first because of the way it was. And he moved and that was a big sacrifice for him, he did very well to move. And then as I had our son, it was easier for him to be off and he spent a lot of time raising him and moving him back and forth when I had to work so that I could nurse him. And then his job evolved and he went back just before our daughter was born.

She also commented that it has been easier for him to return to work than to be at home because of the stigma for a man to be out of the workforce to be a care-giver.

Tracy went on to explain that because he was in the kind of field that was more suited to a large city, he had to work at adapting his skills to create a niche for himself:

He's got lots of varied skills so although I list him computers, he has art skills, some administration skills, sales skills, and engineering skills so he takes a
couple of them at a time and puts them together and that’s what he’s done this time.

His willingness to integrate skills and do something very different has been an important aspect of this relationship. In addition, walking away from following a particular career path reflects flexibility that is part of the balance they try to achieve. Tracy summarized their relationship in the following way:

He believes like me that life does well with balance. It’s good to use the left side of your brain and the right side of your brain, and that art is important, and that travel is important, and that experience is more important than income, and a good family life was more important than esteem in the workplace. So because we share some of these things, we have melded our life together.

“Boy this is different from the rest of these guys”

While she was at law school, one man stood out for Sally above the rest. She described her first impression:

I remember seeing a guy who had the back of his jeans fixed with duct tape and I thought, Boy! this is different from the rest of these guys who had the perfectly pressed shirts and the Levis with the red tabs, and he just had on an old shirt with duct tape right across his bum. And I thought, OK first impression, he can’t be that bad.

Daring to be different, Sally’s husband stood out from the other men at law school. She was not feeling that she herself fit in at that time. and to come across someone who was deliberately not fitting in provided an instant attraction. Sally talks little about his characteristics. but her stories reflect real teamwork between them. When her boss raised his objection to women going on maternity leave, Sally and her husband
saw this as a joint issue and looked for ways in which they could jointly resolve it. Going into practice together was a risky venture but one which they have made to work well.

Sally and her husband both come from backgrounds in which there was a strong sense of family, and this is an over-riding value for them. Although they bring into their relationship the values of their families of origin, this is the nineties and so they are going to be doing things differently. In their relationship, they have an attitude of partnership. Since their joint responsibilities cover the office as well as the home, it has worked out that he is primarily responsible for the business side of running the office and Sally for running the home.

We’ve fallen into our roles, I mean we’ve talked about it on the way, but I think we have done things because that’s what we like to do and it’s what we are better doing. I don’t think either of us would be comfortable in switching roles. I think he would panic if he knew I had control over the business side of the business, and I would probably panic if I knew he was going to take control over the children.

Sally explained that their division of labour is based on what they each do best and that this is a mutual thing. Clearly, it is not exclusive because she is actively involved in the business and he is actively involved in the home. They are supportive of each other because each of the primary areas of responsibility, the home and the office, are equally essential to the working of the system. He may be more directive in the running of the business and she in the running of the home, but it occurs in the spirit of equality. In a sense they have taken some of the values of the past and integrated them with an egalitarian approach that is based on choices. They have created a different model that is
not based on gender differences but on abilities and preferences, and they complement each other.

Although her husband did most of the care taking of their younger son because she was just developing her side of the practice, Sally explained that the idea of parental leave would not sit well with him:

My husband feels that he is the one who has to work, and I think even if he had a company that said he could take six months off, he would say, ‘Wait a minute, no no no!’ But that is because that is how he was raised and we have all been. There’s still a stigma because I think now when men take time off work they are somehow looked at as less male.

“I finally let go and it became a partnership”

After going through a broken relationship. Lorna’s mother advised her to “marry someone that’s more intelligent than you are. that can bring interest and curiosity to stimulate the marriage. you can’t be the strength everywhere.” She described the man she married in the following way:

I chose the right man. He’s a very smart man and has lots of insight. He has a less emotional perspective on life so we complement each other because I am very emotional, and he can separate the chaff from the grain and really focus in and I can bring the other. Despite being with a very traditional family, he is very open. He’s not one of these guys that goes out drinking with the boys, he doesn’t need that sort of male bonding. He’s so comfortable in himself.

In their early years of marriage, they supported each other through periods of residency, both being doctors, and so were used to role sharing. When they had their first child, however, Lorna took all the parenting responsibilities and she assumed she could resume her busy work schedule as well as being the “good mother.” It was her husband
who stepped in and insisted that he share the parenting and increased home responsibilities. “He’d say, ‘Listen you can’t do it all. Suppose I don’t do it the way you do it, does it mean the child suffers? Leave it with me.’” After some time she was able to say, “I finally let go and made it a partnership instead of me on the top telling him what to do all the time.”

In letting go of her need to control the household, Lorna opened the door for her husband to develop a more satisfying relationship with their children. She provided the following example:

He and my younger son go off and do the grocery shopping together every Saturday. It’s their male bonding. The two of them come home and have all of their groceries all over the floor and have to show everybody where they saved money and how they got this special. It is a treat, it is a delight.

Lorna has recognized that it is all right if things are not done in a certain way:

And so what if the kids are in their jamies at 6 o’clock, they were as happy as pigs in mud. They’d had the whole day with their Dad and so what if we were having pizza for supper, it really doesn’t matter. They’re happy and healthy and their dad has a fulfilling life.

Lorna described her husband as being insightful in understanding what needed to be done, but her openness and willingness to make such a drastic shift should also be acknowledged. She compared herself with one of her friends:

A girlfriend of mine is a surgeon, she’s just the bionic woman and she’s so good at everything. I see in her what I have seen in women in the past, they just demote their husband to this level of expectation where he just runs around and does what she expects. My husband has established himself just as much of a caregiver as I am. And I can go to work and I can come home and you know there are squabbles, but I know they are really well looked after.
“Now I am saying, ‘Well no, we are partners in this.’”

The concept of working as a partnership at home is evolving for Ann. The idea that they could share all home responsibilities was previously not really considered by Ann and her husband. She explained that it was default thinking on the part of both of them:

Both he and I thought by default I would be the one doing it and while he is very willing, that’s not either of our default thinking. So I will think that I will do it first. He will think probably I will do it first.

She commented that she took practically all of the responsibility for the children when they were very young, despite having a responsible job; he was working long hours setting up his business. She remembers, though, that there were times when he would help out:

Sometimes they were screaming and screaming and I didn’t know what else to do. They had been fed, they had been changed, there was nothing wrong and he was totally screaming, I could not take this child one more minute. It was eleven o’clock at night screaming it up, “Take him away.” And he would. I mean he would take them out for long drives. He definitely did do things like that. I guess my impression is that I mostly did everything but actually he did do a lot.

Ann’s expectations of what family life should be like were based on memories of her family of origin. She remembers that they would sit round the table and eat together, and do activities as a family. She has found it very frustrating that she could not re-create that in her own family. Now Ann is letting go of some of the ideals and looking at what works for her family. She is involving her husband more in family life. She says of his involvement. “He now talks to them more. I think he is finding out that if he had caught
on to that sooner...” She now speaks of “evolving to this next plane as to how we will look after the children.” It is no longer “I” but “we.”

**NURTURING THE RELATIONSHIP**

A successful relationship has to be nurtured. The women saw the value of spending time together as a couple, but they also recognized that this took a conscious effort. Good communication was seen as being a vital element, and especially when sharing parenting. For these couples, work and home are intertwined. They share the roles of earning income as well as parenting their children. They are equally interested in pursuing a career. which is made easier because they are supportive of each other’s career. The relationship is pivotal to the smooth working of the system.

**“Probably the relationship is the easiest to take for granted”**

Tracy went on to comment in the following way:

The workplace isn’t forgiving, you know that the kids have to be cared for, the bills have to be paid and the bank isn’t forgiving. And so the spouse, you assume he will be there, and self, that’s the other one. Those two seem to end up down four or five on the priority list and you keep having to pull them back up again.

Several of the women mentioned that time put into the relationship was crucial.

Nora went further when she said. “My first priority is for us as a couple.” She felt that placing emphasis on nurturing that relationship was essential for them to be truly partners. “You have to stay very much in love with each other.” They go out together on a regular basis, they take the odd weekend away together, and they spend time together in the evenings. She explained how they have had to work at it:

What we found ourselves doing was we would sit there and turn on the TV and say, “Hi how are you?” So we’ve stopped doing that. We’ve started a Scrabble
tournament and we've started doing more stuff together. We've got a really nice back room so we light it with candles and we've been playing Scrabble or just chatting or having hot chocolate, something like that.

At the foundation is good communication. They reflect on the quality of their time together and are always looking for ways to improve. As parents, they find quality in their relationship in their interactions with their child. Nora described how their child in fact becomes a channel of their love in this example of when they were in an elevator:

The love would kind of go down to the child and then float up to your partner, she's becomes the channel. It's very interesting. I think in a lot of ways I see how much he loves me by how he interacts with her. That's it. It's right there, I can see it.

Sally also talked about closeness through their interaction with the children. They both brought to the marriage a strong sense of family that they wanted to create in their own family. Now that they have two young boys, they get a real sense of that:

We feel like a family now, just the two of us together was just two of us together. We've more sense of family now and what's really important and just real joy. Real simple times of joy and laughter over the silliest things. They are so happy when we get home and it is so wonderful to have the joy. And we like it together as a couple. We are brought closer together.

They also make sure they go out together regularly, recognizing the importance of the link between them. As she said, "Just to keep up the desire to keep the other person happy."

Lorna expressed the importance of "maintaining a thread of passion" in all of the aspects of her life. Of her relationship with her husband she said:
I am looking for passion in that relationship all the time and now you are looking for the intellectual passion, a completely different kind of sensuality. I don’t think it ever goes away but it has got to be there to start with, so you nurture it.

Although she often works in the evenings and at weekends, Lorna makes sure that on her evenings off, she spends relaxed time with the family. She looks back to the “old times” when she frequently worked until two in the morning and things would fall apart.

Knowing that while they are going through a demanding time while the children are very young, Jan and her husband try to carve out time for themselves:

We are very firm about getting our kids in bed at night because we want that extra time. We are very firm about our son at least having a rest period on weekends so that we have an hour or two in the afternoon that we can spend together. We try to go to bed together every night. There are certain things that we try to continue to do together, but it still takes its toll.

She added, “You just have to hope that you are both going to trust that it is not always going to be like this.” Again, the added strain of when the children are very young is reflected in her words.

“As a working mom and dad you have to have tons of communication”

Several of the women talked about good communication between themselves and their spouses as being crucial. Sally explained that when issues trouble either of them, they address them immediately:

We decided that when we got married that if something is bugging one or the other that we would just say it. And we talk in front of our kids, we’re not shouters so we can have a disagreement in front of people when it has to be done. We really encourage that with ourselves and it’s hard because sometimes you don’t want to talk about it right now. A lot of women are so silent in their
communication with the expectation that he should know. He should assume that I am stressed out. I always assume that he doesn’t know and just tell him.

They are available to each other to talk through difficult issues. Recently a colleague passed away and Sally said, “We had dinner together and spent the evening talking about things and our priorities and all sorts of soul-searching stuff.”

Being in touch, despite their busy days, is a priority for Nora and her husband. Which of them is going to be in the best position to pick up their daughter is resolved as the day goes on and this is negotiated in the context of on-going communication through the day. Sometimes they will telephone each other just to be in contact:

We phone just to talk to one another. “Oh I just wanted to hear your voice.” So we will probably talk two or three times a day just to connect and we connect quickly and then we go off and do our thing.

Again. Nora and her husband regard it as a priority to give themselves time to talk through issues that arise in their lives. Nora gave an example of a time when she was feeling under stress:

And he said, “I don’t think we’ve been using the time properly. Let’s talk about it.” So we went out for dinner actually the following Friday. We sat down at the table at 7.30 and we got up at 11.00 and we did nothing but talk strategy and how were we going to change some things.

Lorna also talked about the value they place on good communication. When she handed over some of the home responsibilities to her husband, at first she had to tell him all the things that needed to doing. This required time and patience, both of which were sometimes in short supply for a busy emergency doctor. He would have to remind her to communicate clearly. She made the point that “communication is the key in that nobody
can read my mind because my mind is going at a million miles an hour. If I don’t tell people then I am going to be disappointed.” Of their lives now she said, “We have a good relationship, we talk.”

Talking about the children and agonizing over what is best for them is typical of most parents, and particularly for these parents who have high standards themselves and so want the best for their children. Ann, for example, sends their children to a Montessori school. She feels it gives them “the kind of grounding they need.” There they emphasize the importance of the first three years of the child’s life, which provokes thoughtful and soul-searching discussions, on the part of herself and her husband, as to whether they have provided “the best” for their children. When she second-guesses herself as to whether she should have stayed home with the children, he points out, “If the mother is happy the child is happy.” He is thus validating that she needs the stimulation and concrete rewards of the workplace to be a happy person, and that her happiness affects the children.

“**From a career standpoint, you have to be incredibly supportive of each other**”

Although support for each other’s career is implied by all the women in a relationship, its importance is articulated by both Jan and Nora. Nora made the point in the following way:

As a working mum and dad you have to be very thoughtful, very planned, and very organized, and you have to have tons of communication. And I think on top of it, from a career standpoint, you have to be incredibly supportive of each other, and I think particularly a man has to be very supportive of his wife.
Jan expressed how stressful situations can become and without the encouraging support from her partner, it would be too hard:

G's support doesn't fall just solely to doing his share. I think it's also that he really supports the kind of career that I have and wants me to do it. And so even though, when the responsibilities seem way too onerous in my mind, he will be there, encouraging and getting through the latest situation that's difficult, and saying, "You know this is a good place, this is where you can make a difference." So [this support], if not as important, is more so than just simply doing what he should be doing as a parent.

Traditionally, women have supported men in their careers, but much of women's difficulty in pursuing a career is that they have not felt that level of support. There has not been the wife at home taking care of those responsibilities. These are not the only examples of men taking an active role and taking over responsibilities which makes it possible for their wives to take advantage of career opportunities. We have seen examples in all of the relationships described here. Nora and Jan made the point that it is especially important for a man to be supportive of his wife. There is dissonance and guilt in moving away from gender role expectations and so the value of emotional support cannot be under-estimated.

**WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP DOES NOT WORK**

Paige's first marriage did not survive the added pressure of children. Lorna and Nora were both in serious relationships before their marriages, which they realized would not be sustainable if, as they intended, they were going to continue working after they had children. How were these relationships so different from those that were portrayed in the previous section?
Paige had felt emotionally deprived during her teen years when she lived with her mother and grandmother. She pined after her more nurturing father but at the same time, was disappointed in the way he had treated her mother. As time went on, she started to reject the “good girl” image as she explained:

I went through a really wild stage where I just bucked all the rules and actually could have got myself into a lot of trouble. I think it was rebelling against this perfect person I had to be all the time. When I was 17, I met [T], he paid attention to me, and I loved it. I was not very confident at that time, I had a lot of rough knocks as a teenager and he kind of swooped in and swept me off my feet.

She married young, seeing it as a good alternative to living at home. Paige described herself as being quite happy in the marriage until they had children. then it became obvious that she needed a partner and he could not fulfil that role. He became jealous of her attention to the children and a harsh father. She said of him:

He was the one that pushed me into having a baby in the first place. Then when this child appeared he just wasn’t the kind of parent I expected him to be. He was far more content reading the paper and watching TV. He was terrible helping around the house, he didn’t like to do anything.

According to Paige, his main complaint about the marriage was. “That I was not there to take care of him.” He was a very needy person himself and had unrealistic expectations of Paige. His level of frustration built and as Paige saw it:

He has an angry demeanour and I felt I was protecting my children all the time. I was always kind of straightening, and shushing, and keeping the peace, keeping them away from daddy because daddy had had a bad day and he was very sharp and very abrupt with the kids.
Things came to a head when her husband hit their eldest son, “He knocked him from one end of the coffee table to the other. I loathed him from that day onward because he had hurt one of my kids. I just wanted him out of my life.” He in fact left shortly after the incident and Paige said, “When he left it was like I had died and gone to heaven.”

Lorna too described how at one time she was involved with a needy man until she realized that her life’s work would be devoted to trying to help him:

Actually I was engaged to someone else, but he was very needy and I thought I could fix him. In my younger years, I thought I could fix everything. In my residency we were still going out, and I realized that I could not lead a life in medicine and fix everybody. And I needed some strength at home because the last thing I needed was to fix people all day and then go home and fix him. So I broke up with it all.

An earlier relationship that Nora described was one in which she became involved with a man who seemed to be the kind of man she admired. He switched from a career in which he was unhappy to follow his dream to become a fire fighter. Nora liked this quality in him. As time went on, he moved into her place. By degrees, the relationship was becoming increasingly controlling. It was manifest in behaviours such as his disapproval of her talking to friends on the telephone. When they talked about having children together, he let her know that he expected her to stay home with the children although that was never her intention: she was already on a career path in her company and earning more than he was. She was increasingly being isolated and Nora explained her understanding of the situation in the following way:

I think what ended up happening with [B] was that he felt that I really was very together and he had told me that he felt I didn’t need him as a result. And I think
that's why there was a need to push me down so that I did suddenly have some vulnerability and it made him, in a macho sense, feel that I needed him more.

When her sister was staying with them, she drew Nora’s attention to the unhealthy aspects of the relationship.

There were notable points of comparison between successful role sharing relationships and relationships that did not work out. In the former, the men seemed to be emotionally strong and self-assured. They are understanding and empathic and they did not seem to need the security of defined gender roles. They like the idea of a partnership and of a strong family unit. In recognizing that to combine career and family a strong partnership is desirable, the women were attracted to men who were willing to be different from many of their peers. In fact Paige, who re-married, now has a spouse who is secure in himself, supportive of her career, and readily helps out with the children.

PARENTING TOGETHER

As we have seen, there is a quality about the relationships of the couples who share roles. In addition to being emotionally secure and having liberal gender role attitudes (Gilbert et al., 1994; Hallett & Gilbert, 1997), there is also very good communication between the couple and a sense of real supportiveness of each other. A partnership had evolved before parenting based on firmly held beliefs about mutuality and respect.

Although these couples shared home responsibilities, they also had other good support systems in place. They all had employed help in the house and some had nannies. Additional chores would be shared, although the women tended to have more of an eye for the details of what needed to be done. Household chores did not seem to represent a
burden on the women. Couples participated equally with the children. If children attended
daycare, the pick-up and drop-off were shared; couples negotiated together around
attending events and extra-curricular activities. The women all felt strongly that the men
benefited from the interaction with their children and the shared responsibility helped the
women to mostly stay on top of things.

In this section, I will explore how shared parenting came about for these couples. I
will then look at the tricky issue of negotiating discipline, and lastly I will explore what
the women had to say about gender differences in parenting.

Setting the stage for parenting together

"It's a partnership and the responsibilities we take on, we take on together"

When I spoke to Jan the second and third times, she was on both occasions
coming out of a very busy schedule. On the second occasion, she had been away for
extended periods and the third time, the two children had just come through a bout of the
chicken pox. The pressure of all that they are trying to do was felt strongly. She
recognized just how valuable it is to be able to share the responsibilities as a partnership.
I was interested in how this situation came about.

We have already noted that when they had their first child, at her suggestion her
spouse took parental leave. "He was very much in agreement and wanting to do it." A
lawyer himself, he successfully negotiated the time off, although, as Jan said, "His boss
wondered why he wanted to do this but he was valuable to them and he was
accommodated." He took a month off with both of their children after she went back to
work. Jan explained why she felt strongly about her husband taking parental leave. "It
was very important for me that he take parental leave because I felt that if he didn't spend
time alone with our son, he would never truly parent; he would be in a supportive role.” It was not all smooth going for him and it has already been mentioned that he experienced internal conflict. With their first child, it was less of an issue because he was unhappy in his work and the leave provided a welcome break, but with their second child, he was more content in his work. Added to which, it was at a time of the year when it seemed to rain constantly and she felt that “he just couldn’t quite get a handle on things.” Nevertheless, she believes that because he really bonded with the children by being home alone with them when they were babies, he has clear priorities regarding work and home.

“He is total 50-50 partner, husband and father”

How did their 50-50 relationship function when they had a child? Nora explained that from the day their daughter was born her husband was an involved father:

He ended up staying in the hospital after I’d had her so we brought her home together. We always did it as a couple. And I was very conscious right from day one that I never gave him the impression that I could ever do anything better than he could, other than the nursing. I would say to him, “Do you think this diaper fits? Does this look right to you?” And he would make these decisions, “I don’t think that’s quite right” or...And so we always involve each other in any kind of decisions. And even now I’ll say, “Do you think I should go and check on her?” and if he says “No,” I don’t. So he has equal authority.

She made the point that she sees in some of her friends the situation where women take charge of the baby and so they become the experts. Consequently, the husbands do not feel as competent. As she said:

They’ll say, “Oh you don’t do it right, do it this way.” And that starts to compound itself because you end up pushing this man away who really does want to be involved and then suddenly you’re the one whose arranging for baby-sitters, you’re the one whose deciding what the child is having for its supper; and it just
gets worse. And I really do believe it’s because we did that right at the beginning. I was really conscious of it.

Nora feels that his full involvement right from the beginning was crucial. She said, “Yes OK I carried it but now it’s ours not just mine.” She delights in the special relationship that has developed between father and daughter.

Although both Jan and Nora took the lead in involving their husbands in the care of children from the beginning, clearly these were men who were also prepared to be different from most of their peers. Nora spoke of some of her husband’s characteristics when she talked about him being confident and sure of himself. She also spoke about him being intuitive. It seemed that this ability to see things from the point of view of another is an important quality in a sharing relationship.

For some of the other women, the involvement of their spouse in the care of infants was based on who was most available. Because Tracy’s husband had moved from California shortly before their son was born, it made sense for her to go back to work when their child was two months old. He spent a lot of time raising their son. She worked close to their home and so he would take the baby over to her office so that she could nurse him. She said, “He was ready for that time and even though situations had moved us in that direction, I think he was ready and he was working on his business part-time.” Sally’s husband spent more time with their younger son because she was in the process of setting up her legal practice. His part of the practice was up and running by that time. We have already seen that Lorna’s husband initiated participating more with parenting because she was working the hours when he could be home with the children. Flexibility
and being able to respond intuitively to situations in a way that accommodates the other partner would seem to be important characteristics when parenting together.

