OF DIAPERS AND DISSERTATIONS:
THE EXPERIENCES OF DOCTORAL STUDENT MOTHERS
LIVING AT THE INTERSECTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND
STUDENTHOOD

By

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ABSTRACT

While the literature on the experiences of women in academe generally, is growing, the experiences of women student mothers in post-secondary education are rarely explored. Given the increasing number of women students enrolling in university and the fact that the student population is aging, there is a greater likelihood of these students being mothers. A study of these women is timely and crucial to understanding their needs and challenges within the university.

The purpose of the research was to examine the experiences of doctoral student mothers living at the intersection of studenthood and motherhood as it was expected that the demands from the family and university would create specific challenges. The study delineates the women's understanding of and the degree to which they accepted the dominant North American ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student. Further, the study sought to ascertain whether the student mothers experienced a contradiction between the two ideologies similar to that experienced by the women in Hay's (1996) study of employed and stay-at-home mothers. The study utilizes the concept of the public/private dichotomy and the notions of greedy institutions and competing urgencies in its framework. The design consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with seventeen mothers at various stages in their doctoral programme. The women range in age from thirty-three to forty-seven and have at least one child, under the age of thirteen, living with them full-time.
Findings noted that the women were able to articulate the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student but, for the most part, they rejected them. They preferred to be balanced both as mothers and as students, although almost all of them still insisted their children were their first priority. The women experienced a contradiction between the two ideologies and, using the concept of ideological work developed by Berger (1981), their experiences were explored. The women engaged in ideological work to support their alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student. When they were not as able to sustain their ideological work they tended to revert to the dominant definitions.
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DEDICATION

To my loving husband, David

and

my beautiful babies, Nicola, Julian and Morgan
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation began with a casual remark across a kitchen table. Just before writing my comprehensive exams on an entirely different topic, Ruth Rees announced, "Allison, you should do a study on women students with care responsibilities." Thank you Ruth, for being a friend, a mentor and a role model. Without your suggestion I might never have discovered such an exciting area of research.

Thank you to the seventeen women who were generous with their time and allowed me to share the trials and exhilaration that are their lives as student mothers.

Thanks to my committee, Dr. Donald Fisher, Dr. Deirdre Kelly and Dr. Lesley Andres, for their assistance through the dissertation process.

Thank you #3 to my oldest and dearest friend, Julie. Three theses later we're still learning together.

I would like to acknowledge the love and support of my mother and father, Alice Sears and Paul Sears who always stressed the importance of education. My mother has said on many occasions, "Don't make it your life's work!" and I think when the UBC Academic Plan speaks of encouraging lifelong learning, it probably doesn't mean taking eight years to complete a doctorate. But, to quote Barbara, "School is great, but it has its place" and over those eight years I have done so much more than just be a student. I have taught, I have danced, I have cultivated three children and I have nurtured a marriage. I have lived beyond the bounds of the title student.
But I have also been a student and that has taken me away from my children quite often. I would like to acknowledge their contribution to this enterprise. I thank my wonderful children Nicola Sears-Williams, Julian Sears-Williams and Morgan Sears-Williams for loving me warts and all and for giving me so much fodder for my stand up comedy act!

Lastly, I thank my sweetheart, my friend, my husband, David Williams. There is no doubt in my mind that I would not be finished this dissertation if you had not been there to pick up the pieces and help me put them back together. I publicly declare my love for, and devotion to you and acknowledge my indebtedness to you for your help with my schooling. I promise this is the end of the degree road; now I shall become a responsible citizen – but you know, I’ve always wanted to....
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When Aristotle wrote his books,
When Milton searched for rhyme,
Did they have toddlers at the knee
Requesting dinner time?

When Dante contemplated hell,
Or Shakespeare wrote a sonnet,
Did Junior interrupt to say
His cake had ketchup on it?

When Socrates was teaching youth
And Plato wrote the Phaedo,
Were they the ones to clean the mess
The children made with Play-doh?

If Edmund Burke had had to work
On all his kid's ablutions
Would he have had the time and strength
To speak of revolution?

Did food get bought when Darwin
Sought the origin of species;
Or did he have to hush the tots
And tell them not to tease please?

When Holmes and Brandeis donned their robes
And gave their wise opinions
Was laundry piled four-feet high
With socks mixed up with linens?

How much greater then the task
Of those who manage both
Who juggle scholarship with child
Development and growth

And how much greater is the praise
For those who persevere
And finished their advanced degrees
And take up a career!

Elizabeth Ralph Mertz
Radcliffe Quarterly
Spring, 1997
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A recent article in the *U of T Magazine* (Lawler, 2000) introduced readers to Robert Birgeneau, the new president of the University of Toronto. Nowhere in this eleven-page article, including photos of Birgeneau and his children, does it examine how he could rise to the rank of Dean of Science at Michigan Institute Technology, maintain his cutting edge research programme, and raise four children. Despite the family portraits it appears family is not a critical subject for a father of four. Were the article about a female university president with four children, one of the first things they would ask is how she managed to get so far and raise healthy and happy children.

Mary Powers, a Newfoundland Educator presented a paper at the Canadian Society for Studies in Education in 1999 entitled “How to get your husband a halo: do Your Ph.D.” Discussing the paper several months later, she explained the title came to her while pursuing her doctorate. Everyone in her town was effusive about how wonderful her husband was because he took care of their son while she went to school. However, no one had told her how wonderful she was for caring for her son when her husband worked for pay full-time.
These two situations highlight the differential expectations of mothers and fathers, expectations that are humorously highlighted in the poem “Accomplishments” by Elizabeth Ralph Mertz (1997). Fathers or not, none of the men named in the poem would have been expected to care for children, or run a household. When Aristotle, Milton, Plato, Socrates, Shakespeare, Burke, Dante, Holmes and Brandeis were thinking, theorizing, teaching, writing and expounding, women may have been working for pay but their contributions in the public sphere were rarely valued and legitimated as much as men's (Strong-Boag, 1984; Pierson, 1984). While we can identify famous women who have achieved success in the public sphere, the reason we are able to remark on them is precisely because they are unusual.

Historically a woman's job has been defined as bearing and raising children while doing all other reproductive work in the home. The separation of the public and private spheres was seen as desirable although in actuality it was not complete as, out of necessity, many women worked for pay outside the home, as well as taking work into their home (Strong-Boag, 1984). According to Eichler (1984), the “Patriarchal Family Model,” on which Canadian social policy was based until well into the twentieth century, highlights the separation of spheres. The father/husband was responsible for the economic well being of the family. The wife/mother, on the other hand, was “responsible for the household and personal care of family members especially child care”; she definitely was “not seen as responsible for the economic well-being of the family” (Eichler, 1984: 63). The dominance of the notion of separate spheres, made stepping out of the private sphere, including pursuing a university education, as unusual for women as
was the idea the “great minds” of Mertz’s poem would sort laundry, purchase groceries, make dinner and clean up children’s “messes.”

The participation of women in higher education today, is not as remarkable a notion as it was a hundred and fifty years ago when women first sought to attend university alongside men. In fact, in the 1998/1999 school year women accounted for 56.1% (281132 of 500951) of students enrolled in undergraduate programmes and almost half of all graduate students (48.3%) at the University of British Columbia (UBC Planning and Institutional Research, 2001). The relative number of women in Ph.D. programmes in Canada rose from 33% in 1985 to 44% in 1998 (AUCC, 2001). In faculties of education, women accounted for 66.4% of doctoral students in 1998 (1,551 of 2,337) an increase of 248% (624 to 1,551) between 1985 and 1998, compared to an increase of 143% (548 to 786) for men over the same period (AUCC, 2001). However, although women are making great gains and are almost half the doctoral students at universities across Canada they remain predominantly in a limited number of traditionally female areas of study. The only fields in which female enrolment exceeds male enrolment in doctoral studies are in Education (66.4%), Nursing (97%), Epidemiology and Public Health (63.7%), Fine Arts (58%), Social Sciences (53%), Humanities (51%), and Para-Clinical Sciences (51%) (AUCC, 2001). In more traditionally male fields such as engineering and physical sciences, women remain in the minority.

The graduate student population is also aging. While the majority of undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia are aged twenty-two and under (63.6%) the majority of doctoral students are thirty years of age and over (60.1% -
 Within this group, just less than a quarter 22.5% (386) of female and 20.9% (311) of males have children (Guppy & Trew, 1995). Taking together the increase in the number of women in doctoral studies and the age of these students, one can project that there will be students who must coordinate childcare responsibilities and studies.

Edwards (1993) and Long et al. (1997) found, of those women with partners, many had difficulty combining studies and family because their partners did not give them adequate support both emotionally and practically. Few of the women said their partners were unsupportive in principle; it was more that they were not given the time and sometimes even the space in which to study. Similarly, Guppy and Trew (1995) found that women doctoral students report doing more than their share of the work involved in caring for their children; 53.1% (205/386) of women compared to only 7.7% (24/311) of men indicate they do most of the work. This imbalance is not lost on women students. In a study of barriers women face in postgraduate work, Moses (1989) found her participants were aware of the difficulties of combining studies and family. Few women were able to fit family into an academic lifestyle. The lack of support from partners meant women saw school and family as an either/or choice, describing it as a “lose-lose situation” (Moses, 1989).

The dominant conceptualization of a student around which academic programmes are designed is of an individual with few dependents and family responsibilities (Barnes, 1992; Pyke, 1997; Rau and Durond, 2000; Upcraft, 1996). Pyke (1997) questions the authority of seemingly arbitrary decisions about who and what are legitimate in the

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1 In 1996, Dr. Neil Guppy ran several queries for this research using the data set from the 1995 graduate student survey. The statistics quoted here are from those queries.
university, questions that bother her about the academy and its perception of who is a good student.

Who decided that doctoral students were taking too long to complete their degrees? Why doesn’t anyone care that 50% of those who start their doctoral programme drop out? Whose decision was it that the appropriate lifestyle for a student was that of an individual unencumbered with a partner and/or dependent - the model of the “lean, mean, academic machine”, as one male student described himself? (Pyke, 1997: 14)

To ensure accommodations are made for the varied lives of its student population, the university needs to interrogate assumptions behind the policies related to students, and examine the potential for professional development to assist faculty in addressing the needs of students, both male and female, who do not fit the mould of the “lean, mean academic machine.” In studying equity in the university one must analyse the role of values in the creation, interpretation and dissemination of knowledge as well as in the organizational ideologies and structures of the university.

The usual approach to studying mothers in academe results in concern about the way a family may impede a woman’s progress in school. Using this approach, research would highlight the problems women present for higher education instead of the problems higher education presents for women (Edwards, 1993). Typically the demands of the institution and its impact on the family remain unquestioned. An overview of international literature from the late 1970s to early 1980s found most of the 120 studies dealing with mature students in general, took the former perspective (Osborne et al., 1984, cited in Edwards, 1993: 9). By focusing on the impact family has on the women’s studies, the “baggage of higher education is rendered invisible” (Acker, 1984, cited in Edwards, 1993). It is important then, to examine the process of education from the
students’ perspective if we want to understand the “experiences of students themselves and the meanings they give to their education” (Thomas, 1990: 7). This research examines the meaning doctoral student mothers attach to their experiences, questioning the mutual impact of motherhood and studenthood on women.

Universities, through policies affecting students such as maternity leave, or perhaps subsidies and preferential enrolment for their children at university daycares, has to some extent, acknowledged the personal lives of students. Further, as noted by the student mothers in Long et al.’s (1997) study, individual professors sometimes allow flexibility in deadlines and some are aware of the needs of student mothers. These examples may indicate an easing of the rigid distinction between public and private spheres within the university, something that is addressed in this research project.

An inquiry into the experiences of women doctoral students with childcare responsibilities is crucial to the study of women in higher education and is long overdue. This inquiry is significant for a number of reasons. First, there is a paucity of research on women with childcare responsibilities who are enrolled in post-secondary institutions. One of the responsibilities of the university is to conduct scholarly exploration of fields that are relatively unknown and unarticulated (UBC, 2000). I would argue that the study of the experiences of student mothers in post-secondary education is one such field.

Second, the demographic trends referred to earlier mean there is a greater likelihood of doctoral students combining study with childcare responsibilities. As the literature clearly illustrates, there can be considerable stress involved in balancing these responsibilities. It is imperative we continue to conduct research to understand the stressors experienced by student mothers and indeed student parents in general. The
UBC Academic Plan (2000) clearly states that one of the goals of the university is to "encourage students to be lifelong learners"; something the university has stated is a crucial requirement in the current knowledge-based society. I believe for learning to be truly "life long" it must include the years spent bearing and raising children.

Third, women, on average, are still in the minority in most doctoral programmes and, according to Moses (1989) one of the reasons is that potential students who are mothers are well aware of the difficulties involved in combining studenthood and motherhood. Perhaps if we understand the barriers this group of students face we can develop plans that, at an institutional level, address these barriers. In general, to create a learning environment that is engaging, creative and "supports varied ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge" (UBC, 2000) we must understand the needs of the student population and since women make up a significant proportion of university students, we must continue to initiate and support research on women students. Corollary to this is the desire on the part of the university to encourage the enrolment of mature students. Since it is likely that mature students will have responsibilities beyond their studies, it is imperative to understand their needs if the university wishes to attract and retain them.

Aware of the paucity of research on student mothers, I wanted to investigate whether or not student mothers experienced a contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student. In addition, I wanted to assess their awareness and their acceptance of each of the ideologies. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of women doctoral students living at the intersection of studenthood and motherhood. However, to achieve this purpose, it is first necessary to know what this group of women means when they speak of motherhood and studenthood.
I want to understand what studenthood and motherhood mean, not only from the dominant perspective, but also from the perspective of student mothers at the university. The student mothers’ perspectives can be very complex as they not only include what they hear, see and read are the dominant societal definitions of the good mother and the good student, but their own definitions of the good mother and the good student. The latter could range from a complete acceptance of the dominant definition to a complete rejection and everything in between.

The first two tasks then, are to delineate the various definitions of the good mother and the good student. This includes the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student from the literature, as well as the dominant definitions as perceived by the student mothers. Corollary to delineating the dominant definitions is the task of delineating their own definitions of the good mother and good student. Once all definitions have been outlined they will be compared to assess the extent to which these women accept or reject the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student. This includes not only asking about their experiences combining the two spheres, but also inquiring as to how they perceive themselves as students and as mothers. As part of their experiences, I want to explore what makes combining motherhood and studenthood easier and what makes it more difficult, including what they perceive to be the consequences to themselves and to their family of being a student and a mother at the same time.

The research questions flow from these queries and focus on the woman and her experiences living at the intersection of motherhood and studenthood, in this case being a full-time doctoral student. Three questions have driven the research project:
1. To what extent do the women in this study perceive and accept the dominant ideology of intensive mothering?
2. To what extent do the women in this study perceive and accept the dominant ideology of the good student? and
3. Do the women experience a contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student? What are the consequences of this contradiction for the women as students and as mothers?

These questions not only address the women’s experiences of studenthood and motherhood but they enable one to look through their eyes to see how they perceive the definitions of the good mother and the good student and how they take these definitions and, in some ways, modify them to fit their lives as well as using them to justify and critique their motherhood and studenthood. This study brings together several theoretical tools including the ideology of intensive mothering; the ideology of the good student; the public/private dichotomy; and greedy institutions and competing urgencies. In her poem “Accomplishments” (1997), Mertz captures many of the difficulties and frustrations the student mothers in this study experienced attempting to combine motherhood and studenthood. Each of the women experienced competing urgencies, the effects of greedy institutions and the intersection of the public and private spheres.

The two terms used throughout this research to describe the two aspects of the participants’ lives being studied are “motherhood” and “studenthood.” The concept “studenthood” is used after much consideration. It is accepted to describe a student’s involvement in their studies and in the university as a “student career.” The components of the “student career,” courses, studying, committee work, employment at the university, and participation in seminars and conferences are all part of the whole, which I prefer to call “studenthood.” I have chosen to use “studenthood” for two reasons. First is the
complementarity of the terms motherhood and studenthood. Second, the term "career" attached to "student," in my view, privileges the student side of these women over the mother side. I believe using studenthood is more inclusive and more compatible with motherhood.

This study is what Reinharz (1992) referred to as a "blending of intellectual question with personal trouble" because my reasons for writing on this topic are both personal and academic. Feminists have established the desirability of the researcher making explicit her own consciousness and experiences (Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1983) and by putting myself into the research, I introduce into the project my passion and enthusiasm as well as my identification with the research subject (Reinharz, 1992).

I begin with my ideas about the ideal mother and the ideal student; with the experiences that formed my ideas about the ideal mother and the ideal student that I bring to this project. When I was very young I saw the film, *I Remember Mama* (1948), a story of a Norwegian immigrant mother of four living in San Francisco in the early part of the twentieth century. While Mama, played by Irene Dunne, was married, the husband/father was not the dominant image of the family. Mama was a wise, hard working and very loving miracle worker whose children looked up to her as someone who could fix any problem and who always knew what to do. Mama protected her children from the harsh realities of being poor, while teaching them to care for each other and not to judge people by outward appearances.

For me, Mama was the ideal mother. She personified the North American ideal of the good mother, an ideal that I took on with a vengeance when I too became "Mama."
Coming to this project I brought these ideas with me. Despite being a student and, at times an employed mother, I still felt deep down that “Mama” was the ideal mother, something to which we should all aspire. I wanted to know if other mothers thought the same way.

On the student side, being a student, has been a way of life for me but my most vivid memories of my education come from elementary school, when I was in grade three. It was not a specific incidents that year but a general feeling, which came from being placed on, what seemed to be, the slow side of the class. There were one or two rows of “smart” kids, the ones who were being prepared to skip a grade, then there were the rest of us, doomed to proceed at a regular pace. I cannot recall with certainty if the term “slow” was ever used, but it was implied by comparison to the “faster” or “smarter” children and it left a deep impression. This was my experience with the image of the ideal student and I wondered if other doctoral students had similar images.

My experiences as a student and a student mother were varied. In the process of completing my M.A. and working on my Ph.D. I have attended three Canadian universities. When I entered the M.A. programme at a western Canadian university I was both single and without children. I left four years later with a husband, a child and a degree. I started my Ph.D. in Ontario when my youngest child was ten months old, commuting between my home and school, two and a half hours away. Each week I would remain away from home for three days to take courses. When we moved across the country, I transferred into a Ph.D. programme in British Columbia, which meant I could go to school in the city where I lived; three different experiences, three different dynamics.
In the first instance, my status changed in the middle of my programme. Getting married was not seen as a problem for my colleagues or for my thesis committee, but having a baby was cause for alarm. Not being taken as seriously as I had been before, the expectation I would drop out when I became a mother was clear. However, just a year after my daughter was born, I successfully defended my thesis. Not surprisingly, when I handed in the final copy of my thesis my advisor said, "I really didn’t think you were going to do it."

My second experience was very different. I came in with children, but I was away from home so I was able to focus on my studies for a few days each week. But motherhood was part of my identity, and I tended to include my family in my education. I learned early in the year that discussing my family through my schoolwork was less than welcome. Many of my colleagues, all of whom considered themselves feminists, exhibited annoyance at family being mixed with lessons.

By transferring out to the west coast my family was around me again. But having the family close meant if anything went wrong at my children's school, they would call me. This was a common occurrence in the first year. I was particularly disturbed one day when my husband answered the phone and the school secretary asked for me. She asked the children’s father to pass her on to the children’s mother!

My experiences allow me to speak with some authority about being a young ‘bachelor’ student with no responsibilities, about adding demands mid-stream and about the difficulties and joys of being a mother and a student at the same time. From my experiences I have learned, although there are some faculty and staff who are accommodating and understanding, the university environment is generally not
welcoming for those who have simultaneous demands on their time. The most notable exceptions was a faculty member who had responsibility for assigning teaching positions would always ask me which schedule would be best for me given my family responsibilities. He always held back those sections he thought would be the most convenient so those of us with family responsibilities could choose our schedule first. In this way he made family responsibilities a legitimate university concern.

I consider myself to be a feminist and I consider my work feminist research. I draw on a variety of feminist writers not all of whom agree with each other. Having struggled for years attempting to situate myself amongst the feminisms I find I prefer above the rest, the term used by Bensimon and Marshall (1997), in their discussion of feminist policy analysis, “power and politics feminism” (4). This term includes feminisms focusing on cultural, political, economic and institutional power that preserve and reproduce patriarchy.

Power and politics feminist scholars view men’s power as pervasive and enduring because it is so solidly entrenched in the rules, activities and language of organized systems such as religion, education, health and law that we are not able to notice its workings. (Bensimon and Marshall, 1997: 5)

Highlighting the difference between liberal feminists who prefer strategies of accommodation, power and politics feminists prefer strategies of transformation. According to Bensimon and Marshall (1997), the latter feminists study women in the academy in order to transform it.

The theoretical framework for this study draws heavily on Hays (1996) who, while not explicitly locating her work within feminism, begins with the assumption that patriarchy is the root cause of gender inequality. Hays (1996) also locates gender
inequality in capitalism using the ideology of the marketplace to explain women's
oppression in the private sphere. Hays (1996) highlighted the contradiction between the
ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace. The situation of
mothers in the workplace seemed to mirror the situation of student mothers and the
ideology of the marketplace mirrored the definition of the good student.

In using a theoretical framework that is based on dominant North American views
of mothering and work I acknowledge these views are not shared by all women and I
have been challenged in the past to account for using a definition of mothering based on a
white, middle-class perspective of mothering. I do not accept that this is the only valid
perspective on mothering. However, I believe, because the women in this research
project live in North America, the dominant North American definition of good
mothering will have a profound impact on them regardless of their race, ethnicity, class
or sexual orientation, an assumption that has been borne out in this study.

I came to this project with a structural feminist perspective, assuming the
structure of the university and society would be like millstones around student mothers' 
necks. I end this process with a greater understanding of the agency of the women within
the context of the university structure. I have found, as did Thomas (1990), that the
women's actions, although socially constrained, are not socially determined. They make
their decisions and choices based on their awareness of the possibilities as well as
limitations of various courses of action. No matter the choices or courses of action taken,
how the societal and personal forces encroaching on the lives of these women interact,
creates an enormous challenge to their success as students. Previous research suggests
the challenges faced by student mothers are significantly greater than for students who do
not have conflicting sets of responsibilities (Edwards, 1993; Long et al., 1997; Moses, 1989), this research project takes up this issue.

Chapters two through five set the stage for the study. Chapter two is a review of the literature on women in academe, their place within the university as students and as faculty as well as the academic environment which some have described as masculinist. Chapter three reviews the literature on the social construction of mothering and motherhood, including a discussion of the ideal mother, the influence of experts and balancing work or studies and family. Chapter four delineates the theoretical framework, including a description of the ideology of the good mother and the ideology of the good student and the analytic tools: greedy institutions, competing urgencies and the private/public dichotomy. Chapter five describes the research design and methods used in gathering and analyzing data.

Chapters six through eight present and discuss the analysis. Each chapter begins with a vignette; a story of one of the participants as it relates to the topic of the chapter. Through the use of these stories, the reader can get a better understanding of how the issues discussed in the chapter interact in the real life of the participants. Chapters six and seven address the first two research questions delineating the societal definition of the good mother and the good student as characterized by the participants as well as their own definitions. These two chapters include the women’s alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student.

Chapter eight, based on the third research question, examines the existence and the consequences of the contradiction between the ideology of the good student and the ideology of intensive mothering as experienced by the participants. In this chapter I
explore the ideological work in which the women engage to support their definitions of
the good mother and the good student. Chapter nine draws conclusions from the analysis,
provides recommendations where appropriate, and suggests directions for further
research.
CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AND ACADEME - LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on the university context for women as workers and as students. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first three sections directly address the topic of women in higher education including the context or climate of the university, and the literature on women faculty and women students. The latter section of the chapter examines the literature on the good student, including the ideology of the good student. The review draws on Canadian literature as well as literature from international sources, including research from the United States, Britain and Australia. In addition, because there is little literature available on student mothers specifically, I draw on literature focusing on women faculty and students as well as the literature on women faculty who are mothers.

The University Context

Universities are portrayed as meritocracies where the “best and the brightest” students rise to the top (Katz & Vieland, 1988; Lewis, 1975; Slaughter, 1991; Stalker and Prentice, 1998). Meritocracy and individualism are important foundational principles in
the university. According to Lewis (1975) "the university is still assumed to be one of the last frontiers of individualism, of hard work where excellence is cultivated – where merit is rewarded" (11). Lewis (1975) defines meritocracy as

organizations in which people are assigned tasks and responsibilities and successive power, prestige and rewards, on the basis of competence....There is an assumption of equality of opportunity and also a clear relationship between an individual's tasks, responsibilities, power, prestige, and rewards.... The better qualified an individual, the more elevated his rank, so that under ideal conditions, the best qualified exercise the most control. The criteria for advancement are thus clearly evident: competence, performance, and achievement. (Lewis, 1975: 8-9)

Concomitant to meritocracy is the notion of individualism, which David et al. (1997) characterize as emphasizing "each life being played out according to the person rather than the context" (399).

What is often missing from the discussion of meritocracy is a discussion of race, class, ability, gender and resource monopolies (Slaughter, 1991). The literature does not suggest the notion of meritocracy should be abandoned, but it does point out the need for caution as, while implying equality of opportunity, meritocracy does not necessarily result in equality. Lewis (1975) argues the notion of meritocracy implies social differentiation and so it is "neither value-free nor devoid of political meaning" (201). According to Katz & Vieland (1988), who succeeds and who fails is the result of a complex web of social and political factors, which has little to do with the relative merits of the individual. For the purposes of this study I focus on the gendered nature of meritocracy.

Universities are portrayed as gender neutral entities, engaged in the pursuit of "knowledge" (Currie, Harris & Thiele, 2000). A parallel can be drawn between universities as gender-neutral institutions and other organizations, which are defined as
gender-neutral "machines" yet whose authority structures are dominated by masculine principles (Acker, 1990, Kanter, 1977). In her book on men's resistance to equality in organizations, Cynthia Cockburn (1991) describes how the male culture of organizations blocks the advancement of women. Although her work is not done in a university setting, her description of men producing a "male culture" that makes women feel out of place, can easily be generalized to universities. The discourse on organizations has presented them as gender neutral (Acker, 1990) and the ideology of these institutions is certainly one of equal educational opportunity. Once inside, however women are confronted with men's "ownership" of the university (Cockburn, 1991).

Acker (1990) asserts organizations such as universities are not neutral, but instead are gendered. By this she means "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through, and in terms of, a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker, 1990: 146). The discussion of how organizations are gendered, especially how jobs and hierarchies are defined is relevant to an understanding of the position of students in the university. According to Acker (1990), job descriptions and hierarchies are presented as abstract categories without a specific occupant, there is no body, no gender but they are, in fact, intensely gendered.

Describing jobs and hierarchies without a human context means the hypothetical workers cannot have other responsibilities in their life that might impinge on their job (Acker, 1990: 149). Those who are committed to paid employment are "naturally" assumed to be more suited to responsibility and authority. Those who must divide their commitments, are in the lower ranks. For Acker (1990), the only human worker who
comes close to this description is the male worker “whose life centres on his full time, life long job while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (149). Although non-mothering employed women may fit Acker’s (1990) description of the totally committed worker, women who have children, or indeed anyone with care responsibilities, can offer no such commitment. The abstract student, as the abstract worker, is described in gender-neutral terms as someone fulfilling the requirements of a university programme. Life processes do not have a place in this seemingly neutral description of “student” as these intrude upon and disrupt the ideal workings of the university.

Harris, Thiele and Currie (1998) used Acker’s (1990) framework for analysing the implications of the gendered organization of universities. Acker (1990) argues the gendered nature of an organization is reflected in the division of labour along sex lines; symbols and images that explain and express theses divisions; patterns of interaction between and among men and women; gendered subjectivity; and the underlying processes of the organization (Acker, 1990: 146-147). Harris et al. (1998), examining Australian universities, conclude the sexual division of labour is evident in personnel allocation which shows a disproportionate representation of women in lower ranks of the professoriate as well as in teaching and service positions in the university.

When gender is acknowledged it has generally been treated as a demographic characteristic, and so differential treatment of women in the academy tends to be attributed to individual differences rather than the masculinist context. According to Bensimon and Marshall (1997), conventional policy analysis assumes that the academic structures, practices and processes are gender blind. As such, they are incapable of
recognizing or understanding cases of gender discrimination resulting from structures, norms, values and practices that are gendered. The problem for women is often framed as if it were a matter of representation; there are too few women in academe. The solution then is to increase the number of women students and faculty. Alternatively the problem is identified as incomplete or inadequate socialization to the institution. The latter conclusion leads to strategies that would enhance women's socialization into the university but ignores the fact that socialization is not gender blind.

Feminist policy analysis, in which gender is a lens through which policy is scrutinized, has documented how "seemingly neutral structures and policies contribute to the accumulation of advantage for men" (Bensimon and Marshall, 1997: 15). "From a conventional policy perspective these findings, might inspire compensatory strategies to help women be better socialized to the norms and values" of the university (Bensimon and Marshall, 1997: 16). From a feminist perspective, however, the focus shifts to the university and how it must change. It is not enough to add more women and change them, what is necessary is a reinvention of the university including fundamental changes in teaching practices, institutional policies and social organization (Bensimon and Marshall, 1997: 16).

Symbols and images reflecting the gendered nature of the university were evident in language, which Harris et al. (1998) described as evoking "masculinist traditions"(144). They found "allusions to monastic life" as well as general discourse of "individual excellence, scientific rationality and quantitative output" (145). The patterns of interaction between and among men and women indicated a general exclusion of women from what Harris et al. (1998) refer to as "peak male networks" (145). In
addition they found women’s behaviours were managed through “normative conceptions” of what was appropriate for women such as deference to men and reluctance to promote their achievements. This created particular difficulties for the few women in senior management, as the normative requirement of deference to men conflicted with their position of authority (145).

Finally, Harris et al. (1998) found that gender constructs certain patterns of academic and managerial success and university life, defined in terms of productivity, are organized around this particular notion of success. Production is privileged over reproduction, and output is privileged over process (Harris, Thiele and Currie, 1998). They related this to the last part of Acker’s (1990) framework, which states that the gendered nature of the organization is reflected in the basic processes of the organization.

In another setting, Smith et al. (1986), in their assessment of the status of women at the University of Toronto, concluded the organization of universities was based on the premise that the pursuit of a career was the proper business of men. More than just a matter of attitude, the gender organization of the institution is part of how it gets its business done, and affects the daily workings of the university.

Acker’s (1990) framework has some similarities to the one developed by Thomas in that same year. Thomas (1990) delineated four levels at which gender relations are reproduced in education: ideology; structure or organization; sexual division of labour; and definitions of legitimate knowledge (15). At the first level, the ideology of the good student dictates appropriate and necessary behaviours for students in higher education. Secondly, the structure of higher education is still geared toward the “bachelor students” who live with their parents or are on their own for the first time. As discussed earlier, the
number of men in positions wielding greater power highlights the sexual division of
labour in higher education. Higher proportions of women, on the other hand, are in the
lower ranks of the professoriate as well as in part-time rather than full-time positions.
Finally, Thomas (1990) contends that knowledge is presented as if it were neutral and
objective even though it is not. The meaning of “legitimate knowledge” is highlighted by
remarks such as the one made by a professor who did not want the “women's”
perspective discussed in his class, reported by Blackwell (1998).

The perspective of the university as a masculine environment is common in the
literature (for example see: Backhouse et al., 1994; Blackwell, 1998; Caplan, 1993;
Dagg, 1998; Dagg & Thompson, 1988; Graham, Reilly and Rawlings, 1985; Martin,
ambience in academe serves to undermine the confidence and self-respect of women
scholars. Just because women enter the academy does not mean their contributions are
valued equally with those of men (Schick, 1994). For Graham, Reilly and Rawlings
(1985), the central problem is that the university is a patriarchal system, which seeks to
maintain itself through its educational materials, pedagogy, structure and membership.

Conscious or deliberate discrimination continues to exist in universities, but
visible discrimination is not the only concern invisible or systemic discrimination is also
a concern. According to Backhouse et al. (1994), not all of those who discriminate
intend to cause harm. Systemic discrimination is the result of a seemingly neutral set of
requirements being applied universally. In accordance with the definition of systemic
discrimination Backhouse et al. (1994) assert, the intentions of the discrimination are not
the critical variables, the negative impact on the victim identifies discrimination.
Dagg (1993) cites two examples of unofficial university policy that have resulted in systemic discrimination against women academics. The first is an opposition to nepotism and the second is the opposition to hiring the university’s own graduates. It has been the case that women graduate students often met and married other students or professors in their field. Under anti-nepotism rules the woman marrying a professor or marrying a man who then became a professor, was automatically disqualified from any future academic positions in the same university. The other example, the reluctance of universities to hire their own graduates, means that a woman who earns her degree where her husband is employed or a woman who is unable to move to another university is, again, automatically disqualified from taking an academic position. While these rules seem fair and are applied equally to everyone they have the effect of discriminating against some people. The example I have used is women, but it could just as easily apply to anyone who is not able to move to go to school or to take a job at a university.

Educating women means more than just admitting them into an institution, which was designed for males. Pearson, Shavlik & Touchton (1989) argue that women's needs are not well served in the present organization of the university. The problems women face in the university parallel the problems of the role of women in our society. According to Chamberlain (1988), the fundamental problem for women is rooted in the separation of spheres and the resulting pattern of mothers having primary responsibility for child rearing. Smith (1987), referring to her own experiences as a single mother and academic at Berkeley in California, argues the university was, and still is, purposefully organized to create a world independent of the local and particular (Smith, 1987: 6). The world of academia is set apart from the world of women with childcare responsibilities; a
world of diapers, day care and all the other stresses and joys of motherhood. She refers to the state of academic mothers as “bifurcated consciousness,” defined as “two modes of consciousness [existing] in the same person...often [competing] with one another for time” (Smith, 1987: 7).

Jane Roland Martin (2000) refers to women in academe as “immigrants” because their experiences are similar to those who immigrate to a new country. They have to learn a new language and new customs. They work hard to adopt the ways and norms of the dominant group – what Blackwell (1998) referred to as “cross-dressing” (61). If they cannot pass for one of the dominant group, they run the risk of not being taken seriously and being excluded.

At the University of British Columbia, the first woman dean was appointed in the Faculty of Education, a female dominated discipline, in 1987 (Stewart, 1990) and it took another ten years for a female president to be appointed. While there were three women deans at UBC before this they were all in the position of Dean of Women, which was not considered an academic position. In her history of women at the University of British Columbia, Stewart (1990) attributed the lack of women in upper administrative roles to the gender exclusive nature of the university’s organization. She concluded the sense of cultural entitlement evident in the university’s motto *Tuum Est*, which means “it is yours,” has been directed more at men than at women. For Stewart, the second meaning of *Tuum Est*, “It’s up to you” applies to women in university.

Gillett (1998), commenting on the plight of women in the University of Toronto, in the early 1880’s, said women were “in” the university but not “of” it (39). Examining the position of women in the university one hundred years later, the Commission of
Inquiry on Canadian University Education in 1991, made a similar finding (Smith Commission). Although it states, “Canadian universities today are fundamentally healthy and are serving the country well,” it goes on to say, “universities are looking rather like places where women study and the men run the institution” (Lussier, 1993: 13). In the same way female academics are in but not of the university, women students are in the university but their contributions are not valued equally with those of men.

Stalker and Prentice (1998), refer to women being in but not of the university as the “illusion of inclusion” and identify two harmful illusions in post-secondary education. The first is, although women and people of other non-dominant groups are included in post-secondary education, educational institutions practice “subtle, insidious and damaging forms of sexism...[marginalizing] women and [contributing] to the equity myth” (29). The second illusion is that academe is based on merit. Stalker and Prentice argue “only systemic discrimination can explain the marginalization of women and other minorities in higher education” (Stalker and Prentice, 1998: 29).

Hall and Sandler (1982 and 1984) studied the experiences of women in higher education and found there were certain behaviours in the classroom as well as on campus generally which had the effect of creating an environment, which can interfere with women’s academic participation and career goals and ultimately their development of self-confidence (Lussier, 1991:7). They refer to this as the “chilly climate.” For women students, the chilly climate means: a lack of role models for women; having age, marital status and parental status questioned before and during their programme; being discouraged from doing research on topics related to women; no maternity or parental leave; and a relative lack of interaction with faculty.
Stalker & Prentice (1998) describe “Chilly climate” as:

the combined effects of a number of practices, each of which is relatively inconsequential or even trivial when taken alone, but which cumulatively communicate a lack of confidence, lack of recognition and devaluation. (Stalker and Prentice, 1998: 19)

Stalker and Prentice (1998) refer to the “inconsequential or trivial” practices as “micro-inequities” and say the problem is not just the more blatant discrimination but also the micro-inequities; the behaviours that go unremarked and are not seen as discriminatory but make women uncomfortable. These behaviours tend to put women at a disadvantage. The overall effect of the chilly climate is women find the university less supportive of them, than of men. It takes time and energy to deal with, or to ignore these subtle forms of discriminatory behaviour, and these micro-inequities waste women's time and energy (Stalker & Prentice, 1998).

According to Blackwell (1998) women’s motives for entering university have long been suspect.

Three decades before our research began, it was a common idea that a woman went to university to get her 'MRS' degree, that is, to acquire a husband who had promise of economic success and social respectability. (Blackwell, 1998: 61)

Blackwell’s (1998) study of graduate students’ academic experience found this witticism that degraded women and their academic aspirations, has continued to flourish. Most of the women participants in her study indicated they had been subjected to it.

Research on women in post-secondary education indicates women are continually faced with contradictions. For example, Chisholm and Woodward (1980, cited in Thomas, 1990) found women graduate students were torn between the choice of starting a family or using their education to enter high status jobs. Harris (1974) and Weisstein
reported findings similar to Caplan’s (1990) “Catch 22s.” They found those who appear feminine are less likely to be taken seriously, but at the same time, a woman who tries to keep her femininity in check in order to be taken seriously, will be criticized for being unattractive (cited in Thomas, 1990: 22).

Those who rule have the ruling ideas and are able to preserve their hegemony through their ability to convince subordinates of the validity of their ideas (Acker, 1994). More explicitly, “men impose their conceptualisation of the world on women, whose own experiences are regarded as a less valid, less convincing, and a less scientific way of understanding” (Acker, 1994: 130). According to Gillett,

the academic context is still infused with a residual belief in male superiority and even if we achieve what is considered to be a critical mass of women we have to remember that numbers are not as important as ideology. (Gillett, 1998: 44)

According to Turner & Thompson (1993), graduate student socialization is controlled by prevailing culture, which has been overwhelmingly white and almost exclusively male. Those who were able to do well were those who could fit into the status quo most comfortably. Turner and Thompson (1993) cite James Blackwell (1998) to illustrate the point.

Those who teach are often guilty of subconscious (though sometimes conscious and deliberate) efforts to reproduce themselves through students they come to respect, admire and hope to mentor. (Turner & Thompson, 1993: 366)

For the most part, this value system sees women who succeed as being extraordinary and exceptions to the rule. When women experience difficulties because of the multiple responsibilities they are required to take on, they often come up against the attitude, “you chose it.” The implication being the individual woman must pay the price if she chooses
to have a family and have a job or go to school (Shavlik, Touchton & Pearson, 1989: 442).

David et al. (1997) interrogated the notion of choice as it relates to mother’s choice in education and their children’s schooling. They link the notion of choice with what they refer to as the “new individualism.” According to the new individualism we choose our own options and we create our own welfare (399). David et al. draw attention to what they believe is an erroneous assumption.

Underlying this modernist discourse is the assumption that having choice in something is tantamount to having control over it and the implication that exercising choice means taking responsibility for the making and the outcome of the decision. (David et al., 1997: 400)

David et al. (1997) argue choices are products of particular social contexts including structural and ideological constraints. The concept of choice is gender-blind and may affect women and men in different ways resulting in systemic discrimination. Therefore there is not a real sense of “free choice” in terms of choices mothers make.

While mothers generally are viewed free to choose whether or not to go out to work, if they do so they must deal with the consequences as a private and personal responsibility. (David et al., 1997: 399)

Universities mirror the wider society (David et al., 1996) and their underlying structures, processes and unexamined social arrangements of institutions of higher education reproduce the larger social structure (Lincoln, 1991). Failing to recognise cultural diversity or conceptualise the university as a microcosm of the larger society can have serious consequences for those who are not of the dominant group. Unfortunately, “minority” or nontraditional students are left on the periphery of a largely unchanged university, which Tierney (1991) describes as “being on the border.” On one side of the
border are those activities and individuals who are prominent, on the other side of the border are those who are rendered invisible because of the organization's ideology.

Universities have been accused of being slow to change (Chamberlain, 1988; Hornosty, 1998). Despite the fact that research carried out within the university often critiques social organization, the university itself is often slow to recognize inequities with regard to its own internal organization. The response of many administrators is concern over subdividing or accommodating the needs of a diverse population. Administrators use terms such as "special interest groups" (Wilkerson, 1989), a term that tends to deny legitimate concerns of historically marginalized groups. Wilkerson (1989) encourages university administrators to ask themselves what conditions exist that create the need for "special groups" (29). Mohrman (1994) contrasts the traditional way of dealing with diversity through remediation or special programming handled by student affairs, with the concept of shared responsibility, which concerns itself with the intellectual direction of the future. In the latter approach, "diversity is not about them it is about all of us" [author's emphasis] (Mohrman, 1994: 126).

This is the approach espoused by the University of British Columbia when it adopted the "effective teaching principles and practices," which "include respect for diverse talents and learning styles of students and sensitivity to intellectual and cultural issues" (Equity Office, 2001). In addition the Annual Report for the year 2000, the Equity Office at the University of British Columbia applauded the Faculty of Graduate Studies for eliminating restrictions on distance education courses taken for credit toward a degree. This change in policy "helps students with childcare responsibilities or disabilities complete their work in a timely manner" (Equity Office, 2001: 17). The
University of British Columbia *Academic Plan* (2000) states that the university “must seek, and value, diversity in the student body” (5) and encourages the university to admit more “mature students” (7). Acknowledging the barriers experienced by nontraditional students, the *Academic Plan* states, “where barriers exist for non-traditional learners, we should remove them” (6). In light of the barriers identified in the literature it would be valuable to assess the impact of this document in ten years.

**Women Faculty**

According to Acker (1994) the barriers to equality that women academics experience have their roots deep inside the structure of higher education. The university is permeated with patriarchal views of the world. According to Marchak (1996) it cannot possibly be egalitarian. The unwritten and often invisible “rules of the game” are “stacked against” women (Marchak, 1996). Consequently, while a woman may well rise to be the president of a university, the individualistic nature of meritocracy means one member of a nondominant group rising to the top does not necessarily alter the opportunities for other members of group (Marchak, 1996). Brooks (1997) studied the relationship between gender, power and the academy. While the university is presented as a place of equality and where equality is sought, this is not the reality of university life for many women. Brooks asserts there is a gap between “the model of equality and fairness and the sexist reality of academic life in the institution” (1997: 2).

While the number of women faculty has increased they are still disproportionately found in certain traditional female-dominated academic areas such as education and nursing (Hornosty, 1998). In 1931, 19% of all full-time university teachers in Canada
were women (Dagg, 1998) but by the 1960s that had fallen to 11% (Pyke, 1997; Dagg, 1998). While across Canada, in 1998 women made up 26% of full-time faculty, they only made up 13.7% of Full Professors (AUCC, 2001). Looking to the future, the Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada stated, “At the rate we're going, it will take 1,620 more years -or sixty-four generations - before women see equity as faculty, administrators and role models in Canadian universities.” (Calgary Herald, as quoted in Pyke, 1997: 7-8).

According to the Equity Report (2001), the proportion of women faculty at the University of British Columbia has risen from 16.4% in 1985 to 24.3% in 2000. Getting women into the university is a good start; the other half of the struggle is keeping and then promoting them. The Equity Office at the University of British Columbia carried out a longitudinal study tracking 183 academics (135 men and 48 women) hired to tenure track positions in 1988/89 academic year. After ten years a comparison was made to discover how many had been promoted through the ranks, how many had left and the gender composition of the groups. Assuming men and women would be promoted at the same rate the findings indicate significant gender differences. The study showed that while 71 (53 men and 18 women) of the original 183 had left the university, 23 men and only 1 woman had been promoted to the rank of full professor. The report identified this as a statistically significant difference between the promotion of men and women (Equity Office, 2001: 10).

Paula Caplan (1993) argues that women who encounter barriers may not recognise the systemic source of those barriers because the university gives the impressions of being welcoming and safe. Instead they may think they are doing
something wrong, not doing enough, or both (1993: 4). Although women tend to get blamed for their own insecurities, it is a combination of female socialization to feel inadequate, and the very real sexist aspects existing in academic settings that create or exacerbate these insecurities (12). One of the women Caplan interviewed states

the university runs with very little self-examination. The university lives the unexamined life. It has unwritten rules, and those who can “read” them are the most like those in power- white male etc., others are least likely to know what the words and the silences mean. (Caplan, 1993: 34)

With many rules left unwritten, those who are not treated fairly may find it impossible to prove rules were broken. Caplan (1993) outlines seven points to highlight the discrepancies between women and men in the university. First is what she refers to as the academic funnel, the pictorial representation of enrolment and employment figures for women. Women make up around 56% of undergraduates in Canadian universities but their numbers drop in Master's programmes and again in doctoral programmes (AUCC, 2001). Within faculty, women are concentrated in the lower ranks. At the rank of full professor, women make up only 13.7%. Women are also more likely to work in lower status institutions, and receive a lower salary than men (Caplan, 1993).

At the University of British Columbia, it was found that women graduate students are less likely to receive university financial support than were men. While 51% of women received financial support from the university, 69% of men received financial support (Hawkey, 1996: 2). According to Hawkey (1996), women also receive, on average $165 less support per month, than do men. Even when she took into account field of study and the disproportionate number of women in part-time studies, she found men receive an average of $76 per month more than women. This reduced monthly
income often results in higher long-term debt load for women than for men. The average debt load for men was $14,700 while the average debt load for women was $17,000 (3).

Women are more likely to be registered as part-time students and be part-time faculty. Caplan (1993) reminds us of the disadvantages that come with part-time status such as lower remuneration; fewer resources available to do the job well and difficulties getting to know the dynamics or politics of the department. Women are under-represented in administrative positions as well; especially in the higher positions where power rests. Finally, Caplan (1993) asserts women faculty are more likely to have heavier teaching loads and family responsibilities than male faculty because they are in the lower ranks of the faculty.

Caplan (1993) identified several myths women academics hold about academe: the myth of meritocracy; the myth of non-discrimination and fairness; the myth of liberalism and openness; and the myth of individualism. The myth of meritocracy is the belief people are formally rewarded according to the quantity and quality of their work. She states administrators often say they want to hire more women but there are not any qualified women to hire. The myth of non-discrimination and fairness and the myth of liberalism and openness both address how people are dealt with in the university and stem from the perspectives of those outside of academe. According to Caplan (1993) many women academics regard institutions of higher education as “bastions of liberalism and fairness” although historically, academe has not been open to hiring and promoting nontraditional applicants. According to the myth of non-discrimination and fairness, there are no power dynamics in academe. The myth of collegiality is related to this. It
states academe is not about power; instead people work together cooperatively as partners.

The last myth identified by Caplan (1993) is a culmination of the others, asserting if you try hard and do good work you will succeed. Implicit in this myth is the corresponding negative, but often unspoken idea; if you do not succeed then you cannot blame anyone but yourself. Caplan concludes,

Anyone who genuinely believed academe to be a meritocracy in which objective standards are used to make democratic, collegially respectful decisions must necessarily believe that a person who fails to make it must be individually deficient. (Caplan, 1993: 48)

According to Caplan (1993), women are in a difficult position in the university. First if a woman fails in the university it proves women are inferior, but if she succeeds she becomes proof nothing stands in between women and success in academe and so women have no right to complain. Second, women academics are not considered “real women” if they do not have children and devote a great deal of time to them. But women academics who devote a great deal of time to their children are said not to take their careers seriously. This is projected onto all academic women, so even if you do not have children, you may not be taken seriously because some day you might have them (Caplan, 1993: 65). The perception of family status is different for women and men (Coser, 1991; Rothbell, 1991). Professional women may be taking a greater risk than professional men in revealing their family status (Coser, 1991). Coser and Rothbell both argue it is positive for a man to be seen to care for his family. “A woman's commitment to her family is assumed and it is therefore not image enhancing as it is for a ‘family man’” (Rothbell, 1991: 26).
Women Students

From the time graduate programmes began in Canada, resistance to women's attendance in both undergraduate and graduate programmes has been varied (Lussier, 1993; McKellop, 1994; Stewart, 1990). For example, at the University of Toronto in 1884, women were permitted to take exams, although they were not permitted to attend lectures. The women were left to "eavesdrop" from the corridors (Gillett, 1998). In 1880 the first women students were admitted into the medical school of Queen's University at Kingston. Despite the sexual harassment the women endured from professors they persisted in their studies (Gillett, 1998; McKellop, 1994). The reaction of the male medical students was more effective.

They warned that if the women remained in the Queen's Medical School, they would migrate en masse. The administration succumbed to this threat, so the women had to go. (Gillett, 1998: 39)

Describing the aftermath of the boycott by Queen's male medical students, McKellop (1994) explained that the women who persisted in demanding an education in medicine had to take separate classes in a separate building from the male students; a situation that continued for the next decade (McKellop, 1994: 133-134)

In 1870, at McGill University, the Principal took a different approach. Instead of listing women's shortcomings and arguing they should not be allowed into the university, he listed the university's shortcomings, including the lack of a toilet for women, which he offered as a rationale for excluding women. According to Principal John William Dawson, it was not that "women were not good enough for McGill, but that McGill was not good enough for [women]" (Gillett, 1998: 38).
In 1943 the then president of the American Psychological Association said women should not be allowed into the university because “graduate schools were preparing bright, intellectually talented women students for jobs that did not exist because of sex prejudice.” While it seemed the President of APA was supporting women and felt it was a shame they were not being hired, he did not indicate a need to encourage the hiring of women (as quoted in Pyke, 1997: 5).

Still, women persisted, and because of their persistence the university opened faculties of nursing and home economics, places where the women could be accommodated. According to Lussier (1993), giving women a separate field of study was the least expensive way of satisfying women's demands for equal access and opportunity while not having to accommodate them in the established professional fields. Hence the creation of the School of Nursing at the Vancouver City Hospital (Vancouver General Hospital), which satisfied the need to educate women but was not financed by the University of British Columbia (Stewart, 1990).

Between 1920, when the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, now Statistics Canada, began keeping statistics on graduate students, and 1994, the relative enrolment of women increased from 26% to about 40%\(^2\) an increase of only 16%. During this same period the number of women awarded doctoral degrees as a percentage of the total number of degrees earned, increased from 4% in 1920 to 31% in 1994 (Lussier, 1993; Pyke, 1997; Kerlin R., 1995; Hornosty, 1998). While there has been a substantial increase in the relative number of degrees awarded to women students, they are, like their counterparts

\(^2\) The statistics in the literature vary. According to Vezina(1998) women make up 41% of those enrolled in doctoral programmes in 1994 while R. Kerlin(1995) and Pyke(1997) state they comprise 37.7% and 38% respectively.
in the faculty, disproportionately enrolled in faculties of education and other more woman-friendly and more traditionally feminine fields. In 1998, across Canada only 16% of engineering doctoral students and 24.6% of math and physical science doctoral students were women, while 67% of doctoral students in the field of education and 53% of doctoral students in the fields of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences were women (AUCC, 2001).

The under-representation of women in faculty positions has a direct impact on students through the advisor-student relationship and the lack of mentoring of women students (Saunders et al., 1993; Theodore, 1986). What women academics are able to do has a profound impact on women students who develop a sense of place in the university, partly from their own sense of self or identity and autonomy, but also from observing role models such as women professors (Brooks, 1997). Berg and Ferber (1983) state women are at a disadvantage, which is the inevitable result of an increase in the number of women students without an equivalent increase in the number of women faculty able to advise them.

As noted earlier, the university is often perceived as a masculinist environment, and researchers have found that women students are often aware of learning in a masculine environment. According to Stewart (1990), in the early part of the twentieth century, the standards of feminine behaviour and academic credibility made increasingly contradictory demands on female students. She concluded, “It [is] difficult to be both attractive to men and taken seriously” (Stewart, 1990: 103). Sixty years later, women’s struggle to be taken seriously continues. Moses (1989) found women students often
thought academia did not value female attributes and activities and many women experience a lack of confidence because of the constant struggle to be taken seriously.

Ridding (1996) compared the experiences of doctoral students in four different disciplines and found that women in physics, although conscious of the fact they were functioning in a decidedly male environment, did not describe this situation as particularly problematic (Ridding, 1996: 214). The history department was also described as a distinctively male environment but the women interviewed spoke of feeling less secure than their male colleagues. This often began with their interaction in courses where the atmosphere can be, at first, particularly intimidating for women (Ridding, 1996: 247). The women in the history department were not necessarily passive and some female graduate students wanted to reject the "this is just male, aggressive, survive if you can" attitude that the individualistic approach to doctoral research seems to engender.

At the University of British Columbia, Guppy and Trew (1995) found in Social Sciences and Physical and Applied Sciences women were four times as likely to describe UBC as a "masculine" environment. Across disciplines, twice as many women as men described a masculine environment in which women were treated as people who participated in intellectual life only in a special and limited capacity, while men were considered the primary participants.

Saunders et al. (1993) found women students were perceived as less dedicated to their education than were male students. One reason for this perception is some women have family responsibilities that claim their time. From the perspective of the university, families tend to impede women's educational activities and can have an isolating impact
on women (Edwards, 1993; Moses 1989; Ridding, 1996). One of the participants in Moses' study said,

[A] period of being a wife and mother has made the single mindedness that postgraduate study requires very hard to maintain at times. (Ph.D. student) (Moses, 1989: 85)

This contributes to women's low visibility, which puts them at a disadvantage when it comes time for awarding scholarships, other funding and jobs. If a student has not been able to make herself visible, then she will not be seen as a promising candidate for awards and jobs (Katz & Vieland, 1988). In Moses' study of why women do not go into postgraduate programmes, she found many women were not able to participate fully in any activities that were in the late afternoon or evening. Although seminars were held in the evening to accommodate part time students, it conflicted with childcare responsibilities for others. According to Ridding, students with family commitments were particularly limited in their ability to interact with other students (Ridding, 1996: 253).

The financial impact of families on women is considerable. Women's expenses increase and most scholarships focus on marks, ignoring the connection between marks and responsibilities (Saunders et al., 1993). For example, comparing a B from a woman with care responsibilities to an A from a student without equivalent responsibilities, the woman's care responsibilities affecting her ability to compete, are not considered. This was a common concern of the women studied by Long et al. (1997) (see also Sears, 2000), who repeatedly stated they could not be focused on their studies so their marks suffered. As well, these women were frustrated by the lack of respect for, and recognition within the institution of the work they do as mothers (Long et al., 1997;
Sears, 2000). Even when they receive the same amount of financial support as those without responsibilities, their expenses are greater and so their total indebtedness is greater (Guppy & Trew, 1995).

Isolation is a common theme amongst Ph.D. students (Moses, 1989; Ridding, 1996). In his study of doctoral students Ridding (1996) found virtually all students spoke of the isolating effects of doctoral studies. When students are doing their own research they are isolated. "You do your own research and solve your own problems and if you cannot solve it, it's a lot of frustration" (Ridding, 1996: 236). As one participant in Moses' study commented, "I have come to resent the isolation of graduate study" (Moses, 1989: 30). The isolation of doctoral studies stems from the notion universities are meritocratic and the individualistic nature of North American society. These two perspectives produce the belief doctoral students must prove themselves; they achieve or fail on their own. Certainly some research and writing practices require the individual to work in isolation from other students, however the sense of isolation expressed by Ridding's (1996) and Moses' (1989) participants may have more to do with the competitive nature of doctoral studies. In addition, one could argue the isolation stems from the "sink or swim" perspective that precludes nurturing or guiding students.

Post-secondary studies are often portrayed as a situation of "survival of the fittest" (Hawley, 1993; Kerlin R., 1995; Kerlin S., 1995a). Students are expected to "sink or swim" on their own (Guppy, 1998; Tom, 1997), an attitude that Hulbert (1994) argues, results in a loss of potential. This concern is echoed in the title of Hawley's advice book for doctoral students, Being Bright is Not Enough. Hawley, a retired professor, found
most of the professors she interviewed indicated some of their brightest students had dropped out. Hawley refers to those who drop out as “shadow people.”

Standing behind each smiling graduate is the shadow of another person who also expected to be there on this auspicious occasion, but dropped out somewhere along the way. Are these “shadow people” intellectually inferior to those who stayed the course and received their Ph.D.s? Is the graduation ceremony portrayed here simply an example of Social Darwinism in which only the fittest (brightest) survive? (Hawley, 1993: 3)

According to Hawley (1993), her advice book is written from a student-friendly perspective. She provides not only the usual assortment of “how-to” advice but addresses, in a more academic way, the issues or concerns of doctoral students. She begins by citing the statistics of doctoral completion comparing completion rates of the physical sciences and social sciences and humanities. In addition, she reviews the statistics for “time to degree,” although she only uses the registered time to degree, again comparing physical sciences to social sciences and humanities. The number of doctoral students who sink rather than swim is disturbing. The generally accepted estimate of the rate of attrition for doctoral students in Canada and the United States is approximately 50%; in other words, half of those who begin their doctoral degrees do not finish them (Hawley, 1993; Kerlin R., 1995; Kerlin, S., 1995a; Pyke, 1997). The title of Hawley’s book reflects her concerns about the attrition rates of doctoral students.

R. Kerlin (1995) argues attrition rates have never been of great interest to administrators because attrition is part of the “cooling out” process, or what she refers to as the “weeding out” process. For Kerlin, “the survival of the fittest model is a poor substitute for weak or unstructured admission policies.” In addition “the rising cost of a doctorate and decreasing resources makes ‘survival of the fittest’ an unacceptable model” (Kerlin R., 1995: 6).
The second part of "sink or swim" is that some students "swim" slower than others. The literature uses two measures for time to degree, "registered time to degree" and "total time to degree." The former is limited to the time the student is actually registered in the programme and does not take sick or maternity leave into account, nor does it take into account the situation of a student withdrawing from a programme but returning later to complete. The total time to degree is the time it takes a student to finish their degree from the moment they register, taking all leaves or breaks in studies into account.

Using Canadian and American data, S. Kerlin (1995a) reports, between 1962 and 1992, across disciplines, the median registered time to degree for doctoral students increased from 5.4 years to 7.1 years while the median total time to degree increased from 8.6 years to 10.5 years. For faculties of education during the same period, total time to degree increased from 13.2 years to 19.2 years; an increase of six years. Comparing registered time to degree between fields, engineers finished the fastest in 6 years while the humanities tended to take 8.3 years. Comparing total time to degree for students in physical sciences and students in humanities, Hawley (1993) found the former was 7.6 years while the latter was a "shocking" 18 years (Hawley, 1993: 10).

Attrition and time to completion have been used in discussions of chilly climate to support the finding that the university is a chilly climate for women. Pyke (1997), while not disputing the unacceptably high numbers, argues the evidence does not support the conclusions that women are taking longer to complete their degrees and are dropping out at higher rates than men. Although she did not disagree with the overall statistics, she argued the rates for time to degree and attrition for men and women were not dissimilar.
Taking issue with the use of the statistics and what she perceived to be sloppy analysis, she set out to study how the data was used in various studies as well as carry out her own research on attrition rates and the amount of time it takes to complete a degree (Pyke, 1997).