**Negotiating discipline**

"We struggled through a lot of issues on how to discipline"

Discipline is another topic that these parents discussed at some length. Some of the women spoke of it as being quite a hot topic owing to the fact that they have fundamentally different approaches to discipline. Lorna described how their parenting developed with the first child:

As we evolved with our first child, we struggled through a lot of issues on how to discipline. I’m quite a disciplinarian, he is quite a softie, and so we both had to soften a bit so that we could be consistent. And that was a learning process.

Lorna talked about adjustments they needed to make as parents. She let go of unnecessary standards while he became more structured. This happened, though, because of long and intense conversations about disciplining and parenting in general.

For Jan and her husband it was the other way around. He was the one who was fussier about discipline. Jan felt that mostly their different parenting styles complement each other, but it becomes more complicated when she goes away for periods.

He likes discipline, good behaviour, and good table manners. He likes to do things with them as well. But he was raised in quite an authoritarian household and that sort of style of parenting does come out, whereas I think my parents were much more permissive.

Some conflict can arise when she returns from being away. He feels the children behave better when she is away and when she returns, she is permissive and undermines what he has done. The children tend to go to her more and fuss around her more. She said, "I
don’t know if it’s because we parent differently or if it’s different because I’m the mother and he’s the father.” However, overall she could say, “I think we are actually very good parents.” They work on allowing each other the space to parent in his or her own way.

Nora and her husband were the newest parents of the people I talked with. At the time, they had the one sixteen-month-old daughter and she was pregnant with their second child. I had the impression that they are meticulous parents. They are organized and thorough about everything and there was the sense that they are very much in control of their lives. About discipline she said, “We feel strongly that we have to be consistent so when something comes up, we talk about it and we have made the decision that we will never go against one another with her.” However, children are unpredictable and Nora described how as a couple they dealt with a difficult incident:

I had hold of her, she hit me in the face, and I slapped her back. I know you’re not supposed to, but it was immediate. So then I got really upset about it and I called him, “She just hit me and I feel really bad that I hit her back, isn’t that awful.” And we talked about it and we said strategically that is not what we want to do and it doesn’t make sense and the books say it’s not right. So then we had a whole discussion around this hitting. And then one evening in the bathroom she just smacked him and scratched him across the face and I think it really hurt. And he hit her. He didn’t hit her hard and he said, “No.” And I’m standing there and we had made this decision. So I said, “Don’t hit her.” And then he reacted badly because he knew he shouldn’t have hit her and he was so upset and I was telling him, “Don’t hit her.” It was a bit of one of these issues things. And then later on that night, when she had gone to bed, he said, “We need to discuss what happened in the bathroom.” And then we had this whole discussion. I think he had to experience the shock of it happening to him to recognise he shouldn’t do it, just like I did. Anyway, so that’s the way we deal with it. When we’re off line we have a discussion and we talked about why we had reacted in that way and then as parents what are we going to do as far as our own conduct.
This incident illustrates the value for parents to be accountable to another caring adult for their behaviour with children. It gave Nora and her husband the opportunity to grow and learn from the experience.

**Different parenting styles**

"*We equally parent our children but there is still a difference*"

The women talked about difference in three scenarios. One related to the children tending to go to mother for emotional needs and the different role father tended to play when issues came up. The second was the different style of interaction, especially in the ways mothers and fathers play with children. The third is the result of women tending to take in more environmental cues.

"*We heard “Mummy” a trillion times, we called it an emotion*"

Sally was describing a long trip in the car with their two small boys and the constant appeal to “Mummy,” never to “Daddy.” She found this interesting given that her husband had spent more time with their younger child as a baby than she had. Perhaps because mothers tend to respond to the emotional needs of their children differently from fathers, children demand mother’s attention first. Sally said, “If one falls down and hurts himself. I will do the hugging and the kissing and (father) will make them laugh and forget about the fall and both techniques seem to work.” They have a complementary approach, but Mom is the one to provide the emotional comfort.

Jan talked about how her two-year old son hates to be rushed in the mornings. She feels it is important to take the time to be emotionally present with him in the mornings to help prepare him for the day:
I get into bed with him and cuddle and talk to him and even just spend a couple of minutes, that this is a school day and this is what we are going to do and how did he sleep and talk about his day.

Jan said that she is the one he goes to for a hug and a cuddle. “If I am not there he will go to his dad.”

Mornings are a particularly vulnerable time for children and parents need to respond to children in the midst of the morning rush. Generally, mothers are the ones to notice the child’s emotional needs. Ann’s children look for consistency in the mornings and if she changes anything, they react:

They are very protective of me, especially in the mornings. While they were little, I always put on jeans and sweatshirt in the morning cause you never knew what would happen before you went out the door. And just in the last couple of weeks, I started to get dressed for the office in the morning; especially my older one gets terribly upset with me. “Mummy, I am very upset with you, you are supposed to wear regular clothes right now, and I am going to shout at you if you don’t wear your regular clothes.”

She had to take the time to talk him through the change. She explained that he does not make a fuss when she leaves, but he likes predictability. She said that the boys will go to either parent for comfort, but added. “When things get tough mummy has to be there.”

Lorna talked about her life being on a roller coaster. while her children’s lives tend to go more in fits and starts. She put it this way. “If I am not sensitive to the stage they are going through, a clash occurs between my life and their needs; and then you’re putting out some fires.” Children can be quite creative in asking for attention. She told the following story:
Now the oldest one, there was a phase in his life where every time he would go and hurt himself and he would get a boo boo. Now he is eight years old. But because I'm a doctor and when someone gets hurt, mummy goes to work and the telephone rings and daddy goes to work because someone needs a special test. So all of a sudden M. figures that if he gets hurt, mummy will come. So the school's calling me and paging me, "M.'s fallen and hurt his arm" and "M.'s fallen and hurt his back." It took me a while to figure out what he was doing. As soon as I started paying attention, then it became boring and it stopped.

Although he was trying to attract mummy's attention, she and her husband have a team approach. As she said, "Every time we see a change we always talk about it. 'why do you think he's doing that?'" If one of the children needs extra attention from Mom, then he will spend extra time with the other two.

"Playable, that's what my son calls my husband"

Mothers and fathers tend to interact differently with their children. In this group, children would tend to go to their fathers for project type activities and rough and tumble play. Sally gave the following example:

On holiday, I have the book on the beach and the sandcastles, but I'm not into the splashing around, and the throwing, and the tossing, and all that kind of stuff, and I don't think that's unusual as well. Women interact differently. "Playable," that's what my son calls my husband, "You're really playable." I'm not so playable.

Nora would reiterate her comment. "If he's in a playing mood, they tend to be more physical." Jan echoed a similar sentiment, "I am more light-hearted than he is. I will dance with our son in the living room. he will tend more to "to do" activities like take him camping. or take him for a bicycle ride or something."
“Tunnel vision explains it”

I asked Jan what she thought the main difference was between mother and father as parents. Her response was that she thought that “tunnel-visioned” explains it:

I think he can really go out of the door in the morning and if something happened, I think he can leave that door and go to work. I would delay it. I would make sure whatever thing happened that it was resolved, that the kids were settled before I left. Now if he were to leave by seven o’clock in the morning, he would leave because he is going to catch a certain streetcar and that’s the end of it.

Jan went on to say, “I am still the one who would think who needs the mitts, who needs the clothes, and do they need to get to the doctor?.” In speaking about men not noticing the many small details, Tracy said:

It’s been long enough that I realise that I don’t think it’s a willful thing that they do. I honestly think that they don’t see or understand it, or have been trained to do these small things. He is good at doing what is big and obvious and what has to be done.

Lorna would agree that although there is not a primary caregiver in their family, she is the one who does the errands for the children, partly because she is more available during the day. Her husband says of her, “Lorna knows how many immunizations, she knows the shoe sizes, she knows the clothing sizes,” as if acknowledging that these every day details are her department.

Sharing parenting is essentially a new concept. There are no role models, and all of the women who are in a relationship of this kind commented that they felt that they were the only ones. Their observation of their friends was that the woman took charge and the father helped out, which was not a role that the women thought was good in terms
of the quality of the relationship. From the examples, sharing as a couple demands excellent communication skills, being intuitive in the midst of busy lives, having an attitude of give and take, and acknowledging each other’s strengths and weaknesses. It has been said earlier that the workplace is like a demanding child, it will take all of the time one is prepared to give it. Having children has forced these women, and some of their partners, to look at the balance between work and home. It has led to them finding ways to contain their work. The result seems to be greater satisfaction and a more fulfilling family life.

**REFLECTIVE COMMENTS: SHAPING THEIR LIVES THROUGH WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

Women who are in the workplace want a real partnership in the home. Jan commented that she could not do the job she does without her spouse taking his share of the responsibilities in the home, not merely helping, but playing a full role. Most of the women have built partnerships in which old gender divisions have largely been abandoned in favour of a collaborative relationship. This style of sharing in a relationship is associated with a higher quality of relationship (Vannoy-Hiller & Phillibet, 1989). It also leads to a convergence of men’s and women’s traditional roles, with work and family roles being salient for men and women alike (Barnett et al., 1994). In this section, I will discuss how women shape their lives through their partnership under the themes of choosing a partner, deep friendships, complementary relationships, and collaborating. I will then consider what happened to the breadwinner role, and conclude with some analysis on parenting together.
Choosing a partner

We can see from the relationships that did not work out that the choice of partner is very important. Paige’s first husband expected her to look after him in the traditional sense. Until she had children, she was able to be the wife he expected her to be. Once she had her first child and was back at work, it was not possible. Lorna recognized before she married that she needed a partner, and the man she was with would not fill that role. What sort of men did they choose?

Jan’s husband, coming out of a broken marriage, was willing to try a different kind of relationship. Knowing that he wanted to be a present (as opposed to absent) father to his children, he was willing to take her lead; even as far as taking parental leave. He seems to be a flexible man, with a strong sense of self who is willing to try out a different model of relationship. An outstanding dynamic about their relationship, however, is the strong values they hold about functioning as a partnership. This aspect was also very evident in Nora’s description of her relationship with her spouse. Again, she described her spouse as a man who is very sure of himself and who, despite the demands of his job as a corporate lawyer, is prepared to rise to the challenge of balancing work and family.

Having a strong self-identity was a characteristic also mentioned by Lorna who described her husband as a man who is very comfortable in himself.

Characteristics of self-assurance and having liberal attitudes towards sex roles were common to all the men in these relationships. Hallett and Gilbert (1997), in their study comparing role-sharing and conventional dual-career marriages, found that the women themselves in the first group were higher in self-esteem than the second group, and that they valued liberal attitudes in their partners. The women wanted partners who
would be supportive of their career, willing to share home responsibilities, and capable of an emotionally intimate relationship (Gilbert et al., 1994). From the study, the willingness to be fully participating parents was crucial. Tracy commented that the pleasure her dating partner displayed when interacting with children was one of the characteristics she really liked about him and felt would be valuable in a marriage. Indeed, as we will see later under “parenting together,” all of these men wanted to parent their children. Family roles, as noted by Barnett et al. (1994), were as important for these men as for the women.

In observing that the women chose their partners well, one factor is that nearly all of them were established in their careers before they married and so they chose with a view to combining career and family. Because they married quite late, some being in their mid thirties, they were clear as to what they were looking for in a relationship and expected it to be a partnership.

Deep friendships

Schwartz (1994) used the term “deep friendship” to describe peer partners who are best friends. In her view, this kind of friendship “refers to two people who both know each other very well, who keep lines of communication open, and who are fair and reciprocal with one another” (p. 28). This would characterize several of the relationships in the study. These couples do not lead separate and parallel lives, but lead interactive lives. They share stories and feelings from their workplaces and talk intensely about raising their children. They are supportive of each other’s work and supportive of each other as parents. Lorna described having respect for each other as being the single most important attribute in a relationship and one that would indicate mutuality.
There were many examples of deep friendships that were provided by the women. Tracy talked about the shared interests that brought her and her spouse together, their lives melding and gender roles merging. Because of mutual respect being the basis of their relationship, Sally and her husband can air differences safely and they can talk through very emotional issues, knowing there will be empathy and understanding. Nora provided a delightful illustration of an intimate evening of Scrabble and she and others emphasized the importance of maintaining the romance in the relationship. These couples shape and are shaped by their marriages at the basis of which is a friendship that supports all aspects of the relationship.

**Complementing each other**

Sally’s situation is interesting. Their relationship is perhaps what Bateson (1990) would describe as “complementary.” That is, the differences between men and women are a “mutual source of strength rather than dominance” (p. 116) with the two working together to create a whole. For complementary to be truly creative, according to Bateson, the contributions of both partners need to be acknowledged to be of equal value. Sally does predominantly look after the business of the home while her husband takes care of the business of the office. Far from their lives running in parallel, they enjoy a fully collaborative relationship and one in which they complement each other. So often, the different contributions that men and women make have been turned into inequality, but not in their case.

Complementing each other puts a different slant on the “same” or “different” debate on gender. Bateson (1990) argued that difference makes interdependence possible but that difference often loses its value because it is quickly turned into inequality. In our
culture. symmetrical relationships tend to be the ethical response to inequity, but Bateson makes the point that symmetry is often illusory and limiting. It is illusory in that even though many men are supporters of women, they still hold the positions of power. It is limiting in that symmetry tends to promote competition and conflict. It encourages people to play by the same rules, thus abandoning different contributions and different ways of doing things. The relationships that couples develop in a collaborative way can provide a model for broader relationships in which there are greater degrees of give and take, and in which different strengths are acknowledged as complementing each other.

A collaborative relationship

Barnett and Rivers (1996) describe the collaborative couple as being one in which both are sharing the economic and the household functions in the family. Both are responsible for economically supporting the family, running the house, and attending to the nurturing of the family. From their research, Barnett and Rivers concluded that this style of family life is fast becoming the norm in American life. Certainly, the current study also shows a trend in this direction. The women of the younger couples in the study came into the relationship with expectations of fairness and sharing, while those who are a few years older have deliberately shifted to a more collaborative approach. Lorna and Ann provided us with some insight into the process they went through as their family roles have evolved to a more collaborative style. Jan makes the point that whether or not strong values are held about equality in the relationship, a collaborative approach works best when both are in busy jobs and are parenting children. We have seen from some of the examples how lives are enriched when couples work as a team in a collaborative manner.
Although the women made much of sharing parenting responsibilities, little was made of sharing household tasks. Interestingly, they focused more on mutual respect and supportiveness. This focus is reminiscent of the study by Rosenbluth et al. (1998) in which respondents based equality in a marriage on the equity of task sharing when they were evaluating the marriages of couples they knew. When they were referring to themselves, characteristics such as the ones mentioned by the women in the current study were considered important. In this study, there were allusions regarding their husbands not being good at focusing on more than one task at a time. Sally mentioned that her husband would be mortified if he heard her saying that he did not fully share household responsibilities. Perhaps, as Gager (1998) concluded from her study, justifications help to explain inequalities in dual-earning couples.

What of the breadwinning role?

Despite recent studies indicating that the breadwinning role continues to be a distinct gender boundary (e.g., Spade, 1994), the present study indicates a blurring of these boundaries in these couples. Both partners see themselves as co-providers. The centrality of the breadwinning role to the male identity appears not in the sharing of the role, but in the sacrificing of the role to care taking. Several of the women talked about the dissonance felt by their spouses concerning paternity leave. As Potuchuk (1997) found, people tend to give higher priority to traditional gender role responsibilities and particularly where children are concerned (Rosenbluth, 1998). There were examples from the study of the women looking after the day-to-day details of parenting and running a household, and I will examine that further in the next section. Nevertheless, from the study, the spouses of the women were increasingly taking a care-taking role, and we saw
examples from several of the relationships of the rhythms of give and take which make
for a complementary relationship.

Although on an individual basis roles are becoming less distinctive, as Potuchek
(1997) states, at an institutional level the breadwinning concept is still very much alive.
From the women’s experiences we have seen that the definition of commitment continues
to be time spent on the job (quantity rather than quality). There are few real provisions
made for maternity leaves, and the business world goes on as if children do not exist.
This lack of real change continues to hamper women’s workplace potential and forces
many women to “drop out” (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

Parenting together

From the stories that were shared, we gain some insight into the experience of
parenting together from a very practical perspective. Because the women are in careers
that are of equal standing to their husband’s work, they are not reliant on the husband in
the traditional sense. They neither need to defer to their husband’s career (Betz, 1994) nor
do they feel that they have to be taken care of in a material sense by their husbands
(Gilbert et al., 1994). The men in the relationships, as Gilbert et al. (1994) also found, are
not dominant people, but they enjoy emotional closeness and inclusion. The liberal
attitudes towards roles held by both partners means that moving into non traditional roles
is not such a big issue for them. This needs to be qualified since we see from the study
that the extent of willingness to move from traditional roles varies. Men such as the
spouses of Jan and Tracy seemed more comfortable in making the shift than, for example,
Sally’s husband who is a complementary partner but would not necessarily be
comfortable in letting go of the primacy of roles. Berry and Rao (1997) make the point
that fathers' involvement with children may be stressful because the workplace is typically not supportive of the needs of working parents of either gender. There is, nevertheless, evidence of an evolution in the direction of increased participation by men in family roles.

The role shift that we have seen in some of these couples is quite drastic, especially since they have come from traditional families and so were not exposed to alternative role models. Jan and Nora explain that they were the ones to initiate sharing roles and they helped it to happen by letting go of owning the maternal role. Jan went back a month earlier than she needed to so that her husband could have a month alone with their children when they were infants. This was a sacrifice on her part because she would have liked that extra month herself, but we can see how it paid off. Nora consciously let go of a “mother knows best” attitude to allow room for her husband to be involved equally.

Lee and Duxbury (1998) found that the attributes in role sharing considered to be most important are flexibility and emotional support. These attributes were indeed confirmed in the study. Nora said that she and her spouse talk on the telephone each day to see who is in the best position to pick up their daughter. If there is a last minute delay at work, they know they can call on each other. When Jan has to go away on business, she knows she can depend on her husband to be there for the children and likewise, she picks up the slack when needed. Sally talked about her husband doing most of the care taking of their younger boy because she was more involved at work, and we see that Lorna and her husband have a complementary arrangement. Ann is working on this in their relationship as she encourages her husband to play a bigger role in the lives of the
children, while Tracy’s husband has shaped his life around the family needs. As suggested by Berry and Rao (1997), these parents are negotiating new roles for which they do not have role models in their own parents.

Spouses seem to be emotionally supportive of each other. Erickson (1993) found that emotional support is essential for the smooth running of the home. We got a feel for the intensity of communication that goes on between couples as they negotiate parenting together and support each other in both their home and their work roles. Ehrensaft (1996) commented that role-sharing couples would have a level of communication that would be unlikely in traditional couples. Nora provided a window into the type of discussion that goes on over disciplining, a topic that can be quite emotionally charged. Grych and Clark (1999), in studying the link between mothers’ employment and fathers’ parenting quality, found that the nature of the father-child interaction improved with the level of marital satisfaction. Nurturing the relationship was deemed important by the women in the study, and corroborated by Grych and Clark.

When it comes to orchestrating family life, the women took the lead. As Gager (1998) found, the women were just more efficient at it than their husbands were. The women also attended more to the emotional work in the family. This is born out by other research (e.g., Tingey et al., 1996). It was also clear from the study that the women responded to the expectations of the children. As Sally described, “Mummy” became an emotion. Lorna mentioned that she would be the one to take care of the child with an emotional need while her husband played a supportive role in giving the other two extra time. Again, we see the women being more in tune with relational issues than their husbands were. This would support the suggestion made by Stiver (1991), and alluded to
in the last chapter, that women’s involvement in the home needs to be understood in terms of the emotional bonding and the intensity in relationships that develops. Women’s responsibilities often go beyond the time taken to execute tasks as they pay attention to the emotional needs of the family. Erickson (1993), however, pointed out that the emotional work in the family should be divided in the same way as housework and childcare since he found that the most significant variable in terms of well being. These men are supportive of their wives, but perhaps have not gone the stage further in terms of emotional work with the children.

As will become increasingly clear, a well-functioning relationship forms a basis from which women can move out into expansive roles with greater ease, confident that they have good support at home. This was an advantage primarily enjoyed by career men whose wives took care of the home front, only this time it is enjoyed by both. However, it is also clear that certain differences in home roles remain. Perhaps the extent to which women find themselves pulled by relational issues remains a factor in terms of their workforce participation, as well as their role in orchestrating home life. Although there is evidence of some convergence of roles and of both women and men letting go of traditional roles, can we assume that men and women can fulfill the same roles? The women’s concern with emotional needs has been accepted as part of their responsibility as mothers. Even in relationships that are otherwise equal, this aspect still seems to represent the biggest difference in parenting responsibilities and one which continues to limit women. The convergence we are seeing is that women are growing and developing in more holistic ways, finding their potential through their work and that men are exercising their nurturing qualities as they participate more in family life.
CHAPTER 6: ASPECTS OF A WOMAN’S LIFE: MOTHERHOOD

In this chapter, I will step back from the concept of role sharing to explore motherhood as an experience. It is hard to separate the subjective experience of being a mother from the role of motherhood. Roles are based on shared expectations learned in a common societal context (Attanucci, 1986), and so the experience of being a mother is very much influenced by those expectations. Rich (1975) conceptualized the dual aspects of motherhood as being the experience and the institution. In the first part of the chapter, I will explore the subjective experience of being a mother, and in the second part, the focus will be on social influences impinging on the experience. There is little written on the phenomenology of motherhood (Adams, 1995; Barlow & Cairns, 1997; Ross, 1995). In the psychological literature, the focus of the mother-child relationship has tended to be on the impact of the mother on the child (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). I will focus on the impact of the child on the mother.

The chapter will start with experiences of being pregnant, and move on to the variety of ways in which motherhood affected the women personally and then in terms of their work. Because concepts of motherhood are embedded in social systems. I will then explore the women’s expectations about being a mother and then the guilt that represents the darker side of motherhood. Maternity holds a new sphere of possibility of self-discovery as other aspects of the self emerge through nurturing infants. Because of their life-style, the women in the study are forced to challenge traditional expectations of mothering and develop a style of mothering that allows them to remain committed to a career while also parenting their children.
BEING PREGNANT

Memories of being pregnant often become blurred with time as the activity of mothering becomes all-absorbing. Two of the women, however, spoke passionately about being pregnant and so the focus will be on their stories. Nora was pregnant at the time of our conversations with her second child, and so pregnancy was foremost in her mind. Susan remembered pregnancy as being a special time in her life.