Pyke (1997) carried out an archival study and a survey to assess the accuracy of attrition rates and statistics on time to degree. Pyke and Sheridan (1993) examined “archival records of almost 700 graduate students (159 doctoral candidates).” Their survey study comprised 108 (61 women and 47 men) individuals who had withdrawn from doctoral programmes. Pyke found that although women were not leaving their programmes at a higher rate than men, their reasons for leaving were different. Women who withdrew tended to be less satisfied with the overall doctoral experience than men. Fifty-two percent of women indicated that problems in their supervisory relationship were instrumental in their decision to leave their programme while approximately thirty-three percent of the men said difficulties in the supervisory relationship led to their decision to leave. Almost half the men compared to eleven percent of the women reported their supervisors had attempted to persuade them to continue. Twenty-five percent of women and only one percent of the men reported gender related issues as part of their reason for leaving, and twice as many women (57%) as men (28%) withdrew from their programme because of family responsibilities (Pyke, 1997: 13-14). Men were more likely to report leaving their doctoral programme for “greener pastures” than were women (55% and 35%, respectively). Pyke (1997) concludes, while women and men leave their doctoral programmes at similar rates, their reasons for leaving reflect different experiences of doctoral programmes. In her studies Pyke also highlighted the inaccuracy
of current university enrolment statistics. A significant minority of those who were reported to have dropped out had, in fact, returned to school and finished their degrees despite the fact the university had listed them as officially withdrawn (Pyke, 1997: 13).

Pyke (1997) did not find a gender difference in the length of time to degree but, as in her study of attrition, she found differences in men's and women's experiences of doctoral studies. Women reported less overall satisfaction with their doctoral experience than did men. Specifically, Pyke found significantly more women than men reported less supervisor interest in their research, more conflict among their committee members, delays in obtaining feedback, which they believed slowed them down. More women than men believed their gender affected their progress and reported insufficient financial support as a hindrance to their completion of their degree. Significantly more men than women reported collaborating with their supervisors on papers. Overall, women were more likely than their male counterparts to perceive the academic climate to be a chilly one.

Despite the perceived difference in their experiences and their sense of the academic environment as a chilly one, Pyke asserts women are not dropping out at greater rates nor are they taking longer to finish their degrees than are men. She concludes:

what is particularly astonishing is that in spite of the multitude of apparent inequities women do not abandon their academic studies nor do they allow these barriers to retard their progress in terms of the time it takes to complete their degrees. (Pyke, 1997: 24)

Pyke focused on full-time students and did not differentiate between disciplines unlike Moses (1989), who compared dropouts in the humanities and social sciences and physical sciences and differentiated between full-time and part-time studies. Moses
(1989) found, in the humanities and social sciences, the average completion time for Ph.D.s is longer and the drop out rate is higher than in the physical sciences. She attributes this to the fact in these fields, students generally work on their own to make an original contribution to knowledge, a time consuming task. Students in the humanities and social sciences must do a broad and deep reading of the literature and do research on methodologies before they can formulate their topic and carry out the research project (Moses, 1989). The supervision of students in the social sciences and the humanities is less directive than in the natural sciences and there may be only infrequent contact between supervisor and research student. Part time students are more likely to drop out than are full-time students and because women tend to be concentrated in the social sciences and humanities and often undertake part-time degrees, they are more vulnerable to dropping out (Moses, 1989: 31).

The Good Student

Most of the literature on the good student has been based on empirical studies of retention and persistence to degree, delineating characteristics of the successful student such as age, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Few studies focused on describing the good student in a more abstract way, or identifying an ideology of the good student. Thirty years ago, Katz and Arbib (1971) studied the attitudes of students and staff at two universities in Australia, with the goal of understanding the attributes of the ideal student. They questioned incoming students (559) and staff (123) at both universities and third year students (183) at one of the universities.
The participants were asked what importance they attached to a set of items. The list included behaviours, skill and attitudes. Katz and Arbib (1971) carried out the study without differentiating their participants by gender so they did not report any gender differences in responses. However, there were some findings that were significant for the current study. Comparing first year students to staff, Katz and Arbib (1971) found staff focused on three items: “to write lucidly and correctly,” “to be willing to express views” and “to do independent work.” The incoming students, while noting the relative importance of doing independent work (62%), also focused on the items “to attend class regularly” (90%) and “to be punctual in meeting deadlines” (56%) (Katz & Arbib, 1971: 280).

Students were more likely than staff to view academic ambitions (30% of students and 13% of staff) and competitiveness (12% of students and 2% of staff) as important for the ideal student (280). Neither group, however, indicated that social involvement – extra-curricular activities or community involvement – were important for the ideal student. Perhaps social involvement may be viewed as “important only outside (author’s emphasis) the student role” (283). Summarizing their findings, Katz and Arbib (1971) found more students than staff place a high importance on conformity to institutional requirements, personality attributes and personal interaction. More staff than students placed a high importance on student involvement in the learning process and on the skill of writing lucidly (286).

Katz and Arbib (1971) conclude the ideas about the ideal student as expressed by these sets of students and staff are very narrow. They question the limited scope of the definition of the ideal student; “surely, being a university student might entail more
diverse activities than those which apparently underlie the conception of many students and staff” (287). The two main limitations of this study were that it missed potential gender differences in the importance placed on the specific items and the research design itself. Had the study been less directive and more open ended it might have provided greater insight into the definition of the ideal student. However, one important insight was that university handbooks and calendars provide little guidance for students as to what is expected of them at the university. Instead, much is left implicit or unspecified and unclear, a conclusion which has serious implications for the success of students (278).

Barnes (1992) referred to the notion of the ideal student as the “super student.”

His description of this “idealized image” or “traditional myth” is daunting.

Super students read all the books in the reading list, are always organized, take perfect notes in lectures, study in preference to meeting friends, have excellent memories and are super-confident. They are always on time for lectures, ask relevant and searching questions, are well liked, have a sense of humour, manage their finances to perfection and gain the highest possible grades. (Barnes, 1992:4)

Upcraft (1996) highlights the demographic changes in the university by recounting the myth of “Joe College.”

Remember Joe College? The young man who, after working hard in high school, arrived at Berkeley, where he set out to sample the rich and varied intellectual feast at the University of California. Joe was independent, self-motivated, and academically well-prepared. About his junior year, Joe settled on a major field of study, which he pursued with diligence and increasing confidence in order to graduate in four years after his arrival. (Upcraft, 1996:21)

According to Upcraft (1996), “Joe doesn’t live here anymore” (29). The changes to the student population include: increased racial and ethnic diversity; increase in women’s participation in post-secondary education; aging of student population; increase in part-
time studies; decreased academic preparedness; difficulties financing education; increase in number of students with mental and physical health concerns; and increase in the number of students not living on campus. For Upcraft (1996), these changes have serious and wide reaching implications for both teaching and learning.

Teaching practices must reflect the changes in the learner and acknowledge the challenges these nontraditional students face. The current student population is forcing faculty to see "what happens inside the classroom as a consequence of what happens outside" (Upcraft, 1996: 37). In this way, Upcraft (1996) challenges the presumption of the separation of public and private spheres. He argues that students are constantly bringing "unwanted" and "counterproductive" forces into the classroom.

They sit in class worried about the next tuition bill; they wonder about children in daycare; they fight fatigue and have eight hours of work still ahead; they don’t understand why the professor requires them to attend every lecture; they can’t believe how long it takes to do the reading; they don’t have time to work on the group project; and on and on. (Upcraft, 1996: 36)

Nontraditional students entering a traditional academic environment which holds up the notion of the "ideal student" or "super student" can result in these nontraditional students experiencing considerable angst about their performance. The impact of this ideology on these students can be isolating. According to Barnes (1992), "Nothing is more likely to make students feel ignorant than the deception that others are more vocal, much brighter and considerably better than they are" (4).

Edward Shils (1997) first coined the term "academic ethic," in 1982, describing it as "methodical discovery and teaching of truths about serious and important things" (3). For Shils, the job of the university faculty was "the cultivation of truth in all fields which they study and teach, and respect for truth" (5). Their task was not simply preparing
students for occupations, which deal with “routine tasks” (6). The academic ethic, according to Shils, has a long tradition; “it has its origins in the time when there were no universities, but only learned men seeking reliable and fundamental knowledge” (13). For Shils, the best years of the American university were the years between the two world wars. He opposed the “mass university,” because he believed there were a large number of students who, “although they have met all the formal qualifications for admission, [were] not well qualified for students at the level of the university” (16). He accused the mass university of isolating the “intellectually serious” students from the intellectual stimulation of the faculty by admitting so many students, faculty could not give the talented students the time they needed to develop (18). For Shils, the world of academe is removed from the practicalities of day-to-day life, involving search for truth by serious and talented intellectuals.

Rau and Durond (2000) use Shils' notion of academic ethic in an analysis of grades and the most significant factors in predicting grades in post-secondary education in the United States. They characterize the student who has a well developed academic ethic as someone who places their studies above leisure, who studies in a disciplined, intense and sober fashion on a daily, or nearly daily basis in order to achieve good grades. “These students are fully and methodically committed to their studies” (23). According to Rau and Durond (2000):

In its purest form, the academic ethic takes on the ascetic ambiance of monastic orders. Only a small handful of students – and adult scholars – achieve this level of the academic ethic. (Rau & Durond, 2000: 24)
They differentiate between wanting good marks as a goal in and of itself, and achieving good marks as a means of fulfilling the "calling of education" that Shils (1982/1997) describes.

In 1998, using a different sample of nineteen student mothers across fields and from all levels of university education, I examined what I referred to as the ideology of the good student (Sears, 1998). Through interviews in which the women described the stressors in their lives and how they coped, a picture emerged of the good student; a picture that is pervasive in the academic (Katz and Arbib, 1971; Shils, 1982/1997; Upcraft, 1996) and in the advice books for post-secondary students, which will be discussed later (Hawley, 1993; O'Day, 1990 & 1993; Voeks, 1979). I referred to the picture that emerged from the data as the ideology of the good student and used the interview data to delineate messages of this ideology as perceived by these students. Some of the messages in the ideology were similar to Katz and Arbib's (1971) study, although the sample and research design were markedly different. In addition to identifying some of the more task- or skill-based characteristics of the good student, the ideology relates to the notion of the academic ethic that Shils (1997) described, moving away from the concrete characteristics, which typify the literature of student success.

This ideology is a way of organizing our thoughts about studenthood and is used to describe and differentiate between those who are "good students" and those who are "bad" students (Sears, 1998). This ideology is authoritative; refusing to follow the ideology of the good student puts one at risk of being seen as unfocused, not sufficiently dedicated, or not a "serious" student. According to this ideology, the good student is smart, dedicated, hardworking, focused, knows the materials, has excellent marks, wins
scholarships, takes personal responsibility for their education and has no responsibilities other than their studies.

There is a paucity of literature interrogating the abstract conception of the good student. Advice books for university students, however, whether read by students or student mothers in particular, are a significant source of the ideology of the good student as well as an effective and efficient method of transmitting the ideology to new and current students. The "academic ethic" (Shils, 1997) and ideology of the good student are operationalized in advice books and "how-to" manuals. These books are very accessible to students and are more likely to be read by students than academic research on the good student.

For the most part, these books assume the student is leaving home for the first time without many living skills such as cooking and budgeting, and certainly without any responsibilities beyond caring for themselves (Stein, 1994). Studenthood is presented as all encompassing, leaving little room for other things in life, and it is presented as the only valid way of being a student. According to O'Day (1993), "College is a way of life" (62). The guidebooks tend to ignore students who might have children or other care responsibilities; only Hawley (1993) provides any sustained discussion for those who are parents.

A common thread in guidebooks for students is the stress on time management; creating a schedule and "sticking to it." Students are advised to keep to their schedule so they can get their work done and reduce their anxiety level. This advice assumes students do not have unexpected things happening in their lives and that they are only responsible for themselves. Not only do the books encourage scheduling, they also suggest students
be aware of their time. Being aware of their time also means being aware of the time they may be wasting, those “stray moments here and there can be salvaged and used” (Voeks, 1979: 108).

Standing in line at the supermarket, waiting for class to begin, riding the bus to work, brushing your hair, cooking dinner, watering the lawn, these all are times for effective reviewing and learning. (Voeks, 1979: 107)

Of course, if your children are helping you buy groceries, water the lawn or make dinner, it is impossible to use these stray moments effectively for your studies. The guidebooks do acknowledge the need for relaxation and students are encouraged to put rest periods into their schedule. While Voeks, writing in 1979, acknowledged the potential that students may also be parents, her advice was not realistic.

Intersperse five- or ten-minute rest periods in long evenings or days of study. Ten minutes of playing with the children or taking a brisk walk, even 5 minutes spent watching a sunset, can do wonders for bedraggled spirits. (Voeks, 1979: 112)

Despite the good intentions, parents can attest to the fact “ten minutes of playing with children” is unrealistic. It assumes there is childcare available for the student mother so she can join her children for ten minutes to relax, then head back to her work. It also assumes her children are willing to let her get back to work after a mere ten minutes of play and will leave her alone when she is working.

There is considerable advice on how to write papers, exams, how to study and prepare for classes. The goal, of course is to get good marks. O’Day (1990) highlights the importance of marks when he states, “At least in the minds of others, your achievement at university will be demonstrated by your grades.” In his first edition he said he believes “in the majority of cases grades do truly reflect the student’s performance as perceived by the professor” (O’Day, 1990: 11). In his later edition of the same book he
acknowledges the potential discrepancy between performance and grades, stating, “most students receive grades which do not reflect their intellectual ability” (O'Day, 1993: 5).

The latter statement seems to take into consideration the fact that evaluation procedures may not reflect what the student knows, nor their ability or intelligence. However, he and others still put great stock in the meaning of grades.

The best way to judge whether you are spreading yourself too thin is to examine your marks. If your grades are not what you want or need, then you must re-analyse how your time is being allocated...If you balance your time effectively between studying, work, socializing, eating well and exercising you will be happier with your lifestyle as a student. (O'Day, 1993: 56)

Student mothers reading these guidebooks will not find themselves. What they do find is a student who: is young, does not have responsibilities, specifically does not have children; has her potential measured by the marks she receives, takes personal responsibility for addressing her time constraints through the use of time management, and is engrossed in the student “lifestyle” such that it is the main focus of her life.

O'Day (1993) cites, but does not reference, a study which found women are more likely to leave school before graduating than are men. With a stunning lack of insight, O'Day does not interrogate the possible structural or systemic reasons for this finding. Instead he simply states,

The take home message is simple: the challenges of college life are great and many students do not survive them...What went wrong? I believe the answer is simpler than it appears. That is good news for students who care about their future. It is also good news for colleges because the students who care about their future are in the majority. (O'Day, 1993: 169)

This simplistic rationale has serious implications for how student mothers are perceived by the university. If we accept that those who do not finish are those who do not care about their future, then every time a student mother quits school because she...
does not have the financial, physical, emotional or academic support necessary to continue her studies, she will be perceived as a student who did not care about her future. If these students cannot finish because they are mothers, then all students who are mothers may be perceived in the same way.

Hawley (1993) includes families in her advice book, which she describes as being written from a “student advocacy point of view” (4). She describes a family as the student’s “anchor” in the otherwise “crazy world of doctoral studies” (149). They are students’ “link with reality” and help them keep their perspective in the “heady atmosphere” of academe. However, she reminds the reader time invested in family is time taken away from studies. Hawley (1993) encourages her readers to devote themselves full time to their studies. She describes the writing involved in a dissertation as something you cannot “put down and pick up again without losing continuity and forward momentum” (Hawley, 1993: 103). Interruptions break your train of thought and require you to struggle to get back on track.

Two hours in the morning, one hour in the afternoon, and one hour after dinner may add up to four arithmetically, but time divided is seldom as fruitful as four consecutive hours of concentrated effort. (her emphasis) (Hawley, 1993: 103)

At first blush the book seems laced with subtle and not so subtle sexism, as Hawley makes assumptions about men’s and women’s roles in the household. However, given that women are likely to be doing a second shift when they get home from work (Hochschild, 1989; Statistics Canada, 1996, 2001), perhaps she is simply recognizing the realities of women students’ lives. Hawley (1993) acknowledges the difficulties women in academe can face and takes a gender neutral tone in the section entitled, “Spouses, Families and Friends,” leading one to believe when she talks about students she is
speaking of men and women. However, she adds a section on wives pursuing a
doctorate, which begs the question, “does the term ‘spouses’ actually mean ‘wives’ and
does the gender neutral term ‘students’ really mean ‘male student’?” Hawley (1993)
defends her decision to include a separate section on wives pursuing a doctorate because
women are entering a male dominated world and so it is worth an extra look. She
acknowledges what many women students already know, “wives seeking a doctorate is
apt to be harder on the marriage than the other way round” (Hawley, 1993:147). Then
Hawley goes one step further to suggest a reason this is so. She contends, “women are
too inclined to criticize when husbands, in an effort to help, fall short of good
housekeeping standards” (152).

Hawley states men do not feel prepared and perhaps may even be reluctant to take
on the responsibility for domestic chores. While they may be quite willing to “[help]
with dinner and the dishes occasionally” this is very different from being asked to take on
the responsibility for these tasks on an ongoing basis (147). She warns husbands about
what life will be like when their wives take on doctoral studies.

Nothing will run as smoothly as before; you may miss those extras, which made
your life more comfortable and which you probably took for granted. . . Chances
are you will have to take over many of the responsibilities that your wife
previously handled - ride pools, shopping, cooking, and other mundane but
necessary chores. (Hawley, 1993: 148)

She goes on to suggest the husbands might wish to get some help.

If finances allow, you can mitigate the problem to a large extent by paying others
to handle domestic necessities; send clothes to the laundry, hire a baby-sitter, eat
out more often and buy the main course from the frozen food department of the
local supermarket. (Hawley, 1993: 148)
Hawley’s advice to doctoral student wives is to “dust off your sense of humour and keep your criticisms to yourself.” She warns them not to hold husbands to “Betty Crocker standards” of cooking and cleaning. She does not make a similar suggestion to men who are pursuing their doctorates. One can only assume Hawley believes wives are able to handle taking on the husband’s chores around the house or picking up the slack when the husband is studying.

The literature depicts a varied picture of women in the university. The university has evolved and taken account of women to some extent so that, for some women, there do not appear to be barriers to participation. But the literature also indicates that for other women the barriers are more substantial, and for some authors the university has not taken a critical look at the values, norms and practices – official and unofficial – that affect women’s participation as students, as faculty and as administrators. Beyond studying the university and its impact on the lives of student mothers, the other side of the discussion is the social construction of motherhood and the context of mothering for the women in this study. This literature will be examined in chapter three.
CHAPTER THREE

CONSTRUCTING THE GOOD MOTHER – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the literature on the social construction of mothering and motherhood in North America. It is divided into three sections beginning with the social construction of the Ideal Mother including a brief history of mothering. I then examine the current dominant North American definition of the good mother with reference to the role of experts. I end with a discussion of how the literature addresses the issue of balancing responsibilities. The literature presented here takes to task those who have taken a role in developing the current culturally accepted construction of “mother” and presents the outcome and consequences for mothers, women who do not have children, children, fathers and society in general. Much of the literature seeks to demystify or debunk the construction of the Ideal Mother. Some of the literature takes the mothers’ perspectives on their childrearing experiences, offering a positive view of mothering and challenging the notion that women are simply victims of their biology rather than agents in their own lives making choices in their own best interests. The focus of this research project is mothers of younger children for whom childcare would be a priority and the literature reflects this focus.
The Social Construction of the Ideal Mother

The literature on mothers, motherhood and mothering uses different words and phrases to describe the social construction of motherhood, but for all the authors, "mother" is a socially, historically and culturally constructed and bound concept. The description of the Ideal Mother depends to a great extent on our perception of children, their nature and needs (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988; Glenn, 1994). Once you describe a child, a mother can simply be described as the person who will meet the child's needs. Whether one uses the term ideology, myth, ideal or idea when referring to the socially constructed "mother," the characteristics are basically the same. Motherhood is presented as a fulfilment of her womanhood and central to her sense of self (Boulton, 1983; Woollett, 1991). This ideology is also referred to as the "motherhood Mandate," which is described by Lewis (1991) as "an unwritten but powerful rule that a woman should have children and be good mothers and that this is their primary role in life" (Lewis, 1991: 196).

Motherhood is seen as a natural state for women and mothers are given exclusive responsibility for caring for children (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988; Boulton, 1983; McMahon, 1995), most properly in nuclear families (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988). If one perceives mothering as natural and normal for women, then the caring work women do is simply an extension of their feminine personality (McMahon, 1995) or an outgrowth of their capacity for empathy (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988). This caring work is not recognised as real work requiring "adequate preparation, material resources, social support and organizational responsiveness" (McMahon, 1995: 214). This ideal curtails women's
employment aspirations because, in order for the Ideal Mother to take on these responsibilities, she cannot work outside the home (Tizard, 1991).

The current dominant North American ideology of mothering ignores the desires and needs of women (Eyer, 1996; Thurer, 1994). Mothers tend to be treated as objects not subjects. They play a supporting role in the drama of the mother-child relationship (Thurer, 1994), submerging their needs and feelings (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Mothers are constructed as being “needless” (having no needs) (Rossiter, 1988), or selfless beings (Polatnick, 1982; Hays, 1996).

The social construction of mother is seen as being so pervasive that, “like air, it is unnoticeable” (Thurer, 1994: xv). Lewis (1991) refers to the dominant North American construction as “received wisdom” (197). Others highlight the social context that accompanies a discussion of motherhood by referring to the definitions of the Ideal Mother as “ahistorical givens” (Edwards, 1993: 11) and “timeless truths” (Thurer (1994: xxv) which do not spring from nature but rather they are cultural inventions (Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1994). Examining the social construction of the discourse of “Ideal Mother” enables one to recognise the subjective or value-laden nature of the concept, which originates in a specific historical, social, cultural and political context (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991: 13). McMahon refers to motherhood as a “contested terrain,” which needs to be understood in its social context (McMahon, 1995: 1).

Thurer (1994) examines how cultures have reinvented the good mother from the “stone age” to the present arguing that child centred views of childrearing are recent and have a specific cultural location. In the European context, prior to the eighteenth century the concept of “mother love” did not exist. In general, mothers did not always take an
Active role in rearing their children and not until the Age of Enlightenment, when the survival of children began to be seen as important, were women encouraged to nurture their children. At that time the concept of “mother love” was used to foster nurturance in women (Birns & Hay, 1988). Thurer (1994) argues that childcare manuals have been instrumental in North America during the twentieth century in shaping current myths of the Ideal Mother (Thurer, 1994). The myth places so many duties and expectations on mothers to the point where taking them seriously would result in serious mental health risks for mothers (Thurer, 1994).

The requirement for mothers to take on sole responsibility for childcare is also recent and is not how mothers have always reared children in North America or around the world. Margolis (1984) cited a study of 186 societies around the world, which found that in only 46% of societies were mothers primary caregivers for infants. In 40% of the societies, others, usually older siblings, shared the responsibility for primary care of infants. Most striking was in less than 20% of the societies were mothers the primary or exclusive caregivers of children after infancy. The nuclear family which is so vital to the description of the Ideal Mother presented in child care manuals and in the cultural myth of mother, was found in only 6.1% of the societies studied from around the world (Margolis, 1984: 15). To illustrate the importance of context, Boulton (1983) cites the example of Matabeleland where there is more generalized responsibility for childcare. “In Matabeleland, it is thought unnatural for the biological mother to show more interest in her child than in those of her sisters and cousins” (Boulton, 1983: 17). Woollett and Phoenix (1991) highlight the importance of social and cultural context noting experiences and practices of motherhood in Europe can vary for women of the same social class in
different countries. Children are a part of adult life in Italy, while they are separated from adult life in the United Kingdom (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991: 22).

This study centres on the impact of the dominant North American definition of the good mother on all mothers living in North America; therefore I have focused on literature about this construction. However, there also exist “diverse, often submerged, constructions of mothering that have coexisted alongside this dominant model” (Glenn, 1994:3). In particular, there are several assumptions in the dominant construction of mothering that set it apart from racial ethnic constructions of mothering, which I will briefly outline here (Collins, 1994). These assumptions revolve around kind relationships, economic security and racial privilege.

For Gailey (2000), the dominant perspective on kin relationships in North America is that normal kinship is based on genetic connections between parents and children. Specifically, the dominant kinship relationship is the nuclear family as created by a man and a woman. For many racial ethnic families, however, extended family relationships are important. According to Stanfield (1995), these extended kinship relationships reflect “a distinct cultural characteristic” as well as “a response to structural conditions.”

The second assumption of the dominant construction of mothering is that mothers and their children enjoy “a relative degree of economic security” (Collins, 1994: 63), hence being a stay-at-home mother can be a choice for mothers. However, African-American, Latin and Asian-American women have been excluded from the dominant cult

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3 This is Patricia Hills Collins’ term which she has used interchangeably with “women of colour” although she uses the former in cases when she wishes to express the experiences of a group who experience racial oppression as opposed to the latter which says comes from a “feminist background where racial ethnic women committed to feminist struggle aimed to distinguish their history and issues from those of middle-class, white women” (Collins, 1994: 63).
of domesticity. Instead, these women have been viewed only as units of labour and so being a stay-at-home mother is not a realistic choice (Glenn, 1994). According to Glenn (1994), racial ethnic families have long experienced some of the issues that have only recently been of concern to mainstream families, such as combining work and family, single parenthood and extended family relationships.

Lastly, the dominant construction of mothering assumes that “all women enjoy the racial privilege that allows them to see themselves primarily as individuals in search of personal autonomy.” Therefore is assumed to be a good thing to want more than just the job of looking after their children. Racial ethnic women, however tend to see themselves as part of a group struggling for power (Collins, 1994: 48).

Collins contrasts these assumptions with three core themes, which she argues characterize the experiences of racial ethnic women: survival, power, and identity. While survival is assumed for white middle class children, those from racial ethnic groups who are not as highly valued have a greater likelihood of dying in infancy. In the United States, the infant morality rate of African American children is twice that of white infants (Collins, 1994: 49). Socialization for African-American children, then, is to enable them to survive in a “hostile, racist and discriminatory” environment (Lee & Williams, 2001: 58). For Native-American, Hispanic, Asian-American and African-American mothers, the struggle to survive as a community is one of the fundamental dimensions of their motherwork.

While there are diverse families types in North America, there is a tendency to take the “ideal, conjugal, nuclear unit as the universal model of comparison in determining the extent of familial stability and productivity”(Stanfield, 1995:x). One of
the ways African-American families have endured is through the extended family structure (Collins, 1994; Stanfield, 1995). According to George and Dickerson (1995), the “sharing of child care responsibilities by adult kin other than their parents, has its origins in the values and practices of traditional African communities” (149).

The issue of power for racial ethnic mothers encompasses control over their bodies and control over their children. First, power is the ability to choose whether or not to become mothers. Secondly, power means being able to decide to keep all children whether or not they are planned. Finally, power means control over their children’s minds, including education that validates their culture and values.

The last theme of mothering for racial ethnic mothers is identity. The racial privilege of white women makes the need to engage in motherwork for identity unnecessary but no such privilege is available to racial ethnic mothers. According to Collins (1994), white children may fight against racial oppression, but their survival does not depend upon it. The identity of racial ethnic children is not validated in schools, media or other social institutions; therefore part of their mothering is to teach their children to survive in an oppressive world (Collins, 1994). Collins’ framework for mothering highlights the connection between ideas and their social context and the cultural and social specificity of the dominant definition of the good mother.

The cultural model of childrearing dominating the twentieth century in North America is the ideology of permissive childrearing, which had its beginnings in the 1930s (Hays, 1996). Before this, parents guided childrearing using adult interests. The permissive era brought a new approach called a child centred approach, with childrearing explicitly determined by the needs of the child (Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1994). The goal of
this type of childrearing was no longer to inhibit the "natural inclinations" of children, which tended to be viewed as negative, but to give them free rein. This changed the mother's role from "taming bad habits" to responding to the child's emotional needs, and stimulating the child's cognitive development (Thurer, 1994). In the latter part of the twentieth century, in North America, there have been increasing demands on parents, specifically mothers, in relation to childrearing. Concerns about a child's achievements have intensified becoming more widespread to the point where there has been a sense of competition requiring parents to produce an accomplished baby who has the latest, most stimulating toys (Kaplan, 1992).

The present ideology of intensive mothering was created and has been maintained to a large degree by psychology and psychologists, both developmental and psychoanalytic (Eyer, 1996; Gleason, 1999; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Thurer, 1994; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Considerable attention is given to children, while mothers receive relatively little attention; knowledge about motherhood tends to be assumed rather than examined (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Some researchers note that psychologists may frame their research in ways that reflect the culture's idealized view of mother and motherhood because they accept the dominant ideologies about family life (Thurer, 1994; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Caplan (1985) accuses mental health professionals of sending mothers confusing messages. On the one hand, mothers should expect no joy or reward from their children and should not be personally ambitious but channel their ambitions through their children. On the other hand, mothers are told not to live their lives or achieve goals through their children (Caplan, 1985). Gleason (1999) too, found confusing messages being conveyed to mothers. Mothers were told not to
over-mother or smother their children, but were also warned about maternal deprivation. Aside from knowing when to stop “nagging and bossing” their children, mothers had to know when to stop “indulging them with play and fun,” or their children would grow up to be too dependent on them (Gleason, 1999: 63-64).

In addition to confusing messages, mothers tend to be given all the responsibility for the child’s behaviours (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988; Gleason, 1999; Thurer, 1994). As Caplan states, “mothers have nearly all the work and receive nearly all the blame” (Caplan, 1985:44). Writing in a Canadian context, Gleason (1999) argues mothers were more singled out for parenting advice than were fathers, and mothers were more likely to be blamed for ‘bad’ children (14).

To understand the magnitude of mother blaming, Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale conducted a content analysis of all research articles published in nine mental health journals in the years 1972, 1977 and 1982 identifying the cause of a patient’s (including prisoners’ and high school students’) emotional problems. In the 125 articles Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale analysed, mothers were blamed for an astounding array of problems (Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale list 72 kinds of problems) including:

- anorexia nervosa, arson, chronic vomiting, bedwetting, poor bowel control, inability to deal with colour blindness, male children’s fear of penile shrinkage and death, minimal brain damage, a need to be anally penetrated, poor language development, schizophrenia, self-induced television epilepsy, homicidal transsexualism, and ulcerative colitis. (Caplan, 1985: 52)

Caplan argued mother blaming is so ingrained, clinicians tend to turn to it first without looking for another answer. For example, “school phobia” is a condition routinely blamed on “overprotective, dependent, immature mothers who want to keep their children at home” (Caplan, 1985: 57). The fact that women are less and less at
home during school hours, thus wanting their children to be in school, was not taken into account. Instead the research falls back on an old rationale, placing the blame on mothers (Caplan, 1985). In addition, mothers came under scrutiny to a far greater degree than did fathers. In many cases fathers were not mentioned. Even in articles where mothers were not blamed, the possible contribution to the problem by the father was not even considered (Caplan, 1985).