The wonderment of pregnancy

Nora talked about the “wonderment” of pregnancy. She reflected on the changes that were taking place in her body and as she looked forward to giving birth. She also talked about the link she felt between the whole process of being pregnant and giving birth and feeling a deeper connection with people:

I don't know whether it's that you look at people and think, “That could be my daughter 10 or 20 years from now.” I don't know what it is but I do think you have a much better connectivity with people and I do attribute that to coming through, it's a whole passage, right? Right from the time of finding that you are pregnant, right through to this incredible distortion that your body goes through, which again helps you to examine your values about your own appearance and your own presentation to the rest of the world. And then you move through that, then you go through this wonderful great experience of labour which nothing in life will ever be this intensely painful. You get through that and then you are a different person on the other side. And then you have this other individual, this other person in your life that you are responsible for, that you are responsible to. Really life-changing.

She enlarged further on feelings of connectedness: “I would see the bums on the street, and I would see them as a baby and someone holding them and lovely and clean. And here they are now on the street.” She connected with the humanness of others at a
very basic level. The ability to connect and empathize with others is an aspect of motherhood that was reiterated by several of the participants and will be explored further under the theme of the impact of motherhood on their work.

"It was a wonderful pregnancy thanks to them"

Growing up feeling very much an outsider in the family, Susan thrived on the warmth and acceptance she felt from those around her at the time of her pregnancy. She had previously been pregnant when she was twenty-five years old. At that time, her parents had persuaded her to have an abortion, a decision that she described as "the worst thing that has ever happened to me." When she became pregnant six years later, again her mother's message was "you can not possibly have these children," she was pregnant with twins. This time, though, she was not at home; she was in training in the States. She described the very different response of the director of the school in the following way.

"When I talked to the director, and she was a big person. I thought they were going to kick me out. And you know what she said to me? She gave me a big hug and said, 'Congratulations' and it was like 'Wow.'"

Susan explained that when she first went to the States she was very vulnerable. Her father had died six months previously, the man with whom she had lived and whom she was to marry had left her, and she had sold her house and left her job; all this within a short time frame. While she was at the training centre in the States, she met a fellow Canadian who was just completing his training. She needed somebody and there was an attraction there, though he was quite aloof. It was not a decision to become pregnant, but when she did become pregnant, her reaction was, "Great, great."
The man left, but supported her through the pregnancy from a distance. Her real support, though, was from the others in the school at that time, "They supported me and they loved me and it was a wonderful pregnancy, thanks to them. I will never forget them for that. I had a very good start to the pregnancy."

**THE IMPACT OF MOTHERHOOD ON THE INDIVIDUAL**

Motherhood impacted on the women in a variety of ways. For some, maternal feelings were immediate and profound. Others grew into being mothers. The immediacy of dealing with the effects of the birth and coping with a new infant represented an entirely new experience. The nurturing aspect of motherhood, which is commonly associated with the role, was experienced in different ways by the women and was not always immediate and instinctual; sometimes it developed over time. In this sample of women, we will see quite a range of experiences.

"I never thought I would love something as much as I love my children"

For some, the biggest impact of becoming a mother was the surprising realization that the little being, to whom she had just given birth, took on a centrality in her life. Tracy, who as a family doctor has seen many women come through the birth experience, described this surprise when she said:

I never thought I would love something as much as I love my children. I never thought anything would occupy me in such a total way as children. That was a surprise to me. And I don’t know why it should be such a surprise. Billions of women have done this before, but personally it had more impact.

There was quite a shift in her thinking, which comes across in her words, "All of a sudden there was something that has as much weight as the demands of medicine. I
realized that medicine was not the most important thing in my life, and that was a real surprise.

Several of the women in the study were in their mid thirties when they were married, a pattern that is becoming more common in professional women. It is often a critical stage in their working lives when they are establishing themselves in their chosen field. As we saw from Tracy’s account, work was her focus before she had children.

Like Tracy, Jan was married in her mid thirties and as she commented, “We wanted to have children and there was only so much time.” When she became pregnant, she had finally settled into the type of work that she really enjoyed. She said of herself, “I was very ambivalent through my first pregnancy and then when M. [son] was born, I didn’t even want to see him.” Her husband was concerned over her lack of interest in their baby. Then all that changed:

I think it came as a shock to both [husband] and I equally because I really took to motherhood. People remark what a wonderful mother I am and I never thought I would be a great mum. I never thought I would love it the way that I love it. I just never thought that it could be as good as it is.

Motherhood for these women shook their sense of self. Their priorities changed, and there was now something else apart from their work that was central in their lives.

The intensity of maternal feelings came across in other stories. Paige described her response to her child in the following words, “I made this little person and this little person needs me and that’s a pretty fantastic feeling. As soon as I became a mother, I couldn’t believe the incredible love that you can have for your baby.” She also talked about a very powerful protective instinct. She feared that her angry and jealous husband
would hurt the children, and she said, "These deep-seated feelings just exploded to the surface, they came because I had these two little boys that I had to protect and nurture. I think it was the mother bear in me protecting my children." Interestingly, it was the release of these powerful maternal feelings that she said gave her "tremendous power and strength that I never knew I had." She described herself before as being "shy and quiet and not very confident." Motherhood was a transforming experience.

"Seven days ago my life was perfect"

Some of the women immediately felt intense maternal feelings, for others, there were circumstances that coloured their responses. Sally, who liked to keep her life controlled and organized, had a different experience. She had a colicky baby who presented a challenge to her ideal of motherhood, as well as to the tight control that she likes to keep on her life. She spoke of her experience in the following way:

Seven days ago my life was perfect and you know a nice little pregnancy and everything and today it's a mess, it's a mess. It was a total giving away of control to this little nine pound screaming thing, and I think that was the difficulty I had with it. You have this expectation of, "Here is this list of things I am going to do on maternity leave, re-tiling the kitchen floor, volunteering at six groups that I had." And then my list at the end of three months was get up in the morning, shower, well maybe, there was no control over anything, over when I slept, when I ate and when I showered. I've been in every court in Ontario, I've had judges yell at me, I've had lawyers yell at me and this little baby, he's reduced me to this mess! He cried for six months and didn't sleep through the night and it was just horrendous. And at the time I was nursing all the time. I wouldn't allow a bottle; the perfectionist mother going on; I am the earth mother and nothing but breast milk and so this was a big baby and hungry all the time. And when I think about it now, it's just awful. It's a total upheaval and I think if you have a career beforehand, it's more so.
The memories of those very difficult times remained very fresh in her memory, although at the time of our first meeting her first child was a four-year-old and had well grown beyond the colicky stage. She opened our second conversation by saying:

It's funny, I relived it this morning when my friend called to tell me about her baby. She had her baby yesterday, she is going home today. "Can you stop in on the weekend?" she said. "My God," I felt like saying, "NO, NO, call me when your baby is six months and I will come over." No I don't have to do that any more.

Early experiences of being a mother are not always rosy. However, in an existential way, the experience of coping with a colicky baby was valuable in terms of the work Sally does for the Children’s Aid Society. I will explore that further in the next section when I look at the impact of motherhood on their work.

Sally now experiences a lot of joy in being a mother, as we saw from the last chapter, but those early experiences were quite traumatic. Others too experienced tensions existing alongside positive maternal feelings They appreciate being mothers more as the children get a little older. The stress and upheaval of caring for an infant together with the physical after-effects of giving birth can sometimes be overwhelming.

"I didn't have time to enjoy them"

Susan went back to live with her mother towards the end of her pregnancy. She gave birth to twins who were born six weeks early. Excited though she was at the prospect of having children, she said of her experience. “You go through a lot in those early months, a lot of conflicting emotions plus the pain and the fact that it didn’t come easy. I thought they would just nurse and it doesn’t quite work like that.” She added:
I didn't have time to enjoy them. It was basically very practical, but I got no sleep. My mother was an early riser, she would get up at six and I slept from six to eleven. Other than that I did not sleep.

On top of that, one of the girls was quite frail as a baby and she needed extra care and attention. Susan said about the stronger one, “She didn’t need as much care and so a lot of my attention was with the more fragile one, and I felt really bad about that. I really wanted to nurse her, but she was the one that didn’t want to nurse.” The stress that Susan experienced as a working single mother of twins will be referred to later. Although she went through some terrible years, she could now say of herself, “I’m an OK mum now. I’m better as they get older. I love their activities, I get really involved in their activities, kids are fun.” Her girls also provide her with a sense of family and she misses them when they go away:

My kids are away this weekend and other people have said, “Isn’t it great to have a break?” Well, quite frankly, no, it isn’t I am going to miss them. You know I don’t like it when they are gone. I like going to their ball games and I like doing stuff with them.

Susan mentioned with some sadness that she remembers little of when the children were young “and only tiredness will do that.” She can now say of her experience as a mother:

What they taught me is that I have the capacity to love and to love deeply. They are the most important thing in my life. They are my reason for being to some extent. Jobs come and go. I am expendable here, but no one can take my place there.

The children have given new meaning to her life.
"I think I am definitely a mother for older children"

Ann too did not experience the initial joy of motherhood. Childbirth left her physically weak, "I lost twenty-two pounds in one week. I was just barely standing up." There was sadness in her tone when she said, "There are those women who adore being at home and are very fulfilled by looking after babies, and I kept waiting for this to happen and it didn't happen." She found it hard to adjust to a different role, and she felt insecure as a mother. She also found that the experience of staying at home was isolating and boring. Her attempts to get together with other mothers were not successful. There was an age difference, since most of the mothers were much younger than she was. She missed the intellectual stimulation that she was used to in her work. Ann was happy to return to work and she added, "I was actually surprised because I had heard of women breaking down in the office and sobbing and missing their children." At this time, that was not her experience.

As the children got a little older, Ann started to appreciate the children more. She said, "I think I am definitely a mother for older children. you can talk with them and discuss things with them. I connect with them as people. and I love seeing the world through their eyes." Ann had tended to be overly responsible as a child and she missed out on some of the fun things of childhood. With her children, she can recreate the childhood that she missed, "I love jumping into puddles and seeing how that feels. I love kicking balls and actually reliving my own childhood. I was always fairly serious." When the children were young, her husband was just setting himself up in business and so he worked long hours. Ann was consequently on her own with the children in the evenings. "The kids and I would have candle-lit dinners and also have theme nights I would put the
tape on of Pirates of Penzance and we would dance in the living room together and the kids would love it.” She found pleasure in seeing the world through the eyes and the mind of a child, and in reliving her own childhood:

Learning about traffic signals and seeing an aeroplane fly by, watching a train. All these things are tremendously exciting when you are two or three years old. Also, I really enjoy when you can explain something to a three or four year old like a map, the concept of a map, the concept of a town. You can explain to them government. Things that are very complex sort of concepts but if you can bring it down to that level, you start understanding and learning yourself.

Through her interactions with the children, Ann also came to learn and understand more about herself. Emotions that she had never really thought about, she was finding herself explaining to the children. Through her children, she was growing and developing as a person.

By the time of our second conversation, Ann talked about some changes she would like to make:

I’ve never felt this before and I don’t know where this thought has come from because I am quite happy at work...and now here is the thought that my children may need me more now. I really instinctively want to consolidate, to solidify this relationship.

She was looking out for alternatives at work, such as sometimes leaving earlier, so that she could spend more time with her children. She herself was feeling a greater need to be with her children. She mentioned her older child in particular, with whom she described herself as being “connected on a very close level...I feel much more reluctant to leave him and I feel a much greater need to be around him more.”
“It was important that I fulfilled that mother role to the nth degree”

The notion that motherhood would fit into her previous life-style and her assumption that she would take it on as a role were challenged when Lorna realized that this was not possible. Feeling very tired after childbirth, Lorna took the full six months maternity leave, and then when she returned to work, she tried to continue as the caregiver, with the help of a nanny during her working hours. “The first child, I had to do it all. It was really important to me that I fulfilled that mother role to the “nth” degree as well as a career. And then I realized that wasn’t working.” Although she was working long and disadvantaged hours, she had assumed that she was the best one to take care of all the child and household responsibilities. In addition she found it hard to say “No” to outside requests. As her husband implored her to let him participate more, she said. “I was eventually seeing that I had missed two years of my son’s life so I would pull back and not try and do everything. It was more important for me to be there for him.” At that time, she began to share responsibilities with her husband. She found that by letting go of role expectations, she could experience the positive aspects of being a mother. She also began to be careful of taking on extra responsibilities at work and in the community. In other words, she learned to let go and prioritize, a subject that will be covered more fully later.

These examples of the impact of motherhood on some of the women in the study help to illustrate the diverse ways in which women respond to being mothers and also the powerful emotions and tensions that are evoked in motherhood. Some of them shared the kind of relationships they were developing with their children. Ann and Susan both provided examples of the mutual pleasure of sharing in the children’s activities. The
excerpts give a sense of the transforming experience of being a mother, and so I was curious as to how it affected their work role.

**THE IMPACT OF MOTHERHOOD ON THE WORK ROLE**

"I think women who are in the workforce who are mothers are very powerful"

This phrase from a conversation with Nora intrigued me. It was one of the surprises that make qualitative research so valuable. It also took me back to the transcripts to examine what other women in the study said about the way in which being a mother changed the way they are at work. Some of these changes resulted in tensions between the ways they practised mothering and the ways they were expected to practise at work and those will be explored in the next chapter. This section will focus on important contributions that women who are mothers can make in places of work. It should be noted here that because all of the women in my sample are mothers, I can only talk about this group of people. It does not mean to say that women who are not mothers cannot equally access maternal skills in themselves and so demonstrate the same skills, or that women who are mothers automatically possess particular skills.

Caring for and nurturing young children require skills that enable caretakers to guide and direct the development of children. Nora suggested that those skills, together with their interpersonal skills that are often a strength in women, are going to place women at a real advantage in the workplace. She made the following point:

As organizations change and we start to value what we had traditionally called the softer skills, really that is such a poor nomenclature for that whole group of really powerful people skills, I think women who are mothers who are working have much more ability to tap into those. And I think that is where women are going to be successful in management, in driving organizations. And I think
major organizations are, and I know it’s slow, but I think they are changing and acknowledging that those softer skills are what is going to make them successful in the work force.

She goes on to make the point that in a highly competitive market, it is the implementation of strategies that is important:

If you’ve got the best strategy in the world and you cannot manage people, you cannot lead them, and you cannot grab their hearts and souls and have them come along with you. Then you are never going to realize the competitive advantage. So rightly or wrongly they’ve recognized now that it’s the people in the implementation who are key, and women do a good job for the most part.

In this age when there is less of a hierarchy in companies, women tend to fit easily into a team work style of leadership. Nora suggested that women’s interpersonal skills and the skills that they have acquired as mothers are very valuable and very powerful in the workplace. In her own work, she attributes much of her success to tapping into the “softer skills” that are emphasized in mothering.

Lorna articulated some of these skills further. She uses helping children as a metaphor for her work. She gave an example of how she might help a child to deal with a problem: “The child at school took my hat mum. How I going to deal with that? Well why do you think she was so frustrated she had to steal your hat. what was going on?” And so in her medical practice, she uses the same strategy of opening doors for people so that they can share the real issue. She provided the example of a woman who might come to her complaining of abdominal pain. She would make sure that they were not suffering for organic reasons, and then she would ask some open-ended questions. “Why do you
think you have abdominal pain? How are things at home? Just open a few doors and it’s amazing why they have abdominal pain. And I think that is more mothering."

Lorna’s concept of herself is very much tied into her role as mother. She sees many of the characteristics of herself finding their ultimate purpose in her role as mother, whether it is in mothering her children or in mothering her patients, or in mothering the people she works with. She said, “Everyone refers to me as mum, and even the residents and the faculty come to me with their relational problems; or they come to me with their larger issues or their career issues.” She sees her desire to make things better, “to fix it” as being fulfilled in the mother role.

It was mentioned earlier that Sally’s experience of dealing with a colicky baby has changed her attitude towards some of the women referred to her by the Children’s Aid Society. She described the impact of her experience on her work:

I do a lot of work for parents who have had their children taken away by the Children’s Aid Society, and I think that’s where [being a mother] has made in my work the most conscious change. I remember people coming in and saying, “You know my baby was crying and I just smacked him,” and I can remember being so judgmental of people and the way that they raise their children. And I look back at it and think, “Oh my God how terrible.” I experienced a colicky baby who cried for six months and my only release was when his father came home at five o’clock and I could hand over this child. I was smart enough to know, put the baby in the crib, go, and take a shower because you don’t hear the crying when you are taking a shower. But if you are young and poor and uneducated, and you shake your baby, or you smack your baby. If you don’t have any of the reliefs of the education or the knowledge. I mean you are nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, we’ve got really young mums these days. And I can understand that now because I can understand the frustration, and fear, and lack of sleep, and pain or fatigue from childbirth. Maybe you don’t eat enough during the day,
maybe you've got post-natal depression, there's a whole slew of things that impact on how you care for a child. And so I think it's really enabled me to have a better appreciation from that point of view.

Having more understanding for the humanness in people, and being slower to judge them for their mistakes means that in her work Sally can look beyond an individual act and try to understand the person in a situation.

Having empathy for others often comes from having been down a similar road oneself. Sally could identify with the feelings of clients who had crossed the line in their behaviour with their children because she herself had been on that edge. Paige talked about her increased empathy for the children she taught. The line that divides being a mother and being a teacher blurred. As a mother, she found herself empathizing more with the children at school. She said, "I realized that children were people and they have feelings, they have opinions, they have rights, and they are different because my children are so different from one another." Her children were both born with health problems. She said of her older child, "He was pretty needy because he didn't learn to speak properly, he needed a speech therapist. And I think that gave me a better understanding that some children don't learn things just by experiencing them." As a teacher, she had gravitated towards children who were disadvantaged, and then both of her children went through severe health problems as infants and young children. She rationalized this situation in the following way:

And then to have two children of my own that were both at risk when they were born. I guess I basically told myself I was the right mum to have this kind of a child because I knew whatever happened to my youngest child, even if he was
developmentally delayed, I would survive and I would make him the best he
could be.

Some of the women also spoke about how being a mother helps them to keep their
work in perspective. Ann said that she has two aspects of her life that are of equal
importance to her, her children and her work. Some said that they always carry images of
their children in their minds. Paige said, “Your children pop into your head at various
times throughout your day. Something will trigger a thought, a feeling, an emotion and you
will think about one of your own children.” Sally talked about her children always being at
the back of her mind. She did not have photographs on her desk, but she had a picture in her
office of some artwork that her elder son had done at nursery school. Nora too talked about
images of her daughter popping into her mind during the day, and that helps her to keep her
work in perspective. I will return to this theme later, but holding their children in their
minds in a very positive way is a part of keeping life in perspective.

Interestingly, in these examples the women were explicit in terms of how they
integrated the role of mother into their self-concept. The women have allowed themselves
to be changed by the experience and to continue to change. In the process of changing,
they have had to come to terms with some assumptions that they had about being a
mother.

CONFRONTING THE MYTH OF THE GOOD MOTHER

Women’s ideas about being mothers were greatly influenced by their own
mothers. As has been seen, their mothers were strong and capable women whose primary
task was looking after the home. They modeled high standards and the women in the
study carry with them the expectation that they should be as good as their mothers were.
even though they are also committed to a career. Although the idea of the supermom has long been abandoned as unrealistic, some of the women spoke about the need to be good at everything when they first had children. The expectations and the roles we assume as mothers are very strong and difficult to break out of. This section will consist of short excerpts from conversations with the women, each providing some different insight into ways in which the women experienced trying to live up to expectations.

"I wanted to be good at everything so I wanted to be good at being a mother too"

The quotation is from one of my conversations with Lorna, who went on to explain her assumptions about being a mother and her realization of how unrealistic they were:

> When I had my first child I had to be in charge of everything. I had to be in charge of the home, the groceries, the kids, the diapers, the everything. And I had to be in charge of my career. But that was a very troublesome time when that first child came along. I wasn't willing to give it all up. I had to be good at everything and it had to be done my way for a purpose. There really wasn't a purpose, but I thought there was. I couldn't do it all.

Her mother had taken charge in her family of origin and Lorna assumed that she would too, and furthermore, there was a "right" way and a "wrong" way.

"The perfectionist comes out obsessively and needlessly"

Sally’s birthday cake story illustrates how she tried to model herself as a mother after her own mother, and realized that with her commitment to her career as well, she could not attain her mother’s standards.

> I was planning my first son's second birthday. We were out shopping and I was going to look for a birthday cake book because I was going to make this birthday cake. As we were going through the stores and looking at all these cakes, my
friend said, "Why in the world are you doing that?" She said, "Go to Dairy Queen, buy a ten dollar ice cream cake, put two candles on it and everybody's happy."

And I just had this idea that I had to have this birthday cake. My mother always had these sort of elaborate birthday cakes, and I thought, well it's my responsibility.

Sally goes on to describe in another story how this need to be as good as her own mother takes on an obsessive quality to counter the guilt of not being a full-time mother.

But the perfectionist kind of comes out obsessively and needlessly. I was kind of going WILD. All the stuff in the bedrooms has to match, the sheets have to match their pillowcases. It was just weird. I think it was almost trying to make up for what I felt was my lack of presence there. Because I wasn't there during the day, I had better make sure the things I do are perfect because if I am going to be a good mother, I had better make sure the pillowcases match.

The guilt that the women experience will be discussed in the next theme. Sally's image of a good mother was based on how she remembered her own mother. She placed high expectations on herself only to realize that, in her circumstances, they were impossible for her to attain. Over time, she was able to clarify her priorities and let go of non-essential details.

"I didn't feel I could do both and do a good job of both at the same time"

The need to be good at everything was also part of Paige's experience. Initially reluctant to have children, she changed her mind due to pressure from her husband:

I didn't want to be a mother. I didn't think that having children was going to fit into my life very well because a career was always really important to me, and I didn't feel I could do both and do a good job of both at the same time

The fear that she might not be able to maintain those standards is reflected in her words:
I was probably a bit of a super woman, because I do tend to be very driven. I almost work too hard to a fault. I’m a perfectionist and I have to have a really neat and clean home as well. I felt very stressed out all the time because I had to do a perfect job of everything and it was really hard for me to let things slide, and I needed to let things slide a little bit. For me to do that, then I would feel anxious inside. I know that was tough on me at first, but I realized my children needed me more.