Mother blaming was not always straightforward. Even when the topic of study was the amount of time fathers spent with their children, the results were interpreted in such a way as to place blame on mothers. A good illustration of this was a study of children in day care carried out in the 1980s. J. Belsky, had been a supporter of day care, determined that employed mothers are either “selfishly depriving their infants or selfishly overwhelming their babies with excess attention is order to alleviate their guilt.” Belsky found employed mothers spent as much time with their infants as stay-at-home mothers. He also found that fathers whose wives are employed, spent less time with their children than fathers with stay-at-home wives. From these findings he concluded that employed mothers are not only over-stimulating their babies, but are preventing fathers from having their share of play time with their children (unpublished manuscript cited in Birns & ben-Ner, 1988: 60).

Attachment theory, the cornerstone of childrearing manuals for the past fifty years, was one of the theories fuelling mother blaming (Caplan, 1985; Thurer, 1994). This theory stressed the importance of bonding between the mother and child in the early years of life. Without this bonding, a child would suffer maternal deprivation (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). According to attachment theorists, mother and baby must not be
separated as the continuous warm and intimate relationship with the mother is vital to a child's normal functioning and the establishment of secure attachments (Thurer, 1994; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). In fact, it has been suggested that turning one's child over to be cared for by another person was tantamount to child abuse (Dally, 1982; Gordon, 1990).

Not only was attachment theory appealing, it was socially and politically useful. The requirement of a continuous relationship between mother and child meant stay-at-home mothering, was not only natural and normal, it was necessary (Dally, 1982; Rossiter, 1988; Thurer, 1994). Critics of attachment theory do not suggest that there is not a bond between mother and child. Instead they criticized the obsessive nature of the interest in attachment (Caplan, 1985, Thurer, 1994), and the assertion that women staying at home with their children was the only way of ensuring bonding between mother and child (Rossiter, 1988). Mothers' feelings about, and experiences of being required to behave in what psychologists have deemed "normal" and "natural" ways were given little consideration (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Rossiter (1988) acknowledges what she calls a preferential attachment between infants and mothers because of mothers' ability to feed babies from their bodies. She asserts, however, it does not necessarily follow this preferential attachment requires a particular social arrangement of mothering, specifically stay-at-home mothering (Rossiter, 1988).

Instead of being seen as a full participant in the mother-child relationship, mothers have tended to be ignored or seen only through their influence on their child's development (Eyer, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Psychology has little to say about what motherhood means to women, how they feel about being mothers, what the job
entails on a day-to-day basis, and how being a mother relates to her other jobs (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Much of the psychological research and literature on mothers does not reflect the realities of women's lives. Developmental psychologists, in particular, ignore mothers as human beings and the context of mothering when they define good mothering (Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Psychoanalysts also have contributed to the development of the Ideal Mother through their construction of ideal female behaviour. In fact, by the middle of the twentieth century, the description of ideal female behaviours came to match the behaviours needed for raising a child. Maternal self-sacrifice was deemed to be normal and good (Thurer, 1994).

Psychologists have been so influential, and have had such a widespread impact because their ideas and conceptions about mothering have filtered through to popular texts such as childrearing manuals (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Childcare "experts" who write childrearing manuals put tremendous pressure on women to be the "Ideal Mother". These manuals have increased in popularity over the twentieth century and reflect the desire for "scientific" solutions to social ills (Hays, 1996).

Dr. Spock, Dr. Terry Brazelton, and Penelope Leach, who Eyer (1996) refers to as the "Holy Triumvirate" (124), were the three most popular "experts" of the middle to late twentieth century (based on number of books sold) and all espouse the ideology of intensive mothering as described by Hays (1996). They assume childcare is primarily the responsibility of the mother; recommend methods that are, "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996: 8). The child is defined as a sacred, innocent and pure being, who should be regarded as "completely distinct from questions of efficiency and financial profitability" (Hays, 1996: 8).
The assumption that mothers should be primarily responsible is clear in the manuals. In 1976 however, Dr. Spock reversed his original position on women working outside the home when he allowed that, with some restrictions, mothers could work outside the home without causing their children harm (Eyer, 1996; Thurer, 1994). In addition, these manuals portray raising children as natural and instinctive for women (Hays, 1996).

Relying on these “experts,” however, did not make a mother's life easier. Hays (1996) outlines some of the requirements of the job. Mothers must know the latest information on physical, emotional and cognitive development; keep a tight rein on displays of affection; be able to recognise the various developmental stages in their child's life so they can respond appropriately; and be objective, detached and insightful about their children's needs (Hays, 1996: 44). After heeding all this advice the mother is urged to follow her instincts. It would seem, however, the very existence of these manuals might lead her to distrust her own instincts and rely on the experts (Thurer, 1994). In fact, according to Gleason (1999),

> the notion that women did not have innately superior mothering ability made professional intervention all the more palatable and possible. Thus, psychologists had to reconcile a central tension in their advice: a mother was the most important person in the child's life, but she still needed the most guidance to do the job well. (Gleason, 1999: 63)

A number of concerns are expressed in the literature about childrearing manuals. The first is that the advice offered has not been scientifically evaluated. Both Margolis (1984) and Hays (1996) highlight the cultural context of child rearing manuals when they describe them as records of “prescriptive dicta, not actual practice” that are subject to selective emphasis (Margolis, 1984: 17) and as “reflection[s] of a specific cultural model
that was constructed socially over time under particular circumstances” (Hays, 1996: 52).

Thurer (1994) characterises them as,

largely impressionistic... imbued with an aura of moral superiority and absolute science, persuasive enough to put fear in the hearts of most inexperienced mothers. (Thurer, 1994: 262)

The manuals took their credibility from the writer’s degrees in medicine or psychology and this aura of expertise inhibited challenges from mothers (Thurer, 1994). These manuals came to determine mothering, to be a final statement on what/who mothers were.

As the experts grew more and more sensitive to the needs of the child they became increasingly insensitive to the needs of mothers (Thurer, 1994). This “child centred” thinking was imposed on the views of mothers’ attachment to their children without question. Whereas a mother may be the centre of a child’s universe the opposite may not necessarily be true (Boulton, 1983). By focusing on the mother-child dyad as the primary unit in which children develop, mothers are constructed as being critical influences on their child’s well being (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). According to Thurer (1994), the research on the impact of day care on children has failed to demonstrate any negative consequences.

If an intensive one-on-one exclusive mother relationship were, in fact, essential, one would have to conclude that except for a brief period in the fifties, most cultures, past and present, in its absence, produced damaged people. (Thurer, 1994: 291)

Although most childrearing manuals, articles and discussions of childrearing use the terms “parents” and “parenting” instead of “mothers” and “mothering,” the current dominant North American childrearing ideology reinforces the perspective that the parent
engaging in the everyday tasks of caring for children is most likely and, in fact, ought to be the mother (Marshall, 1991). Generally it was only mothers who were studied and not until the 1960s and 1970s did experts begin to recognise the importance of children's attachment to their father (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Thurer, 1994). Although there was the assumption of interchangeability of mothers and fathers, assumptions about "parenthood" are not necessarily gender-free (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

Men can be perceived as "good fathers" and still not be closely involved in childcare or even spend very much time with their children (McMahon, 1995; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). We do not consider children at risk for profound emotional or physical harm if their fathers are not fully involved in childcare. When men do take a more active role with their children they tend to take on responsibility for playtime, while mothers are left in more of a caretaking role (McMahon, 1995), displacing women from the most rewarding times with their children. As Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) have noted, when husbands take on domestic tasks they tend to be those with higher gratification and greater positive feedback such as bathing children or reading bedtime stories. Mothers then are left with the lower order chores such as cleaning the bathroom, what Hawley (1993) refers to as the "mundane but necessary chores" (148). Based on 1998 statistics on unpaid household work responsibilities, mothers employed full-time with a spouse and a child at home under the age of 19 years, spent, on average, 4.9 hours per day on unpaid work activities while her male counterpart spent on average 3.3 hours per day on unpaid work activities (Statistics Canada, 2001: 5). In the Greater Vancouver Regional District women spent, on average, 2.4 hours per day on primary child care while men spent only 1.8 hours per day on primary childcare (Statistics Canada, 1996).
Internalizing Ideology

Women are socialised to feel they should want to be mothers. They are taught “real women” have an instinct for “doing the right thing” in childrearing (Caplan, 1985). McMahon (1995) suggests “caring for” and “caring about” have been conflated such that caring work is constructed to be evidence of women’s natural expression of love. To resist this definition of caring work is to put one’s self in the position of being accused of not caring for one’s children or of being selfish. At the same time, this work is devalued and women are encouraged to describe the work they do for their families as “doing nothing” when they are, in fact, exhausting themselves trying to prove they are “real women” (Caplan, 1985: 45).

In accepting this ideology, women attempt to conform to the myths of the Ideal Mother (Birns & Hay, 1988) and are therefore susceptible to the impossibly high standards set for mothers (Caplan, 1985). Because the ideology of mothering is tied to the notion of being “real women” taking on the responsibility of their children becomes more than just a social role, it is constitutive of self. It would be unthinkable to deny this responsibility without a serious questioning of identity, for a woman to not feel responsible for her children would implicate her whole moral character (McMahon, 1995). This does not mean there is not a struggle. As McMahon (1995) found in her study of how women create their identities as mothers and women, the commitment women have to motherhood requires ongoing ideological work to reduce the potential for cognitive dissonance (McMahon, 1995: 224). Hays (1996) found a similar need for
ideological work in her study comparing the acceptance of ideology of intensive 
mothering by stay-at-home and employed mothers.

The ideology of motherhood bears little resemblance to women's lived reality. 
Birns & Hay (1988) assert that when the advice women receive fails, they tend to feel 
anxious, guilty and possibly even despair, all of which have a powerful impact on their 
experiences of motherhood (Birns & Hay, 1988: 3). Caplan (1985) challenges the 
popular myth that women are masochistic and enjoy guilt. She argues society has created 
an image of a mother whose worth depends primarily on mothering her children but who 
is so powerful anything she does could “mess up” her children (Caplan, 1985: 47). 
Experts have created images of mothers, which have come to define mothering, and 
ended up being conclusive statements about “natural” mothering (Rossiter, 1988). 
Although these images do not reflect the reality of women's lives, they have an impact as 
women try to relate their experiences to these artificial images rather than creating 
images that fit their experiences (Birns & Hay, 1988; Gordon, 1990; Polatnick, 1982; 
Rossiter, 1988). McMahon (1995) also found that the everyday living of the role of 
mother led to perceived character changes such the women's identities adapting to 
approximate the culturally romanticized image of what a mother is supposed to be. This, 
in turn, functions to reproduce much of the ambivalence and pressure women feel about 
motherhood (Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995).

We must resist the temptation to view mothers as victims of an overwhelming 
structure which is oppressing them. Kaplan (1992) portrays women as victims. She 
perpetuates the image of women as passive receptors rather than active agents in the 
creation of their lives with statements such as “mother's unwitting acceptance of myth”
and “how can a woman distinguish her desire for the child from that imposed on her?” (Kaplan, 1992: 3-4). McMahon (1995) warns that by focusing on the oppressiveness of motherhood we tend to view women's sense of their experiences as ideological in nature and see the women themselves as merely “passive accomplices in their own subjugation” (McMahon, 1995: 8). This view is challenged by women themselves who see their mothering as being instrumental in the creation of their sense of self and identity (McMahon, 1995).

While women may voice their dissatisfaction with the unfair division of family labour as they attempt to live up to the image of the Ideal Mother, they seldom question the ideal itself (Thurer, 1994). Mothers tend not to not direct their anger at a political or social order that expects them to carry an unmanageable burden (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989). Duffy et al. (1989) suggest women contribute to their situation by taking on more work, managing the contradictory demands on their time and accepting greater and greater stress in their lives instead of reorganizing family, economic and gender systems to address the structural barriers such as inflexibility of paid work and school.

Understanding the social construction of mothering, asserts Rossiter (1988), is essential to resisting “knowledge about mothers - knowledge created by abstraction which controls women through individualism and biology” (Rossiter, 1988: 17).

The current cultural rhetoric of individualism has an enormous impact on mothers and their ability to enact social change. Social problems tend to be translated into personal and individual ones, which transform what could be political anger into individual guilt and malaise (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989). Mothers will drop courses, reduce their workload and reduce the amount of sleep they get because there are few
practical alternatives and they do not feel they are able to question the context within which they live and work (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989; Long et al., 1997). Political, organizational and ideological contradictions between the spheres are reduced to a private problem of organizing and scheduling. Structural problems are treated as individual problems (Dornbusch & Strober, 1988) and women are left to balance the various demands for their time (McMahon, 1995). Coping, for women, is articulated as finding ways to manage everything in their lives. Duffy et al. (1989) found some women speak about strategies reminiscent of managerial efficiency such as time management skills. The focus on the individual can act as a barrier to social action (Dornbusch & Strober, 1988).

A number of issues are identified in the literature as vital to changing the situation in which mothers find themselves. McMahon (1995) indicates the necessity of creating adequate language and concepts to make visible women's everyday caring activities. Most importantly, it is necessary to understand how the social, historical and cultural contexts within which we live affect our perception of the Ideal Mother (Lewis, 1991; Marshall, 1991; Skold, 1988, Thurer, 1994; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991). Before change can happen, we must shift our gaze from the family to social structures. While it may be immediate and personally helpful to urge fathers to take on more of the domestic responsibilities, for a long-term, generalized impact this must be accompanied by institutional change (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989). We need to ask why nurturing acts by women are seen as an expression of their biological nature while nurturing acts by men are interpreted as beyond their “normal” duty and therefore extraordinary
McMahon (1995) suggests we question the high cost of parenthood and why women are expected to privately bear the burden.

Balancing Responsibilities

It has been suggested that the liberation of women has been at a cost to their children, a statement challenged by Skold (1988). Underlying this statement is the assumption that a mother's and a child's interests are in conflict. That one must necessarily sacrifice their needs for the other is evident in the views of developmental psychologists and the desire for mothers to stay at home. The assumption that children's and mother's interests are in conflict has two parts. First, there is an assumption based on attachment theory that children need to be cared for within the family and substitute care is not only undesirable, but damaging for children. The second part of the assumption is that to be equal to men, women must not only work but they must participate in public life in the same way men do, with little accommodation for the demands of their family (Skold, 1988). According to Lewis (1991), equality has provided mothers with the opportunity to conform to male patterns of work and even male patterns of parenting, which she feels does little to improve conditions for mothers, fathers or children.

Rossiter (1988) asserts that this assumption of conflicting interests is a false dichotomy created to regulate women. She refers to the required state for women as "needlessness" (Rossiter, 1988: 229). If women attend to their own needs then their children will suffer (Rossiter, 1988; Skold, 1988). In essence, women cease to exist after they have children; mothers exist bodily but they is not permitted to have needs and
desires (Thurer, 1994). According to Thurer (1994) “once she attains motherhood she must hand over her point of view” (xvii). Family life has been organized without taking into account extra-familial responsibilities and women are forced to choose between structurally incompatible goals in a way that men are not (McMahon, 1995; Skold, 1988).

Separating one's own needs from one's child's needs is not always an easy matter. Many women are unable or unwilling to separate themselves as mothers, from themselves as individuals arguing instead that the two are interrelated (Edwards, 1993; Lewis, 1991). Women and men experience the demands of mothering and fathering differently. Women tend to experience their roles simultaneously, while men tend to experiences their roles sequentially (Lewis, 1991; McMahon, 1995). This is illustrated in Edwards' (1993) study of mature women students in which one of the participants was told by a tutor to “put herself first.” The woman had some difficulty conceptualising this because her “self” was both a mother and a student simultaneously (Edwards, 1993: 90). Similarly, in a study of student mothers, most of the participants said they were not able to compartmentalize their lives despite the fact they perceive the university as being desirous of them doing so. Many student mothers found their student experiences were, in fact, enriched by their mothering experiences (Long et al., 1997).

The dominant ideology of motherhood is based on a gendered division of labour. So, too, are the dominant ideology of employment and the ideology of the good student. The Ideal Mother is constructed as one who does not work outside the home, while the Ideal Worker/Student is constructed as someone who puts work first. The latter two are based on traditional male values and precludes any substantial involvement in domestic responsibilities (Tizard, 1991). These two ideologies combine to encourage women to
stay in the home. Despite these pressures, since World War II more women have entered the paid workforce than in any previous period (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989; Hays, 1996). Instead of being seen as detrimental, maternal employment is now considered to have a positive effect on family members (Strober, 1988). For many women this means satisfying two “greedy institutions” (Acker, 1994; Coser, 1974; Currie, Harris & Thiele, 2000; Edwards, 1993), which make simultaneous demands on women's emotional, physical and intellectual energy. Employed mothers must also reconcile two incompatible perspectives. First, a happy mother who works outside the home, is better than one who stays at home and is resentful. Second, is the fear her work may, in some way, be hurting her child (McCartney & Phillips, 1988).

Owing to their various responsibilities, women's work patterns have tended to be different from the normal male work pattern (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989; Lewis, 1991). Women often make plans for their future taking into account the expectation of becoming mothers (Moses, 1989; Tizard, 1991; Woollett, 1991). They have reduced their career expectations to take lower paying, lower status jobs that enable them to carry out what they feel are their responsibilities (McMahon, 1995). In addition, many women have tried to “do it all” by becoming “Supermom” (Thurer, 1994; Hays, 1996).

The impact of family responsibilities on a woman’s employment is that she ends up with a cumulative deficit across her career because she takes time out for child bearing and rearing, as well as caring for sick children, elderly parents and relatives (Lie & O’Leary, 1990). Acker (1994) cites problems specific to women academics, such as women having less time and energy left for committee work and image enhancing departmental activities after dealing with family, teaching and research responsibilities
Acker, 1994: 127). She is not optimistic because, in a tight job market where hiring committees must make subtle distinctions between candidates, it is unlikely the university would take the women's other responsibilities into account and reject productivity as a key criterion for hiring and promotion. At the University of British Columbia the Academic Plan indicates a desire to take into account the different stages in careers of faculty when productivity may be reduced. When operationalized, this policy could address Acker's (1994) concern. Land (1989), in her essay detailing her experiences as a mother working outside the home, contends that as a result of taking time out from her career, she was just getting into her stride when it was time for early retirement. As men are establishing themselves in their careers, women are bearing and rearing children. Their career patterns are incompatible with “normal” career progression. Even those women who wait to have children until they have established themselves in a career or have the appropriate credentials will still experience interruptions in their career progression when they take time away from work to have children. In response to this incompatibility, Young (1992) suggests we need to rethink how we view ambition and career paths. Bilken (1986) proposes,

a new understanding of career commitment and career interruptions that does not dismiss or delegate parenting and other domestic responsibilities or equate an absence of ambition in the organizational hierarchy with a lack of career commitment. (cited in Young, 1992: 149)

The major forces influencing women's career decisions have less to do with women themselves than with the economy and the society in which they live (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989). Women try to make sense of the available options by choosing between the trade offs built into the structure of family and paid work (Duffy, Mandrell
& Pupo, 1989). The latter stresses and constraints stem from discrimination and
occupational segregation in the job market (Strober, 1988). Work schedules and
demands on time do not take into account the needs of children. Work is still organized
as if all workers were men with wives at home looking after the children (Acker, 1990;
expected of the professional implies selflessness and devotion to a calling” (128).
Because of this ideal, women experience “a conflict of normative priorities” (118).

The choice between the two activity systems follows a preferential
cultural pattern. The woman has the cultural mandate to give priority
to the family. Even when working outside the home she is expected to
be committed to her family first, her work second and this helps prevent
disruptions within the family. (Coser, 1991: 118)

For many women the “balancing act” turns into stress and anxiety, which can
affect their paid work (Paris, 1989). This stress is attributed to working within what has
been described as an unyielding workplace (Swiss & Walker, 1993). Women learn it is
difficult if not impossible to combine work or school and family. Moses (1989), in her
research on barriers to women pursuing postgraduate work, addressed the issue of
balancing work and family responsibilities. She found little optimism from the women
she interviewed about their ability, in the current university environment, to have a
family and continue their studies. The women she interviewed saw barriers everywhere,
“school timetables, [university] timetables don't connect, work makes few allowances,
and all organizational burdens fall on women” (Moses, 1989: 103). According to Moses’
(1989) participants, it was extremely difficult to have young children unless you could
afford childcare, have a cleaner and had a very supportive spouse and family.
Lavell (1998) described trying to “fit classes and assignments between the cracks of [her] life” (197).

From four o'clock until after ten I was a mother... Doing supper, playing with my kids, helping with their homework... chats, complaints, fights. Life. Most nights I had my own homework, which sometimes I could attend to for short periods, but mostly I didn't get to it until after the kids' bedtimes. I was often still at my homework early into the morning. (Lavell, 1998: 195)

Her approach to her studies was far removed from the approach described earlier in the ideology of the good student and the “academic ethic.” Mothers are not supported in achieving and maintaining the commitment, through accessible childcare and cultural changes, to acknowledge the responsibilities of father in childrearing (Lewis, 1991). In a brief to the Special Committee on Childcare twenty-four years ago, the Canadian Association of University Teachers warned, “unless you support women in their role as mother, you will never get equality of opportunity” (cited in Hornosty, 1998: 180). The issues of balancing childcare responsibilities with the responsibilities of a career are not new in the university. However, the university has failed to address this form of systemic discrimination (Hornosty, 1998). Despite the semblance of equality, some important systemic and institutional barriers to women's full and equal participation in the university remain (Hornosty, 1998: 181).

Funding agencies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC) and the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) have attempted to address the issue of career interruptions by allowing research grant applicants to indicate time taken for family responsibilities. SSHRCC refers to this as “career interruptions” asking the applicant to specify effective dates of
the interruption to assist in the calculation of research contribution. NSERC includes a
section called “special considerations” where the applicant described, among other
things, family responsibilities that have affected their performance or productivity. The
selection committees can then take these under consideration in funding decisions.

This is an important step forward for women academics who, until recently, were
not encouraged to indicate the time taken away in family responsibilities.
Acknowledging the impact of family on productivity and progress is vital, in order for
women to take a greater role in academe. It seems however, that considering family
responsibilities, specifically raising children as a one time career interruption that can be
defined by “effective dates,” is to underestimate the impact of children on parents and
suggest it is a time limited endeavour. Beyond the maternity leave and the parental leave
are many years of child rearing and, as the statistics cited earlier make clear, mothers –
with or without spouses - are left with the largest share of the work. Beyond mothering,
those women who become responsible for the care of their own parents, also considered a
family responsibility, will be affected. Caring for ailing parents, like raising children
cannot be contained in a matter of months. While it is important to acknowledge the
positive nature of this change, it is necessary to recognize its limitations.

The institutional structures and policies of universities have evolved and are
applied in a gender blind way, which perpetuates a particular model of the proper
academic. Men have traditionally held “gatekeeping” positions within the university
defining the criteria for academic suitability and influencing the structures and policies by
which the university operates. A recent survey of graduate students in Canada found
the male model of the single unencumbered student who devotes all waking hours and resources to academic work remains alive and well in departments across Canada. (Dubinsky et al., 1990 cited in Hornosty, 1998: 183)

Hornosty (1998) argues that universities are slow to recognise the principles of equality and the definition of the ideal student epitomises the traditional view. Women who do not fit this definition, such as those with children and family responsibilities, pose a challenge to this tradition. Family responsibilities often affect women's progress in a number of ways. They can lengthen the time a woman takes to complete her studies (see discussion in Chapter Two) or develop a research programme. In addition, women may have difficulty finding adequate time for writing, research and getting necessary qualifications for tenure and promotions. As a result academic women - students and faculty - often pay a high personal price in terms of "interrupted careers, fewer promotions, less pay, denial of tenure, greater stress, less academic recognition and feelings of inadequacy" (Hornosty, 1998: 185). Academic women are less likely to be married or have children when compared to non-academic women with similar training in other professions, or compared to academic men (Hornosty, 1998: 186).

Student mothers, as employed mothers "are faced with the power of both logics simultaneously and are forced to make choices between them" (Hays, 1996: 9). The notion of choice is often turned into an accusation when mothers who are employed or are studying are confronted with the charge, "you chose it" (Shavlik, Touchton & Pearson, 1989). "You chose it," means that you cannot complain when something does not work out for you or if you are finding it is difficult to cope with the choices you have made. David et al. (1997) question the notion of "free choice," which is described as a
rational rather than emotional decision based on a careful weighing of alternatives (David et al., 1997). The assumption underlying the charge “you chose it,” is that when you make a choice you have some sort of control over it and you must take responsibility for the consequences of the choices you make. But there is no control when, to be a good mother, you must be an intensive one and to be considered a good student you must take on the “academic ethic” and conform to the ideology of the good student?

The notion of “free choice” is not only depicted as rational or “emotion free,” but instead it is assumed to be “gender blind” (David et al., 1997). The literature indicates men are not required to make similar choices between studies or employment and fatherhood, as the expectations of fatherhood and the expectations of employment tend to be complementary. Fathers are still meant to provide for their family and education and employment facilitate this provider role. For women however, the expectations of studies/employment and the expectations of motherhood tend to be mutually exclusive requiring some difficult choices for women.

Hornosty (1998) draws on Madame Justice Rosalie Abella’s report of the Royal Commission on Employment Equity to support her argument in favour of institutional child care. She argues that “meshing” of women’s careers and family cannot be legitimized without institutional values that support this meshing. If the university environment is not supportive of women and men, but especially of women, in meshing family and careers, then we should not be surprised when colleagues are not open about changing meeting times or accommodating family needs in class schedules. Hornosty (1998) states this hostility is sometimes expressed as a questioning of a woman’s professional commitment to her career. She illustrates the institutional insensitivity to
family responsibilities with the example of an instructional skills workshop for graduate students, which was scheduled for a weekend. The rationale for the scheduling choice was "Saturday is when everyone is free" (Hornosty, 1998: 188). Lavell (1998) states the present organization of the university is terribly unresponsive to the needs and lifestyles of mothers, particularly working-class mothers. Her experience has led her to believe everyone concerned with the university, including instructors, students, university administration and funding agencies, assumes "the primary or only responsibility of the student is a commitment to her or his education" (Lavell, 1998: 194). Hornosty (1998) focuses on childcare and the penalties women face when they have children. She states: "the lack of maternity leave provisions, loss of funding and various university privileges if they took time out to have children and time limits set on how many years one can take to complete a degree" (183), disadvantage women.

Childcare is important for students in a number of ways. Not only does it facilitate participation in formal requirements for degrees such as going to classes, the library or lab, but it facilitates participation in the informal but also important part of studenthood, such as peer and faculty social activities, informal discussion, special lectures and workshops. However, childcare is often viewed as "an ancillary service much like a sports arena," rather than something that is essential to achieving educational equity (Hornosty, 1998). The Queen's Faculty Association noted,

Female faculty members with family commitments are penalized because the demands on their time is so great as to almost preclude scholarly interaction with their peers... Women, who traditionally bear the brunt of parenting responsibilities, are thus more likely to be excluded from scholarly functions. (Hornosty, 1998: 190)
The university structure can be a barrier to women’s participation. As Moses (1989) found in her study, some women chose not to enter doctoral programmes because they would like to have a family and they perceived the two as mutually exclusive. Of those employed in the university, some women decide to remain in the position of lecturer so as to avoid the “rat race of applying for research grants and publishing” (Hornosty, 1998: 188). What is needed is a woman friendly university (Hornosty, 1998; Saunders, Therrien & Williams, 1998; Rich, 1979). Saunders, Therrien & Williams (1998) describe a woman-friendly university as one in which there is campus daycare, parental leave for undergraduates as well as graduate students and a university where male instructors at all levels are encouraged to pursue their child rearing responsibilities (223).

While not all mothers have partners, the literature indicates lack of support from partners is common for employed women. The reason for so little support can be found in the expectations of society and of the family. Women have been given responsibility for organizing and carrying out family work, direct and delegated care giving and other domestic responsibilities (Hochschild, 1989; Young, 1992). Women have been more likely to juggle three spheres -job, children and housework- while men juggle two -job and children (Hochschild, 1989). Hochschild (1989) found that women bear the weight of a contradiction between traditional ideology and modern circumstances. If women lived in a culture that presumed active fatherhood, they would not need to devise personal strategies to handle their responsibilities (Hochschild, 1989: 194). As one participant in Moses’ study declared,
Any woman who attempts to study while keeping a relationship going must first educate her partner and children to the equality of labour and individuality of needs before enrolling, once this is done she can tackle anything. (Moses, 1989: 114)

Hochschild (1989) calls for a shift in the way men perceive their role in parenting. Women whose husbands share fully in childrearing still consider themselves "unusual" or "lucky" while women whose husbands do not, still consider themselves "normal" (Hochschild, 1989: xii). While fathers seem to be taking on more care responsibilities, the fact that these men are singled out indicates they are still the exception (Welch, 1990). Hochschild argues, if men such as these are so unusual, rare and precious, then something is fundamentally wrong with that outlook.

At a more fundamental level, stress can be attributed to the continuing myth of work and family as two separate worlds (Glenn, 1994; Kanter, 1977; Vanden Hevrel, 1993). Glenn (1987) states the debate about women's place in the family was actually a debate about women's place in society (348). She goes on to argue that women are virtually equated with family and their existence is so fused with, and embedded in, the family it has been difficult to see them as individuals (Glenn, 1987: 349). This oppositional representation of the two realms does not necessarily have to mean women are experiencing conflict. According to Tom (1993), women's work and personal lives are oversimplified and misunderstood when researchers assume that having a job and having a family always put a women in a position of conflict (Tom, 1993: 37). The reason for assuming conflict is the conceptual opposition of the two realms and the reality that our society currently does not accommodate women's movement between the realms (39). Many researchers assert the two spheres are in fact interrelated and should be
considered together (Glenn, 1987; Pateman, 1983; Tom, 1993; Vanden Hevrel, 1993) which is how many employed and student mothers perceive their lives (Edwards, 1993; Long et al., 1997).