There was evidence of an internal struggle of needing to have everything just so, as her mother did, but also the child in her identified with her children’s needs of her attention. She explained that she was driven by an internal critic whom she said “would be my grandmother’s voice. And even the other day when I went to visit her she commented, ‘Oh I guess you don’t make soup do you?’” with the implied expectation of why not. In those early years, Paige was trying to cope with a sick child, an uncooperative school principle, and a marriage that was not working out. Her husband provided no help. “I know everything sort of went wrong all at once. I felt I had the weight of the world on me and he wasn’t there to help either.” It was a lonely struggle, and a struggle in which she was trying to give one hundred percent to her job as well as to her children.

“You can do it all, you’re a woman”

Susan acutely feels the expectations that others have of her as a mother. She compared the different responses of people to men who are also single parents:

I still have to bake for all the school things. I’m still expected to be there for the PTA meetings. I’m expected to be a driver, it’s expected that my kids have to be in several activities. And in fact people are quite surprised if single fathers show up. I can’t believe the difference. And I got a comment by a neighbour of mine, “Well you really can’t expect these men to get their lawn cut on time because they have to cook and they have the children.” Well, I kind of looked at them and
they didn't really see me in the same boat. It wasn't a malicious comment, they just didn't see me. They thought, of course you can do it all, you're a woman.

Susan went on to explain how these expectations play out in her own life:

So part of the reason I wasn't able to break down is because I didn't want anyone to know I couldn't do it all because it was expected. I would be looked upon as like almost an unfit mother. They don't expect those men to do it all.

Trying to meet expectations places a huge burden on her. Choosing not to do all of the things that are expected of her as a woman and as a mother would leave her open to being judged as unfit as a mother, a label that she could not live with.

The expectations that society places on women, and thus the roles they assume, place them at a disadvantage. Being a “good” mother is interpreted as doing everything that society defines as being part of the role. Although some of the women saw their mothers as epitomizing that role, others saw their mothers in a different light. Jan saw severe shortcomings in aspects of her mother’s parenting. She had in the back of her mind an almost fatalistic fear that she might become like her mother:

I just don't want to repeat it, that's my great fear because so much of what we do is habit. My relationship with her terrifies me and even my relationship with M. [son] because M. is really dependent on me and we are very close and we are very tight, as my mother and my brother were. I think this is history repeating itself. I hope not.

In trying to do things differently from her mother, Jan also second-guesses herself, and as we can see from the quotation, she is even questioning the health of her relationship with her son. As mothers try to do the best they can, there are always feelings of guilt that perhaps they could have done better.
FEELINGS OF GUILT ASSOCIATED WITH MOTHERS WHO HAVE CAREERS

As has already been seen, the need to be a good mother is very strong and women are vulnerable when “the good mother” status is challenged. The women who are committed to their careers, as well as being committed to being good mothers, have deviated from the so-called cultural “wisdom” that says that mothers should be home with their children. The challenge can come not only from societal messages about who should be looking after children, but also from their own ambivalence over wanting to be with the child and wanting to work. In a workplace that offers little flexibility, they are faced with either/or choices. Either they stay at home with their children, or they work full time. Mothers feel very responsible for the well being of their children. They are bombarded with literature that emphasizes the importance of the infant years of the child’s life, and they find themselves second guessing as to whether they are providing the right care for the optimal development of the child.

“I felt guilty sending my child to be raised by somebody else”

Sending her children to a day-care conflicted with Paige’s ideals of the good mother as is reflected in her words, “I am the one that should be at home with my kids. I shouldn’t be leaving them with a stranger even though we have gone to great lengths to choose someone who’s very competent and capable.” Paige had wanted to work on a part-time basis for a while, but in those days, in so doing, she would have lost her full-time status and seniority as a teacher. She felt trapped into going back to work full-time, and instead opted for the best day-care she could find. The following excerpt from our conversations demonstrates something of the guilt she experienced:
It was a very good day-care. It was run by four nurses and very well managed and I felt he was safe and well cared for. But I felt guilty sending my child to be raised by somebody else. No one nurtures your children like you do. I had to give up nursing to go back to work, so I felt guilty about that because he was only five months old.

Then she went on to say, “I would not have been a good stay-at-home mom, I know that,” reflecting the ambivalence she felt.

“There’s this thing that my mother was there for us”

The women in the study are essentially organizing their lives in a different way from the previous generation. As a generation, they are using childcare facilities far more than previous generations have done and in Ann’s words. “You do feel guilty or you wonder if you are doing the right thing for your children.” This questioning is evident in the following excerpt from a conversation with Ann:

This week I was at a parents’ evening at school and they were telling us just how vital it is that children receive all sorts of positive reinforcement, and unconditional love, and all these things in the first three years. And I have no idea how much of that they got I don’t know. So I wonder if, by having worked, and for me I don’t think there was a choice of not working, it’s just what I now realize I need to do. But I wonder if by doing that, I may have taken something from them that they’ve never complained about because they never knew they may have needed it, but subconsciously they will carry with them into their adult years. There’s this thing that my mother was there for us. Was this good or bad? I don’t know.

In agonizing over whether she has done the right thing for her children. Ann rationalized that all of the nannies she has employed have contributed towards the
children's development, and they have a place in their lives. However, again the guilt comes across in her words:

They definitely form a connection with the Nanny, and the older they are, the stronger that connection is. And this one now can ask me for more money, and she can ask me for all sorts of things, the kids love her, I will bend all sorts of ways to keep them happy. I mean periodically I have to say, "Look you know you are crossing a line here."

In reasoning through the situation, Ann went on to say:

I feel that if I had been at home, they wouldn't have been exposed to as many different things because it wouldn't have occurred to me to go there or do that. So in some ways they have probably had more interests in life. And I've always been at home in the evening, all these years, there as regular as clockwork. Now I always thought it's the nanny's job to look after the children during the day, and at the end of the day, they finish their work and they go home. So we each have a break. I have a break from the kids during the day, she has a break from the kids during the evening, and in a way, it's kind of shared parenting.

The rationalization may indicate a deep-seated ambivalence about the pros and cons of being a working mother. When the children were young, her decisions around work and childcare seemed obvious. Now that they are reaching school age, Ann finds herself constantly evaluating her situation. In noticing that other women are working part-time, she feels that she too would like to have more time for the children. On the other hand, she is in a good position at work and questions whether she wants to jeopardize that. Furthermore, her children clearly are benefiting from their time with nannies. There are no easy answers.
"Mummy don't go"

The words that Nora heard from her child that morning are familiar to all mothers. They strike a deep chord in the heart of every mother. Nora spoke about being confronted with self-doubt on a daily basis:

Everything has such a price to it. The guilt's huge. This morning was one of those mornings. I had a day off yesterday and I had such a wonderful day with my daughter and my folks, and then this morning when I dropped her off, "Say bye bye to mummy, give me a hug." It was like, "Mummy don't go." And you go "OK wring my heart" and it's very very hard. And then you second guess, "Am I making the right decision?" And you know you do that all the time.

She went on to say, "Will I look back 5 years from now and say, I should have spent more time with her?" As Nora said, "I think women second guess themselves far more than men do. and everyday you just work through it."

Sally had a neat way of conceptualizing guilt in terms of X and Y-chromosomes. Men have both X and Y-chromosomes and women have two X-chromosomes. "That extra bit on the X that women have is our guilt." She illustrated her point in the following way:

When I first went off to work and left my oldest son with a baby-sitter, he was crying at the door and crying and crying. And of course I was just an emotional wreck. My husband said, "Just wait until the first day he doesn't cry when you leave, oh he doesn't care!"

Jan would have agreed with her. She said that when her husband leaves in the morning, he just goes, where she has to make sure that everything is all right with the children first. She too carries the responsibility and the guilt for the children.
"Every day my sense is that I would like to be a better mother"

The guilt that Susan feels over her children comes across poignantly in her words. The toll of single-handedly taking on the roles of parent, worker, and homemaker while also coping with a problematic child will be discussed in the next chapter. One of the effects of the stress, however, was that from time to time she felt so overwhelmed that she would vent at home, and she continues to feel the guilt for that:

To break down in front of the children is inexcusable. And I felt I have done it because I just couldn't take it any more. Those kids should not have had to go through some of the things they went through with me.

With the guilt there is the remorse that she would have liked things to be different. There was also a helplessness that given her circumstances, how could it have been different? One of her comments was, "I really would have liked to have more children. I would like to have had a different circumstance when I had the children."

**REFLECTIVE COMMENTS: SHAPING THEIR LIVES AS MOTHERS**

In exploring the subjective experience of the women as mothers, we can see that there are striking individual differences in the women’s initial responses to motherhood. Some gave us a feel for the unexpected passion and joy that comes with being a mother and others, the relentless demands and loss of self that also is a part of motherhood. To attempt to simplify the experience of being a mother by placing women at one end of the continuum or the other would also be misguided. The women would all have talked about being at different places along the continuum at different times. Motherhood is a complex experience (Oberman & Josselson, 1996), and the women shared the intensity of feelings that were evoked and which surprised them. For career women that are used to being in
control of their lives, motherhood provokes a crisis, which forces them to re-evaluate themselves and the direction of their lives.

I will first reflect on the idea of motherhood being a transformative experience. I will then explore the notion of the cultural script for motherhood and its application to working mothers. Guilt constantly plays out in the lives of mothers and so it has to be mentioned in this context. I will lastly take up the notion of a transformed maternal practice that acknowledges its power.

**Motherhood as a transformative experience**

Motherhood is essentially about a relationship. Through the stories of the participants, we have been able to follow that relationship and at the same time, follow their development as women. Gleve (1987) had cautioned that women are expected to mirror the giving aspect of motherhood beyond the role of being a mother. Susan’s experience was an example of the expectations of women to take care of others. We also saw that some of the women could use the special qualities of motherhood as powerful tools. They could be a means of enhancing themselves by expanding their sense of self, rather than losing their sense of self through continuing to give of themselves beyond the role.

Part of the process of motherhood, according to Oberman and Josselson (1996), is to integrate polarized tensions. One frequently mentioned is the loss of self versus the expansion of self. It was evident, from the stories, that being exposed to the vulnerability of a newborn baby gives rise to both a loss of self and an expansion of self. The loss of self is in constantly responding to the needs of the baby, and an expansion of the
capacities of the self is in the tremendous capacity for caring (Oberman & Josselson, 1996).

The loss of self was graphically expressed by Sally and by Susan. When faced with a screaming colicky baby, Sally realized she had no control. She became, in Gleve's (1987) words, "a responsive, acquiescent mother" (p.43), subsuming even her most basic needs to the needs of the child. Susan, in the early months of nurturing premature twins, lost herself in the rhythms of taking care of the needs of the babies and grabbing moments of sleep, feeling denied of the rewards of nursing the babies. This loss of self is a part of being a mother of a young infant, and as long as it does not extend into other roles, it is healthy. We saw that one of the ways the expansion of self was represented by Sally was in the way motherhood affected her practise in law. She developed a tremendous empathy for her young clients who were judged as not being good mothers. Susan found in her children a capacity for love. The expansion of self arises out of the loss of the self and so the two aspects become integrated, and thus transforming.

Motherhood transformed Paige in a very striking way. The need to preserve the child is a primary interest in maternal practice (Ruddick, 1984). It was expressed strongly by Paige when she described herself as feeling like a mother bear protecting her young. She described how she felt a new strength in herself that transformed her from being a shy person to a person who was prepared to protect her children fearlessly. She perceived her children to be at risk, both because of their angry father and because of congenital problems. She became more assertive in her everyday life and learned to stand up for herself as well as for her children.
Because these mothers had interests outside mothering, the undifferentiatedness between the self and the child was temporary and in returning to work, there was a degree of disengagement. This in part helped them to contain the "mother" role, especially if they were not in a caring profession. Some felt ready and others would have liked to stay with their children longer. Ann, for example, was quite ready to disengage. In fact, discovering her children as individual personalities opened her to the suppressed child in herself. She developed a relationship with them in which her own needs were being met as well as those of her children. She could thus not only maintain a sense of selfhood, but also incorporate a lost aspect of herself into her personality.

The relational aspect of motherhood runs like a thread through all of the stories. It is there in the activities they share with their children as well as when they have to separate from their children. Paige, Sally, Nora, and Jan all provide some insight into the psychological pulls they experience, especially if their child seems unhappy when they leave. Despite sharing parenting, the leaving of their children seems harder for them than for their husbands. Hock, McBride, and Grexda (1989) explain this in terms of mothers violating a traditional societal norm. It would seem that mothers develop stronger emotional ties with their children, which makes them more sensitive to any anxious feelings.

Part of the transformative process was to become mothers in their own terms. This meant challenging social myths and confronting "ghosts of mothering received" (Barlow & Cairns, 1997, p. 237). It also meant creating a script for mothering that responds to the reality of their own situation, rather than trying to follow a prescribed cultural script (Willard, 1988).
Navigating without a map

Just as it was noted that women have few role models to guide them through the workplace culture, the same is true in their roles as working mothers. Willard (1988) defines a cultural script as a set of ideas that function as a map that helps to guide choices. She made the point that it works best when supported by social structures that make it possible to fulfil expectations without a conflict. Willard suggested that in our culture there are a number of scripts for motherhood. There is the script of the traditional role of the selfless wife and mother, there is the superwoman script of the woman who tries to achieve in the workplace and also be the ideal mother. and then there is the script that the woman creates based on her realities. The lack of structures to support such diverse scripts leaves people vulnerable to the consequences of feeling insecure about their role performance, such as feelings of guilt.

Although the women in the study seem to be moving towards the third option, there was plenty of evidence that the other scripts are still alive. An important part of the women's development as mothers has been to confront the cultural image of the good mother, the selfless mother, often represented by their own mothers. We saw that some of the women were forced, because of the pressures of trying to be working mothers, to abandon the myth. Sally, for instance, realized the irrationality of making the elaborate birthday cake that her mother would have made, and instead had to acknowledge that her child would not suffer if she bought an ice cream cake. This is an example of the internal pressures to meet the cultural expectations of the good mother. even over such small but time consuming tasks as the birthday cake. Although the myth is part of an old script based on the father as the breadwinner and the mother staying at home with the children.
it still lingers. It is a script that has been idealized, but does not match the realities of women's lives today. Barlow and Cairns (1997) made the point that in not trying to live the myth meant that they were mothering without a script, which led to some feelings of insecurity about whether they were doing their best for their children.

Because the women in the study are high achieving women, they find it important to succeed in whatever they do, not least of all being a mother. There was a tendency to try the "superwoman" script. Lorna talked about initially thinking that she had to fulfil the mother role to the "nth degree." This meant doing everything herself. The problem was that in so doing, she realized that she had missed the first two years of her son's life. With her husband's encouragement, she developed a script that was more suited to her own reality. Paige hesitated about having children because she was not sure that she could do a good job of being a mother and being a teacher at the same time. It was hard for her to let go of standards, but she realized that her children were her priority. Sally's story also informs us of the struggle to let go of perfectionistic standards. Polasky and Holahan (1998) found from their study of professional women with children that many mothers were reluctant to let go of responsibilities related to family roles. The authors discussed the persistence of the superwoman strategy of coping with multiple roles.

Some of the stories also point us to the fact that it is more than the need to do well that motivates the women to be good mothers. In her birthday cake story and her story about the matching sheet sets. Sally provides more insight. She talks about doing these things out of needing to conform to her mother's standards. Guilt shows through when she says that she had better have everything perfect in the house to compensate for the fact that she is out working. There are ambiguous messages from the culture regarding
mothering children, which are reflected in women’s guilt that they are falling short of expectations. They cannot follow the traditional script of their mothers because the expectation nowadays is that they work outside the home. The superwoman script is entirely unrealistic because they are sensitive to the needs of their children and to their own needs. This leaves them without a cultural script.

Women are forced to find a script that is based on their own realities in the absence of a viable script. However, Willard (1988) makes the point that without supportive social structures it is very hard. From the perspective of the participants in the study, it was easier for the women who had the support of a fully participating partner to make alternative choices about how they wanted to parent their children as working mothers. However, they do not feel the societal support for what they are doing, both from a practical perspective and from an ideological perspective.

The women may work out of necessity, but they also work out of choice. In a later chapter, it will become clearer that they work on attaining a balance, including their own needs as well as the needs of the family in their schedules. The women learned to include themselves in the circle of those for whom they care (Attanucci, 1988). They struggle through feelings of guilt, but they also find their own voice and define their own terms.

Mothers’ guilt

The fantasy of the perfect mother, according to Pope et al. (1990), is that she is the sole provider of her children’s emotional needs. Guilt is aroused in women when their adequacy in fulfilling traditional family roles is challenged (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). The researchers pointed out that although the women have added the role of wage earner, psychologically they have real difficulty in letting go of the culturally defined mother
role. The myth that the mother takes best care of the children is reflected in some of the stories. The nagging feeling that they might have been better mothers, and that they may look back and wish they had spent more time with their children is typical and illustrates how debilitating myths can be. At the same time, the women all acknowledged that they are better mothers because they work. They gain their self-esteem through their work and so are able to be better mothers to their children. These contradictory feelings are reflective of women’s internal struggle conceptualized by Levinson (1996) as the struggle between the “Anti-Traditional Figure” and the “Traditional Homemaker Figure,” between their own aims and the expectations of others.

The guilt feelings were centred on leaving their children in the care of someone else, a stranger. In no cases were family members available to care for the children while the parents were working. Herz (1997) noted that a woman who holds strong beliefs that she is the one best suited to raise her children suffers more guilt than those who believe that both parents hold responsibility. This distinction was not evident from the study. Continuing to feel insecure about being working mothers because of cultural myths about motherhood, as suggested by Willard (1989), would seem to explain the position of these women. Guilt remains a barrier to women who are in paid employment because they constantly have to work through contradictory feelings.

**Mothers can be powerful people**

In contrast to debilitating expressions of guilt, this statement made by one of the participants was extremely interesting and worthy of further exploration. Several of the women spoke about the variety of ways they felt that being a mother contributed in a positive way in the workplace. One referred to the “softer” skills, developed in
mothering, that helped her to connect with people and specifically contributed to her success as a manager. Another gave examples of how her skills as a mother enhanced her practice as a doctor, and another, similarly, as a teacher and yet another as a lawyer. There is an interconnection between the various aspects of their lives with no indication of being a different person at work than at home.

Richie et al. (1997), in their qualitative study of highly achieving women, also reported that several of their participants described how being a parent had contributed to their career success. The writers noted that the women’s expressive characteristics, such as relational orientation, and being sensitive, stood in sharp contrast to the rugged individualism often associated with male styles of achievement. The writers also noted that the women in their study did not have to silence their femininity to succeed in their careers. They achieved success on their own terms.

These women might be indicating a trend in workplace values. Writing a decade ago, Raugust (1992) promoted the value of feminist ethics in the workplace. Her argument was that the workplace would be enriched if co-operation, relationship, and interdependent nurturance were the kind of values engendered in workplace arrangements. The notion of maternal power in the mother-child interactions being translated into broader arenas was conceptualized by Sara Ruddick (1984). She posited that mothers develop intellectual capacities, make judgements, and affirm values in response to the reality of the growing child and that maternal thought, untainted by mothers’ social powerlessness, could be transformed to the benefit of communities. Ruddick adds that although maternal thinking arises out of mothering children, she views
"maternal" as a social category and so many women who are not mothers and some men express maternal thinking in aspects of their lives.

The interesting implication for women who are mothers is that rather than being discriminated against in the workplace, they could be recognized for the benefits they bring. Instead of motherhood being perceived in the workplace as an imposition, the particular skills they have to offer could be tapped. The thinking that men will work more continuously and be more effective and committed in the workplace (Gilbert et al., 1994) could become redundant as women demonstrate their power in their places of work. From the study, it is evident that women who are in a position to transform the skills they learned as mothers into skills that are beneficial in the workplace are also women who have a sense of their own power. They are women who have learned to live in their own terms. The women themselves are asserting their skills and values, and in turn, are gradually gaining increased respect in the workplace.
CHAPTER 7: DILEMMAS ENCOUNTERED

Although women make up an increasing percentage of the working population, the fact that they do have babies has never been really acknowledged in the workplace in terms of policy. Much as some companies purport to have family-friendly policies, they are often more in the form of tokens than really addressing the issues. In all of my conversations with Jan, she emphasized how hard it is to balance career and family, “I think it’s a tremendous toll on women.” There are inherent conflicts for women and men who are committed to their work and their families. Frequently, difficult choices and compromises have to be made between their ideals and realistic goals. Susan made the point:

The two most important things in your life, they happen together. What do you do? what a conflict. And no matter which choice you make, you will pay some price somewhere, I think, because I believe you are in a no win situation, rearing young children.

Another of the women, in referring to the home-workplace conflict, likened the workplace to a demanding child. “Which child is shouting the loudest?” The responsibilities of the home and of the workplace are both greedy of one’s time.

As we shall see from this chapter, we are still far from the situation where work and family complement each other. I shall start by looking at issues that are directly related to maternity and the workplace. Pregnancy is a particular time when the private sphere of the home impinges on the public sphere of the workplace. Returning to work after having a child is a particular time when the distinction between the two worlds can be highly obvious. The workplace tries hard to ignore children and under “the invisible
child,” I will look at the examples that the women gave of this aspect of their experience as mothers. I shall then explore the hard choices and compromises that working women often have to make when they have a child. “Juggling time” gets to the heart of the dilemma for working women, and the lack of time is exacerbated when there is no support at home. The chapter will conclude with some reflective comments on the obstacles and dilemmas that were encountered by the working women who participated in the study.

MATERNITY AND THE WORKPLACE

“You don’t get brownie points for having children”

At the time of our conversations, Nora was pregnant with her second child and so issues related to pregnancy and maternity leave were very much on her mind. She shared some of the issues that came to light in the context of her own experience of being pregnant in a company that supposedly has good family policies in place. The comments that she made reveal underlying tensions and attitudes around the inconveniences that pregnancy presents to companies:

There are legal parameters out there of what they can and cannot say to someone who is pregnant, but my boss’s reaction was very poor when I told him I was pregnant with my first child. His comments were that my timing was dreadful, and I was told, “You don’t get brownie points for having children.” What I said to him was “Actually I’m not in it for brownie points I know there is a cost involved, and we don’t want to move through our lives with no children.”

She had thought, in fact, that she had planned her first pregnancy so that it would cause the least inconvenience to the company. Nora believes that time off to have
children gives rise to such tensions because of the lack of policy concerning the
management of maternity leaves:

I think the corporation sees it as a huge inconvenience. There is a real price for
the company to pay. I don't think we do a very good job of succession planning
so there isn't necessarily a group of people waiting behind you to step into the
role you are leaving.

In fact, on the second occasion when we spoke together, there were only two weeks left
before she was going on leave. Nora was heading up a team that was about to launch a
new product, and still no conversations had occurred around the handing over of the files.

Perhaps because of the insecurity companies feel about an employee's
commitment when she has children, there are attitudes that result in women being
penalized if there are any doubts about commitment. With her first child, Nora chose to
take the full six months maternity leave for her own sake as well as that of her child. She
explained what she perceived as being the outcome:

On a professional level I did miss a promotion, and I missed it to a woman who
had taken basically three weeks off for maternity leave. She was seen as far
more committed than me plus her timing was better. I really think we have to
recognize that if we make a choice to have children there's a price to pay.

Again, commitment is seen in terms of hours spent on the job rather than the quality of
the work that is done, and the person's potential to do good work. This is reminiscent of
Sally's experience of her boss telling her that he did not pay women to have babies. She
saw this attitude as being very shortsighted, which neglected the fact that she had the
potential to earn the company a lot of money in the long run.
Nora describes the kind of predicament that women can be faced with when she talked about her second pregnancy, which was unplanned. The baby was due at the same time as the department that she manages was due to launch an extremely high-profile and important new product. “That’s a real issue for the corporation because you need the manager in the role to guide the team for the launch phase.” Nora described what it was like for her when this pregnancy was confirmed:

I had my husband come with me for a second blood test. I remember phoning him and telling him. And we went and sat in the Second Cup and I just cried my eyes out because it was just like I’m very controlled and I had everything planned and this wasn’t in my plan this soon. And I know what an impact it is going to have on my career. And I also felt that I would lose credibility, because here, she can’t even control her own cycles let alone a team of marketing people.

She could not feel joy in her pregnancy because of her distress that she had conceived at a time that was inconvenient to the company. She chose to inform her managers at once and at the same time to offer to step down from her position. Her two immediate bosses are younger men and they were supportive of her. Nora, however, heard later that the president of the company, an older man, said to them. “You shouldn’t put women in their reproductive years in these key roles in the company.” This statement is loaded with underlying feelings about the inconvenience of pregnancy to the company. Because of the polarization of the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of the workplace. it seems that when the private is brought into the public, as when a woman is pregnant, there is a lot of reacting because there has been insufficient discussion about accommodating maternity leaves.
Pregnancy is so much a part of the private world, "and yet here is a pregnant woman. she epitomizes the biology." The awkwardness of people in the workplace towards pregnancy and the petty and subtle ways in which her status changed is illustrated by a story that Nora told me:

I'm a manager with a company, quite well respected one day, and the next day I've got an associate, who's the level of the folks that report to me, yelling across the whole cafeteria place where you get food, "Are you peeing every half an hour?" I think that's so inappropriate, how rude, but it seems to be OK with a pregnant woman. I found people talking to my stomach all the time. Just funny people stuff, which you don't get offended by, but it's something that you do notice. And I remember going home to my husband saying, "I just feel like one day I had a brain and now I'm being considered that I don't."

Although Nora does not allow herself to be phased by the way others respond to her being pregnant, it is as if pregnancy is foreign to the culture of the workplace and it reduces the status of the woman. It provides an excuse for people to take liberties with women.

Because companies have not resolved maternity as an issue, it continues to be categorized as a disability. Women are placed at a disadvantage for taking time off to allow the body the rest it needs and to provide the infant with the nurture it needs. Nora described how pay scales work, highlighting the fact that because pregnancy is treated as a disability, every time the woman takes more than four months off in a year, she loses out on pay increments. Because a woman might take one, two, three, or four periods of maternity leave, it means that she can never catch up with a man whose career path is totally parallel with her own.
"When you've just had a baby it's about human qualities"

Jan took a maternity leave of four months after her second child was born. When she returned to work, her husband took parental leave. She enjoyed her time at home with the children and found the switch quite difficult. She shared with me an experience she had soon after she returned to work:

I came back to a crisis at work that was really difficult. I hadn't appreciated how hard it was for me, but I broke down my first weekend back. I had this weekend emergency meeting that had been called and I was not able to maintain my composure at the meeting and that's a very big deal for me. The issue that the meeting was about was very difficult in any event. And I think when you've just had a baby it's all about human qualities, nurturing, and caring, and loving, and being, and comforting, and then it was some very difficult decisions being made about a person in our organisation. She was judged very hard and some were taking the view that there's just no excuses. You make a mistake and there's consequences. I don't think people should ever be that unforgiving. I don't think life's lessons should ever be that hard. I don't believe in that.

It was as if being with her children for the period had brought her in closer touch with humanity so that the lack of empathy in handling the situation at work really jarred her. It was an emotional time for her anyway, and the insensitivity shown in the situation was particularly highlighted.

THE INVISIBLE CHILD

"They didn't know I had children"

Susan made the point that when she was being interviewed for her job, she purposely did not mention that she had young twins, and certainly not that she was a single mother. To have made mention of these facts would, she felt, have jeopardized her chances of being awarded the job. The workplace tends to hold the view that women who
are mothers are less committed to their work. There is the perception that they are less reliable employees because they are going to need all sorts of time off for their children. Employers guard against this by functioning as if people do not have these considerations. Sally suggested that the token acknowledgement of children is at the company picnic or the Christmas party.

Paige, whose children had health problems when they were babies and young children, would sometimes spend half the night in the emergency department of the hospital, but she would be at work the next day. The principal of the school where she taught would not have seen that as a reason for being absent. She described her situation in the following way:

Even though I might have been at desperation point, if I called in I would have had to pretend that I was ill, I would have had to lie. That's a horrible position to put yourself into. I had an awful principal who was a very cruel man and he used to frustrate me because he was an elder in his church, he was probably the most unchristian-like man I've ever met in my life. I remember one day I left his staff meeting early, by early I mean 5.30 p.m., the day-care closed at 5.30. The next morning, he was waiting for me at the front door. He chewed me out and said I would never walk out of the staff meeting again. And I remember being so insulted by that because I considered myself a very professional person and I never did it to be insulting, I did it out of need, it was a necessity. By letting my children interfere with my job, I wasn't being professional. I definitely felt like I was a lower class citizen.

Her children were interfering with her work. They were supposed to be invisible.

Even in working for a feminist organization, Jan made the following comments:

I work as though I don't have children. Probably four or five days a month I am out of town travelling, and I work probably a weekend a month, and I never say that I am going to need childcare. There is this expectation that I will take care of
it or have somebody in my life to take care of it. It's like what women do on Bay Street and I am doing the same thing working for a women's organization. It should be different.

Her words reflect a belief at all levels of society that childcare is the mother's responsibility. She went on to make the point that one of the main reasons for women's disadvantage is because they assume the majority of childcare responsibilities. If they do not, then who will?

Time actually spent on the job tends to be more valued than the quality of work done. Jan has run into adverse comments, even made by other women, because in working a compressed week and taking Mondays off whenever possible, she is seen as being less committed.

I usually don't say anything because I can't stand getting into that sort of rationalisation of how you work. Well, in fact, I work two weekends out of four or when I work for my four days, I work these hours. Well, even if I did work four days of the week from 9 to 5, the total lack of appreciation that I get up at 6 o'clock and we put our kids to bed by 8 or 8.30 and that's our day. And it really amazes me that this feminist fails to get that. And I work harder and I work longer than anyone else in my organization.

The emotion of both Jan and Paige is reflected in their words. They are deeply offended by the implications that they are less committed to their work because they have children.

In fact, from her observation of the women who work under her. Ann commented that young mothers tend to be more conscientious than other workers are. They know that from time to time they are going to need to take time off for an emergency, and that makes them very careful not to take advantage of the situation. Ann also knows, from her
own experience, the stress of facing an emergency such as when child-care arrangements fall through:

If your nanny is sick what do you do? How do you cope? How do you manage? For me, I have to rearrange my schedule two weeks in advance. I have meetings, I have things I have to prepare what to do, communications to get out, and so on. When my Nanny calls me at quarter to seven in the morning and says “I’m not in today, I’m sick,” right away the mind clicks in to over-drive. How will I cope? Can I afford to be home? Can my husband afford to be home? Who can give up their day? Can they go to school? Then who picks them up? And then who takes care of them between twelve and three thirty? And between three thirty and six? And how is it going to juggle around?

The best arrangements can be flawed. Back-up plans for last minute emergencies are not available, and it places enormous pressure on the individual, almost always the woman. As Sally commented, “It’s fine if you have your little career, but you make sure that you have taken care of your responsibility of the children first and foremost.” How much do these words reflect continuing cultural beliefs and assumptions?

Companies tend to be interested in their bottom line and so family considerations are of little interest, especially as they have no contingencies for dealing with them. Children are invisible.

HARD CHOICES: THE COMPROMISES THAT ARE MADE

“Work is very much like a child, it can be very demanding, and women have to decide which child they are going to spend their time with. Which child is screaming louder?”

Tracy captured in these words the dilemma that women face. The workplace, developed for the man who had a wife at home taking care of the children and all his domestic needs, could keep demanding more of his time. Because a man’s identity was
primarily his work role, this was sanctioned. In medical practice, for example, to work an eighty-hour week is common for a person who wishes to advance in his or her career.

This immediately places women or men who wish to parent children at a disadvantage in terms of career development. Because Tracy has a brother who graduated from medical school at the same time as herself, and because they are both in family medicine, the differences in their career paths are quite blatant:

I watched his role going through medicine and my role going through medicine. And he does the 80 hour work week, he does the committees, the meals where they talk about medicine, he writes books, he does drug studies, he does all that stuff. His wife is at home with the kids full time and does some of his paper work and that allows him a lot of freedom in medicine. Of course when you do that you don’t know the kids as well, but at this point in time, his resume is far more impressive than mine is, and that’s the choice, for both of us.

Tracy made the point that it is her choice to work shorter hours so that she can spend important time with her children. Nevertheless, she knows that she has paid a price in terms of her career because of her choice:

There are wonderful opportunities in medicine that come your way all the time, to do a teaching ward here, or to do a drug study there, or to write a book. There’s always things coming and you always have to fall back and revisit and say, ‘What are my priorities at this point, do I really believe in that still? No I can’t take this on.’ And there’s a lot of that revisiting.

In working closely with her brother, Tracy can monitor where her career would be now if she were a man. She is constantly faced with re-evaluating the choices she has made.

When he takes on innovative new projects, she has to re-look at her level of involvement. Her words reflect the struggle she goes through:
I have to see if this is another opportunity, is it my choice or not my choice, what is the cost of this? No, I mentally choose not to do this and he chooses to do that and that’s OK. But I have to acknowledge that this is an option for me and that I am taking another path. I have to work through that. My brother is a very dynamic person, a very active person. He’s always got lots of things going so there’s lots of these opportunities that come along, and so also they become opportunities for me because he’s so dynamic.

Because of underlying sibling rivalry, it has been hard for Tracy to become comfortable with the fact that professionally her brother has surpassed her, “It is something that I work with. I am almost there that I can truly validate my choice now.” Although within herself she knows her choice is good and right for her, she is daily confronted with the possibilities of a different kind of life. Fame and fortune have always had their allure, but having a simpler lifestyle and spending time with her children are consistent with her values. She rationalizes by telling herself that there will be another season for medicine.

Lorna, who is also a doctor, could point to a man in the restaurant that is senior to her but younger. Her comment was “My male colleagues who are the same age or younger are far more academically productive. Most of them have wives that stay at home.” She made the point that this also applies to her husband who is a participating parent:

I think in both of us, our careers have suffered because we have kids. The colleagues that I have that are male at the age of 33 and 35 have accomplished so much more than I have, they have presented more, and they have climbed the administrative ladder. And the same is true of my husband. He is not as published as some of his colleagues who have dedicated their life to medicine.
Both careers have not achieved the same brilliance as other colleagues have who are not married or who are not contributing to the marriage.

Nevertheless, she also could say:

I just have to look at our three kids and the fact that my husband and I have a fairly good relationship that OK I am just not as successful as they, and that took a while to come to grips with. I should have been promoted three years ago, but that would have been at a tremendous cost to my kids.

Lorna compromises by being as productive as she can be at the present time, while also looking at her life as a whole and realizing that overall she is satisfied. Although she took some time out to have children, and chooses not to work as long hours as colleagues at the present time, she will likely pick up speed when the children are a little older. In having more variety in her life, she may well have more energy to contribute longer than colleagues who have not had a break in their careers.

Of the lawyers in the study, the part of Sally’s story about how she and her husband compromised by forming their own partnership has been told. Jan and her husband settled for lower paying legal work which provided them with the hours and flexibility that they wanted. However, Jan makes the following point:

What I think happens is when the children grow up or whatever, notwithstanding the choices that he made which are similar to the choices that I made, he could re-enter much more easily because he’s a man. But my choices will be more long lasting, permanent. His are more transitional.

She made the point that women constantly have to work at establishing their credibility. She feels that as a lawyer, she is never fully accepted, but is constantly being evaluated; men’s careers are not like that.
The workplace as a culture is very slow to change. Women have been entering it in growing numbers over the last 30 or so years but the ideology of the workplace continues to perpetuate the myth that family life must accommodate employment. The fact that men and women have children is only recognized in token ways in the workplace. At the same time, as Sally said, there are still expectations in our society that if the woman is not taking care of the children, then who is? When she goes to a conference, people will ask her who is looking after her children. Her husband has never been asked that question. “A man can have a high powered job, a wife, and children easily. Not too many women can have a high powered career, and a husband. and children.” Women almost always have to make compromises.

Juggling Time

“Men have been trained to worry about who is going to bring home the bacon and women have been trained to worry about how it is going to be cooked”

When a couple has children, roles tend to become more polarized (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). Sally’s understanding is that because of the differences in the way men and women are socialized, their basic concerns are different. She is less concerned about bringing in the dollar and more about managing the home, whereas her husband’s basic concern is being out working. Ann expressed their basic concerns in the following way:

I think what changes when there are children for men and women is generally that I think a woman feels she has taken on an extra job. I think a man may feel he has taken on additional responsibility. I think he is much more concerned about security and being able to provide for his family.

Even where couples essentially share home responsibilities, women frequently assume responsibility for the smooth running of the home.
"It is juggling. There are so many things to remember"

Ann, like most other women, took on the added role when she had children because that was what she and her husband assumed would happen. She felt better trained in tasks around the house than her husband and with her ‘can do’ attitude, assumed she could do it all, despite having a job of equal value to his. Although Ann assumed a greater share of household responsibilities than most of the women in the study, all of the women mentioned being more efficient at multi-tasking than men are.

The juggling starts first thing in the morning for Ann. Before anyone else in the house is up, she is organizing the household before going off to manage her department at work:

I do the grocery list. I make a meal plan and I draw the grocery list from that. Then I have to remember which day will the baby-sitter do shopping, then I have to remember to leave a cheque. So I have several things I need to check in the morning. I have to check what’s in the fridge and what isn’t and what needs to be replenished. Then I have to remember which of the boys is doing what today. Do we need any sports equipment, do they have money, do they have their signed permission, whatever. I am thinking, OK now have we got all the baby sitters we need lined up for whatever events are coming up? When are the boys going to get their hair cut? When are the doctors’ appointments? Who is going to the dentist? When and how do we engineer that around their schedule and my schedule? So I start lists, then I have lists of lists, and then I lose my lists. It’s so complicated.

She sees others who appear to be much more organized and she wonders if she could have done things differently. "The truly great manager excels in getting people to act independently." The words reflect some second-guessing of herself. They sound good in
theory, but somehow in her family, others do not take the initiative and as she said, “When I do it I know it’s done.”

Sally also commented on being the one in the family who thinks of essential details:

I think when men come into work; they focus on their work. I think I don’t. I think of a lot of things even months in advance. And all of my lists. I mean I’ve been looking at my list of things to do and it involves a whole slew of things like I’ve got to get the accounts done, I have got to get my hair cut. I have to make an eye doctor’s appointment for my son, I have to call my friend because we have got to have lunch. I’ve got to call our lawyer because we are having a house deal close next week, I have to do an adoption. I’m looking at my list of things to do and it’s interesting what it includes, and I’m sure my husband doesn’t include this stuff in his list.

Like Sally, Tracy’s partnership with her husband is a very equitable one. but she attributes the differences in what men attend to as not so much being willful but as being in their nature:

I would say that when there’s hard tasks, a hard task is something that’s very evident like the laundry or dishes or bathing the kids, then it’s 50-50. But the soft tasks, which are getting the family’s birthday gifts, filling out the forms for school, that’s me. I honestly think that they don’t see it or understand it, or have been trained to do all these small things. My husband is good at doing what is big and obvious and what has to be done.

Because women tend to be better than men are at thinking of important details, it becomes part of their role. Then they are faced with the difficulty of keeping on top of things. Nora who also is in a sharing partnership noted:

You always have to think forward and you really don’t have a lot of down time. I mean you can have down time and say, “I’ll just take a walk down to Bayview.”
Oh, while I'm there I should probably just pick up a Fathers' Day card for his dad and my dad." And that's the kind of thing that you do and if you don't you are going to be in trouble. If you let that go for a week or two and don't think forward, then you will be in trouble, then you get behind. It's a real challenge.

Women may be better at multi-tasking, but as we can see, it places a tremendous burden on them to stay "on top of things." Even in the most favourable situations, women struggle. Susan mirrored the need to stay in control but, as a single mother, she has found her life very stressful:

You need to feel that you are in control otherwise it would be like taking a bathtub plug out. You can't afford to let that happen because there is that sense of how deep is it. How deep am I really in trouble here?

"You feel you are on this treadmill"

Feeling tired seemed to be a particular issue when the children were very young, and especially the memories the women had of returning to work after maternity leave were of chronic tiredness. When we first met, Jan had just returned to work after her second child was born. Although she has a husband who equally shares the home responsibilities she commented, "It's just very, very tiring. When you really want to have a career there are times when you feel you are on this treadmill and that you're going around and around and around and you're very tired."

She found mornings were particularly hard. Initially, they had a sitter come to the house. However, because she and her spouse have opted for low paying law jobs so that they can be more available for the children, they had to look for cheaper childcare. Consequently, they have to pack the children up in the morning and take them off to their respective places of care.
We started off with a nanny and that's great because you have got someone coming to your home. You leave and you come home and your child's bathed and fed and shiny, and now we ship them off to two different places and I thought I was going to die. That's one stress that I don't handle very well is that feeling I don't have time.

"Even fifteen minutes to sit in a chair and unwind"

Tiredness and a lack of time for herself characterized Ann's early experience with children. Ann found the transition from work to home very hard when the children were young. She spoke of needing time for herself and the difficulty in finding it, and she spoke about the lack of time to do important things.

Taking on the extra role of motherhood meant for Ann that life became little more than work, home, and sleep. "You do it, you have to do it" was how Ann described returning to work after her first child. Because her son was a poor sleeper, Ann would sometimes go to work on two hours sleep. She well remembered the tiredness. She had taken on motherhood as an additional role and at that time, she was also handling difficult situations at work.

I think it's just the chronic state that you are in. You don't even know you are tired. Many times I was just sort of plodding along, just a steady business you know. It's not that you work hard, you just work steadily, and you just keep going.

Wanting to maintain their standards in the workplace, and not daring to show signs that might be interpreted as weakness, women have to keep up appearances at all cost.

The transitions from home to work and work to home are not smooth for everyone. Switching roles and coping with the demands of small children after a busy day
at the office can be a source of stress. Ann shared her experience of coming home at night when the children were younger:

I would have the nanny work 7.30 till 5.00 which meant I came home, the kids were starving, they would be screaming. First thing that would hit me when I came in the door were these screaming kids. The nanny would just send them over and walk away and that I resented.

The boys were fine during the day and much as they were fond of the nannies, things were different when mummy came home:

They can hang in there through all sorts of things during the day, but in the evening when you walk in the door, now they are safe and more often than not, they lose it and all hell breaks loose. Screams and fights, they behave miserably and here you've been at the office all day, working hard, you're tired too and you come home to your sweet loving family. It's this place from hell you know.

People comment that it must be easy having a live-in nanny, but as Ann said, it is only until she comes home. Immediately, she has to switch roles and change her mode of thinking. She made the comment that if she only had a few minutes to sit and unwind it would make a difference.

With a need for time to herself, Ann at times felt resentful of the demands made on her. “From the minute I wake up to the minute I close my eyes, somebody wants something of me.” She reframes nights when she is unable to sleep as time for herself:

Some nights, I wake up at three in the morning and I can’t get back to sleep. I’m thinking about work, or one of the children is coughing or something and I used to resent that. Now, until an hour and a half or two later when I go back to sleep, that’s my time. I can read a book, I can read the newspaper, I can read the journals. It’s my time. I enjoy that time. If I can’t sleep, I read. It’s wonderful.
Adapting her image of an ideal family life, based on the good things that she remembered from childhood, Ann tries to orchestrate her family. This has become a vicious circle for her because now the family waits for her cues, and the more they rely on her, the less time she has to herself.

Even when I do sit down, everyone sees this as an indication to sit with me. It's not bad if I had planned it as a together time. If I have planned it as my own time to sit and read or sit and think, then it's not as good.

Having little time to call her own is very stressful.

"Life's too busy"

Several of the women mentioned with regret that they no longer have much time for friends. On this topic Ann said,

Life is too busy, things are changing too much. Other friends are equally busy. They are mothers with young children and working full time. I very much feel that we really lack that aspect of our lives because we can barely get together. It's such a task to organise our schedule. Everyone's too tired, you don't want to make a meal for everybody because you'll be exhausted.

There is a sense of life slipping by at a mad pace and those important things are being missed. Ann also felt strongly that because of a lack of time, aspects such as self-discovery and spiritual development were squeezed out. Tracy echoed the same thought, and this part of her story will be taken up later.