To suggest all mothers are unhappy mothers would be inaccurate (Thurer, 1994). It seems despite the intensely difficult times, the exhaustion and frustration, mothering can also produce intense joy and emotional commitment (Caplan, 1985; Edwards, 1993; Johnson, 1988). Distinguishing between the work of motherhood which is socially organized in ways that are stifling, overwhelming and oppressive, and the relationship of mothering which is seen as a potentially rich and rewarding experience would clarify this inaccuracy (McMahon, 1995). Thurer (1994) suggests, in what can be seen as a cold world, the relation between a mother and a child may be the most “genuine, natural, spontaneous, exquisite” love (292). In practice, however, not all children are valued and many women find motherhood socially devalues rather than enhances them. The impact of the current social construction of Ideal Mother on women's experiences of motherhood is direct, through the operation of the discourse of the Ideal Mother and indirect, through shadow images of deviant and “bad” mothers (McMahon, 1995).

Employed mothers live at the intersection of the public and private spheres, balancing both sides of their lives (Duffy, Mandrell & Pupo, 1989). Two sources of conflict are identified: one is the inflexibility of the organization of work; the other is the inequality of family organization (Skold, 1988). The way work is presently organized assumes a male worker without childcare or domestic responsibilities. Employers expect that professionals and management will work unlimited hours and put all other things in their life aside (Skold, 1988; Tizard, 1991). This clashes with the social construction of
the Ideal Mother (Lewis, 1991). Some women have dealt with the potential of being stereotyped by selectively revealing their maternal identities. If they do not reveal they are mothers, then their occupational identities cannot be “contaminated” by their maternal identities (Long et al., 1997). This, however, continues the isolation of women from each other and does not address the gender-biased culture of the workplace (McMahon, 1995).

When women do try to carry out societal expectations of motherhood by modifying the male work pattern, they are accused of not being serious about work or lacking commitment (Lewis, 1991). Lewis (1991) offers another dilemma for women in making choices about work and family. She notes that mothers are not expected to have careers but well educated women who choose full or even part-time motherhood are accused of wasting their education (Lewis, 1991: 201).

If mothers ask for concessions to address their mothering responsibilities, they risk being stereotyped as uncommitted workers. Other women may distance themselves from mothering by taking on male-like involvement in their jobs (Lewis, 1991). No matter how committed women are to their jobs, if they choose to have children, they will be taking some time away. This produces a female pattern of work in which women will work part time, often in jobs for which they are overqualified, or take breaks from work to care for children. The ideology of the good mother leads to discontinuous work patterns for many women, which perpetuate the inequality between mothers on the one hand, and fathers and childless women on the other (Lewis, 1991).

It is not just workplace policies that need a complete transformation. Neither will day care centres and modified school hours necessarily eliminate the stress many women experience combining work and family. What is necessary is a more fundamental
transformation of society. Glenn (1994) asserts the ideology of motherhood has served an important mystifying function in capitalist society, simultaneously glorifying motherhood and marginalizing mothering. If motherhood is the inevitable fate of women, then other activities, including earning an income and going to school, interfere with full time devotion to the role. The literature highlights how the dominant North American conceptualizations of motherhood and studenthood result in them being mutually exclusive. From here I construct a framework with which to analyze the contradictory nature of the lives of these women living at the intersection of studenthood and motherhood.
CHAPTER FOUR

FRAMING THE LIVES OF STUDENT MOTHERS

The theoretical framework for this study is made up of five components: the ideology of intensive mothering; the ideology of the good student; the concept of public/private dichotomy; and the notions of greedy institution and competing urgencies. The first component is adapted from Sharon Hays' (1996) book *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood*. Hays argues that employed mothers experience a contradiction between the dominant North American ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace, although I substitute the ideology of marketplace with the ideology of the good student in order to study the lives of doctoral student mothers. In this study, ideology refers to how a group looks at or organizes its thinking about the world (Rothman, 1994: 139).

According to the concept of the public/private dichotomy, the home is the private sphere and the university, in the case of this study, is the public sphere. The last two components of the theoretical framework are "greedy institutions" and "competing urgencies." "Greedy institutions" is an external process where the family, the workplace and the university, as greedy institutions, demand the student mother’s time. Competing
urgencies is an internal process and is described as the sense of being pulled in two
directions or having to think in two different ways at the same time.

This chapter delineates the theoretical framework, beginning with a definition of
ideology and how it is used in this study. I then examine the applicability of the five
components of the framework to the study of the lives of doctoral student mothers.
Finally I define and describe the concept of ideological work, which will be used in the
analysis of life at the intersection in chapter eight.

**Ideology**

The term ideology dates back to the late eighteenth century, when Destutt de
Tracey proposed a science of the origin of ideas; a “discipline which took ideas as its
subject matter” (Boudon, 1989: 25). According to Thompson (1990), the term ideology
quickly became a political weapon. Used to delegitimate the ideas of opponents, the term
ideologue meant those who “wanted to substitute abstract considerations for real politics”
(Boudon, 1989: 25).

While some may endeavour to use ideology as a neutral term, to refer to “systems
of thought, systems of beliefs or symbolic systems which pertain to social action or
political practice,” Thompson (1990) argues the term should not be “stripped of its
negative, critical sense,” as part of the reason for the concept was to draw attention to
problems (5-6). Larrain (1994) perceives ideologies in a more negative way as “a kind of
distorted thought which seeks to mask reality... disguises not just forms of class domination but other forms too, such as racial, gender and colonial oppression”(15).

Thompson (1990) refers to his conceptualisation of ideology as a “critical conception” because it conveys a “negative, critical or pejorative sense” (53) and “it preserves the negative connotation and binds the analysis of ideology to the question of critique” (6). For Thompson (1990), it is not of import whether or not the ideology is true or false, rather the importance lies in how it serves to establish and sustain the relations of domination, be they related to class, race or gender oppression (57). He argues that ideology refers to the “ways in which meaning seems in particular circumstances to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical,” what he calls “relations of domination” (7). Ideology, according to Thompson (1990) is “meaning in the service of power” (7).

Brantlinger et al. (1996) and Brantlinger (1997) use Thompson’s conceptualisation of ideology in their study of middle class mothers who espoused liberal views on education and in studying the politics of special education, respectively. They conclude that ideologies “work to disguise or justify social class privileges for middle-class mothers” (579), similar to the perspective espoused by Larrain (1994).

Not all ideologies are of equal value or have “equal sway” (Glenn, 1994: 9). Dominant ideologies represent the views of the dominant group who justify this

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4 While women in academe, specifically the doctoral student mothers of this study, can be argued to be an “oppressed group” it is important to acknowledge the relatively privileged position of these women. Working in the rather rarefied atmosphere of doctoral studies, these women may be viewed as the elite of the oppressed. However, this does not invalidate their very real experiences of discrimination, intentional and systemic.
domination by “making the existing order seem inevitable” (Glenn, 1994: 9). According to Brantlinger (1997), power in modern societies, is located in the middle class.

The middle class puts forth its knowledge as the legitimate knowledge and circulates ideas that reinforce its advantaged position...allowing the dominant class to appear not as a class but as representative of the whole society (438)

Although I would question the totality of the power wielded by the middle class in North America, I would argue for the purposes of a discussion of the good mother and the good student that the ideas of the middle class are the dominant ideas in North America. The dominant conceptions of the good mother and the good student are embraced in the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student.

Brantlinger (1997) and Brantlinger et al. (1996) also link ideologies and institutions and, although their work focused on elementary and secondary education, their comments are relevant to the current discussion of universities. Brantlinger (1997) argues that there is a “circular reciprocal interaction between ideology and institutions,” which explains why educational institutions and their practices have remained stable over time (439). The relationship between ideology and institutions helps to explain the continued existence of a relatively unchanged ideology of the good student despite the changing demographics of the student population. According to Smith (1990), “ideas and concepts as such are not ideological, they are ideological by virtue of being distinctive methods of reasoning and interpreting society” (36). I would argue that although the ideas about what is a good student may not be ideology per se, because the dominant definition of a good student is used as a way of understanding who is and who is not a good student, the ideas about, and concept of, a good student become the ideology of the good student.
Glenn (1994) asserts that ideologies are flexible, because one cannot maintain dominance without some flexibility. In this study, the ideology of intensive mothering accommodates two kinds of mothering, stay-at-home mothers and Supermoms. The ideology of the good student accommodates those who are “stay-at-school” students and students who are mothers. In both cases, to be considered a good mother or a good student you must follow the applicable ideology. However, allowing some flexibility in the approach to being a good mother or a good student encourages compliance by making it seem as if compliance is a choice. While it would require greater work to be an intensive mother if one is employed, one could strive to mother intensively.

Ideology is used in this study to mean how a group makes sense of, or organises its thinking about the world (Glenn, 1994; Rothman, 1994). Ideologies “serve as frameworks which guide our conceptualization” (Conces, 1997: 44). According to Brantlinger (1997), ideologies “present plausible explanations of social life that establish a basis for …solidarity” (438). These definitions all highlight the collective nature of ideology which, according to Glenn (1994) is not an individual, but a group product. This study takes a critical approach to ideology as espoused by Thompson in that I do not view the ideologies as neutral, but as the perspective of a particular group who use their powerful position to support a particular ideology that maintains their position of privilege. According to Smith (1990), as a feminist, my work must be ideological because “ideology identifies the biasing of sociological statements by special interests or perspectives” (Smith, 1990:32). The importance of our inquiries is not seeking “the truth” but it is the desire to know more about “how things work, how our world is put together, how things happen to us as they do” (Smith, 1990: 34).
Ideology of Intensive Mothering and Ideology of the Good Student

Hays (1996) argues the cultural contradiction women experience between home and the world of work, is part of a larger cultural contradiction which has a long history. Drawing on the literature of the history of childhood and family, she outlines a history of European and North American society's views of children, mothers and child rearing practices. According to Hays, the ideology of child rearing flows from the values, beliefs and hierarchical organization of society as a whole, although the current dominant one has a more narrow foundation.

The model of white, native-born middle class has long been, and continues to be, the most powerful, visible, and self-consciously articulated, while the child-rearing ideas of new immigrant groups, slaves, American Indians, and the poor and working classes have received little positive press. (Hays, 1996: 21)

The ideology of intensive mothering is used in this study because, as Hays has noted, no matter what your race, ethnicity or cultural background, if you are a mother living in North America you are judged relative to this ideology.

Hays (1996) identifies three elements of intensive mothering. First is that the mother is the central caregiver, the underlying assumption being children absolutely require consistent nurturing from a single caregiver and the mother is the best person for the job. The second element relates to the appropriate form of child rearing. This method is described as: “child centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive.” The third element of intensive mothering is that one cannot compare childrearing and paid work. Children are not only more important

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5 See also Thurer (1994) and Margolis (1984), and Chapter three examining the social construction of motherhood.
than paid work, but the logic of child rearing is completely different from that of the marketplace. Innocent and pure, children have a special value and one cannot make decisions regarding children based on a simple cost benefit analysis. For example, deciding between staying at home with a sick child and going to an important meeting, one could discuss attendance at the meeting in terms of pay and cost in dollars of losing business by missing the meeting but one cannot discuss the cost in terms of dollars of not staying home with a sick child. It is not possible to put a dollar value on being with a child who is in need (Hays, 1996: 8).

The logic of the marketplace on the other hand is connected to the cultural conception of men's place in the public sphere, which is described as, "competitive, self-interested, efficiency-minded, materialistically oriented" (Hays, 1996:9). Hays (1996) refers only to the ideology of the marketplace in her description of the cultural contradiction experienced by mothers. In the context of this study, however, the ideology of the marketplace is replaced by the ideology of the good student.

In 1998, using a data set comprising nineteen interviews with student mothers at all levels of university education, B.A. to Ph.D. (Long et al., 1997), I set out what I referred to as the six elements of the Ideology of the Good Student (Sears, 1998). Through interviews centred on their experiences of stress and coping as student mothers, the expectations they had of themselves and their perceptions of the expectations of colleagues and professors an ideology emerged. While this particular articulation of the ideology of the good student is based on a set of student mothers, the literature supports this conception (Katz & Arbib, 1971; Rau & Durond, 2000; Shils, 1982/1997), although it has not been delineated in this way.
The ideology of the good student has six elements: the good student has no responsibilities other than her studies; the good student's abilities are reflected in her marks; the good student takes individual responsibility for her studies; the good student is completely focused on her studies; the good student is hard working and dedicated to her studies; and the good student is clever or smart. The categories should not be taken as finite or rigid, however as there can be considerable flexibility and overlap between the elements (Sears, 1998: 41). For example “time management” could be part of “Focused,” “Works Hard,” and “Individual Responsibility”; sometimes the issue of time management seems more suited to a discussion of one than the other or one element may be stronger than another in a particular context.

I now believe that only five of the six messages appear to be measures of the good student. The first message - the good student does not have any responsibilities except her studies – rather than being a personality trait of the good student appears to be an assumption made by the university or an ideal state for a student. One would hardly expect a professor to judge a student to be good on the basis of a lack of other responsibilities in the same way this professor might judge a student to be good by looking at their transcripts.

This ideology is a way of organizing our thoughts about studenthood. It is used not just to describe and differentiate between those who are good students and those who are “bad” students, but also to control the behaviour of current and prospective students. This ideology is not something you can modify to make it relevant to your life without consequences. “To resist the dominant discourse is to put oneself at risk of being accused that you are not committed to your education” (Sears, 2000: 32).
The ideology of the good student exerts hegemonic control, which is one of the similarities it has with the ideology of the marketplace. The ethos of the university corresponds with the ethos of the marketplace as students are expected to be competitive, self-interested and efficiency minded. The idea of being materialistically oriented is not readily apparent in the ideology of the good student, although one could argue students are always competing for material gain in the form of teaching positions and scholarships, which not only provide financial assistance but aid graduates in getting good academic positions in the future. Although one could argue that those really interested in money might find a different avenue for financial gain.

Both ideologies are seen as natural and necessary (Hays, 1996); the first stemming from what is perceived to be the natural bond between mother and child and the latter stemming from what is seen as a natural human quality of self-interest. However, Hays (1996) argues neither ideology is natural and inevitable, nor is one ideology inherently more rational, worthy or valuable than the other. Rather, they are socially constructed realities.

Both arguments are historically constructed ideologies that include a whole set of assumptions about human nature and the appropriate framework for social life. (Hays, 1996: 16)

As well as being socially constructed, they are differentially valued. While the ideology of intensive mothering holds a powerful cultural position in North American society, the value of “mother” is more symbolic than real, the work of child rearing is not valued in the same way as the work that is done in the marketplace. The logic of the marketplace is more powerful and the workplace is perceived to be more important, despite the rhetoric of “family values.”
In addition to her historical research, Hays interviewed eighteen stay-at-home mothers and twenty employed mothers of children between the ages two and four years. Her sample was equally divided into working class and middle class mothers.² In the process of examining the “commonsense,” everyday ideas about child rearing, Hays (1996) found the requirements of appropriate child rearing were considered self-evident and natural. She found the women in her study viewed questioning intensive mothering as a cynical response of “selfish, ignorant and insensitive people” (Hays, 1996:13). Instead of interrogating the ideologies, they remain intact and discussions revolve around how to manage within them (Hays, 1996:15). Rather than questioning intensive mothering or workplace logic, the focus is on women’s participation in the labour force, family values, proper responsibility of fathers and the effects of day care.

Comparing the ideas and practices of working class and middle class mothers in her sample, Hays (1996) found some differences, but more commonalities. Both working class and middle class mothers in her study showed a commitment to “good mothering” and according to Hays (1996), a good mother is necessarily an intensive one. She also compared stay-at-home mothers with employed mothers, examining how each group made sense of their situation. The cultural images of stay-at-home mothers and employed mothers caused each to feel inadequate and a failure. In the end, the women negotiate and modify, but never reject intensive mothering. What is key for this study of student mothers is, although not all women may practise intensive mothering all the time, it remains, implicitly or explicitly, understood as the proper approach to raising children.

² The study was carried out in the United States in 1991. Each interview lasted 2-4 hours and the participants filled out a 13-page questionnaire. Of the 38 participants, 28 were non-specific white and 10 were non-white, including Asian American, African American and Latina.
According to Hays (1996) the ideology of intensive mothering gained currency in opposition to the selfish materialism of the marketplace. North American society, in search of a peaceful haven away from the "dog-eat-dog" public world accepted the ideology of intensive mothering, which suggests all the troubles of the world could be solved by the individual efforts of a superhuman woman (177). One might ask if women are being passively selfless when they talk about their love of their children. Hays (1996) says no, instead this is the active rejection of market logic (171-173). The women, too, feel their connection with their children is a special one, which has a rejuvenating effect. Is intensive mothering hegemonic control of mothers or an active rejection of the ideology of the marketplace? Hays (1996) argues it is both. On the one hand intensive mothering exerts hegemonic control.

[It] operate[s] to convince women that they want...to commit themselves to a task that, in fact, ultimately serves those with the power to manipulate and control ideas. (165)

On the other hand, according to Hays (1996), one cannot simply explain away the ideology of intensive mothering...as solely a manipulative strategy meant to serve the powerful...[Instead] Mothers... are actively participating in a rejection of that logic. (Hays, 1996:172-173)

If it were an active rejection, by mothers, of the logic of the marketplace, it would seem they are acting in a similar manner to Willis' (1981) lads who, in rejecting school and middle class aspirations, ended up reinforcing their subordinate status.

The cultural contradiction of motherhood is the coexistence within the same person of two opposing ideologies, the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace (Hays, 1996). According to Hays (1996), all mothers ultimately share a recognition of the ideology of intensive mothering.
At the same time, all mothers live in a society where child rearing is generally devalued and the primary emphasis is placed on profit, efficiency, and "getting ahead." If you are a mother, both logics operate in your daily life. (Hays, 1996:131)

Within the context of this study, the contradiction is between the ideology of intensive mothering, as in Hays' (1996) study and the ideology of the good student, which emphasizes "getting ahead" in terms of achieving high marks, receiving scholarships, taking on Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant positions, finishing degrees within the university proscribed timeframe and networking for future positions within the academy. It has been noted earlier that the university and the family are greedy institutions, demanding the undivided attention of the student mother. Student mothers experience the pull of these greedy institutions as competing urgencies.

To remain powerful, as stated earlier, an ideology must be flexible (Glenn, 1994). The ideology of intensive mothering is flexible as it allows for two types of good mothers, stay-at-home mothers and Supermoms. The hegemonic nature of the ideology of intensive mothering means in North America, for a stay-at-home or employed mother to be a good mother, she must be an intensive one. The only "choice" for mothers is whether to also be employed. This leaves student mothers in the position of necessarily being unable to comply fully with either the ideology of the marketplace or the ideology of the good student.

Although Hays (1996) focuses on motherhood, she identifies several key elements of the contradiction for employed and stay-at-home mothers. One of the most significant results of the contradiction is the need for mothers to engage in ideological work so their behaviours will be in accordance with the ideology of intensive mothering (see also
McMahon, 1995). Hays (1996) found in her sample of employed and stay-at-home mothers that both referred back to the logic of intensive mothering to support their decision to stay at home or be employed outside the home. Both sets of mothers argued they were doing what was best for their children because their children were their top priority.

Hays (1996) argued employed mothers are acting against their own best interests when they mother intensively.

Practically speaking, mothers who work in the paid work force seem to be acting irrationally when they dedicate so much time and energy to child rearing, because this strategy is physically and emotionally draining—wearing them down with added demands of the second shift. At the same time, they face the contradiction of engaging in the self-interested pursuit of financial gain at work while simultaneously pumping vast resources into the appropriate rearing of their children. (9)

Following the tenets of intensive mothering resulted in several serious consequences for employed mothers. Putting so much energy into their mothering, these mothers may end up being “worn out” and not have the energy to deal with their work, which can result in losing promotions and possibly jeopardizing current work status. Attempting to maintain two opposing ideas of how they need to behave, “cool-headed at work but warm-hearted and nurturing at home” (Hays, 1996:10), can cause considerable strain. The discussion of chapter eight will address this strain in the discussion of reconciling one’s professed beliefs to one’s lived reality and the consequences of combining motherhood and studenthood.
Public/Private Dichotomy

The cultural contradiction some women experience, is a result of the normative separation of public and private spheres. As a fundamental concept in the theoretical framework, this dichotomy warrants further discussion. Some feminist researchers advise caution when utilizing the notion of the public/private dichotomy. Although they accept the rallying cry of the women's movement, "the personal is political," they do not embrace it to such an extent as to argue there are no distinction between the public and private spheres. Their concern is that feminist research acknowledge the harm of perpetuating a distinction, when the two spheres are, in fact, interconnected (Pateman, 1983; Tom, 1993). The public/private dichotomy has been used to relegate women to a particular sphere (Lewis, 1993) and can prevent people from seeing the relationship between their work life and their family life (Ackelsberg, 1988). Tom (1993) suggests the dichotomizing of women's lives into public and private spheres does not present their lives with an essential cohesiveness and women may end up appearing to be willing participants in their own powerlessness rather than intelligent actors (48).

The concern of those who challenge this dichotomy is it does not exist in fact. According to Connell (1987), what is normative is not necessarily what is actual or what is happening in reality. The normative patterns accompanying the separation of the public and private spheres (husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker) while still powerful ideologically, are undermined by reality (Connell, 1987). Or as Ackelsberg states:

Although an ideological split between public and private community and workplace may be alive and well in American political ideology - even among feminists - women's activities challenge the existence of the distinction in practice. (Ackelsberg, 1988: 297)
However, by distinguishing between that which is normative and that which is actual we are able to see the picture of what the powerful wish to have accepted. Connell suggests,

[B]y raising the issues of whose interests are embodied in the norms and how far the daily life of other people represents resistance to those interests and what potentially normative principles might emerge from currently non-normative but widespread practices. (Connell, 1987: 52)

I would argue that it is necessary to distinguish between using this dichotomy as a way of rationalizing or justifying the separation of spheres and using this dichotomy as a tool for analyzing and understanding why women experience difficulties when combining spheres. Instead of accepting or rejecting the dichotomy out of hand, it is necessary to explore the assumptions embedded in the categories in order to uncover the distortions arising from thinking dichotomously (Fraser, 1999).

The public/private divide defines the social roles of men and women. Despite the interconnections between public and private sphere, which prove the division to be imaginary, the “mythical division” has remained intact throughout the nineteenth, twentieth centuries and even into the twenty-first century (Fraser, 1999). The view that women’s proper place was in the home has persisted throughout the twentieth century despite women’s engagement in economic activity through both World Wars when women entered industry and challenged the conventions that separated women and men (Fraser, 1999). The 1960s, however, brought an increased realization that private concerns were public issue hence the rallying cry, “the personal is political” (Fraser, 1999).

Feminists have shown this concept of separate spheres is a “potent ideology,” which has helped maintain women’s subordination (Fraser, 1999; Morgen & Bookman,
1988). They have also shown it is an inadequate tool for explaining relationships in society because of the interconnections between the spheres. Feminists and women union organizers of the 1960s called for the recognition of family specific problems experienced by women workers, which led to a discussion of sameness and difference. Recognizing unique demands on mothers emphasizes their differences from men, while calls for equality lead to sameness. The argument has been, if women want equality they must accept the conditions men have accepted (Fraser, 1999: 213). The concern is how to overcome equating difference with inferiority. If women’s needs are different from men’s it does not follow that they are inferior (Fraser, 1999: 29). By asking for women’s extra domestic responsibilities to be recognized, the very link disadvantaging women is emphasized (Fraser, 1999).

Recently feminist scholars have pointed to the negative implications for women of demanding equality because equality with men does not necessarily challenge male standards. The debate around women and work did not include an interrogation of the allocation of domestic responsibilities, instead the debate centred on the accommodation of women’s domestic responsibilities in the workplace (Fraser, 1999). Women, then, are judged by male standards and are often found deficient or are forced to become surrogate men (Fraser, 1999: 122). The men Cockburn (1991) interviewed declared, if women want to join men as equals in the public sphere they must leave behind womanly things, they must be indistinguishable from men; they must assimilate. Fraser (1999) in her discussion of union organizing of women workers, quoted a woman’s reaction to male union leaders who wanted women to do the very things as Cockburn delineated. The male union leaders insisted the women give up either their quest for equal pay, or their
desire for protective legislation. The woman's response was, “If the economy wants me
to work night shift, then I want a different economy [original emphasis]” (Fraser, 1999: 213). This woman articulated what many do not recognize; we need to question the
“taken-for-granted,” the “usual way of doing things.” We must question the status quo rather than simply trying to accommodate the domestic responsibilities of women within the existing structure.

The ideology of workplace and the ideology of the good student are more highly valued than the ideology of intensive mothering because the public and private spheres are differentially valued. In North America the public sphere is valued more highly than the private sphere. This was evident when Cockburn (1991) asked men if they would be interested in taking on a greater role in the family by taking on some of the responsibilities women have in the home. The men were not interested in taking a greater role in the private sphere. The public sphere gave the men a sense of belonging and they “frankly preferred their work” as it gave them a sense of having a place in society, belonging to a men’s club (Cockburn, 1991: 99). If they interrupted their job to care for children, then they would lose the continuity in their employment history and this interruption would affect their reputation and their future promotions. One man said, “If you get out of that and let someone else go past you've lost the momentum and momentum is everything” (Cockburn, 1991: 99). Stepping out of the public sphere and taking on domestic responsibilities is, in a sense, adding a career handicap, and it was a perverse idea for the men Cockburn interviewed. In horror at the thought of interrupting his career to perform domestic duties one man said, “You are pulling back the man to have the same problems as a woman!” (Cockburn, 1991).
Research shows any privileges women may get in the workplace to accommodate being mothers are contradictory for women. While they help women deal with the struggles to balance work and home responsibilities, they benefit only some women and for a relatively short time (Cockburn, 1991: 104). Cockburn states,

If they are not extended to men and used by men so that men too come to lead more “womanly” lives, increased support for women’s domestic roles could drive women even more firmly into a distinct domestically defined place in the labour market. (104)

Cockburn (1991) argues there should be a change in the typical work life of men, making the wage earning life more sustainable. In this way she goes beyond asking for greater accommodation for the needs of women.

What in the long run has to change is the pattern of men’s lives - a 45 hour week, 48 week year and 50 year wage earning life cannot be sustained by both sexes, it should be worked by neither. (Cockburn, 1991: 104)

Like the woman union member who would like a new economy, Cockburn would like to overhaul the workplace and the way we view how one ought to engage in one’s career.

The separation of the public and private spheres has a direct impact on the way women mother, the way mothers are perceived and more broadly who is in charge of parenting - taking care of children and other domestic chores. The various dimensions are distinct but not necessarily separate or opposed (Pateman, 1983). Instead of separating them, Tom (1993) suggests a more accurate picture of women’s lives could be built from their own perspective rather than “from the perspective of malestream theory”; a picture demonstrating how women “weave their lives into a pattern more complex than a dualistic model can capture” (Tom, 1993: 38).

Although there is concern when the public/private spheres are seen as discrete categories, the tensions have not dissolved or disappeared (Pateman, 1983, Edwards,
As indicated earlier, to acknowledge the public/private dichotomy is to acknowledge a social reality. Finch (1983) argues that the boundary still exists because "the domestic sphere is treated as private and the notion it ought to be private, penetrates cultural practices" (cited in Edwards, 1993: 27). Public and private separation as it is used here, does not mean women in actuality remain in the private sphere. Student mothers' lives straddle the two spheres and the interrelationship between the spheres is highlighted in situations such as when student mothers bring their children both literally and metaphorically into the classroom. The interrelationship is also highlighted when education comes into the home such as when a student mother is studying at the dining room or kitchen table, or when she discusses what she is learning at school with her family. As an integral part of the contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student, the public/private dichotomy is an important and appropriate tool for analysis in this study.

**Greedy Institutions/Competing Urgencies**

The family and the university can be identified as greedy institutions, and the cultural contradictions mother's experience can be described as experiencing competing urgencies. These two notions are the same phenomenon from different perspectives. The notion of Greedy institutions is an external process; the demands and expectations of the family and the university are pulling at the woman often at the same time. Competing urgencies, on the other hand, is an internal process. The woman feels pulled in more than one direction at the same time.
The term "greedy institution" is used to describe those institutions that seek continuous, "exclusive and undivided loyalty" from individuals (Acker, 1994; Coser, 1974; Edwards, 1993). Coser (1974) described both educational institutions and the family as greedy because they demand the undivided attention of the individual, creating a problem of coordinating the demands of more than one greedy institution (Acker, 1994; Coser, 1974). Coser and Coser (1974), in their discussion of the housewife and her "greedy family" state that women who have or wish to have careers are said to experience conflict which is a source of disruption in the workplace as well as in the family. Professional women are expected to have the same commitment to their jobs as men, but they are also normatively required to give priority to their family (Coser & Coser, 1974: 92). The most important point to be made about greedy institutions is they do not impose physical boundaries. According to Acker (1994), it is more subtle. Acker (1994) views universities as greedy institutions for academics, and I would add they are greedy institutions for students. She states, like housework, academic work is never really done. In order to make an impact on the field, academics must invest considerable time and effort. In this academic enterprise women with family responsibilities are at a disadvantage because devoting all of one's time to a greedy institution is only possible if one does not experience claims from more than one (Acker, 1994: 132).

Women are under considerable pressure to achieve success in each of the two greedy institutions by showing neither has suffered as a result of her participation in the other (Edwards, 1993). The problem employed and student mothers face is the assumption and expectation that mothers are totally and always available for their children (Land, 1989) as is the case in the ideology of intensive mothering. The term
"competing urgencies," is used to describe the feeling of being pulled in more than one direction at the same time (Rubin, 1983; Young, 1992). The key is that the demands are simultaneous not sequential. Rubin (1983) gives credit to Arlie Hochschild for this term (160), describing it as "an evocative phrase whose meaning is immediately clear to all who live in families where the roles of women and men are no longer as firmly fixed" (Rubin, 1983: 161).

According to Rubin (1983), for a woman with a deeply integrated professional commitment, family concerns and relationships are not displaced from the centre of her life and thought. Land (1989) refers to this as a "preoccupying state" and states she feels she must be available at all times. The analogy most often used to describe the process of dealing with working or studying and family demands, is juggling. Women often talk about how they "juggle" the various parts of their life, and women regard successful juggling of these simultaneous rather than sequential demands as a considerable accomplishment (Young, 1992: 151).