WHEN SUPPORT IS NOT THERE

Juggling time was an issue for everyone, but the amount of support was closely related to whether they felt they could stay on top of things. All of the women have good organizational skills, which helps them to structure their time. They are also mostly high
in emotional and physical energy. As we have seen, most of the women in the study either were in sharing relationships or at least had good support at home. Life was very different for Paige and for Susan, and their stories give us some insight into just how hard it can be for working mothers. In particular, the sense of terrible tiredness and loneliness comes across in their stories.

"You are tired right to the core of your being"

We pick up on Paige’s story at the time when she was contending with the extra burdens of a sick child, and a husband who could not cope with children who were very demanding. Their first child was born with skeletal problems and later, intestinal problems that were discovered to be a lactose intolerance. All this meant many doctors appointments and a lot of extra care. No sooner was this baby over the worst than she had a second child:

Oh my gosh, just a disaster. He was sick constantly, hospitalised three times, he nearly died the one time he was so ill. I remember staying with him at the hospital all night. I rarely missed work because of this. Occasionally I used to call in sick because I was mentally sick, just frazzled. You are tired right to the core of your being.

By this time, her husband’s frustration was showing and in the midst of her extreme tiredness, there was also loneliness. Although he was the one initially to want children, he did not have the patience for them.

Paige wanted to have a second child “because I wanted to take some of the pressure off the first child.” Her husband was very hard on their first child and consequently, “he was a really anxious and uptight little boy.” After the second child was born, the husband distanced himself from the family and she said, “I remember feeling
very empty inside. I didn’t feel loved by my husband because he was very distant and very cold.”

At that time, Paige and her husband decided to move house. They were in a little starter bungalow. He was spending their money on a boat, a fancy car and a motor cycle. She wanted a larger place to raise their boys. The move gave rise to added pressure financially and it was then that she almost reached breaking point:

When baby number two came and we moved, I had that unbelievable fatigue and then with that came the loneliness. I never ever thought of myself as depressed, but maybe I was a bit depressed too, but it was more of a loneliness and I felt as if I was searching, like this is it? That’s how I felt; drained and wasted and empty and why am I doing this, where am I going with all this?

She described those years, when the children were very small, as being the hardest in her life. Her husband was an angry man, sexually demanding, and she was afraid of him. All the emotional energy she had was spent in protecting her children from him. Her words, “When he left it was like I had died and gone to heaven” express the huge relief she felt when he finally did leave.

Trying to do everything in her job, in her home, and as a mother to the high standard she had set for herself, as she acknowledged, contributed to the tension in the family. It was clearly all too much for a man who came into the marriage with his own needs for attention. He became very angry and defensive and Paige felt alone and unsupported. The break-up was difficult. He fought over custody. There were times when he burst into the classroom where she taught to rant and rave. There were threats to kidnap the children, and she had to have a restraining order put on him. She recalled a conversation with his current girlfriend, a younger woman, who said that she did not want to have children because taking care of him
is a full-time job. For Paige, raising children alone was far less stressful than coping with a
difficult relationship.

"I was always exhausted and had to pretend so much that I wasn't"

For the first two years while her twins were babies, Susan lived with her mother. It was not an easy relationship and a distance from her job. She longed for independence for herself and her girls, and so she purchased a house. That, as she reflects, was when she took on too much:

I moved out of my Mum's house when they were two and came here and bought my own house. It may have been a mistake. I needed to get away from her, but I probably should not have got into the home-ownership, plus this job, plus the kids. My Mum, even though I took care of the kids, cooked, she did the laundry, I didn't have a house to look after, I had no idea, it's the house.

She was still in the midst of setting up the centre where she was appointed director, establishing new programs and hiring new staff. She explained that her work was exhilarating but also very draining. She described what it was like for her at that time:

I was always just exhausted and had to pretend so much that I wasn't. You know I remember coming in and having to run this place and very needy staff and lots of problems in the early years while we were just developing, and then going home.

Increasingly the stress became harder to handle. In her words, "I was a basket case. I didn't think I was going to make it. There were times I just wanted to die. It was the combination of twins, this job and trying to maintain a house, cook and clean." On top of trying to take care of all of these things, one of the twins was a very difficult child. She described the pain and helplessness she felt over this child:
I was beside myself. I really thought something was wrong with her. The only way I can describe her is she was a tortured soul. She broke my heart, just broke it in two and I didn't know what to do for her. And she pushed my buttons really badly because I couldn't help her.

There was no one she could turn to for help, and the situation overwhelmed her:

I remember feeling so strongly, "Why won't anybody help me?" I mean I can't even talk about that. "Why won't anybody help me?" And they wouldn't. Now I tried talking to my mom about the pain I was in, but she couldn't hear it. It was terrible, terrible. I really wanted to have a breakdown, but then I couldn't because of the kids. But it was like I thought, "Maybe that will get somebody's attention here, I am in real trouble." I did very well at times. People thought I did, that's that image. But in my heart of hearts, no way. Those kids should not have had to go through some of the things they went through with me. I didn't even know any young mothers. There was nobody that I could call to say, 'Come over, I need a cup of coffee and a chat' or whatever. I felt so alone in those early years when we just moved. I had no opportunity to meet anyone.

Outside support had always been Susan's source of validation and well-being. As a single mother, she felt the isolation. Living in a small town surrounded by families of mum and dad and kids, she still feels she does not really belong.

Susan made the point that she was acknowledged as being good at her job, and everyone thought she was a good mother. She managed well to mask the turmoil she was experiencing. As she said, much is expected of her because she is a woman. Those expectations went with her to the workplace.

I have a male co-ordinator here and he is a very smart guy. If you ask the staff, they would say they would prefer me over him because they feel I care more, and that's important to them. I think being female, I'm expected to care more. Whether I do or whether I don't, it's the expectations that I find are still very stereotypical. People have no idea that I really don't need to hear all these little
details, but it's almost like that's your job, that's what you do, you're here to support us. And maybe I have just had too many years of this, but I see my co-ordinator, they don't go to him, not nearly the same way as they come to me.

In feeling the burden of care, Susan became more aware of the lack of support she has herself. “Who do I go to? I am not allowed to break down here. I've got thirty two staff, I'm not allowed to be friends with them, so for me I'm very lonely.”

When Susan comes across situations where men have to make so little effort to be acknowledged, it makes her a little bitter:

I had an experience where I had been on a strategic committee and this was my second time presenting to the Church council. The Chair, he's a lawyer in town, I like him, he's a good guy, but it's like “He's the best chair we've ever had on this council and he's so great,” and I kept thinking, “It's so easy for you, it's so easy. You don't even have to work at it,” and I remember that thought going through my head. The minute that you find a half-decent male, people are all over him. You're smart and you're caring and you are with it and that's all you have to be in this day and age and people are almost on their knees with these men.

Susan feels that as a woman, she has to be all of those things and much more. This expectation that she can and should do everything that is stereotypically expected of her as a woman contributes hugely to the stress that Susan already experiences as a worker, as a mother, and as a home maker. She finds herself in a no-win situation. As a single mother, she feels that there is already a strike against her in terms of social roles. She feels obliged to make up for that by fulfilling expectations in other aspects of her role as a woman and as a mother.
REFLECTIVE COMMENTS

The uneasy relationship between maternity and the workplace

Maternity is at the heart of differences between men and women, and at the heart of women's disadvantaged position in the workplace. There is an entrenched public ideology that venerates motherhood and family (Vogel, 1990), which at the same time tends to "fix and hold women in the position of mothers, regardless of their deepest intentions and their conscious convictions" (Finzi, 1996, p. 164). When faced with issues of maternity, employers continue to struggle with appropriate policies, and in the meantime, female employees are left realizing that there will be a price to pay in terms of their career if they have children.

Nora gave us some insight into the range of emotions that she experienced when she was pregnant. In the last chapter, she described the wonderment of being pregnant and then in this chapter, she is brought down to earth by the negative reactions in the workplace. She gave us an idea of the dilemmas that women who are in high-powered jobs may face if they want to have children and still have a career job. Nora tried so hard to time pregnancies so that they would cause the least inconvenience to the company. Sometimes the best-laid plans do not work out, and she shared some of the responses from senior people in the company. Although two of her seniors tried to lend support, the fact was that the company's business would be disrupted by her maternity leave. The frustration on the part of the company comes out in the boss's "off the record" words that women in childbearing years should not be put in positions of authority. Of course, this statement represents attitudes that we had hoped were out-moded, but the reality is that in
the absence of good policies, men who hold senior positions frequently react out of traditional ideologies.

Vogel (1990) addresses some of the dilemmas concerning pregnancy. Companies generally class pregnancy as a temporary disability, as in Nora’s case, and Vogel discusses alternative ways of classing pregnancy, which have been put forward by feminists. Two alternatives described are special treatment and the equal treatment. The special treatment proponents abhor the idea of regarding pregnancy as a temporary disability because it stigmatizes childbearing “as a pathological departure from an implicitly male norm” (p.23). Instead, they argue that “women’s special needs can be accommodated within a framework that emphasizes caring and responsibility” (p.23). Wary of the consequences of treating pregnant workers differently from other workers, equal treatment proponents argue that rather than splitting employees by sex, any employees could have special needs. Childbearing is one of these needs “that must be accommodated in a society transformed to equally meet the special needs of all” (p.25).

Although the arguments of the equal treatment group sound compelling, the fact remains that it would probably be mostly female employees who would have the “special needs.” It is, therefore, likely that their opportunities for equal employment would continue to be impeded.

Nora described the no-win situation in which women find themselves. She wanted to do the best thing for herself and her child and take the full six months of maternity leave. By doing so, she was judged as being less committed to her work than colleagues who take a short maternity leave. Hyde, Klein, Essex, and Clark (1995), in their study of the effects of maternity leave on women’s mental health, found that in fact women who
took short maternity leaves (6 weeks or less) were at a higher risk for developing depression. In other words, companies may not benefit in the long term from encouraging short maternity leaves. Nora was very sure of what she wanted, as well as of her good standing in the company, and was willing to take risks in terms of her job to ensure the well being of herself and her child. Her competing role priorities means that she has other important considerations outside of her work role (Farmer, 1985). Because she was sure of her role priorities, she did not allow herself to be cornered by the imperatives of the workplace. However, at the same time, she realized that she would have to pay a price in terms of her career advancement.

As we saw from the last chapter, maternity can be a transforming experience through which women often develop a greater sensitivity for human values. Jan gave the example of returning to work after maternity leave and being upset by the unfeeling attitudes she encountered. Paden and Buehler (1995) make the point that conflict arises when expectations of personality characteristics are different at work from the characteristics displayed at home. The impression given by all of the women in the study is that they do not want to play the role of a different person at work. In an earlier chapter, Ann spoke about avoiding office politics because they are not consistent with her values, and Lorna and others gave examples of ways in which they take an attitude of care into the workplace.

Can women have it all?

Nowadays, high achieving women come into the workforce with the notion that they can successfully manage work and family life (McCrachen & Weitzman, 1997). Once they have children, however, they often experience conflict between their roles and
feeling overwhelmed by all that they are trying to do (Paden & Buehler, 1995). Employers sometimes doubt their commitment but, as Ann observed, women conscientiously try to do the best they can in all of their areas of responsibility. In fact, it has been found that despite their heavy responsibility for household work, women put at least as much effort into their paid work as do men (Bielby & Bielby, 1988; Ross & Mirowsky, 1992). Paden and Buehler (1995) found that women with young children tend not to limit their job responsibilities as a way of coping with role strain. The researchers speculated that this is perhaps because they worry about being perceived as uncommitted employees. However, they sometimes have to make hard choices in terms of their careers.

In Tracy’s story, she compares herself with her brother who follows a traditional type of career path, even with a wife at home doing his paper work. Medicine is a profession that is very traditional in its expectations of doctors, with long hours and high commitment to the job being a part of the profession. Tracy explained how she chose to take a different career path, one that is no less in terms of commitment, but is more realistic in terms of working hours. It allows her to accommodate to the needs of work and family, but it precludes her from reaching the same level of achievement. Although she knows she has made good choices, she nevertheless continues to experience some feelings of loss around what she might have achieved. Women who are not prepared to follow the traditional male career model still are at a disadvantage in the workplace.

It should be added that in making compromises, the women seemed to feel that there was really no choice. Developing relationships in the family was preferable to being single-minded about their careers and it was something that was a given. This primary
focus is reminiscent of the work of Gilligan and her colleagues who argue for the importance to women of maintaining relationships and connection (Gilligan 1982).

Some of the participants noted that despite role sharing, home responsibilities are still the basic concern of women, and they are the ones who are most likely to think in terms of what needs to be done at home. Because these tasks are part of women’s traditional family role, the point is made that they still tend to be experienced as more obligatory for women and voluntary for men (Larson et al., 1994), and particularly when it comes to who takes principal responsibility for young children (Tingey et al., 1996). Women are the ones, therefore, who juggle multiple roles which, according to Tingey et al., frequently lead to work-family conflict and role overload. Women’s ability to hold multiple roles has been seen in terms of simultaneous thinking as opposed to sequential thinking (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). This tends to translate into being expected of women. Although Gager (1998) makes the point that husbands seem to be able to multi-task at their paid work, it may well be that in fact women are much better at it.

The women gave examples of orchestrating the household. Although women have the reputation of being able to hold more details in their minds than men, in fact they had to work at it. They tend to be very organized women and so they would work with lists. Even those who are in functional sharing relationships found themselves to be the ones to take care of the day-to-day details. They would always be thinking ahead because it was very important to them to stay on top of things. Williams et al. (1991) found that juggling was not detrimental to women, but stress develops when a person lacks a sense of control over the demands of multiple roles (Duxbury et al., 1994; Tingey et al., 1996).
It was the constant demand; the feeling that she always had to respond to someone who needed something of her that gave rise to Ann's role strain. It seemed to be this chronic situation that wore her down. Ann retained many of the traditional responsibilities of women in the home, and although she did receive help from her husband, she may, according to Polasky and Holahan (1998), experience intrapsychic conflict concerning her perceived responsibilities. The researchers found that the sources of the conflict were the expectations women have for themselves and also the standards she believes others have for her. This stress is in part ameliorated when there is good support. For Ann, her life improved when she started to involve her husband much more in family affairs and began to expect him to fulfil his role as a parent.

Can women have it all? Would it be unrealistic and overly optimistic to expect to be able to do it all as Polasky and Holahan (1998) suggest? One point that is clear from the study is that these women do not want to be assimilated into a white male career world which is based on old-fashioned notions of the male as provider with few other family obligations. They do not want to lose their identity as women and as mothers. They want to do it in their own terms; however, they are still functioning in a white male world. This presents a huge dilemma. It forces them to make compromises and to juggle roles. There would seem to be a strong association between the extent to which roles are shared at home and the stress experienced especially role overload. This result is consistent with the findings of Bolger et al. (1989) that the marital dyad acts as a protection from multiple role demands, and of Deater-Deckard and Scarr (1996) who reported lower levels of parental stress when the father shared or did most of the childcare.
The dilemma of trying to do it alone

Two of the participants shared some of their difficult experiences of trying to have careers and children without a supportive relationship at home. Paige was in an unhappy marriage in which she did not feel supported. Deater-Deckard and Scarr (1996) found that the largest correlate of parenting stress was the lack of emotional support from the spouse. In Paige’s case, she felt very isolated and became quite depressed. She did not have a husband who could cope with the stress and be a partner, and in fact, he became more of a problem than a solution.

Although much is written about the stress of being a single parent, it is generally in terms of economic hardships. Susan was trying to cope with too much to do and no real support. Her situation was exacerbated by the fact that she has twins, one of whom was going through emotional problems, triggering feelings of helplessness in Susan as the mother. Folkman et al. (1986) suggest that at work it is easier to regulate emotional responses and at home it is sometimes hard to rationally problem solve. As Lococco (1997) pointed out, single mothers take the dual role of “good provider” and “good mother” and as she found from her study, the stress can be enormous. Lee and Duxbury (1998) emphasized that the lack of both instrumental and emotional support makes it hard for single mothers to cope. The number of unmarried women who undertake motherhood is rising (Johnson, 1988), whereas the dual career couple, with parenting being a joint activity, is becoming accepted as normal. Again, this places unmarried mothers outside the norm.

In summary, the dilemmas that these working mothers are dealing with are rooted in the unchanging culture of the work place. The women have become a part of an
institution that is based on notions of clearly defined social roles, of which the breadwinner role is the most prestigious. They may enjoy their work and invest considerable time and energy into their jobs, but their reality is that they do not want their work to consume all of their time and energy. They have other aspects to their lives that are equally important. They are attempting to find new ways to accommodate work and family life that the workplace is not yet ready to accept. The hope is that as they and other men and women with similar values demonstrate the benefits of lives that are more balanced, there may be a greater acceptance of and movement towards alternative ways of organizing the workplace.
CHAPTER 8: ACCOMMODATING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE

The purpose of this chapter is to step back from the craziness of day to day living and to look at the larger picture of how the women seek to make sense of their lives. The cohort of women, whom the women in the study represent, is carving out new contexts for themselves. They are evaluating their social learning and integrating elements of it with the reality of their own lives and thereby creating new models. For the participants in this study, motherhood caused a shift in their thinking, bringing about a change in perspective, and forcing them to evaluate the work and home balance. Based on their beliefs and values, the women in the study engaged in a process that involved consciously letting go of many of the expectations that were a part of their socialization. It involved being clear on their priorities so that they were not just responding to whatever and whoever was shouting the loudest. Balance was a term frequently mentioned as a goal they were seeking to attain. Leading a balanced life was understood as incorporating important elements into their lives in the proportion that was fitting at that time and feeling content with how their lives were unfolding.

In this chapter, I will explore how the women in the study manage to accommodate work and family and thus shape their lives in their own terms. We already have the background of the part early influences played in their lives, of how the women shaped their careers, and formed partnerships that would be supportive. We know something of impact of motherhood on them and the dilemmas they encountered as mothers. In this concluding chapter of the findings from the study, I will highlight the process the women went through and continue to go through in order to accommodate important aspects of their lives.
The themes that emerged from this part of the analysis are: learning to let go of non-essential elements, continually prioritizing as an organizing tool, attempting to find a balance in their lives, and seeking out good childcare. I will then conclude the chapter with some reflections on these findings.

**LETTING GO**

Letting go was a term used by several of the women to describe the constant and realistic evaluation of what is important in their lives. In sharing their experiences on this topic, they spoke of letting go of trying to do too much, and of letting go of career ambitions or putting their career in a holding pattern for the time being. Some also spoke about paring down their lifestyle so that they could spend more time with their children and thus less time earning. The guilt they feel as mothers is always present. Once they let go of its debilitating aspects, they were more able to follow their own dictates and do what in their hearts they felt was right for themselves and their families.

Because of their socialization, women tend to assume that they can take care of their jobs, their homes and their families. The women had the examples of their mothers who, although they did not necessarily have jobs, in fact did seem to take care of everything. They picked up a work ethic directly and indirectly while they were growing up. Paige never knew what it was like to relax. Susan internalized her mother saying, "Busy children are happy children." Sally remembers her mother just being able to take care of everything. They therefore had a certain schema that they took into motherhood. In addition, the women had high standards. Phrases such as, "I had to be a good mother and a good worker," "When I do the work I do I like it to be done properly," and "I want to be good at everything" illustrate a certain drivenness and an identity based on always
doing well. Consequently, these women put their best into everything they do. However, the toll tells when they try to apply these standards to too many aspects and they find themselves being overwhelmed. The letting go is about letting go of the excesses and letting go of thinking that they are the only ones who are going to do the job right.

"I have been able to let go a bit of that superwoman role"

Following the example of her mother and grandmother, Paige thought that part of her role in the home was to do all sorts of jobs like canning, bottling, and sewing her own clothes. She had internalized doing these things as being part of being a good homemaker; consequently, she struggled about giving up these things when she had children. She also, however, wanted to give her children some of the attention she felt was lacking in her own experience of growing up, and this became her priority. It forced her to see that some of the tasks that she was doing she did not realistically have the time to do. Further, she always felt that she had to keep a perfect home. It took longer for her to let go of the excesses around being tidy and organized, but, as she explained, “Part of it is that I don’t like feeling drained and tired.” This letting go has freed her up to do other things in her life:

I know my home is very clean and very organized, I like it that way, but I am not a clean freak any more. I used to spend too much time worrying about the house. I had a girlfriend who used to nag me to go out with her and she would say, “Every time I call you you’re cleaning, this is ridiculous.”

Now she goes out with a friend and does some fun things. Although she says that at work she is as organized as ever, she no longer does needless extra work. “When I would write up a lesson plan I used to re-write it neatly. I can live with some scribble as
long as I can read it.” She said, “I get a little bit driven at times and worry that I’m not being productive enough,” but she recognizes this inner critic as being the voice of her mother or grandmother and it no longer controls her life. There was a self-confidence and a self-awareness about Paige that seemed to be because she now makes conscious choices rather than feeling driven.

The letting go has not been the letting go of high standards the women set for themselves, rather it has been the letting go of needless extras so that they can direct their energy into important areas. Sally likes to do what she does well and sometimes, as she compares herself with others in her job as a lawyer, she is aware of the burden she places on herself:

When I am up at four o’clock in the morning working on a case, it’s because everything has to be just right. I know that the person who is going to be in court next to me is probably sleeping in right now, because it is not such a big deal for him.

However, she used to find that her perfectionism took over, particularly around the home. A home project would easily get away from her and she would find herself running around over something that was not really important. She said that she is now learning, “Even if it does rear its ugly head, I can usually back off it.” Separating the important from the unimportant is an aspect of letting go. Sally said, “When you make that basic acceptance that you can’t do it all, then the rest falls into place.” Once she had let go of thinking that she had to be a superwoman, she was free to make other choices.

The challenge for Lorna was to let go of her need to be the one “to fix” everything. At home, she allowed her husband to take his share. At first, it had to be done
in her way. Over time, she has recognized the importance of letting go of the control and allowing him to parent in his way. She provided the following example:

When I get home now he has this beautiful gourmet supper ready that the kids had contributed to. They have the muffins cooling, the house would be all organized. And it has really evolved because before, the house would be bedlam, the kids would be in their jamies and there would be pizza. And so we have come a long way and I think a lot of it has to do with him but a moderate has to be that I finally let go, that it didn't matter any more.

In her work, also, Lorna liked to be in control, but she found that people did not necessarily conform to what she had in mind:

That was the biggest lesson I had to learn was that there are some things you can't fix. And I had to get the same rewarding feeling of contribution from just helping them to help themselves and if they didn't want help, then that was their prerogative and I wasn't going to be able to fix it all.

At home and at work, Lorna has let go of feeling that she is the one to manage everything and as she said, "Before I tried to do everything and work these disadvantaged hours."

When I spoke with her, she gave the impression of feeling very much in control of her life. She attributed this to feeling more secure in herself.

Guilt was a factor which all of the women recognized in themselves, and which was also highlighted in an earlier chapter. As already discussed, it seemed to be largely related to the fact that they felt they were not always living up to the "good mother" image as it has been defined by the culture. It was particularly manifest when their children were small and associated with leaving them in the care of someone else while they were so young. When they see their children happy and content with the people who look after them, they seemed to let go of the worst of the guilt. Sally summed it up when
she said. “I’m at a good point right now, the letting go and the lack of guilt that I felt for a long time.”

PRIORITIZING

Part of the process of letting go is to take stock of oneself and to think about and formulate priorities. Before having children, it is typical to underestimate their impact on our lives. It is only as we experience motherhood that we find how all encompassing it is. We tend to respond either by minimizing the impact of motherhood by carrying on almost as if we did not have children. Or we undergo a shift in our thinking that forces us to revisit our values and to find new and creative ways of incorporating the important aspects of our lives. Because being a career woman and a mother demands so much time and energy, prioritizing was viewed as being essential to the women in the study in terms of organizing their lives.

“An individual's energy is a finite resource”

Tracy realized that holding ambitions as a doctor would upset the fragile balance between work and family life while the children are young. She described her process of prioritizing as one of frequently re-visiting her values and deciding what is really important to her at this moment. She puts her life in perspective by being aware of a wider context and she speaks of her concerns about the society in which we live which she believes is unhappy because some important elements are missing:

Our society, at this point in time, is very economically oriented at the cost of so many things: our interactions with each other, societal networks, the problems that we are having with the children, with crime. All these things are because we are not balanced and we are not caring in the right areas. Just as in individuals,
there is a tendency to be divorced from our inner voices our society has lost its voice too.

It reminds her that she needs to make choices that are based not on economic principles, but on principles of care. In re-visiting these values, she knows that her decision to spend less time in her medical practice and more time with her children is the right one for her now. Nevertheless, the struggle she went through to reach the point of being able to make this shift is reflected in her words:

Partly it was to make that conscious decision that family was the most important at this time. And even though I would see things happen around me, opportunities for education and growth and experience, and making a better income, that sort of thing, that I had to actively choose. But it has taken a while for that to gel. Finally, a light went on the other day when I was on one of my days off. I was taking the kids in the wagon to the park and we had a lunch and I was thinking, “It would be really nice to have a big yard for them to play in,” but that’s not where we are at this point in time. I chose time as opposed to the possessions. And then I realised on the way home we were the only ones in the playground, and I was with my kids on a beautiful spring day, spending time with them and I had gotten exactly what I wanted and it took me, BING this is what I want.

Feeling at peace within herself in the choices she has made is as a result of carefully thinking through her priorities at this particular time in her life.

Because family is Tracy`s priority at what she conceptualizes as this season, it does not mean that she will not come back to medicine as her priority, or art, which is her other passion, as her priority in another season. Nor does it mean that art and medicine are not important to her at this time. Mindful that her energy is a finite resource, she
decides what she wants to achieve in these and other important areas of her life during this season of the children.

"It's not until you actually have your child that things start to shift"

Sally made this point in reflecting on her own experience. It was only after having a child that she realized that her priorities regarding work and family changed. "I think you have to make a conscious decision of where your priorities are going to lie." Sally’s and her husband’s choice to be in a partnership together as lawyers was because they knew that family would be important for both of them, and flexibility in her work would be desirable. It was not until she was a mother, however, that she realized the extent of her priority shift. Her work needed to accommodate her children. She said, “I am content coming to work but I know that my children need to spend time with me so I pare my work to do that as well.” She points out that most women in her profession do not have the opportunity to make the kind of choices that she can make. She is in a position to make those choices, however, because she and her husband knew where their priorities lay and they created a life that would accommodate their strong values around family.

Lorna, as a doctor who works long hours and has three small children, at one time had difficulty in saying “No” to requests from people. She has found a way to manage her time by adopting the Covey (1989) model. Through this model, she sees her life in terms of four quadrants. These quadrants are the important and urgent, things that she needs to attend to; the urgent, usually someone else’s agenda but not important to her; the important, like family activities and lastly, those activities that are neither important nor urgent, which she sees as being all the things that other people get her to do. She said, “It’s really good now. I have organized my life and I think to myself OK what quadrant
activity is this?” She now filters requests and evaluates whether she is spending appropriate time in a particular quadrant. While recognizing that she needs to stay on a competitive edge in her work, she also tries to stay in tune with family needs. Shortly before we met the second time, she had a situation with her daughter. She explained it in the following way: “It was really important for me to tip the balance there and walk in the personal quadrant for a while just so that I could be there for her.” Because she is an adaptable person, and has the emotional energy to have many tasks on the go at once, Lorna is able to move with ease between the quadrants. Seeing her life in this way helps her to accommodate to situations as they come up and be comfortable to be in a particular quadrant for a while. It gives her a sense of confidence that she can manage her life and make some choices.

When I first saw Ann, she said she had two priorities, her work and her family. She manages this because of her ability to compartmentalize.

I do my work when I'm at work and I deal with my children when I'm at home. I don't really take work home, there's no point, I'd never get to it anyway and by the same token, I don't think about my children during the day, that's what the nanny's for and so they're two very separate worlds.

However, between our conversations, although work was still very important to her, it became obvious that her children were taking a more central place in her life. She was looking at possible ways of spending more time with the children. Priorities change and as several of the women indicated, they need to constantly and consciously re-evaluate what is most important at that time.
STRIVING FOR BALANCE

Balance is a term that is much used when thinking of life-style. Most of the women referred to balance as being a goal to keep their lives on track. In working towards balance, they felt a sense of control and purpose in the daily rush of their lives. In this section, I will explore women's experience of balance under the themes that emerged from the stories. Sally's experience and understanding shed some light on the old dichotomy of balancing and juggling. Balancing is also about making room for the important elements of a person's life, and Lorna's struggle to reach the place of feeling she has achieved this balance provides an example. In trying to attain balance, several women commented that nurturing the partnership and allowing time for themselves were aspects most likely to be neglected. Nurturing the partnership has already been discussed in the chapter on the relationship, but including themselves in their care will be discussed. It has already been mentioned that children play a role in helping women and men to keep their work in perspective. Jan has a story that illustrates this theme and Sally and Nora provided further examples. Some women highlighted finding a stronger sense of themselves as women and as mothers, and the role of spirituality in balance was particularly addressed by Tracy. Common to all is the evolutionary aspect of balance and the conscious effort involved. The section will end with a brief commentary on Susan's understanding and experience of balance.

"Sometimes it's juggling but most times it's balance"

Being very clear on her priority of a good family life, Sally purposefully created a life-style in which she could have a reasonable balance between work and home. She was aware too that overall balance meant time for herself and time to nurture the relationship
with her husband. She acknowledged that on a daily basis balance did not happen, but that looking at it over a longer term was more realistic.

I think I have just reached the point where I don’t get frustrated as much by the constant balancing and juggling. It’s something that you are going to have to accept if you are going to have a job outside the home and you are going to be a mother, and a conscientious mother. I mean you can have children and not care one way or another. Sometimes it’s juggling but most times it’s balance. Some weeks it’s a wild crazy doing everything. Balancing, things felt under control.

Sally suggests that this shift between juggling and balancing is a fact for women who are conscientious both as mothers and as workers. Accepting this ebb and flow takes the edge off some of the guilt and pressure that she used to feel.

Sally also learned that it is important not to be caught up in attempting to lead a balanced life on a daily basis. She looks back over a period to reflect on whether there has been a fair balance between her work, her children, her husband, and herself:

So it’s not every week that everything is balanced perfectly, but I think overall, maybe at the end of the year I can look back and say, “OK, there was a fair balance in the year of all these different things.”

In having a more relaxed approach to attaining balance, she can accommodate to the fluctuating demands of the different aspects of her life. In order to reach that place, she talked about repeatedly having to make a conscious effort, particularly in terms of time she allowed for herself:

I think like everything else, you have to make time. You put it on your list of things to do, but I think we make more a conscious effort to do that. I don’t think it even occurs to my husband when he goes to the gym on a Friday afternoon that now he is spending me time or quality time with himself. I think he just does it, I think he just says “I feel like working out, so off I go.”
The distinction that Sally made between herself and her husband regarding doing things for herself reflects the difficulty women often have in including themselves in their care. Other women also made mention of this fact. Juggling and balancing seem to be terms that are reserved for women. It is something they learn to do as mothers taking care of young children, putting the needs of the child first. Men, on the other hand, tend to have a more pragmatic approach to life. Her example illustrates this different approach, which has the implication that there is someone at home taking care of other aspects of life.

"Striving to get the balance of being there for my kids, being there for the job, being there for my husband and being there for myself"

Lorna talked about these four aspects of her life as being the primary ones that she needs to pay attention to. There is also the aspect of community involvement which she did not mention in this context but which she brought up at a different time. This is the balance about which she was referring when she said that maintaining balance in her life was her priority. It has been a very conscious effort for her to reach this place. She attributes being able even to talk about balance to personal changes, and talking things through with her husband to keep herself on track. At the time of our first meeting, a job opportunity had just come up that would have been a promotion. Lorna had to think carefully about how it might upset the balance that she had worked hard to achieve. In a new job, she would have to give extra time to establish herself. She said:

It's a difficult time for me because I really don't want to upset the apple cart. If there's going to be one commitment and dedication in my life, it's going to be to keep this balance. Even if it's a different career path, I am going to preserve this as my number one.
The recognition that her work needed to be contained has meant that she has not achieved as much in her field as she might have otherwise done, and that piece of Lorna’s story has been discussed. Balance became her priority.

“If you allow yourself into that group of people that have to be cared for, then you do it”

Some women spoke of needing time to themselves to do independent activities, while others spoke of the time for themselves as being extra time with their children. Nora, as the newest mother, spoke about her husband encouraging her to spend an evening a week doing something with her friends. She felt, however, that it would take valuable time away from her daughter. “I would come home and she’s in bed and I haven’t seen her. And the ultimate sacrifice is you look at it and you say, I really get two hours a day with her, that’s all.” She explained that her husband, working in a downtown location, could go to the gym at lunchtime. She does not have the same option and is not willing to give up her time at home in the evenings.

Ann has been a mother for six years and not only does she have her job and her family, but she also has an aging mother with whom she needs to spend time. She is keen to get into outdoor activities involving all the family. She and her husband had been out hiking at the weekend and they both found it very enjoyable. She also sees spending some time on herself as a priority. On the second occasion when I saw her, she was taking a self-assertiveness course that she wanted to do for herself to help her to handle difficult people in her job. By the third time when I saw her, the children were becoming a little more self-sufficient and her husband was more involved with them. She had begun to take an architectural course that was totally unrelated to her work and was purely for
interest. She felt that with all her commitments and responsibilities, doing something for herself provided some balance in her life. She also makes time at work to exercise. “It’s something I’m doing for me. I feel better for doing it and I just make time.”

When I asked Tracy how she knew if her life was in balance, she responded in the following way:

I use subtle signs with my health when I need to change things and the time for me. One of the strengths and the weaknesses with medicine is you learn to focus and turn everything out while you do what you have to do, that’s how you get through college, that’s how you get to do difficult jobs. But while you are on that path, you learn to not listen to a lot of important voices. It has a cost and you have to retrain how to listen to the other voices again.

The discipline of listening to her inner voice has been a part of Tracy’s personal growth and something that is becoming increasingly important to her.

“The children provide the balance for me”

Jan emphasized the difficulty of finding balance in her life while the children are very young and she is working long hours at her job. Having a partner who shares the home responsibilities enables her to survive, but mostly she does not feel that she is balancing at all. She spoke about the role her children play in helping her to find balance within herself. She gave an example of her experience at an out-of-town conference that she recently attended:

In that conference I was beside myself. I needed to be home and I realised that when I was with the children for a couple of hours it was like I got filled again. I’ve come to realise that they really provide my balance for me, my saneness, my perspective and when I don’t have them I am really out of whack. At the end of the day, it’s a job and yet it can take over very easily.
Having a sense of perspective about her work is an essential part of attaining some balance and she commented that she is learning to be more compartmentalized about her job. When she is there, she is focused on her work, but she leaves it behind when she comes home. Again, she attributed the ease of transition to the children:

> It is not an option for you to come home and just be in a complete fit because of what happened at work. You can't do that to them, you just can't. And it's healthy to get to a level, it's such a basic level, you're reading or talking and they demand that you are there.

It sometimes requires conscious effort to put her job into perspective and as Jan said, "Some days are better than others."

Sally also talked about the children helping her to keep in perspective aspects of her life that are important.

> If I have had a stressful day, it's a pleasure to come back to just the simple things of making a bead necklace, that we were doing last night, out of painted macaroni. Really not day-to-day changes but it has a profound effect on how you look at things and how you look at other people.

At work, too, she spoke of always having an awareness of the children at the back of her mind, which helps her to keep her work in perspective. Nora echoes this thought, and it is also her husband’s experience:

> When I'm in a very stressful situation and I'm not sure if I have things in perspective, I just think quickly about our daughter or something that she's done. And it puts my whole life back into perspective for me quickly and then I can move forward with more confidence in whatever it is. And he said the same thing to me because he said before he'll go into court and he will be nervous, he'll take a mind trip and think, 'Wasn't it funny when she said such and such yesterday,
and he says for him it brings him back down. He walks in with more confidence because it just doesn’t seem to be as big now.

Being able to keep work in perspective is an important aspect of balance. Nora went on to say:

In my working life, I feel I am much more confident and I’m not as insecure about the role my job takes in my life because I have it more in perspective now. If I lost my job, I don’t think I’d be near as devastated as I would before I had the kids, that I have another role outside of what I am doing at work.

Having this other aspect of her life that is at least as important as her job is a source of empowerment. As Ann said, “Work is an aspect of my life but not all of my life.”

Having children has led to women and men containing their work in other ways. For example, both Lorna and Jan work long hours, Lorna as a physician and Jan as a lawyer. Both women make sure they take long holidays to coincide with the children’s holidays. Lorna explained that when she does not work, she is not paid. Therefore, she works extensive hours through the winter so that she can be off over Christmas, at March break and then five weeks in the summer when her husband also takes time off. Jan said:

My timetable, even though it’s horrendous, is completely within my control. I took a month in the summer and I will probably take another couple of weeks at Christmas. My guess is that I will probably have seven or eight weeks of holiday this year just because I make sure that happens.

“I am in a good place now”

The search for balance has also involved self exploration. To find balance in their lives, the women have found balance within themselves. The processes are interwoven. In letting go of some of the constraints of their socialization and through making choices
that resonate with deeply held values, they have found their power as women and as mothers.

From the pieces of her story cited in this section, we can see how Sally has evolved to the point where she can now say that she is in a good place now. She knows that her life is on track when she feels a contentment that she described in the following way:

It's something as basic as waking up in the morning and feeling that things are OK, wanting to get out of bed in the morning, wanting to come into work, wanting to spend time with my family, enjoying my husband.

Jan used those same words “I am in a good place now” to describe how she felt. She has created a life in which she enjoys a good partnership with her husband, and she has two children who are basically happy children. Also, she is in a job where she is making a worthwhile contribution as a social activist. She commented that she has not fundamentally changed but that her life has come together in such a way that she feels very good about it.

Feeling more secure in themselves was echoed by several of the women. Lorna spoke about feeling more secure in herself through her struggle of letting go of her need to be in charge. She adopted a model that enables her to accommodate important aspects of her life. She can accept that in her desire to care for people, she can not fix every situation and she can accept that she is not always going to be able to please people. She seemed confident about herself in all of the aspects of her life. Putting her work in perspective has made Nora more sure about herself. Motherhood has increased her confidence and has given her a sense of power that has added to her competency at work.
Paige also found her confidence in motherhood. Through her need to defend her children from their angry father, she found a power and strength within herself that was transforming. She has since married a man who is much more of a partner to her and she commented that she no longer has the empty feeling that she had when her life was so hard. Ann’s life too has evolved in a different direction since she had children. Coming through a period of frustration when she first had the children that life was not turning out as she had hoped, she found that she could make changes that would lead her life to a better place. By orchestrating family activities and encouraging her husband to participate more in the care of the children, she is feeling better about her life.

“To re-supply that checking account, meditation works and exercise works”

Since Tracy had considered being a minister in a church, I asked her how important spirituality is in her life.

It is something that I found is a very important part of my daily life. And as the workplace came in and other things that are important, it got pushed aside so I would say that it hasn’t had the chance to grow. I realise it’s something that needs far more attention than it’s getting. Being in medicine and being a parent you’re care-giving. You spend your mornings in intense care giving and your evenings in intense care giving. In order to re-supply that checking account, meditation works, and exercise works and those are the two things that I have found consistently will replenish in a short period of time, will give back. And I think we would probably be an awful lot happier if we knew how to walk with our spirit in our day to day existence far more, while peeling the carrots, while dealing with a difficult patient. Sometimes that’s the one thing that can keep you from getting exhausted and burnt out and saying, “I just really don’t want to deal with this” is calling into that spirit because not only does it ask more of you, it also gives you the tools to stretch that little bit farther.
Tracy is well aware of the importance of spirituality in her daily life but again, finding the personal space for it to develop is hard.

"It all comes down to balance and that's so difficult to achieve"

Susan commented that people would say that she had achieved both a successful career and a successful family. Her children are bright and very involved, she commands considerable respect in her work, and she is also very involved in the community. On the face of it, everything looks fine. Susan, however, looks beneath the surface and says that everything is far from fine. As a single mother, she looked to the church for support, and she found it for a while in a group run for single mothers. But then she was asked to run the group and that tipped the balance. Instead of receiving some replenishment for herself, she was again being asked to give. Now she finds that she is also helping out with the choir and the Sunday school. When I asked her if she felt she was taking on more than she wanted, she said:

"How much do you bring on yourself because of your natural ability? Almost we are trained into it and it's almost as difficult to back out of it as it is to do it. It's like at home. The house is a mess but it's my own fault for not being consistent with my girls. We're a family and we need to be sharing in this but I haven't and it's left up to me."

It is hard for her to let go of needing to live up to expectations, and the desire for recognition that comes from the work she does for the church. At home, she knows that to stay on top of things she would need to be very disciplined and very organized, but that is not her nature and so balance is allusive. She said of herself, "I'm one of these people who wants to experience everything." Would the discipline of trying to achieve balance be too restrictive and limiting for one who values freedom in herself? I had the sense that
in the larger picture of life, details such as a tidy house and an organized life would not be for her. Susan sees balance as an inner state, as an integration of all aspects of the self. This is what she searches for. Due to the intense pressure of her life, she feels she has lost much of her spirit, “I was much more passionate and excited ten years ago.” At present, she feels that her roles as mother and boss define her and she has lost the sense of who she is. She said, “We have to evolve truthfully. Some day I will evolve, it will be a different me, one that is more mature, one that has more perspective, I really believe that.” She struggles to live her life in her own terms.

**SUPPORTIVE SYSTEMS**

The supportiveness of partners and role sharing has already been discussed. The choice of partner and the level of marital satisfaction are clearly the most important determinant of coping with busy life-styles. None of the women in the study had extended family members readily available to help out with the children. The women took the task of finding good care very seriously.

"I can leave them when I leave them because of tremendous childcare"

Jan’s words would be echoed by all of the participants. Good childcare was a subject that was raised by each of the women. Outside of the time when one of the parents was with the children, four of the participants took their children to care outside the home and four had someone come to the home to care for the children.

Finding care that was satisfactory required considerable time and energy. Nora wanted a day-care for her daughter because she liked the idea of more than one caregiver and it alleviated concerns around trusting a person alone in the house with her baby. She described her experience of how she took on the task as a business project:
As soon as I could function properly, I went out in the neighbourhood and I networked and I sat in Second Cup and chatted with women and I got into conversations, “What would they do about day-care? Where were they going?” and all this kind of stuff.

She believed that through her research, she came up with the very best for their daughter.

“It’s about five minutes from home, it’s two junior kindergarten teachers with their ECE’s and they make home-made food and they interact with the children and it’s really good, so I felt very good about that.” She commented on her fortune of being able to afford premium day-care and she said that she would have stayed at home rather than compromise on childcare.

Susan found a sitter for her twins by going round and interviewing anyone who had advertised their services. She described her search in the following way:

I remember interviewing sitters and thinking, “What am I going to do?” I just couldn’t bear it. And then I remember she was the last person, I rang her doorbell and looked at her and I just knew this was it and she was wonderful. She always wanted girls; she just adored those girls.

The tremendous relief of finding good care for her children comes across in her words.

Because of the special needs of Paige’s children, finding a day-care where the staff would be willing and able to cope with their physical problems was a challenge. She eventually came by a place that was run by nurses, “I worked hard to pick an excellent day-care so that they were getting very good care.”

The contrasts of concern and relief over childcare are evident. It was very important for the women to see that the children were well cared for and happy with the person they were with during the day.
Those who had someone come into the home also struggled with finding the right person as well as with the cost. They felt strongly that they wanted to keep their children in their own home until they were ready for school. Of the cost, Sally said, “You take your priorities and you change other ways. We don’t go off to Florida for March breaks, we don’t go off for weekends together, because we pay in one end we give up on the other.”

For Sally, having someone come to the house means more than the children being in their own place, it means that as brothers, her two boys would grow up together. “We thought for our own children being split in two different groups and not spending their days together. that would concern me. They are the best of pals now, they play together all day long. they wouldn’t have had that.” Most importantly, her children connect well with their nanny, “She came highly recommended and she blended right into our family. The kids just love her and they hug and kiss her and she is caring for them.”

Ann has had a series of nannies from Europe that are in Canada for a limited time. She feels that each nanny has contributed in a special way to the development of the children.