**Ideological Work**

Hays (1996) uses the term "ideological work" to describe the ways in which the women in her study reconcile the contradiction of the two opposing ideologies affecting their lives. Bennett Berger first coined the term "ideological work" in his 1981 book, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life among Rural Communards*. Ideological work is the concept he developed to:
describe the efforts on the part of communards to cope intellectually with discrepancies, discontinuities and apparent contradictions between beliefs that they brought to communal life and the constraints of actually living with those beliefs in a communal environment. (Berger, 1995:79)

Berger originally intended to study child rearing beliefs in communes but soon found himself preoccupied with the relationship between professed beliefs and day-to-day behaviours. He noted several situations in which there was a discrepancy between professed beliefs and day-to-day behaviours and wondered whether what he was witnessing were simply self-serving, or were actually new ideological approaches. His inquiry, as it relates to child rearing directly relates to this discussion of student mothers.

The communards in his study espouse beliefs about child rearing that were in opposition to what Berger referred to as “longstanding ideas about child rearing” in North America, which require “close supervision by parents, a long period of socialization and great inputs of time, money and energy.” The communards did not accept the dominant ideas about child rearing, instead they believed in a more equalitarian ethic toward children seeing them as members of the commune just like everyone else. While young children, infants and “knee babies” (1981:60) were generally in the care of their mothers or other women, children over the age of four or five were not seen as requiring special attention, monitoring, restrictions or privileges (1981: 63).

As Berger explains, the communards did not have the resources required to sustain this type of child rearing, given the physically and emotionally exhausting work of creating and maintaining a rural commune. As a result, any attempts to live up to the dominant ideals would have ended in failure. By espousing alternative perspectives that
suited their situation and their available resources, the communards were able then to live up to their standards of parenting and feel good about themselves as parents.

For Berger, that beliefs are self-serving or may have to be compromised in the course of day-to-day living is not newsworthy, and he takes to task sociologists who believe it is their right and responsibility to point out the inconsistencies in the behaviour and beliefs of others.

I take it as a matter of course that beliefs are likely to have a self-serving component for the individuals or groups who espouse them. Therefore I regard it as juvenile for scholars...to take as their task ‘exposing’ the ‘real’ interests served by ideas or ‘unmasking’ or debunking ideas by revealing the contradictions between what ideas apparently profess and the day-to-day behaviour of those who profess them. (Berger, 1981: 19)

Berger acknowledges the hegemony of the dominant ideas affecting the communards.

It seems plain enough that societies and their major institutions ... are successful far more often than not at inducing their members not only to behave properly but also to want to behave properly and to feel virtuous or otherwise gratified for having done so. (Berger, 1981: 206)

The hegemonic nature of two ideologies, which plays an integral role in the lives of student mothers, means that espousing alternative ideals of the good mother or the good student would result in considerable work. This “work” is the ideological work student mothers would do.

Ideological work not only supports and sustains alternative beliefs, it can also be used to delegitimate opposing beliefs. Berger uses child-rearing practices as an example.
The ideological work consists of a mélange of moral and empirical or logical argument designed to legitimate their course of action regarding children and to confer honour on those who undertake it... It is also used against those who are predisposed to be critical to it and to delegitimate their arguments by invoking for example images of excessive parenting, smothering etc. (Berger, 1995: 81)

From Berger's discussion, ideological work functions to reconcile one's professed beliefs to one's situation. As in the case of the communards' perspective on child rearing which was different from the dominant perspective but suited their situation. Corollary to this legitimating function of ideological work is the delegitimating function, as when the communards seek to delegitimate the dominant views of child rearing by referring to it as smothering or over-mothering. However, the integrative achievement of ideological work is seldom total; often day-to-day behaviour is contrary to professed beliefs. For example, the communards' belief in conserving and not commercially exploiting the timber on their property had to be tempered with the need to survive and pay their monthly bills. In addition to the imperfect success of ideological work, some circumstances make ideological work easier by encouraging and sustaining behaviour that is consistent with professed beliefs, while other circumstances make ideological work more difficult by hampering or obstructing behaviour that is consistent with professed beliefs.

Day-to-day behaviour is obviously and routinely affected by a variety of circumstances other than professed belief (habit, unconscious feeling, emergencies, power of pressure by others, fear, prior socialization etc.) to say nothing of assumptions buried or taken for granted, not all of which may be logically or intuitively "consistent" with each other. Some circumstances encourage or sustain a line of behaviour consistent with professed belief, these circumstances tend to affirm and strengthen ideology in ways that leave relatively little new ideological work to do. Other circumstances may obstruct such lines of behaviour or make them impossible. (Berger, 1981: 20)
An important difference between Berger's communards and the student mothers in this study is the nature of the grouping. While the latter are referred to as a group they are, in fact, not a cohesive unit as those who live in the commune. I would argue that being a group makes the ideological work of legitimizing an alternative perspective easier than an individual. Student mothers in the university do not speak as a group; instead, in this instance they are seventeen individuals. I would suggest that being isolated could certainly be described as a circumstance inhibiting or hampering ideological work. Perhaps this is why so many of the women wanted to know how I managed and what I thought, asking for approval or support, in some way looking for reinforcement for their alternative perspectives.

The theoretical framework for this study is made up of the ideology of intensive mothering, the ideology of the good student, the concept of public/private dichotomy, and the notions of greedy institution and competing urgencies. In addition, the notion of ideological work is a useful lens through which to view the women's struggle to maintain their sense of being a good mother and a good student. Taken together these components make a rich framework with which to analyze the experiences of doctoral student mothers. Chapter five delineates the research methods of this study, which were designed to best utilize this framework.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The essential meaning of women's lives can only be grasped by listening to the women themselves. The goal of this study is to understand the experiences of doctoral student mothers living at the intersection of motherhood and studenthood, from their perspective, to capture the realities of women's lives from the standpoint of women who live them (Acker, 1994; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987; Tom, 1993). For these reason qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews were chosen. Qualitative methods are a contextual, experiential approach to knowledge (Stacey, 1988), which allow the participants to become active in the research process (Acker, 1994; Kasper, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). Qualitative methods tend to facilitate creating an egalitarian and reciprocal relationship between the participant and the researcher.

The researcher is an integral part of the research, drawing her personal experiences into her work (Stacey, 1988) and this needs to be acknowledged (Acker, 1981; 1994; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1983). Nevertheless, while valuing her own experiences, the researcher must be careful not to regard her experiences as normative, and use them as a standard by which to judge the experiences or behaviours
of others (Reinharz, 1992: 262). Qualitative analysis, then, is well suited to illustrating the meanings the women in this study place on their lived experiences, as student mothers. Arguably, this type of analysis creates a more complete depiction of the dynamic nature of the lives of the women, than would quantitative methods.

Research Design

This research is a case study involving 17 doctoral student mothers of the Faculty of Education at a large research university in western Canada. It explores their lived experiences as both students and mothers, through personal interviews, on-going communication and a follow-up questionnaire (described in more detail in the section on procedure). Several reasons for using case studies are delineated in the literature: to illustrate an idea; explain the process of development over time; to show the limits of generalizations; to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case; and to pose provocative questions (Reinharz, 1992: 167). The purpose of this study was “to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case.” It was to represent the case, not to represent the world. This reflects what Stake (1994) refers to as an instrumental case study, because it is not this particular faculty of education that is of interest but the insights it provides into a broader issue, the experience of Ph.D. student mothers.

In part because of the concentration of women noted earlier, the Faculty of Education offered a good learning opportunity, a criterion that is important in case study selection (Stake, 1994). Although women in the Faculty of Education will probably have many things in common with women in other faculties, as was found in another study of student mothers (Long et al., 1997), the purpose here is not necessarily to generalize from
the experiences of these particular women to the experiences of women across the university, although this study can be used as the basis for further study of student mothers and other students with care responsibilities. According to Reinharz (1992) a case study "defies social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions and completeness" (174).

Greater exploration of the generalizability or "transferability" identified by Lincoln & Guba (1985), of the study will be discussed later in a section on the trustworthiness of the data. At this stage in this research topic, examining one small piece of one university is more important than being able to compare universities or departments. Because of the lack of research on student mothers, this study is meant to add to the field and point to directions for further research.

The Sample

The initial target population was doctoral student mothers who had finished their comprehensive exams. The rationale being, these women would have had a wide range of experiences in the doctoral programme. In addition to their stage in their programme the women were to have primary care responsibility for at least one child under the age of thirteen. By definition, the effect of the ideology of intensive mothering tends to be more pronounced for mothers of younger children and it is generally accepted that a thirteen year old may begin baby-sitting on their own, indicating their need for intensive mothering has decreased. The participants' children must have been living with them full time or in the case of joint custody, living with them at least halftime. Selection of the
sample was done with a view to making it as heterogeneous as possible taking into
coloration ethnicity, age, social class, number of children and type of family.

Because of the paucity of volunteers, the target population was expanded in
March 1998, to include those who had not finished comprehensive exams. By changing
the criteria of the target population, I was able to include some women who had made
contact in the fall but could not be included in the first round of sampling. While it is
possible the difficulties I experienced in finding suitable participants may indicate there
are not very many doctoral student mothers in the Faculty of Education at this university,
many of the participants talked about other student mothers in their programme whom I
know did not make contact. In fact, at the end of the interview with Maurilla, we entered
the student lounge where she introduced me to a colleague who was a student mother.
She commented to this woman that she should participate in my study, to which the
woman replied she could not spare the time.

Difficulties in finding student mothers able and willing to participate in particular
projects is not a problem confined to this study. Early in 1999, a group of graduate
students in the Department of Counselling Psychology, in the Faculty of Education at the
University of British Columbia, as part of the practical component of their programme,
attempted to set up a support group for students who are parents. The purpose of the
groups was to support students dealing with the stresses of being a parent and a student at
the same time. By the end of March 2000, the group had been cancelled due to lack of
participants.

The idea of student mother support was raised with a group of mothers during a
focus group, which was part of a broader study of student mothers across the university
(Long et al., 1997). The consensus seemed to be, while these were the very people who needed a support group they just did not have the time to attend one. Cannon, Higginbotham and Leung (1988) found that certain groups of women are less likely to volunteer for research studies, for example women from non-dominant groups. Because I felt it was important to have as diverse a sample as possible, I made a concerted effort to reach out to all student mothers in the faculty of education. One avenue chosen was to contact the student representatives in several departments; unfortunately they were not as helpful as I had hoped.

The women are identified here through self-chosen pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity. The group of seventeen participants is described in Appendix A. The sample consists of sixteen women currently enrolled full-time in a doctoral programme and one woman who had graduated just before the interview, but who was a student when we first made contact. All of these women have childcare responsibilities for one or more children aged thirteen or under, who lived with them full-time. The group is predominantly white/Caucasian and married. Thirteen of the seventeen women were married, three were divorced or separated and one was single. Seven of the women had one child, six had two children and four had three children. None of the women had more than three children. The women self reported their race/ethnicity/cultural group (See Demographic Information Form Appendix E). Eight of the seventeen women indicated they were First Nations, of Chinese descent, African, South American or South Asian; the remaining nine women self-identified as Caucasian, white or European.

The representativeness of the sample in the context of doctoral students at the Faculty of Education in terms of, for example, ethnicity, race, immigrant status or
number of children is difficult to state definitively, as the university does not collect information on mothers. What is evident is that women make up 66.9% (202 of 302) of all doctoral students in the Faculty of Education. This is the highest percentage in any faculty in the university, compared to the Faculty of Arts in which women account for 54.2% (237 of 437) of all doctoral students (UBC, 2001).

Procedure

Using human subjects necessitated ethical approval, which was obtained in September 1997. I then contacted the Dean of Graduate Studies, as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Education by letter to obtain their support. While the Dean of Graduate Studies did not feel the need to be involved, the Dean of the Faculty of Education suggested we meet to discuss the project. At the meeting we discussed the objectives of the research as well as the research design. I obtained verbal support from the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the end of meeting, which was followed up by a letter of support for the study. As soon as the approval of the Dean was received, I contacted the heads of the various departments in the Faculty of Education to ask for their assistance in gaining access to their students. Without exception the department heads were supportive of the project allowing me access to the student nets.

I approached students through e-mail postings on the student nets, the Education newsletter and posted a sign in each of the departments in the Faculty of Education (See Appendix B and Appendix C). All postings contained an e-mail address as well as a phone number, if the women preferred not to use e-mail. Only one woman contacted me
by phone; the rest replied by e-mail. The first call for participants went out at the end of October 1997. The first posting brought six qualifying participants. A reminder was sent in January 1998, which brought one new participant for a total of seven participants. In March 1998, the criteria were modified to include women who had not completed their comprehensive exams. This posting brought two new responses and two replies from those who had contacted me in the fall but were not qualified at that time. The final reminder went out in June and brought four more replies, bringing the total number of participants to seventeen. The interviews were carried out between November 29, 1997 and July 10, 1998.

The interviews were held at a place convenient for the woman, as well as being a venue conducive to intense and open conversation, for example, her home, my home, and my office at the university. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, what Burgess (1984) refers to as a “conversations with a purpose” (1984: 102). The open-ended interview allows informants to tell their story in their own way; it allows women to approach their lives on their own terms (Smith, 1987; Tom, 1993). From interviewing women in other research projects, I have found using my own experiences creates an atmosphere of trust and empathy in which women are willing and, in fact, excited about discussing their lives. This approach to interviewing is supported in the literature. For Oakley (1981 cited in Fontana & Frey, 1994) you cannot have intimacy without reciprocity in an interview. Reinharz (1981) refers to this as creating “a humble relation to the subject.” Empathy, and sharing of experiences with subjects enhances the interview process (Griffiths and Smith, 1987; Reinharz, 1992). Griffiths and Smith (1987) illustrate this point with the example of their experiences interviewing mothers:
we have deployed our own experiences as mothers to establish ‘rapport’ by indicating shared experiences and a common knowledge of typical situations, problems etc.. (Griffiths and Smith, 1987: 91)

I met with each participant for an interview, which was in-depth and semi-structured lasting between 45 minutes and two hours. At the beginning of the interview each woman signed an Informed Consent form (Appendix D) and completed a Demographic Form (Appendix E). The interview protocol consisted of eight main questions. Each of the women were asked to draw a word picture of the good mother; to draw a word picture of the good student; the source of the images of the good mother; the source of the images of the good student; if they thought they were good mothers; if they thought they were good students; what they might do to be like the good student; and what they might do to be like the good mother. These were the only questions used in every interview.

At the outset of the research project I had intended to interview each participant twice, with a break of several months between the interviews. This plan was modified half way through the study, as most of the women were unable to commit to a second interview. As an alternative, I provided them with their summaries for review, as initially proposed, and they commented on and responded to them, indicating the summaries were accurate or indicating things they wanted changed. Beyond the one interview, two of the participants met with me a second time for a shorter interview, I had e-mail discussions with several others and informal conversations on and off campus. In each instance we continued to talk about the research and our lives as student mothers.

I found it was important to include a description of my life or to respond to the women in such a way as to indicate I understood their situation because I too was living
it. I had met a few of the participants on other occasions so they were aware I am a mother and a student. Others whom I had not met, wanted to know about me. Sometimes it was a situation of them wanting me to commiserate with them, using my own experiences to validate theirs. Mercedes wanted to know if she was “normal,” not only in relation to me but in relation to the other participants, so she asked how the other participants responded and if her response was in line with what they said.

During the first couple of interviews I spoke with the women as if we were sharing our experiences. I was concerned about sharing too much of my experiences and steering the women into agreeing with me or telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. I became increasingly concerned I was taking too much time in the interviews, (After reviewing the transcripts I found this was not the case.) and I endeavoured to keep my own comments short while not stepping completely out of the interview. Balancing the need to disclose, with my need to refrain from putting words in their mouths or provide them with what they might see as the “right” or most appropriate answer, I presented myself as someone who empathized and was having similar experiences.

Part way through my interview with Maurilla I felt she was reluctant to talk about herself. It was at this point she asked me what I would do and what I thought - what would be my response to the question I was asking her. I realized in my efforts not to dominate the discussion I had gone the other way and had, in effect, removed myself from the interview. After I answered her questions about my own life and she saw I was not going to judge her, she was more forthcoming and the interview was very productive. Beyond our interviews, Maurilla and I met at a conference where we continued our discussion of her experiences of combining studenthood and motherhood.
In the analysis phase of the study, a typist transcribed each of the interviews from tapes then I edited each transcript for clarity, accuracy and context, adding indications of long pauses, hesitations and emotional reaction that were not evident in the transcript, but were important for analysis. Each interview was coded twice using ATLAS-ti\textsuperscript{7}. The first coding was for the summaries and the second was for the general analysis. The coding scheme for the first round of coding was based on the interview protocol comprising the following seven subheadings: general information; definition of the good mother; definition of the good student; description of mothering; description of studenthood; experiences combining studenthood and motherhood; and support. The second coding was based on codes that emerged from the interviews. This coding resulted in over one hundred codes that were then combined into code families. Creating code families helped me develop a framework for understanding the women's experiences and analysing the data.

In the spring of 2000, each participant was sent a short questionnaire to elicit comments on the definitions and perceptions of studenthood and motherhood that had emerged from the data (Appendix F). Although using a short answer questionnaire seems to go against the grain of qualitative research, it was useful in confirming my initial findings on some of the key issues. In some cases the responses confirmed what the women had said in their interview, in some cases it allowed the women to think about the issue and make additional comments. For example, Vicki was able to elaborate on her perspective on traditional Asian parenting and the impact that it has had on her behaviour during family gatherings.

\textsuperscript{7} ATLAS-ti is a software package designed specifically for qualitative research.
For the most part, the women were pleased to be of assistance. Ten of the interviewees returned the questionnaire. Four of the participants were not able to respond because of time constraints; two did not respond to the request and one refused to answer. The latter participant sent several detailed e-mail messages outlining her sense of frustration at what she perceived to be an attempt to place her in a category. I explained that, while I was noting the differences between the women’s experiences, there were many commonalities that needed to be presented. In each of my replies I addressed her specific concern about being labelled or categorized and offered her the opportunity to withdraw her consent if she so desired. In the end she was content simply to refuse to answer the questionnaire while allowing me to include her interview in the analysis.

Discussion

All research requires the researcher to be aware of and acknowledge the assumptions or preconceptions with which they approach their work. Fundamentally at issue in any study, is whether or not the work has truly measured what is was intended to measure and whether or not the findings are sufficiently persuasive that the audience would consider them trustworthy. The issue of validity in qualitative research is the subject of considerable debate. Maxwell (1992) describes validity as being like “integrity, character and quality to be assessed relative to purpose and circumstance” (1992: 281). He developed an approach to using the concept of validity in qualitative research; an approach, which refers to accounts, not to data or methods. Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method (Lather, 1986; Maxwell, 1992), but relates to
data and the accounts, inferences and conclusions reached using a specific method in a specific context for a specific reason (Maxwell, 1992: 284). Maxwell (1992) outlined validity of: the account of what is said and heard (audio recordings); constructions of meanings of the experiences; the theoretical constructions of the study brought by the researcher; and the appropriateness of the application of the meanings.

The question of validity is what Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to as “truth value.” In the context of this study is may be more helpful to discuss traditional concerns of reliability and validity in terms of their criteria of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They suggest four criteria for trustworthiness in the evaluation of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. While activities and techniques for establishing trustworthiness are important, there is not necessarily a strict or exclusive checklist of items. Each check, audit or observation builds on the others to make the findings that much more persuasive.

Olesen (2000), in her review of feminisms and qualitative research, also recognizes “trustworthiness” as a term more fitting this type of research than the more conventional criteria of validity and reliability. She identifies validity and trustworthiness as newly framed issues in the growing complexity of feminist qualitative research, as she does the issues of bias and objectivity (Olesen 2000:218). She argues that the term “bias” is misplaced, as we cannot rid ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us to our research project and it need no longer to be seen “as a troublesome element to be eradicated and controlled but rather a set of resources” (229). It would require the researcher to understand the influence of her bias on the research findings and recommendations.
Being aware of my own stance and preconceptions was an ongoing concern. Prior to my decision to study student mothers, my only knowledge of the experiences of student mothers was my own, unexamined experiences as a new mother finishing my Master’s thesis and as a mother of three in my doctoral programme. However, before this study I had spent considerable time examining my own definition of the Ideal Mother and mothering in course work and in a conference presentation (Sears, 1997). When I began interviewing the participants it was this idea of the Ideal Mother I had in my mind (as described in the Introduction), but by the end of the interview process, my idea of the Ideal Mother had been seriously challenged. It was for this reason, after coding the data for a second time, I felt the need to reflect on my perspective separate from the analysis of the data. I enlisted the help of a friend and took on the role of an interviewee answering the same questions I had posed. By examining my perspective pre- and post-interviews, I have been able to remain clear about whose perspectives are represented in the analysis and the extent to which my perspective guided my work.

In contextualizing the resources of the cultural self, Olesen (2000) insisted, “if researchers are sufficiently self-reflexive they can evoke these resources to guide the gathering, creation and interpretation of data as well as their own behaviour” (229). Fonow and Cook (1991) define reflexivity as the “tendency to reflect upon, examine critically and explore analytically the nature of the research process” (2). Yin (1994) states research should be carried out as if someone were watching over your shoulder. This can be facilitated through the use of journal entries and discussion with other researchers through which one can reflect on the research process, as well as on one’s reaction to research participants. Lather (1986) also addresses the issues of validity,
identifying reflexive subjectivity, which requires some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the "logic of the data." Lather refers to this, elsewhere in the article as, "construct validity" and says systematic reflexivity is necessary to thwart the tendency to impose theory on the lives of participants, which she states is inherent in theoretically guided empirical work.

I identified several ways to ensure the trustworthiness of the data in this project. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are two specific activities, which can enhance credibility of the findings, accompanied by techniques including, peer debriefing, member check or validation, and reflexive journal writing. The reflexive journal and an audit trail were also used to establish elements of dependability and confirmability. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), the elements of engagement and observation increase the probability of credible findings. The investment of sufficient time, learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced by the distortions of self or participants and rising above of the researcher's own preconceptions all increase the credibility of the findings. In addition, it includes the opportunity to identify the salient qualities within the situation most relevant to the "problem" and to engage in a detailed exploration of the setting.

Maxwell (1992) is concerned, in part, with the meaning of the experiences and statements of the participants in his analysis of validity. Meaning is constructed by the researcher but is tested against the meanings and constructions from the perspective of the participants. The engagement and observations in this study allowed for analysis of meaning, and were not confined solely to the interview process. Engagement and observation continued through contact by email, face-to-face discussions and other on-
going communication. My position as a student mother within the Faculty of Education afforded me the opportunity to achieve these objectives, and my awareness of my biases enabled me to guard against over-rapport with the participants and premature closure of my observations.

My concern about the impact of my preconceptions led me to read and re-read the taped transcripts after coding, returning to the context of the quotations. While I was aware and accepting of my "cultural self," examination was necessary to guard against self-imposed distortions and over-rapport. I also listened to the tapes after they were transcribed to hear how the participants were stating their opinions and ideas to ensure I had, in fact, understood what they were saying. Utilizing the audiotapes made a difference in the way I interpreted things as I could hear the tone and emphasis the women used, allowing a certain depth and richness to the data from the initial bulk.

In one instance in particular, my ideas were challenged when, after four interviews with women who tended to agree with my perspective of the Ideal Mother, I interviewed Barbara. Barbara's perspective on the good mother was surprising. Her immediate reaction to the question asking for a definition of the Ideal Mother was that she did not believe in one and did not subscribe to the societal view of the Ideal Mother. As the conversation progressed it was clear, while she denounced the idea of the Ideal Mother, she accepted it without acknowledging it. By the middle of the interview, I knew she did not fit the mould of the previous participants nor my own assumptions (field notes February 4, 1998). After Barbara, there were several participants who professed similar views. I took notice of my response to those who did not share my perspective and this heightened my awareness of my own biases.
Early into the process, I created a team to discuss all stages of the research and reflect on the biases I may have brought into the research. This support team was to serve as the “people watching over my shoulder” as Yin (1994) suggested. The team originally consisted of two people, one male and one female. The first member of the team was a mental health worker/addictions counsellor who facilitated an anger management programme for men. He has a graduate degree and while his research experience is in a different field he is familiar both with methodology and the field of feminism and education. This support team member is well aware, both personally and professionally, of the inequalities between men and women as parents. I asked him to be on my support team not because of his knowledge of student mothers but because of his ability to listen and synthesize to see different perspectives, and to challenge my assumptions and analysis. His help was mostly in allowing me to speak about the interviews and to listen as I processed the ideas. He questioned and challenged my assumptions and interpretations and guided me by questioning me about what I needed to ask of the data. Through listening, he helped me to synthesize the literature and the data.

The support team, although a good idea, could not be entirely sustained. The second member of the team was a colleague from the same programme who has since stopped pursuing her Ph.D. because she moved away and became a mother. At the time I created the team she was eager to be a part of it; and we had already had several discussions regarding the initial formulation of this project, the interview protocol, researcher’s preconceived notions and how to most effectively have the voices of the women speak through the study. However, the realities of dealing with young children while being a homemaker became too much and, although she was helpful during the
early stages, she was not able to respond in any substantial manner in the later stages of the research study.

In a more peripheral manner, two other peers within the Faculty assisted me in the earlier stages to explore aspects of this inquiry in a similar manner. Conference presentations, while not intended to fit criteria of peer debriefing *per se*, served as a further avenue to expose the research and the researcher to the examination from other researchers working in the education field. I have used these data for three papers written for conferences and have taken these opportunities to ask for and consider feedback from conference delegates. In one instance, I was challenged about my use of a North American model of mothering, when I presented the initial results describing the definitions of the good mother and the good student. I believe my position and the findings were made more credible as they was supported by one of my participants who attended the paper session. This particular participant, an African woman, provided feedback as well as support for my use of the ideology as part of the theoretical framework.

Yin (1994) identifies peer discussion and journal writing as tools for reflexivity. This also is supported by Lincoln & Guba (1985) who argue this makes the findings of qualitative work more credible. The use of a journal for reflecting on the interviews in this study proved very helpful. It was intended as a tool to address the extent to which the researcher's subjectivity influences the outcomes of the study, as a description of process for myself and for the interviewing method. Notes were written after each interview, detailing my reactions to what was said in the interviews and to the participants themselves. The focus of my journal writing was post-interview reflection,
although I also kept notes on ideas, feelings about the process, as well as changes made to the procedures. These notes provided important insight as well as information. My notes have enabled me to understand the feelings and thoughts I had during and after the interviews as well as address any concerns regarding the methods being employed. The value of the journal, then, was both a check and audit, describing the process of self and method and having an influence on all four criteria of trustworthiness of the methods as identified by Lincoln & Guba (1985).

Credibility is further satisfied when study participants attest to the reconstructions and agree to honour them i.e. member checks (Lincoln & Guba: 1985). The interview summaries created for the participants, the on-going correspondence, and the earlier example of the conference session attended by one of the participants, reinforce this criterion and also may address some of the requirements for interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992) and face validity criteria (Lather, 1986). The data collection described in the section on procedures, conforms to the approach suggested for descriptive validity by Maxwell (1992). All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and summarized. Other contacts were written either in e-mail messages or notes on the summary. The tapes, edited transcripts and all written correspondence are available to be verified. Lather (1986) identifies the establishment of face validity, in part, through the recycling of categories and emerging analysis and conclusions back to the participants or at least a sub-sample of participants and refining analysis in light of their feedback.

Lather (1986) also urged the researcher to seek out counter-patterns as well as commonalities. The interview protocol allows for both. By using semi-structured interviews and allowing the participants to define their own terms, I have been able to
highlight similarities and differences amongst the women. For example, instead of providing the participants with a definition of the Ideal Mother taken from the literature, which would have constricted their response to those qualities I believed to be significant, I allowed them to describe the Ideal Mother and the Ideal Student in their own words, highlighting the qualities they believed were significant. Both the commonalities and differences are presented in the findings.

After the first coding I created summaries which paraphrased the interviews, although wherever possible the women’s words were used and line numbers were indicated to assist in referring back to the original transcript. The summaries were then reviewed and accepted by the participants. If the participant did not think her point came across correctly in the interview or she felt she could be identified through her statements, changes were made to the summary to reflect the participant’s wishes.

Several women have asked to read articles I have written using these data, although none have offered any feedback. In addition the questionnaire enabled me to solicit feedback on some of the interpretations I had made. The interviewees commented on the definitions of the good student and the good mother that had emerged from the data as well as clarifying the findings around priorities and the kinds of support they have received.

In some cases I was able to speak to the participant more than once and she clarified statements or omissions. For example, during our interview Annie mentioned her husband only once. When writing the section of her summary about support, there was nothing in the interview to provide any indication her husband was or was not
supportive. After contacting her she sent an e-mail message explaining in greater detail the role her husband has played in supporting her as a student mother.

What Lather (1986) refers to as construct validity (although she later refers only to reflexive subjectivity) and what Maxwell (1992) calls theoretical validity, both relate to the \textit{a priori} theory being imposed on the experiences of the participants. Lather (1986) calls for systematic reflexivity in which the researcher is constantly testing the theoretical framework in light of the data have been collected. This is similar to Maxwell's (1992) theoretical validity, which is a check of the appropriateness of the terms.

The conventional criteria of generalizability, which refers to the extent to which one can make statements about people and situations not studied, is not usually accommodated in qualitative research design. Maxwell (1992) however, asserts internal generalizability, the ability to generalize within the community or group studied to those not directly studied, is important for qualitative research, more so than external generalizability, the ability to generalize to other communities or groups.

The sample facilitates generalizing about other student mothers in the Faculty of Education, as the participants are from across the faculty, at various levels of their doctoral programme and represent various family types and cultural groups. The choice of using a Faculty of Education may however, limit the extent to which one could generalize the findings to other disciplines, although the limits may stem from the idiosyncrasies of various disciplines, while the general issues related to being a mother and a student at the same time may remain. The differences are mainly related to programme requirements and the mentoring practices of different departments and faculties in the university. Long \textit{et al.} (1997) have found that while there are some
differences in experiences related to programme requirements, there are more similarities of experiences of student mothers across disciplines and departments. In addition, participants commented on the experiences of friends in different disciplines remarking on the similarities of experiences of student mothers despite the different academic discipline.

Again the constructs of trustworthiness identified by Lincoln & Guba (1984) and supported by Olesen (2000), may be more instructive for this study. Having stated the possibilities above, the onus to generalize or the ability to transfer these findings to another similar study is not mine, but that of the researcher in a new study. There is a need within this study process to provide a clear and complete or “thick” description of process and intent. It would then follow that the new researcher would assess the description within the context of the new project, addressing its applicability and answering the question of whether transfer is possible.

In general, the research design was well suited to the aims and purposes of this study. The interview process allowed the women to present their ideas and focus on specific personally significant issues within a loose interview framework, thus providing a rich source of data for analysis. However, the sample is limited to those who are “successfully” navigating their doctoral programme as student mothers. This sample does not include those who found the dual burden impossible to carry, or those who have withdrawn from the university in order to pursue a career themselves or for their partners to pursue a career. However, the potential is there for some of these women (those who have not graduated thus far) to withdraw although I do not know of any who have. Given the significant percentage of doctoral candidates commonly referred to as ABDs (All But
Dissertation), I believe we are missing an important part of the doctoral experience. This comparison is beyond the scope of this study. From here we move onto the analysis of the data, beginning with the first two research questions on defining the terms good mother and good student.
CHAPTER SIX

THE GOOD MOTHER

Carol – Penelope Leach wouldn’t yell at her kids

“GET OUT OF BED!” shouts Carol, re-enacting the final scene of her morning routine with her children. Prior to this outburst, Carol followed the rules set out by Penelope Leach. Speak to you children in what Carol refers to as, “that voice that Penelope Leach says you should use,” a calm and soothing tone, keep repeating yourself and never yell. Carol awakens her children à la Penelope Leach, “It’s time to get up now,” Carol croons using her soothing motherly voice. “We really have to go.... Would you like to wear these clothes today? No? How about these clothes today?” But it is not only a school day for Carol’s two daughters aged seven and nine, it is a school day for Carol as well and after 30 minutes of this gentle and patient prodding Carol has had enough. She raises her voice to her children, gives them a directive, then feels terribly inadequate and thinks, “Penelope Leach wouldn’t yell at her kids.”

Carol expresses a certain frustration about the state of her mothering, although she acknowledges she is doing a pretty good job considering the context within which she mothers. As a student, Carol just does not have the kind of time she would like to spend with her children in an unhurried and less tense manner. She thinks that if she didn’t have to get her schoolwork done, then she would have more time for her children and she wouldn’t be so impatient all the time. “I tend to snap at the kids, like [they ask] ‘Can we have a story tonight?’ NO! And then I realize that’s being a terrible mom. You’re supposed to read to your kids every night.” Carol believes that she has a significant
impact on her children; if she can be a good mother, then her children will grow up happy and emotionally healthy.

Despite being aware of its unreasonableness, Carol finds herself taking on the societal view of the good mother. Her own definition of the good mother reflects the selfless nature of the dominant societal definition. First, she believes the good mother should always be there for her children. Mother should be waiting for her children to come home from school to talk about what they did during the day, help with homework, practice piano together and do lots of fun things like arts and crafts. The good mother should also be able to look at the world through children’s eyes, from a child’s perspective “where time is elastic.” This means taking time to poke in the mud, bake cookies and make a huge mess and not have these activities contained within the half hours between school...and lessons...and dinner...and homework...and bedtime. The good mother is so enthralled with her children, so outwardly focused, that she will have an abundance of patience. The good mother should never lose her temper nor yell at her children.

Carol tempers this selfless definition of the good mother by suggesting that it is also important for the good mother to have interests outside of her children and her home. Carol believes it is good for her daughters to see her pursuing something that is really important to her. It is good for her daughters to see her continuing to learn and making a contribution to society. Even though she feels that pursuing her own interests is important, Carol puts the interests and needs of her daughters in the forefront of her life. Her daughters are in after-school care everyday, but if they want her to pick them up early on a day when she is not teaching, she will make every effort to be there for them. Sometimes she will take them out for lunch if she cannot be there after school. During difficult times when things are tense and she is feeling rushed, she thinks about what life would be like if she weren’t doing these other things like going to school and teaching. She thinks how wonderful it would be to home school her children and not have to get up until ten in the morning. But Carol also knows that this is not realistic for her.

Carol identifies two areas of weakness in her mothering. First, she does not have enough patience to be considered a good mother. Second, she “over-mothers” her
children. She said that in striving for her ideal, she is not allowing her children to gain the kind of independence they need to develop. Carol sheepishly admitted she still helps her seven year old get dressed. She is concerned that her children are too dependent on her, that, as she strives for the Ideal Mother she is not allowing them to develop a healthy independence. Carol believes that their time together is precious because it is so limited, so she does not expect her daughters to do chores around the house.

To illustrate her over-mothering, she describes her morning routine, "I comb their hair, and I run downstairs and I put breakfast on the table, I make all the lunches, I go through - what's today? Is it gym day? You need running shoes. Is it library day? Find your library book. I put it in. Is there anything else that you're supposed to bring? I do all of this." She believes she is overcompensating for the fact that her children spend much of their time in the care of others and she doesn't have the energy to give them what they would like. So she is constantly doing things for them to the point where she now feels her children might be manipulating her.

Despite these concerns Carol believes her ideal is just a few steps further away from where she is now.

Carol is a mother who moves back and forth between viewing family as one of several very important aspects of her life and taking on the ideology of intensive mothering. What is striking in this story is that Carol does not feel like a good mother in either place. She feels she is not giving her children enough attention one moment and in another moment she feels she is coddling them and stunting their development. Carol's story is a fine example of a woman taking on the dominant definition of the good mother while trying to fulfill her own need to engage in the world outside of family. She accepts responsibility for all aspects of her children's behaviour, which, according to child rearing experts, is appropriate.

After identifying several concerns about her children's behaviour, she then blames herself for having created that behaviour in the first place. Carol was
embarrassed to admit her seven-year-old child still did not dress herself in the morning. This story exemplifies the difficulty of walking the fine line between being a good mother according to the ideology of intensive mothering and its interpretation by child rearing experts. Mothers are told that their children must be their top priority, they are solely responsible for the welfare of their children and that their children’s development and behaviours are a direct consequence of their attention or lack thereof. In this case Carol believes she is responsible for her seven year old not dressing herself in the morning and for her daughter’s attempts to manipulate her. Not only is independence presented as a social good but mothers are supposed to know instinctively when to step back so their children can develop independence and maturity.

This chapter addresses the first research question exploring the women’s perspective on and perceptions of, the dominant definition of the good mother including the sources of their images of the good mother. The discussion then moves on to the way they define the good mother and in what ways it differs from the dominant definitions. The last part of the chapter highlights the cultural specificity of the dominant ideology of mothering through a discussion of the cultural differences the women noticed between the dominant North American perspective on mothering and their own background or upbringing.

**Definition of the Good Mother**

The good mother, as described by the women, often conjoins the stereotypical definitions with the alternative definitions. The women had clearly thought about what it means to be a good mother. They see and are able to articulate the dominant societal view of the good mother and are attempting to forge a different one. The definitions of the
good mother were windows on the personalities, temperaments and philosophies of the
dwomen. More so than the definition of the good student which will be discussed in
chapter seven, the definition of the good mother seems to strike at the heart of their
identity. This is not surprising in light of the importance given to mothering as an
indication of womanhood. Having jumped one of the hoops in the test of womanhood by
becoming mothers, the women now are judged on how well they do this job. Given that
being a mother has been viewed as a natural state for women whose worth, as a woman,
is predicated on her performance in the private sphere, it is not surprising that the
definition of the good mother is fraught with emotion.

The basic description of the good mother was fairly consistent across the
participants. They tended to begin with a more task-oriented picture: the good mother
takes care of physical and emotional needs; she is nurturing, supportive and loving; she
makes herself available to her children; she makes a connection with her children and she
is patient. Just over half of the women said a good mother takes care of her children’s
physical needs. According to Judith the good mother takes care of “physical nurturing,
making sure that [her child] eats well and that [her child] is physically healthy.” In
addition to food and physical health, a good mother provides shelter and safety (Annie,
Frances) and makes sure her children have “what they need in order to grow” (Angela).

By far the most important characteristic of the good mother was that she takes
care of her children’s emotional needs; she is emotionally nurturing. Over three quarters
of the women indicated that the good mother is emotionally nurturing. This included
dealing with children’s emotional responses to situations such as when they are upset or
angry. Vicki said a good mother deals with all kinds of needs.
She’s crying, I’ll sit there with her for a few minutes and try to talk her down... She’s angry because we have to go and I turn off her video... dealing with these kinds of need. My idea of an ideal mom... talking to her, acknowledging her feelings, her emotions... (Vicki)

In addition to anger and sadness, Frances acknowledges the frustrations her young son will experience as he grows but will be unable to do.

So loving him in a way that you encourage him and you support him... encourage him, to when ...he is struggling to do things, to encourage him that he can do it. Or encourage him that he is not unusual or there is nothing wrong with him. To encourage him that he can do things. He can solve his own problems...right now with [son] there’d be a lot of learning things, that he’ll be able to do it [even though] he can’t do it [now]. (Frances)

Annie, too, feels it is her responsibility as a mother to help her children develop into independent adults. She thinks the good mother should help her children grow up to feel good about themselves and feel competent. She and Carol both see their job as mothers changing, as their children grow older. As a mother of two children aged 12 and 15 years, Annie is at a different stage in mothering than Frances whose son is 3 years old. The emotional and physical struggles for the children are different. While Frances is witnessing the pre-school physical and emotional development, Annie sees her job as preparing her children to take their place in the world as adults.

I see mom as more directive, as they get younger and then growing my kids to be independent... keeping in mind always that they’re gonna be adults before I know it and I need to prepare them for that. They’re not mine in the sense that I won them, they’re just...almost visiting me for... eighteen years...so I need to prepare them to...face the world. (Annie)

Caring for emotional needs for Njeri, includes being a teacher and a guide for her children. A good mother is intellectually stimulating.

So your question now is answered in many ways, because you’re not just the nurturer you are also their teacher, you are also their intellectual... you give them intellectual thoughts, you stimulate. (Njeri)
Half of the women said a good mother is caring and loving.

I think a good mother is loving, she loves her children, she loves her child. She...the most important thing is to love your child. Which is to communicate to them that they are wonderful beings, they are lovely. (Frances)

The good mother shows her children she loves them by being physically affectionate. According to Angela you show your children you love them by “caressing, touching, being close.” Francine and Leah spoke of “unconditional” and “unequivocal” love for one’s children. It was important for a mother not only to show love toward her children but also to model loving, by being affectionate to her partner and friends. Tassie said she models loving by hugging and holding hands with her husband in front of her child. Leah said to love your children means to accept them as they are.

What I aspire to...would be unequivocal love for my children and by that I mean accepting them as they are and hoping and teaching them to accept me as I am, that would be very important. (Leah)

Accepting children for who they are and encouraging them to accept you is part of learning about each other. Leah said, getting to know who your children really are, is very important for making a connection with them. A third of the women said it was important to make a connection with their children; to be in tune with what is happening in their children’s lives. There is a bonding and closeness between the good mother and her children. According to Debbie, a mother is “in tune, she knows...and it doesn’t have to be that she’s there with them all the time.” Being in tune or connected to your children means knowing who they are and their needs in terms of nurturing and space. If you have more than one child, it means understanding the differences between the children and knowing what each child needs. Leah made the distinction between being involved
with her children by being the mom that drives them everywhere, and forging a
connection based on knowing her children.

I think it involves being involved in your children’s lives...not so much...the
mother who drive children everywhere...or who is there on every field trip or
...is the class mother, but more an involvement in...what’s in your children’s
head, what’s important to them, who are they as people, what are their particular
gifts, what are their interests in life, that sort of thing. (Leah)

To make a connection with children requires spending time with, or being
available to, your children. Two thirds of the women said the good mother is available to
her children. Being available is important for children’s development:

The ideal mom for me is somebody who...is able to be there when people
need her. That’s really important because I really do believe this...was it
Penelope Leach or something, you know all these folks that...the young child,
the infant demands because they need it. And when you continue to give
it, they will stop demanding because they know that their needs will be met.
And I really honestly believe that...the child, who believes that parents are
there, or significant caregivers are there for them, when they need them, will
grow up secure and able to move beyond that infant relationship. (Carol)

Both Maurilla and Reni, who believe that the mother is not the only person who
can take care of children’s physical needs, said it is not necessary for the mother to be
physically present; it is more important for mothers to be emotionally available for their
children. Maurilla said, “being there, I’m not saying being physically there for them.”
Instead the children know within themselves their mother is there for them.

A quarter of the women indicated the good mother is patient. Carol and Tassie
grew one step further to say the good mother should take a children’s view of the world.
They should see the world through a child’s eye where, as Carol said, “time is totally
elastic.” Tassie’s Ideal Mother is someone who is always fascinated with what her
children do and say, and this fascination should never waiver and should be genuine,
ever feigned.
I have this ideal in my head that... everything that my daughter’s interested in right now, I should be as fascinated by, that I should be seeing the world through her eyes and, and sometimes it... happens, sometimes she says something that’s so amazingly profound... or she makes a connection, like she’s right at that point where she’s making comparisons... that I haven’t seen. There are times in which I look at her and I just think, what an amazing human being but... when we’re driving down the street, and... my daughter’s going [“there’s a big bus”]... [“there’s a little bus”]... [and I say] “isn’t that a big bus”, and I have to say (laughs)... it’s like it’s just talk, and I wish it wasn’t, and... I really try to put enthusiasm in my voice. (Tassie)

The women approached the task of describing the good mother with varying degrees of resistance. Some said there was not just one type of ideal mother. Debbie illustrated this perspective when she said, “It’s very hard to say this is what an ideal mom looks like... and give you a model that would work in every situation.” Although they formed a definition of the good mother, they were quick to acknowledge that it might not work for everyone.

Angela had “a disdain for the image of the perfect mom because it is so unrealistic.” Francine and Judith acknowledged a dominant societal view and expressed frustration at the pressure mothers experience because of it. Judith said society’s expectations were based on the dominant definition of the good mother, which left her feeling “angry and defeated.” One third of the women rejected the notion outright, or were troubled by the concept. According to Leah there is no such thing as the Ideal Mother.

I don’t think there is or ever should be or could be any one picture of a mom because I think that women are so different and I also think it would be very destructive to... make and... try to perpetuate such a construct. (Leah)

The majority described an alternative view of the ideal that took into account the differences between women and the realities of their lives as student mothers. The main difference between the dominant view and their alternative views was mothers should
have something in their lives outside of mothering. While they did not reject particular elements of the dominant societal view of the good mother, they rejected more generally, the intensive part of mothering. They rejected the need for mothers to be solely responsible for mothering and the need for children to be a mother’s sole focus.

Reni and Judith took issue with the notion that mothers should be the main caregivers arguing one person could not possibly do all the nurturing required in raising children and should not be given this onerous responsibility. Reni gives full credit for her success in school to her mother-in-law who takes on the lion’s share of day-to-day childcare. Annie and Carol both see mothering as an evolving process that changes with the age of their children. Said Carol, “the good mother of a baby [is] not [the] Ideal Mom all the time.” As children’s needs evolve, so too should mothering.

Most of these alternative views challenged the North American ideal of the good mother by beginning with the premise that the good mother should lead a balanced life and have interests outside the home. Judith and Barbara referred to this as a “complete parent” and a “whole person,” respectively. Lan said that her Ideal Mother is a professional mother who has her own self-growth. The rationale for balance has two parts. First, it is important for the mother to be balanced so she can be happy and healthy. Second, mothers need to be balanced for the sake of the children.

I guess somebody who has a lot of enthusiasm, and energy...whose first priority is...not only to their child but to themselves...I guess people who aren’t consumed in their children. I think it’s, it’s someone who’s...balanced...emotionally...and with their roles as mothers, parent, as woman...as community member...somebody who can really balance all those roles...and yet...family’s an important part of their life, I think. So...I think I see it as someone who’s very...balanced. (Alice)
The person is caring for herself also... they're not... just giving to other people, but that they're taking the time to... look after their own interests and needs... like for me, part of being happy is... having friends... meeting people, and, and having someone to talk to about... issues that I can't talk to with... my 21-month-old baby. (Angela)

Almost half of the women identified the source of the dominant image of the good mother as television, films and other popular media sources. Although they tended not to be specific about the particular magazine, television show or film, June Cleaver the television mother on *Leave it To Beaver*, which aired in the 1950s and was in re-runs throughout the 1970s was an immediate response for Vicki, Francine and Leah. The quintessential “housewife,” June Cleaver’s life purpose was caring for her husband and two sons.

It is significant that, although all the women could identify the characteristics of the dominant societal definition of the good mother, only a little over half of them commented on the source of the image. The social construction of the good mother was characterized in the literature in several ways including “air,” “unnoticeable,” (Thurer, 1994) “ahistorical givens,” (Edwards, 1993) “received wisdom” (Lewis, 1991) and “timeless truths” (Thurer, 1994). The lack of readily identifiable sources of the dominant societal image of the good mother supports the suggestion that the definition of the good mother is like air; it is all around them, they take it in but they are not necessarily aware of its source.

Both their family of origin and the family they have created are an important source of their personal image of the good mother in a variety of ways. One half of the women said their mothers provided them with some of their ideas about the good mother although not necessarily the dominant societal view of the good mother. A minority of
women wanted to emulate their mothers to some degree or believed their mother was a
good mother. Francine had great respect for her mother, “I think my mother really
was...a very good mother, and...I don’t know whether I idolize her, but...I try to live up
to what [my] mother was.” Vicki said her mom was a “Supermom.”

My idea of a mom...and how I guess I was raised was...somebody who
worked...full-time, and did everything in the house. Supermom. That was
kind of what I grew up with, was in the media, and...the women’s movement
and everything. My mother was...one...lady in the...early seventies who
didn’t want to be home any more, went back to school, and then she was
Supermom. (Vicki)

Because Vicki saw this as a positive role model, she strove to emulate this ideal of “doing
it all.”

The women learned from their mothers either by emulating them or by acting
differently. A full third of the women did not want to be like their mothers. Frances did
not want to be a stay-at-home mother like her mom. Lan’s mother was also a stay-at-
home mother who devoted her life to her children such that she became a “martyr,”
losing her own identity in her children. Annie and Angela said their mothers were not
always physically affectionate, something they believe is important while acknowledging
they have different personalities than their mothers. Debbie said her mother was not in
tune with her children. In the end, mothers helped the women by showing them what
they did not want to do as mothers. Sometimes it was simply a personality difference
between mother and daughter; sometimes it was a different philosophy of child rearing.

Carol thought her mother was a good mother in general, but saw how she would
like to be different with her own children.

It felt that although my mother was there, I didn’t feel as though she
was always there for me. And that um, so I guess I wanted to compensate
for that with my kids. (Carol)
Annie and Maurilla both find themselves unconsciously doing things that their mothers did. Annie said she has come to realize not everything her mother did was bad.

I imagine [I am ] parroting my own mom to some degree like a lot of people thinking, I'm never gonna do that, you know constant focusing on the things that my mother didn't do well, but I think some of the things that she did do well probably ... balanced out, too... {Interviewer: So you focus on the things she did do well and copy those?} I don't think I... did that consciously but certainly ended up doing a lot of... what my own mom did, and I think coming to grips with, well, a lot of what she did was good it wasn't all bad. (Annie)

Maurilla found herself unconsciously copying her mother, a humbling experience, because in those moments she knew her mother had been right and had done a good job contrary to what Maurilla thought when she was younger.

yeah, there was many things I liked about my mother, there was many things I thought, I would never teach my kids! Ha, ha! {interviewer: And do you do them now?} Surprise Surprise! (both laugh)... Oh, it's quite humbling! (Maurilla)

The women also received messages from other family members. Carol's husband and mother-in-law both voiced their expectations and opinions. Mercedes, Barbara and Judith, all received messages from their siblings. In the case of the latter two the messages came from brothers who indicated mothers were there to take care of their families to the exclusion of all else. Mercedes tried to emulate her sister who modeled good mothering.

She... seems to me, I mean... if there was a course in high school on how to raise kids it looks like she took it and I missed that one I mean... she's... great! She's really good I think she would argue, of course, but I think she's great. (Mercedes)
Cultural Differences

Six of the seventeen participants are of cultures other than the dominant culture in North America: white, middle class and Christian. From this diversity, images of good mothering emerged that did not always correspond to the North American ideology of intensive mothering as described earlier. For example, Maurilla, an African woman, had a conception of a family that was different than the North American idea of the nuclear family, “my own conception of the family... it includes all those people [mother-in-law, sister-in-law, husband, mother].”

Reni, too, included her mother-in-law and father-in-law in the list of those who were part of her children’s primary childcare. By diffusing the responsibility of childcare to more than just themselves, Reni and Maurilla were able to not only draw on the expertise of their mothers, mothers-in-law and, in Reni’s case, her father-in-law, but they were able to remove some of the pressure that comes from being expected to be the person solely responsible for the children.

Beyond immediate family members, Maurilla and Njeri, also African, both described community involvement in the raising of children in their countries of origin. Raising children was a collective or a community effort.

The mother...is expected in my community to be the nurturer... it’s a tough job. Like it’s recognized, mothering - motherhood is a tough job. And so they get as much support from the village, from the rest of the community...a mother who has just given birth to a child could not leave the house for at least three weeks, and every mother, any other mothers would come and do all her chores for her. So her job was to sit down and suckle that baby as much as you want; we are here to help. (Njeri)

It is important to note here that these comments only reflect the women’s experiences of their own culture; it is not the purpose of this discussion to make definitive statements about mothering in any culture.
It was a shock for Njeri when she came to Canada and found mothering was her sole domain; the responsibility for her children was all on her shoulders. She observes that in North America “motherhood here is a burden.” Maurilla said in her country of origin there was more support for mothers so they did not need to stop working when they had children because grandparents, aunts and uncles would pick up the slack. In addition, Maurilla said neighbours also felt free to discipline other people’s children and would let the parents know what was going on so the children were not able to get away with very much.

If they are playing in the yard and they were kind of being um what’s that word, if they’re... being mean to another, other people, or being destructive, it will get to you not only will it get to you, some neighbour would discipline them for you maybe by saying, go home and I’ll tell your mom you’re not allowed to play here for the next one week and that would work. (Maurilla)

Community mothering and nurturing was discussed in the literature, which indicated the uniqueness of child centred and intensive mothering. In fact, it was found that a minority of societies identified the mother as the sole caregiver (Margolis, 1984).

Two women, one South American and one Asian talked about mothering in their countries of origin and how it was accepted for mothers to have nannies and maids. The difference between the two was in the amount of time that was acceptable for the mother to be away from the children in a day. Lan stated the need for mothers to work full-time to contribute to the family income.

Debbie, a South American woman, said it was normal for mothers to work part-time, not full time and to have nannies. In fact, the mother could be a stay-at-home mother and have the assistance of nannies and maids. In essence, the mother is a manager of the house and not necessarily the person responsible for doing the work,
either housework or childcare. While Debbie does not explicitly state this approach is for mothers from higher socio-economic background, one can assume that not all mothers could afford live-in help as described by Debbie.

If I were in [country of origin] today, the Ideal Mother would be one that worked part-time...that doesn’t send their children to daycare, preschool, whatever, for the full day. Absolutely not...a mother that goes out with the children, and does things with the children, makes sure the children are in certain activities...invites children over...but there is a maid, there is always a maid, and so being the main caregiver is not the same as here, where being the main caregiver means that you’re bathing them every night, making lunch, dinner. (Debbie)

Lan, an Asian woman living with her husband and children in on-campus family housing, was surprised when she came to North America and found that the women around her were stay-at-home mothers. She assumed that North American women, as women in her country of origin, would be employed outside the home.

For Reni, defining mothering was not simply outlining the tasks she and her husband took on but included describing the role played by her mother-in-law and father-in-law in the lives of her children.

To me, good mothering...I couldn’t do it without my mother-in-law, so she’s part of the mothering and my father-in-law, and my husband. There is absolutely no way. I don’t think it, good mothering is, is the role of...a single person. (Reni)

Reni and her husband took on the emotional and values education of their children, while her in-laws took on the physical care. She said that it is difficult for first generation immigrants such as her in-laws to deal with the combination of cultures, so it is important for her and her husband as second generation South Asians to mediate the two cultures.
Both Reni and Maurilla said the physical nurturing children need, playing, being fed, can be done by people in the family other than the mother, although the emotional needs are best addressed by the mother or father.

I think physical needs...are more easily provided...like food, for example, cooking...meals, can be provided by more than just the primary person. A primary caretaker. (Reni)

After school they go to school and I like to know, who did you play with, how was school today...who's your friends, who did you hang around and, stuff like that, I find I need to do that, and when they were babies I didn't need to do that so all they cared about was being fed and going to the playground to play, and...anybody else could do that...they need me, they need my husband, we both decided they both need us and we're both making sacrifices to make sure that at least one of us is there most of the time...anybody in quotation marks...but I wouldn't let just anybody.... (Maurilla)

Francine, who was born in North America, has been heavily influenced by her Italian heritage. “My family is Italian so I guess it's pretty intense on the mothering.” She sees mothering as being about feeding, housing and offering unconditional love not only to your own children but to everyone.

The difference between the dominant view of mothering in North America and mothering in the cultures as presented by these participants is varied. While the expectations for children's development are similar across cultures, the burden of responsibility for facilitating this development differs. Njeri said what she sees in North America is that it is the mothers care for children all the time, in fact the mother is seen as the natural person to do the child care. Not only are mothers responsible for caring for the children, but it is the mother who is held responsible for the child's welfare and behaviour whether they are happy, how they are dressed and how they look. Her experience with the public education system has been that teachers blame mothers if something goes wrong.
All those expectations, all that society expects the duties that should be fulfilled, by the mother and should you not be able to fulfill ...to the expectation of society, you are condemned. (Njeri)

Lan felt the effects of the dominant North American ideology of intensive mothering even in her own country. Before she came here she had read some North American child rearing books. She says,

maybe [we] accept some of the ideas and so we feel bad...being professional mom at the same time though...but we have to work. (Lan).

The impact of the dominant North American ideas around mothering is felt around the world. As Maurilla observed, wherever there is a television set the viewers will be aware of the dominant North American societal perspective of the good mother (field notes, July 1999). In Lan’s country of origin the accepted way of mothering is at odds with the child rearing experts, which cause mothers such as Lan to experience guilt and feelings of inadequacy. But in her culture if she does not work, then she is seen as being “abnormal.”

Contrast Lan’s experience with Vicki, a third generation Asian Canadian, whose mother was, as Vicki has described her, a Supermom. Vicki’s own experience is with the traditional Asian culture of her and her husband’s relatives. Responding to the definition delineated in the questionnaire, Vicki wrote,

But even though both my parents are second generation Canadian [Asian] there is still an implied assumption that “good” Asian mothers sacrifice everything for their children...to the point of being a martyr. The older generation still believes that males should dominate the relationship. Thus I believe some of my relatives (older generation) do not understand my philosophy of parenting. They sometimes question my decisions. (Vicki)

This relates back to Lan’s comment about her mother who sacrificed herself for her children. Lan’s mother reflects the traditional Asian perspective of mothering, while Lan
reflects a newer perspective stemming from the need for everyone to work in order to survive. Living in the North American context these women are socialized to accept and adopt the dominant societal definition of the good mother.

Summary

The literature on the social construction of the Ideal Mother describes the good mother as someone who stays at home and looks after her children in a child centred manner. The focus of her life is her children, everything else is secondary. The women in this study recognize this and, for the most part, reject it. They prefer to strive for a more balanced life as a mother, loving and caring for their children in what they consider to be a healthier fashion. They refuse the claim that children require a mother as their main caregiver, asserting instead that others are as capable of many of the necessary tasks for raising healthy children.

Even while accepting some of the parameters of the ideology of intensive mothering the women desire self-fulfillment beyond that which they get from caring for their children. Whether the women in this study are rationalizing their choice to be students as well as mothers as Barbara noted is not clear. However there seemed to be a difference between what the women say they think and desire and how they describe their actions. This contradiction is illustrated when Barbara takes a Supermom approach by being the kind of mother her mother was as well as being a student, and being employed. Despite rejecting the dominant definition of the good mother, the women experienced more ambivalence than they were either aware of, or were willing to admit. This contradiction will be examined later in chapter eight.
While the data cannot show the historical context of the ideology of intensive mothering, it clearly indicates the cultural context of mothering through the words of those women not of the dominant North American culture. Foreign to the dominant ideology of mothering in North America is the idea that a community can and should contribute to the raising of children, and that this is a positive thing. Some cultures demand that women work outside the home and contribute financially to the family; being a stay-at-home mother is seen as abnormal. Still others accept women working outside the home, but the children remain in the home under the care of nannies or other family members. It is clear is that, although these women live in North America, and are subject to the dominant North American view of mothering, this perspective is only one of many definitions of the good mother.

More directive questioning might have highlighted a significant difference in focus or emphasis in child rearing based on children's ages. While this makes sense, it is not clear from the data as most of the women have young children. The data show a pattern that cannot be stated with certainty. As children age the good mother image shifts from focusing on physical nurturing to focusing on emotional nurturing, facilitating children's progression to adulthood. The women see their job more as preparing their children to be responsible adults and world citizens.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GOOD STUDENT

A Tale of Two Star Students

Debbie was a star student. Debbie had a baby. Debbie wasn’t a star student anymore. Tassie was a star student. Tassie had a baby. Tassie remained a star student. The difference? Timing. Both women were very hard workers who devoted most of their time to their studies and to their involvement in departmental affairs. But they had their babies at different points in their doctoral programmes. Tassie had her baby just as she was finishing her dissertation, while Debbie had her child as she was finishing her MA and was beginning her Ph.D.. But what was it about these women that made them star students in the first place?

Debbie

Debbie doesn’t really believe in star students. She says that each student is different. They shine in different areas and in different stages in their education so it isn’t really fair to have only one definition of the good student. When pushed, Debbie broadly describes a good student as someone who is creative, can define and pursue an argument and explain her thinking. For Debbie, a good student learns from her own and others’ experiences in addition to book learning.