The first two were trained. The first one was very maternal and the second one was extremely outgoing, got our older boy involved with other children on the street. The third one took them to the library, she adored the baby and took them for story time in the library and so on. The next one was good for me. She asked me at the end of the day how my day was, bright, articulate, really nice. And now this one is very sporty and active. I feel that each one of them has given my children something that I couldn’t have. I don’t think I am rationalizing that. I think my children learnt to be with other people early on and had more experiences.
Tracy made the point that as long as you can trust who is with the children, then you can be a mother and have a career. The mothers took it as being their responsibility to find good care for their children and as Ann said, to manage the care. Even though they are working outside the home, childcare remains primarily women’s responsibility. Seeking the best possible care and knowing that their children are happy not only provides peace of mind but it also alleviates their guilt about leaving their children with someone else.

**REFLECTIONS ON ACCOMMODATING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE**

Women who are oriented towards career tend to be higher in self-esteem and higher in instrumentality, and those who are married feel entitled to a role sharing marriage (Hallett & Gilbert, 1994). According to Duxbury et al. (1996), women in careers tend to have a higher perceived control and thus do better with role conflict and role overload. I was particularly interested in studying women with these characteristics because I believed they would have the most to teach us from their experience of managing to accommodate careers and family life.

In this section, I will look at what can be learned from the ways in which the women reduced the conflict between work and family and worked towards that fine line of balance in their lives. I will then explore in more detail what it means to live their lives on their own terms. Lastly, I will look at women’s particular qualities that enable them to accommodate work and family life.

**Reducing the conflict between work and family life**

There is a considerable amount written on the specific coping mechanisms that are used in response to the work-family conflict. For example, personal agency, a problem-
solving approach, and liberal gender-role attitudes (Long et al., 1992; McCracken & Weitzman, 1997). In sharing their experiences, the women in the study talked in broader terms about the process they went through to reduce the conflict and ways in which they consciously tried to create balance in their lives.

Learning to let go and prioritize, which the women spoke about was a response to the overwhelming demands that they found they were having to cope with, as professional and career women, when they had children. Realizing that trying to be a superwoman was not an option, they gained some control of the situation by objectively thinking about what was important and what was less important in their lives. Part of this process involved evaluating the script they were following, and particularly the script that had been passed down by their mothers. Because they were trying to manage their lives in a different way, there was a lot of looking over their shoulders and questioning themselves as to whether they were being good mothers. Mitchelson and Burns (1998) found that women who are in careers and are mothers tend to be driven in a perfectionistic way to avoid feelings of guilt and failure. The women confronted this tendency in themselves and learned to let go of unreasonable standards. Good care giving was incredibly important since much of the guilt was centred on the quality of care their children were receiving. They were dependent on that care in order to be able to lead independent lives. Some of the agonizing over finding good quality care is reflected in their stories.

To resolve the work-family conflict, the women needed to reconcile being mothers with being in the labour force. They could justify it in terms of beliefs in fairness, by rationalizing that they were better mothers because they were working, and
by the fact that their children were benefiting from the kind of care they were receiving. Nevertheless, they constantly struggled within themselves over whether they were doing the right thing for their children. They could deal with the volume of work by enlisting good support, by letting go of less important factors and by prioritizing. The volume of work, or the work overload, was less of an issue than the psychological conflicts they experienced.

The intrapsychoic pulls that differentiate role conflict from role overload (Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992) stemmed from questioning themselves about their roles as mothers, and from a desire to spend more time with their children. The first source of conflict gave rise to feelings of guilt. Although the women talked about the guilt showing its face from time to time, they essentially had learned to cope with that. They felt that they were doing the best they could for themselves and their children and they consciously let go of feelings of guilt. The realization that their children were at least as an important part of their lives as their work caused them to constantly look at their lives and to evaluate what they were doing. This did create an obstacle to career achievement, as we saw particularly from Tracy’s story, but it was a sacrifice that was made consciously. Tracy did reduce her professional involvement to have children but she also organized her life to include the disparate elements that are important to her.

The notion that an aspect of mothers’ conflict is feelings about separation from the child is found in the literature on mothers’ separation anxiety (Wille, 1995). Wille found that mothers with less traditional gender role behaviour have lower levels of separation anxiety, and particularly when fathers participate in childcare. This was not the case for the participants in the study. Their experiences of separation from their children
had a relational component and were more to do with bonding. It was the strength of their emotional ties with their children, as suggested by Stiver (1991), that led to ambivalent feelings. The only way of dealing with this was by adjusting their work roles to be more accommodating of family. We saw from several of the stories, and as Miller (1996) also found, the women improvised and chose different ways of developing their careers to match their changing identities.

**In their own terms**

I have already made mention of the fact that the women in the study were very aware that they are shaping their lives in a way that does not follow a particular script. They are finding their own terms because of their circumstances. As far as they can, they have shaped their work roles in a way that allows them to accommodate to their family life. Ross and Mirowsky (1992) found that having autonomy on the job increases the sense of control over one's life, and that working for pay is liberating in terms of concrete rewards and the opportunity for expressing oneself in one's work. As mothers, according to Willard's (1988) conceptualization, the women are creating their own script based on their own realities and are incorporating their own needs as well as those of the child. They are, as described by Attanucci (1988), informed by role expectations but not dominated by them. They have "a perspective on themselves and their relationships beyond role expectations" (p. 207). The women in this category in Attanucci's study saw themselves "in a human relationship of mutual nurturance and benefit, interwoven with their own strengths and weaknesses" (p. 216). These relationships could be with their children, their partners, and with their work.
We saw from the study how the women seek to incorporate aspects into their lives that they believe are important to themselves and to their families. When the children are very young and work is busy, it is hard to be doing much more than dealing with the situation at hand. However, Jan and Sally commented on coming home from a busy day and becoming involved in the children's activities. They and their children benefited from these activities. Ann described taking bicycle rides with her husband and children, as well as branching out and taking courses that were of personal interest. Tracy gave an example of taking the children to the park and realizing that she was exactly where she wanted to be in her life. In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that the partnership was where many of the women found mutual nurturance. Through their partnership they received the support that they needed to shape their lives. Some focused on finding balance by engaging in pleasurable activities for themselves as well as with the family. Susan emphasized the importance of being true to herself. Although when her children were very young, she felt that she had lost her sense of self, she is now searching for her identity apart from her roles as mother and as manager. She has also found a part of herself in her role as mother when she talks about enjoying being with the children at weekends and participating in their activities.

The women are defining their own ways of incorporating work and family life. They are, as Berry and Rao (1997) also found, negotiating new roles without a script.

Accommodating work and family life in their own terms

It has been said that women are well practised at handling a multitude of different tasks. The anthropologist, Catherine Bateson (1994), makes the point that long before the contemporary conflicts between home and career, women had developed patterns of
multiple levels of focus. Because their traditional work in the home has always involved an array of tasks, they have always tried to balance multiple claims to their attention, to tolerate frequent interruptions, and to think about more than one thing at a time. Taking a broader perspective, Bateson reminds us that whereas men tended to be engaged at tasks that require single focus, like hunting and warfare, women tended to the myriad activities that were essential on a day-to-day basis.

Participating in two distinct spheres of activity simultaneously has been considered a barrier to women's ability to develop their potential (see Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992 for review). As Bateson (1994) points out, and as the experiences of the women in the research would indicate, women have the ability to function on more than one level simultaneously. Research by Williams et al. (1991) indicates that women cope quite well with attending to different demands. Duxbury and Higgins (1991) also report evidence of women's tendency towards simultaneous thinking, whereas men tend more towards sequential thinking. It seems reasonable to believe that women are well able to accommodate multiple roles, given the flexibility to operate within their own terms and the support systems to ease the role strain of having too much to do. Evidence indicates that given some freedom to shape their own work, they may be more productive than someone who is working to a fixed schedule may (Bateson, 1989).

It should also be noted, however, that as working mothers they have to be good at managing roles. Women have more invested in learning to work on multiple levels. From the study, we have seen that although they are efficient at thinking at different levels, they work at it by making lists and lists of things to be done. Indeed, Duxbury and Higgins (1991) noted that women have fewer options than men for gaining control over
competing role demands because, as professional women, they are expected to be committed to their work and at the same time, social norms dictate that they take care of home responsibilities.

The spheres of home and work are not separate entities in the women's lives. Sally's list of "to do's" with its mix of home and work reminders demonstrates that she can not separate her work from her family life. Lorna has organized her work so that she can respond to her children if they need her during the day. Susan has her children come to her office if she has work to complete after school. Jan even took her children to work when they had the chicken pox. Ann firmly believes in flexibility in the workplace and if one of her staff needs to bring a child to work, she is accommodating. Children are engrossing and although women may advance more slowly in their careers at the time when they have young children, they bring perspectives to their work that offer creative alternatives to the status quo.

Smelser (1980), in extrapolating from a phrase reputedly uttered by Freud that "the definition of maturity was to be found in the capacity to work and love" (p.4), made the point that these two orientations of human action are not discrete but "are often so inextricably meshed that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them" (p.105). He goes on to make the case that they are distinguished by a culture that compartmentalizes orientations with work so that they become discrete occupational roles, governed by norms that tend to be isolated from the rest of life. This split between the two orientations has become deeply rooted in our modern North American tradition, the one being valued while the other is devalued. Women, for whom the two orientations are indeed inextricably entwined, can not tolerate the split. From this study, we have seen how all of
the women in different ways seek to repair this split. In accommodating work and family life they have found creative ways of enjoying both a satisfying work life and an enriching home life.
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There's a flow and there's a purpose in every time and different components... in every season... it flows like... a series of paintings and you can do it in a lot of ways... there's an overlay between them and different tonalities and different depth.

Tracy, herself an artist, used this metaphor to explain how she makes sense of her life. Her life unfolds like a series of paintings. Sometimes there is an emphasis on one aspect of her life and sometimes on another but there is a flow. Colours evolve as the series progresses. "I would pull colours. I would pull a couple into the next season and add some more on, still use the same basic colours.” In youth, there is a predominance of primary colours as life seems more straightforward. In the series of her life she said, “as you get older, you start to really like taupe.” She described taupe as being an amalgamation of many colours, but if one looks closely, a particular hue shows through. That hue represents the primary focus of her life in that season or at that particular time.

When, as an artist, she works at a picture she sometimes becomes engrossed as she becomes one with her work. These moments of “flow” occur in her life as well, in those times when she can be at one with the moment, whether it is a moment with her children, her husband, or in her work. As she paints, she sometimes finds herself struggling with a very detailed area of the painting, and has to step back from time to time to look at the whole picture. In life, at times she becomes overwhelmed with immediate concerns, the volume goes up, and then she has to remind herself or be reminded to step back and look at the bigger picture. At those moments of being overwhelmed, she has lost her connection with herself.
She sees the beauty of the painting in the contrasts such as of light and shade and in its subtleties. These are what give the picture balance. She balances the warmth and simplicity of children with the stimulation of adult conversation. When the volume of life is turned up, she focuses on the child. “It takes you out of the stress to focus on where is that piece of black Lego.” The subtleties of her life are there for her appreciation if she can tune into them.

**The beauty is in the contrasts**

Contrasts are in the stories of other participants. Jan spoke about coming home from work and focusing on a story with the children. Sally came home to make macaroni necklaces with her children. Ann would dance in the living room with her children. This balance between activities with the children and the stimulation of the workplace provides a tremendous richness in the lives of people if they allow themselves to be in that moment. As a number of participants pointed out, it helps them to keep their lives in perspective. Home and work do not need to compete with each other if one learns to appreciate the value of contrasts.

The participants looked for contrast in the ways they tried to create balance in their lives. In their hectic schedules, they made sure that they included elements that were important to them. They made things happen for themselves. In stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, several women commented that they feel that they are in a good place in their lives. Nora said that her life is full of quality, and Jan that she felt she had brought her life to a wonderful place. They look for signs that their lives are on track. Tracy tries to keep in tune with the subtle messages her body is giving her. Sally spoke about feelings of contentment when she wakes up in the morning and she wants to get out
of bed, she wants to go to work, and she wants to spend time with her family. The women
consciously and creatively set about achieving this state in their lives.

**Writing a script based on their own realities**

The script that the women in the study have developed in the context of their lives
is one that allows success in a career and satisfaction in motherhood. It is a script that is
dynamic in nature, in contrast to the fixed scripts that are prescribed by the culture. It
allows them to take the elements of their lives that are currently important and to meld
them together in a way that allows the individual parts to have expression; as well
creating a whole within which the contrasts can provide a life with some balance. It is not
an oppressive script because it allows room for growth and change. There can be a
different focus as their lives move into a different season and the hue changes. Because of
their histories, women are well used to changes and interruptions as they go through life
and so a script that is based on their own realities makes more sense.

We saw from Chapter 3 that the women took from their family of origin a positive
attitude towards working and a belief that as women, they could achieve what they
wanted to achieve. They struggled to find a niche in their occupations in order to do work
that was meaningful to them and provided some flexibility (Chapter 4). They did not
want to lose their identity as women and as mothers and so for some, this meant treating
their career in an unorthodox manner. They were sometimes misinterpreted and
sometimes wrongfully accused of being uncommitted because they took quality of work
over quantity of time on the job as a value or they took a full maternity leave and wanted
some flexibility when needed. They did not want to be assimilated into a white male
career world that is based on old-fashioned notions (Chapter 7). Although they sometimes made compromises, they worked on shaping their careers based on their own realities.

In the absence of supportive structures, their choice of partner was critical. Most of the women established relationships in which there was a real sharing of responsibilities. In Chapter 5, we saw how shared parenting was initiated and how it was practiced and the important distinction between helping out and fully participating became clear. They shared the importance of nurturing the marital relationship and of working together as partners. On the other side of the coin, we gained rich insight into the experience and hardships of a single mother who struggled along without support systems (Chapter 7). Again, she shaped her career in a way that balanced her own needs with those of her children. However, her story of trying to cope with home responsibilities alone allowed us to understand just how hard it can be for women who make less conventional choices in their lives.

The women let us into their experiences as mothers. They shared the impact that motherhood had on them (Chapter 6). As an experience it transformed them, bringing out qualities that gave them power in their lives. This expansive aspect stands in contrast to the reductive aspect through which they felt constrained by cultural myths and expectations that give rise to guilty feelings.

In order to live their lives in their own terms (Chapter 8), the women had to confront stereotypical beliefs and myths concerning being a good mother. While retaining a conscientious attitude towards aspects of their lives, they let go of needless perfectionism and set priorities based on what they believed was important for themselves and their families. They sought to balance the need for strong familial and relational ties
against the needs of the workplace. They found good supportive systems that gave them confidence that their children were being well cared for. Though important in itself, it also helped to balance the need to be good mothers with the their choice to work outside the home. Aware that the workplace is greedy of their time, they set boundaries around the hours they gave to it. This often meant having to make compromises, and again, it was necessary to step back and see the bigger picture. They had learned that their lives do well with balance and that at the end of the day, their relationship with their children was more important than success in the workplace.

The script that has been generated by these women allows for success in the workplace as well as in motherhood. They have shaped their lives in their process of trying to accommodate work and family life through some critical choices that they have made and also by carefully and pragmatically stepping back and thinking through what is important to them. They came into the process with some personal advantages. They come from homes where they were encouraged to develop their potential. and they are well educated. In their process of shaping their lives, they learned to discern and differentiate between how their lives should unfold according to old cultural scripts and how they would like their lives to unfold. The script is the way they lead their lives, at the basis of which are strongly held beliefs and values about what they want to achieve as women. The stories they have told about their lives give us, the readers, a model for accommodating important elements in our own lives.

As a society we are not listening to our inner voice

The picture would be incomplete if I did not place it in the context of its surroundings. We live in a world that places high value on material success and men and
nowadays women too are being socialized into believing that worldly success will automatically bring fulfillment. It is easier to focus on this individualistic pursuit of "happiness" than to focus on the underlying malaise in our society for which we do not have obvious solutions. As Tracy pointed out, as a society we avoid listening to our inner voice. In our society are men and women who are having to work long hours and there are many families where children are growing up without the care and nurturance they need to be healthy adults. As a society, we are not willing to take responsibility for our children.

Jan would point out a number of times that she felt dissonant because her life is so different from that of many women who have little opportunity to find the kind of balance that most of the women in the study have found. For them, the support is neither in the family nor in social structures. We are slow to acknowledge women's workplace potential and are reluctant to look for good solutions. Old stereotypes still exist. Sally feels very strongly about bringing up her boys to believe that women can do anything in life but she finds stereotypical thinking even at the nursery school. She shared her dismay in the following example of her son arriving home from his nursery school one day: "He had this little doctor's bag with him that he had made as a craft and he said to me, 'the boys made the doctors bags and the girls made the nurses' hats.'" She explained that her son would have been quite happy to wear a nurse's hat, but now the gender association has been made.

Marilyn French (1985) makes the following point, "Assimilation in an unworthy society is an unworthy goal" (p.474) and she goes on to suggest that the structure of institutions alone guarantees the continuation of that unworthy society. The institution of
the workplace frequently has family-friendly policies in place, but when it comes to the implementation, there is a strong reluctance to change. Nora’s story of announcing her pregnancy and being told that women do not gain brownie points for being pregnant places in a nutshell the attitudes of many businesses to pregnancy. The participants’ stories attest to the fact that at least among this group of women are those who are not willing to be assimilated into a traditional white male career world.

The women in the study bring into their jobs an integrity that is based on strongly held beliefs and values and a preparedness to listen to their inner voices. The statement made by one of the women that mothers can be very powerful people is important. She was referring to the notion that women can bring into the workplace more affiliative ways of working and that these approaches are being found to motivate people more successfully than traditional ways of exerting power and control over people. The particular qualities that women and mothers bring to the workplace have not been valued from a material sense. The study also referred to the ethic of care that the participants bring to their jobs where concern and respect for others are paramount.

**Shaping their lives**

This study allows us an in-depth look at how women shape their lives and create their own scripts to accommodate work and family life. Because they place a high value on their families as well as on their work and are successful in accommodating both we can learn from their achievement. It is important to note that they do what they do in a way that is not trying to fit in with structures that are in place, but in accordance with their own needs and the needs of their families. They give us an optimism that it is
possible for women to integrate the components that are represented by the terms “work” and “love” into their lives.

Being a qualitative work, I cannot generalize beyond the people who participated. However, as their stories resonate with aspects of our own lives, we can learn from them. It would be interesting to see if the script they developed applied to other cohorts of women who are oriented towards both work and family life. From a counselling perspective, there is much to be gained from understanding how successful women do integrate work and family life. Their script could well become a working model for counsellors who are working with women who are trying to accommodate various elements into their lives.

A mother’s legacy

These women are pioneers in the sense that they are the first generation of women to attempt to integrate work with family life. Some of them spoke about wanting to be mentors to other women at the early stages of their working lives. They have much to offer out of the riches of their experience. As we compare generations of women, we can see that their lives are evolving. The process is slow, but it is happening. When women first entered the workforce in large numbers, they tended to be assimilated into male models. We are now seeing that women want to participate in the work force on their own terms. Indeed, we have before us a possibility that people like these women and their male partners could help us to move into a more equitable society.

The ending of a dissertation is arbitrary. There are many issues that are raised that could be discussed. I would like to end with a quote from one of the participants who
expressed her dreams for her daughter in the following way, a dream that I would echo for my own daughter:

I would like her to listen to her voice, to be happy with herself, to follow her dreams. To know that this society is not always woman friendly, but that she can probably find a way to make what is really important to her happen for her and that it will get easier with time. That she has value and that she is strong.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1

Letter of Information

Dear

Further to our telephone conversation, I am writing to give you some more information about the research topic for my doctoral dissertation.

As I explained to you over the telephone, I am a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. In my research study, I am asking career women to reflect back on the time when they had their first child and to explore its impact both on themselves as women and on their careers. I am particularly interested in what equality has come to mean to them at home and at work since the birth of their first child. My hope is that the women who participate in the study will gain some personal benefit. Also, that the lived experience documented in the thesis will expand our knowledge of women’s experience in our current social context and provide a basis for recommendations.

I would like to explore the topic with women who have invested considerable time and energy in developing their career and who also have at least one child of school age or younger. I thank you for considering being part of the study. The topic will be investigated through conversational interviews with you as a participant and they will be taped and transcribed. During the first interview, I will ask you to describe your experience. I will provide you with a copy of the transcript and then we can both decide on particular themes which can be developed in the second interview. At each stage, I will provide you with copies of any written material pertaining to yourself.

I understand that participation in the study may raise some personal issues for you. If at any point you are not comfortable with continuing with the project, you are free to withdraw without explanation.

This research is being carried out under the direction of Dr. Sabir Alvi, a professor of applied psychology at O.I.S.E. and if you have any questions or wish for further information about myself or the study, please feel free to contact myself at the address at the head of the letter or Dr. Alvi at the Department of Applied Psychology, O.I.S.E., 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ont. M5S 1V6. Telephone (416) 923 6641 Ext. 2485.

I greatly appreciate your agreement to participate in my study and I very much look forward to meeting with you. I will call you in a few days so that we can arrange a convenient time and place.

Yours sincerely

Jacquie Aston
APPENDIX 2

Form of consent

I agree to participate in the study entitled, "The meaning and experience of equality for career women who have children," which is to be conducted by Jacquie Aston under the supervision of Dr. Sabir Alvi of the Applied Psychology department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. I understand that the topic will be explored through conversational interviews which will be tape recorded and transcribed. I am informed that I will also have the opportunity to comment on the transcribed material and interpretations pertaining to myself as participant.

I understand that access to the interview transcriptions and tapes will be restricted to yourself, your committee and to an independent transcriber and that at the conclusion of the study, all interview tapes will be erased. I also understand that identifying characteristics will be changed so that I will not be identified personally as a participant. I am aware that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________


June 10, 1966

Dear ________________________

I am enclosing the transcript of our first conversation of May 28, 1996. I have numbered the lines for easy cross-referencing and I have left a wide margin for notes. Where I had difficulty in picking up the odd words from the recording, I wrote in my best guess, followed by a (?). They are on pages ____________. I would be glad if you would check for accuracy.

Sometimes people are concerned when they read a transcript of a conversation in that it does not have the flow of written text. We rarely speak as we write.

After reading through the transcript, you might note aspects that were particularly interesting and significant to you. You might also jot down thoughts and reflections that we could explore in our next conversation.

Before we meet again, I will send you a summary of the first interview. Because this will be based on aspects that I have selected from the transcript, I would value your feedback, both in terms of the points I have selected and in accuracy of interpretation.

Again, thank you so much for participating in this research. Some wonderful information came out of our first meeting, and I look forward to getting together with you again. I will telephone after I have sent you the summary to arrange a convenient time.

Yours sincerely,

Jacquie Aston