This definition is somewhat different to the one that emerges when she describes why she was referred to as a “star student.” From the latter definition we can hear the dominant ideology of the good student being operationalized. “I was a star student
according to some people in the department,” said Debbie with a mixture of discomfort and bemused pride. It is clear from her expression that, while it felt nice to have a good reputation, she was not comfortable with the star student label that had been used in her presence on several occasions. Debbie was particularly uncomfortable one day when a professor introduced her to another student as “the best student we have in the department!” Putting herself in the other student’s shoes, Debbie indicated that the professor had been insensitive, as the comment made both her and the new student feel awkward.

Describing her life as a star student, Debbie said she was at school all day from eight in the morning until the last class finished in the evening, around seven-thirty. Debbie’s stumbling block was her language. Coming from South America she needed to hone her English reading and writing skills. Debbie understood why she was seen as a star student in her department. She said it was because she was at school every day, all day and was completely focused on being a student. She was writing papers, attending every meeting, and lunch seminars as well as assisting in preparing academic seminars and colloquia. Being a star student also meant having scholarships. A scholarship was recognition that she was a star student; something she saw in the looks people gave her.

“I was a star student...I was doing everything right, until I got pregnant. Jeffery was born and then I wasn’t a star student anymore.” And so Debbie’s star student status came to an abrupt end. Now, says Debbie, she can work on her studies between nine o’clock and two-thirty, if there isn’t anything else she has to do. Once Jeffery is home from school she has to stop, as she is not able to work when he is in the house. Once Jeffery is in bed there is time to work but no energy; Debbie is exhausted. Debbie is quick to note the positive side of being a student while being a mother. She said she has been able to leave class early in order to pick up her son from school, something she would not be able to do if she had a full time job. She said you couldn’t beat the flexibility of graduate student life.

Forget about marks! Debbie doesn’t even try anymore. She will audit courses, but taking them for marks is too stressful and it isn’t worth the worry. The same goes for scholarships. While “Star student Debbie” had a university scholarship at the end of her Masters, which carried over into her Ph.D., she hasn’t had any luck since. She attributes
her inability to win scholarships to the fact that she received a B grade in one course after Jeffery was born. Because of this mark she cannot compete with other students. In addition, Debbie says it doesn’t help that she took four years to complete her Masters degree. She feels this has had a negative impact on her scholarship applications.

Debbie is struggling between trying to give attention to her son and being the kind of mother she would like to be, and the desire or need to be finished with her Ph.D. and move on to other things. She is feeling the pressure to be finished, and feels guilty that she has not talked to her committee in a year, although she is in constant contact with her supervisor. She feels the way she is engaging with her studies is like playing, although when she looks back she can see how she has progressed. Debbie and her husband have recently decided that it is time for her studies to be the family’s top priority. Debbie hopes this communal focus will provide the push she needs to finish.

Tassie

"An image of a halo and this shiny hair" is how Tassie described the "golden haired girl" which is the term she used to describe the "star student." She was the kind of student who would push herself to illness to ensure that she wrote a thorough paper. Tassie became a mother as she finished her dissertation, so her experience of being a student mother is limited. But she is an excellent illustration of the ideology of the good student, for not only was Tassie thorough, she participated in the working of her department, sitting on committees and offering to edit the papers of other students, even of professors. Tassie decided when she began her doctorate, not only would she work very hard, she was not going to just sit back and let academe happen to her. She said if the department head were to be asked for the name of the most trustworthy and reliable student, her name would come up first.

Tassie was driven. Before her child was born she would rise with her husband, who had to be at work at five o’clock in the morning, and have a contest with herself to see how much work she could get done before the sun rose. In one instance, Tassie read so much for one paper that she suffered eyestrain and had to write lying on the floor citing quotations from memory with her husband looking over her shoulder because she could not see the computer screen. Tassie did not have a well-rounded life. She worked
16 hours a day, seven days a week, taking breaks only to have a shower. Her focus paid off and Tassie finished all her courses with well over a 90% average. Although she knew she was a good student, it was only when she received a scholarship that she was able to really feel recognized as a good student. As she put it, if someone else tells you, you are a good student by awarding you a scholarship, then you feel it’s okay for you to say you are a good student.

Tassie used the term “true academic” instead of good student because she thinks of the definition of the good student in terms of a set of behaviours rather than an academically challenging and creative mind. A true academic she says, is someone who takes risks and is not afraid to challenge the boundaries. Tassie is passionate about what she does, and it shows. She would prefer to write a paper that moves her and not get a good mark than write a dull paper that receives an ‘A.’

Tassie said having a baby made her a bit softer, less judgemental. Before she became a mother she was critical of those who might take time off to see a movie. With her child came a sense of acceptance of difference. She allowed that other people had different ways of doing and seeing things, and although she may not respect their choices she was able to understand how her way of working might not be appropriate for all people.

Since the interviews Debbie and Tassie have each had another child. Tassie has taken on an academic position, while Debbie is finishing her degree while tending to a new baby. The main difference between these two tales is timing. Because Tassie had her child so late in her programme, the impact was significantly less than for Debbie who had her child as she was finishing her Master’s, deciding whether to go on to a doctoral programme.
Definition of the Good Student

When asked to describe the ideal of the good student, the participants used words like “focused”, “dedicated” and “serious” to depict the character of the good student. They said the good student worked hard, knew the materials, got good marks and won merit-based awards; in essence, they described the good student by clearly articulating the ideology of the good student without identifying it as such. The picture they drew of the good student tended to be external to them; they defined the good student, and then described how they approached their studies. They recognized the pressure from, as well as the impact of, this ideal, although they did not necessarily take it on.

First and foremost, the women said the good student is focused, dedicated and committed to their education. Almost all the participants indicated this was one of the hallmarks of a good student. According to these women, a good student is a “really focused person” who spends “all [her] time on [her] studies”; the good student “lives, breathes, eats school.” The good student is “dedicated” and works until the work is finished. She is conscientious, responsible, disciplined and determined to meet personal goals. For Reni, attending school means only one thing.

[The] attitude is, if you’re there, you’re there to learn… a really focused person, who has a goal… and who’s going to meet that goal so if you’re setting goals for yourself in terms of… when you expect to accomplish certain things then to be determined enough to make sure that those are going to be accomplished regardless how you manage to do it. (Reni)

Only a quarter of the women used the term “serious,” which was rather surprising as serious is commonly associated with good student as in “the good student is serious about [her] work.” Frances, the daughter of an academic, used the term several times in
defining the good student, but had some difficulty when pressed to give a precise meaning for the word in this context.

It means that you’re a serious student, so that means that...I don’t know—
that you’re serious! That you, that you know things. You know, that you study and you know and I don’t know but that you are not dilly-dallying around or...I don’t know. (Frances)

Good students show their focus and dedication through their hard work. They have good work habits, get work done on time and do not procrastinate. A majority of women said the good student knows the required readings and is able to cite authors. Only one quarter of the women described the good student as smart, clever, and intelligent or having a natural ability, leading to the conclusion it was through dedication and focus that the good student gains her knowledge. Of course, being in a doctoral programme, it is assumed that they are intelligent or they would not have been admitted; although, Shils (1982/1997) would argue, being admitted does not guarantee one is suited to being a student.

A few of the women suggested the good student reads everything connected to a topic because she is curious for more than just the required readings. Although publishing papers and presenting at conferences is an integral part of being a doctoral student and vital to a successful academic apprenticeship, only one half of the women identified these activities as the mark of a good student.

Next to being focused, dedicated and committed to their studies, high marks were the most commonly stated marker of a good student. Almost all the participants said good students achieve high marks; they are the A students. However, the marks in and of themselves were not the important marker as much as the understanding that high marks are required to win merit-based financial awards such as SSHRCC scholarships.
According to over half of the participants, since SSHRCC scholarships are the most significant, receiving one is a good indicator of who is a good student. Of those who said scholarships are an indicator of the good student, two thirds have never received a scholarship. Of those with scholarships, over half did not name scholarships as an indicator of a good student. A quarter of the women said scholarships are recognition from the university that you are a good student.

Tassie won several financial awards, one of which was a SSHRCC scholarship. She said winning awards was a validation that you are a good student, a validation often used by others in the university to identify you as a good student. Certainly this was Carol’s perspective.

It seems to me that there is so little money to go around so that when you see some people who seem to get grant after grant, or...award after award, gosh, that must be a really good student. (Carol)

In addition to the work that good students do on their own - studying, reading and writing - the good student also sits on committees, goes to brown bag lunches and networks or talks with professors. Three quarters of the women said participating in departmental dealings and networking was part of the job of a good student; what Angela referred to as “schmoozing,” something she was not interested in pursuing. Mercedes, on the other hand, saw it in a positive light, noting that by attending special seminars and meetings, one is able to gain a more holistic perspective on one’s education.

According to Carol, good students are able to stay after class or to be at the university later in the day when the really good conversations were taking place.

The really good students, the ones that seem to do really well are the ones that are...staying on and sitting around and talking and I have to shut my mind down at this point and go home and do something else. (Carol)
One third of the participants indicated that "being around" allowed the student to get to know the system and understand its workings. They indicated a good student “knows the system,” something that could be used to a student’s advantage.

I see it happening around me... also that’s how the world works. I mean, this is a community of adults here. To put [it] in more crude terms, I mean, you have to suck up to them if you’re gonna want them to reward you! (Barbara)

The women receive messages about what is a good student from a variety of sources including professors, colleagues, role models and university surroundings. Now in their doctoral programmes, the participants have had many years experience, some at various universities across Canada. Through these experiences they have observed what is and what is not rewarded.

Frances asserts that professors take a hand in creating this image of the good student by not telling students what it is professors actually do.

The professors and the teachers should let you know what they do. That’s not what they let you know. They let you know what the ideal is. (Frances)

Expectations around the good student are also expressed in situations such as in Debbie’s story when a professor introduced her to a new student as the “best student in the department.” While probably intending it as a compliment, the professor indicated to the new student that Debbie was approaching her studies the way a good student should. The new student only had to observe Debbie to see how one ought to behave if one wanted to be considered a good student also. Lan said she could tell who the good students are through observation. Once she knows who the good students are, either through observation or by being told, she tries to emulate them.
I think from my observations... from my... conversations with my friends... from some example, maybe people say, "Oh, she's good!" and I try to find out what the qualities she has that make her good. (Lan)

The women saw students modeling technical mastery rather than creativity, including the use of jargon and receiving high marks for their efforts.

But when I looked around I realized that the people that were getting the top mark, the most research support and... were considered sort of the bright lights, were not the people who were coming mostly from a humanistic or a whole person perspective about learning. But they were saying, okay this is the task, I know how to do it quickly, I know the shortcuts, I know how to get what I want from this system and I'm going to do it. And that was how they treated academic experiences. And they got academic rewards for that. (Judith)

Frances said she could see the expectations of the university in the physical surroundings and personnel. What she saw resonated for her both as a mother and as a woman.

What do we see in our images of school?... what do we see in the universities? We don't see pregnant presidents of universities. We don't see... many female professors... walking through the university, the pictures on the walls... are... of men, groups of men. (Frances)

As was found in other studies (Ridding, 1996; Guppy and Trew, 1995), Frances observed the masculine environment in the university and noted as did Edwards (1993) the incongruity of pregnancy and academe. Frances observed, motherhood is about curvy lines, while being a student is about straight lines.

What Njeri and Maurilla describe as the good student is not their own interpretation or perspective but what is expected of them at the university. Maurilla said, "I don't know what the ideal student is [what I'm telling you is] what I think is
expected of me here.” Alice described education as a series of markers. If you can achieve these markers, then you are considered successful.

I think the system has little markers…and if people can achieve these markers, then they are successful, which are things like scholarships that look at things like publishing…but I think…it’s unfortunate because there’s a lot more to an individual and to being successful than…simply these markers. (Alice)

The ideology of the good student is presented as logical and just good common sense. It does not exist in university policy nor is it delineated in student handbooks; there is no real evidence of its existence. According to Leah, “nothing [is]…stated but just…the expectations when you apply for scholarships…that sort of thing.” It just makes sense to focus on your studies, work hard, achieve high marks, receive scholarships, present at conferences and take responsibility for your choices. The ideology of the good student is hegemonic and even those who are most disadvantaged believe it makes sense. In Long et al.’s (1997) study, one participant referred to extensions and other accommodations as “special treatment” and did not believe, as a mother, she should be treated any differently because she chose to combine studenthood and motherhood. Those who are different from the norm take full responsibility to accommodate or mask their differences by trying harder, working longer hours and not complaining. Because they are the exception - mothers – they just try to fit into the mould of the unencumbered good student. They will try hard to ensure that no one will accuse them of not being able to handle the work.

The outcome of this hegemonic ideology is systemic discrimination. All rules apply equally to everyone despite their differences. Instead of having “fairness in the process, and justice in the outcome,” as Justice Rosalie Abella stated, there is equality –
meaning sameness – in the process and injustice in the outcome. While this may be more acutely felt in undergraduate studies, as is indicated in Long et al. (1997), than was indicated in this data set, situations such as scholarship applications and coursework in which there can be, albeit mostly unintended, discrimination (see discussion of systemic discrimination in chapter two).

Most of the women said their idea of the good student was different from what is valued at the university. Some ideas of the good student expanded on the basic definition not necessarily eliminating the need for high marks - which they saw as something they all had to strive for in graduate school - and being focused. They recognized the limits of the definition of the good student as it is presented in the university relative to what they thought were important qualities for good students. Speaking to the limitations of evaluation, Carol said, “I know as an instructor when you give a [high] mark, it doesn’t mean that that’s the wisest person in the class.”

For Judith being a “good student and [being] an interesting student are not necessarily the same.” This conclusion comes from her own experiences observing students who display technical mastery while not being creative enough to develop their own research project. According to Judith, these students simply take an existing data set, often from a study of their supervisors. Clearly these students “know the system” and understand the complexities of creating their own data set, but choose instead to take what Judith sees as the easy way out.

Moving beyond the two dimensional, the women gave life to the definition of the good student and created alternative definitions. Debbie sees becoming educated as a reciprocal process in which we learn from and value the experiences of others.
It's probably different for different stages in education, but let's talk about a Ph.D. I think that a good Ph.D. student is one that has creative ideas that can... that can pursue an argument and define it and pursue it in the sense that explain why he or she is thinking about that, what other, what's the framework to, how can she study it in a creative way...[pause] And that is in writing and in, and orally as well. I think a good student is one that's compassionate towards the others and relates to the other people's experiences as well. And learns from everything, not only from the books but from all the experiences that are out there to learn about. (Debbie)

Here Debbie acknowledged the different stages of personal growth of students as well as learning styles and strengths. She also acknowledged differences in what was expected in the way of expertise and scholarship at different levels of education.

The women indicated in their definition of the good student what they believed was the purpose or meaning of education. Leah emphasised the need for a good student to take an active role in her education, taking what she has learned as a starting point, rather than the end. She believed the good student must make her education meaningful to herself, personalizing her learning.

So for me being a student is to use your time well, not just to coast through and not just to do what you need to do to get a good grade, but to make it really meaningful to me personally and in doing that, exploration would be the key word for me. (Leah)

Angela believes the purpose of education is twofold. First, you must learn from others and make your education personally meaningful. Then you take your skills and knowledge back into the community and make a difference in the lives of others.

Hopefully by your increased...knowledge, or skills that you're able to take that back out...work with others to make something better...that was my whole purpose in coming to graduate school. (Angela)

In the initial interviews a quarter of the women said it was important for a good student to be balanced. In response to the questionnaire in which the dominant and alternative definitions of the good student were outlined, three women who had not
explicitly indicated a need for students to be balanced said this was important. The good student balances their studies with a personal life, not necessarily children but it could be children. The good student is someone who is not focused on their education to the exclusion of all else. As Barbara put it, “school is great but it has its place.”

A good student is also somebody, again, who has a more rounded life than just being a student. Who not necessarily has to have a family, although I think that helps, but has other communities besides the economic community and, I keep on talking about my neighbourhood community and that’s just because I’ve been really involved in my neighbourhood and again, that’s great, because you see how, or the school, and you see how many of the things that we talk about play out on a real level. (Barbara)

Not only does the alternative good student have a personal life, she does not divorce it from her studies. Tassie argued that to divorce one’s professional and personal lives makes one’s work “flat and meaningless.”

Okay there’s... more to life than... you can’t separate the public and that private... you have to bring... your life to your work and as soon as you try to divorce the two of them, then the work is flat and meaningless.... (Tassie)

Angela agreed with Tassie stating that caring for one’s personal needs improves the quality of one’s work, while ignoring the personal side of one’s life means one’s work will be disconnected.

I believe that an individual who is consumed with studies and academia will produce work that is disconnected from real life. An individual who attend to their physical, emotional and spiritual needs will bring important insight to their academic work which I believe will enhance, strengthen, broaden their views and ultimately their work. (Angela)

Even though they talk about the alternative perspectives of the good student, the women sometime feel they are in a powerless position in a university that values something different. So while they may believe a good student needs to be a balanced
person, her ability to change the system is limited. Carol acknowledges this reality of her position.

Being the good student there's your own interpretation, but ...you're up against an institution...In order to be considered a good student not only do I have to feel myself, I'm a good student, but I have to feel that the university feels that...considers that I'm a good student...It doesn't feel that I...have got a lot of space to manipulate maybe and to present my view of what a good student would be and to change anything. (Carol)

The ideal emerging from the data is strikingly similar to the ideology of the good student. The good student is focused, dedicated and committed to her studies. She tends to work hard, has good working habits and does not procrastinate. Although not necessarily clever or naturally smart, the good student works hard to understand the materials, often reading more than is required. The good student achieves high marks that enable her to win academic, merit-based awards. She participates in the university community by being on hand for impromptu intellectual discussions, sitting on departmental committees and attending, if not organizing, seminars and colloquia. All this helps her to create networks with professors so she is able to be in the right place at the right time for employment, present and future. The good student does not have a personal life that interferes with her education because her education is her top priority.

Paralleling the questions about motherhood, the women were asked if they thought they were good students. Their answers speak to the definitions of the good student, as delineated earlier. The women talked about being a good student or being a bad student and how they came to define themselves using these terms. Given the format of the interviews, it is not surprising they tended to refer back to the definition of the good student and use those attributes to measure themselves. The majority of participants indicated, in various ways, they thought of themselves as good students. They discussed
their marks, work habits, publishing and presenting record, whether they thought they were smart and how they network. They used these same attributes to indicate ways in which they would like to change to become a better student or to be like their ideal of the good student, while some acknowledged they would never be satisfied with their work.

While almost all participants indicated the good student gets good marks, only one half of the women talked about their own marks or used their marks in describing their perceptions of themselves as students. The importance of marks to the advancement of one's studenthood cannot be overstated. Marks are still the dominant judge of a student's worth, especially in scholarship applications, which are extremely important at this level of academe. Several years ago, the accompanying documents to a scholarship application, which were distributed within one of the departments of the faculty of education at the University of British Columbia, stated in no uncertain terms, only students with the highest academic standing would be considered for scholarships. This type of caution dampens a student's hopes of receiving such an award and reinforces the notion that only the best students have the high marks and only the best students, as indicated by the marks, are deserving of academic scholarships or university support. Intelligent, creative or innovative student who, for some reason do not have the highest marks, are clearly discouraged from applying.

Summary

In addition to the ideology of the good student, described in chapters two and four, the literature on studenthood highlighted a number of characteristics that, taken together, create a picture of the good student that can be discerned in the data. The way in which the life of the good student is described by the participants, for example staying
late and having intellectual conversations, clearly indicates the good student does not have responsibilities for anyone but herself. Vicki said the good student would either have no personal life or be able to contain it, so it does not interfere with her studies. For the most part, the women rejected the demand for a single-minded approach to their education, preferring to integrate their schooling into a more balanced way of living.

The good student was also described as being dedicated and hard working, meeting deadlines and possessing good work habits. The good student is described as focused on her studies. Although the data does not indicate the good student is clever or smart, they did indicate the good student could use big words or jargon and she had the ability to cite authors in class. This group of women did not necessarily value the latter two traits.

The women took responsibility for the way in which their work was done, either by meeting deadlines even if it meant handing in a paper that was not as good as they might like, or by asking for an extension and being prepared to defend their request. Several women said to ask for an extension means everything else gets shifted and so they preferred to hand in an imperfect paper than to have to rearrange their schedules that have little room for movement, which was also found in Long et al. (1997).

The women recognized the necessity of high marks and most of them put this in their definition of the good student although they said those getting the high marks may not be the “wisest” nor the “best” students. One of the women acknowledged, however, they have to be smart to get into a doctoral programme. Marks are important because they are used to identify the good student, because they are used in the adjudication process for scholarships and receiving a scholarship is a sure sign of the good student.
Maurilla described the moment when she attended a workshop for SSHRCC applications and she realized she would not apply for the large scholarships, as she knew she could not compete because they were merit based awards. Given that these women are in the upper echelons of post secondary education and have gone beyond the vast majority of their undergraduate peers, we cannot fall back on the excuse that those who do not get high grades are in some way inferior to those who do not. We need only go back to the story of Debbie, the “star student” who at one moment is the best and brightest in the department and in another moment receives a B grade in a course, effectively eliminating her from further scholarship competition.

The ideology of the good student is predicated on the “dominant conceptualization of a student [as] an individual with few dependents and family responsibilities” (Pyke, 1997: 14). The structure of the university, the design of higher education programmes and the university’s expectations of students as represented in the ideology of the good student, are all based on this assumption. The dominant definition of the good student works to prevent student mothers from questioning the ideology of the good student and the structure of the university. Instead women are encouraged to question themselves and their commitment to their education. If student mothers do not recognize the systemic nature of the problem, but take it on as a personal one, then nothing need ever change. The rigidity of the institutional rules for success ends up justifying the continuation of the separation of the public and private spheres.
CHAPTER EIGHT

LIFE AT THE INTERSECTION

"More than just a chauffeur"

"I don't want to be seen as the chauffeur," said Alice, describing her idea of the good mother. Instead Alice, a 33-year-old single mother of a toddler, wants her son to see a real person. When Alice became pregnant in the midst of her doctoral programme she decided, rather than stop she would, as she phrased it, "buckle down" and finish. To do this she had to acknowledge the reality of her situation. Not only did she have a baby to look after she had half a doctoral programme to finish. Alice's reality is reflected in her definitions of the good mother and the good student.

Alice defines the good mother as someone who is not totally consumed with their children. She says some women believe they were put on this earth to mother but she isn't one of them. She could never be a stay-at-home mother because she just doesn't find it fulfilling enough intellectually or socially. A balanced mom, said Alice, "it's someone who's balanced...emotionally...and with their roles as mother, parent, as woman...as community member.” Doing something she finds fulfilling is not only for herself but also for her son. Alice said that if she is happy then he is happy. For Alice, part of this happiness comes from being a student.

But even on the student side Alice says a good student must be balanced. The good student, according to Alice, is someone who “has a life outside of academics, outside of school.” It's important for the good student to “not just have one focus, not a narrow focussed person but...a broad range of experiences...a wide range of interests.” She said she's seen many students who are so narrowly focused that they miss out on
what is happening around them. While Alice considers herself to be successful as a student she said it wasn’t because of the markers she sees the university use, such as grades, publishing or scholarships, instead she sees herself as a well rounded academic, someone who is interested in topics other than her speciality. Of course, Alice does publish and she had just been awarded a large scholarship, although she said it had little to do with her grades.

For Alice, part of being able to be a good mother and a good student at the same time involved compartmentalizing her life. Her schedule and her physical space are compartmentalized to reduce the intrusions from one side into the other. This enables her to focus on her son for part of the day then on her studies for another part of the day. Her schedule is broken into three periods: from her son awakening to just after lunch when he was in daycare, then the time while he is in daycare, then after daycare to bedtime. Alice focuses on her son in the morning and in the evening and on her studies in the afternoon. Alice knows her priorities at various times of the day; this is part of being a good mother.

Being a role model is very important for Alice and for her that means modelling a balanced life. She wants her son to be raised with a sense of social responsibility. She said she’s showing her son a variety of roles; she is showing him energy, enthusiasm and commitment, but she is also showing him someone who cannot do it all; she is showing him a “real person.” In doing this she believes she is a good mother. But that doesn’t stop her from feeling guilty about sending her son to daycare, a guilt that was going to increase because he would be going to daycare full-time in order for Alice to finish her doctorate.

Alice believes she is a good student because she has diverse interests and she studies and publishes on a variety of topics. But she has had to remind herself of this on occasion when a colleague dismissed her success. Instead of winning her scholarship on her own merit, people said it was because she was doing work on Aboriginal issues and is herself First Nations. She said her merits as a scholar were overlooked. People have told her she wouldn’t have any problem getting a job. She said, “one, I’m First Nations, two, I’m a woman...!” While she tends to brush off this kind of comment she said it is disappointing and she also wonders, “Is that why...my work is successful?” But Alice is
strong in her convictions that she is a good student and these moments of doubt tend to be short lived.

Alice recognizes the reality of her situation. As a single parent of a young child, she is aware of her limitations and this has enabled her to perceive herself as a good mother and as a good student despite her sense that they do not combine well and keep “knocking each other.”

In Alice’s story we see a woman who rejects the focused nature of the dominant definitions of both the good mother and the good student, replacing them with an alternative definition that fits with her lived reality. For Alice to take on the dominant definitions would be to court disappointment and feelings of inadequacy. Her story is a good example of the ideological work in which these student mothers engage. First, her professed beliefs suit the reality of being a single mother of a young child. She believes the good mother and the good student are balanced; they have interests beyond being mothers and being students.

Alice’s ideological work not only serves to support her beliefs but also to invalidate the dominant definitions, in essence making a pre-emptive strike on those who would judge her based on the dominant definitions. She criticises these definitions by referring to them as “narrow” and referring to her own definition as providing a role model for her son of a “real person.” In her moments of doubt, Alice is less able to support her alternative definition and so, for example, experiences guilt about sending her son to daycare.

This chapter builds on chapters six and seven, which explore the first two questions driving this research study questions about the women’s perceptions, and acceptance of the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student. The
purpose of this chapter is to explore the women's experiences living at the intersection of motherhood and studenthood. While the focus is on the ideological work in which the women engage, I also want to address some of the consequences for the women of combining motherhood and studenthood. The first part of this chapter is a discussion of the ideological work they do as mothers and as students. At the end of this section is a brief discussion of the cultural differences that emerged in the study. While not conclusive, they do highlight the cultural and social specificity of the two ideologies. In the second part of the chapter I bring them back together to delineate some of the consequences of combining studenthood and motherhood such as guilt feelings and the effect of combining studenthood and motherhood on the women's health.

According to Hays (1996), all mothers in North American society, employed or stay-at-home, experience a contradiction, which she describes as the coexistence of two opposing ideologies, the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace, within the same person\(^9\). In the present research on student mothers, the contradiction is between the ideology of the good student and the ideology of intensive mothering. The contradiction manifested itself in student mothers both taking on, and negotiating these two ideologies, in an attempt to make sense of their lived reality. The struggle between structural forces and the women's agency was evident. The two greedy

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\(^9\) According to Hays, there are two acceptable ways to mother either as a stay-at-home or Supermom. I have already noted that, to be considered a good mother, one must be an intensive one, so the only choice is whether or not to add employment. While it may seem that there is a contradiction between the perspectives of stay-at-home and employed mothers, Hays found their perspectives on child rearing were surprisingly similar. In fact, she argues that the so-called "Mommy Wars" between the two groups of mothers exist more in the media than in reality. While stay-at-home mothers and employed mothers had different approaches to mothering their ideological work was very similar. In this study I am focussing on the ideological work related to motherhood and studenthood, I cannot address the issue of differences between stay-at-home and student mothers.
institutions – the two ideologies – are the structural forces while the women's agency is highlighted in their negotiations with the ideologies; how they dealt with their competing urgencies.

While Hays (1996) studied the contradiction of motherhood exclusively, this study examines the contradiction student mothers face both as mothers and as students. This means the participants engage in ideological work both to affirm their alternative perspective of the good mother and to affirm their alternative perspective of the good student.

Student mothers sought to modify the ideologies to suit their lives, but they also accepted the ideologies to some extent. One of the major differences between Hays' (1996) sample and this sample is the ability of these student mothers to identify the socially constructed nature of the ideologies. This ability stems from their education, which has given them the tools to critically analyse social relations. They often drew on feminist analysis of patriarchy to uncover the assumptions of the ideologies, and make sense of their own struggles, as well as those of their families. While their critical analysis did not free them from the influence of the ideologies, it did, at times, facilitate the women resisting or modifying the ideologies.

The one attribute on which all the participants agreed was the necessity of being balanced to be both a good mother and a good student. It means taking time for themselves, for their fulfillment so that they are good role models for their children. As greedy institutions, it is reasonable to assume neither the university nor the family would desire the student mother to be balanced. Therefore balance would seem to be something the women do for themselves. The notion of balance is also individual. It could mean
maintaining a balanced approach on an ongoing basis or it could mean a fluctuation in
dominance between studenthood and motherhood such that on average they are balanced.
The literature tends to use the term balance when speaking of the strategies for balancing,
or the "how-to" of balancing motherhood and employment. While this group of women
does refer to the "how-to" of balancing, the focus here is a more philosophical
perspective; the desirability of having a balanced lifestyle.

The great majority of the participants explicitly stated balance was important to be
a good mother and a good student. For mothers, being balanced means making time for
themselves, for their fulfillment as well as being a positive role model for their children.
For students, balance was seen as necessary for a healthy lifestyle, and to broadening
horizons. To be balanced as a mother, Barbara needed to be active outside the home and
Annie needed to have a life away from her children. Lan, Angela and Alice all sought
fulfillment and "self-growth".

Women, however, have the cultural mandate to give priority to their families and
so experience what Coser (1991) refers to as a "conflict of normative priorities." A
discussion of students and university life always includes the notion of priorities but
while the discussion is set in neutral tones, it is value-laden. Underlying the neutral
advice to set priorities is the assumption about how the student ought to order her
priorities. Students are told to identify priorities, set priorities and, most importantly for
student mothers, to "keep their priorities straight." This last warning is most often used
when the speaker, be it a professor, advisor or counsellor, believes the student is not
focusing all her attention on her studies. The advisor who told the student mother in
Edwards' (1993) study she needed to focus on her studies is a good example of this
perspective (90). From a professor keeping priorities “straight,” most likely means putting schooling first; from a child-rearing expert it means putting one’s children first.

**Ideological Work**

This section is a discussion of the ideological work relating to motherhood and the ideological work relating to studenthood. When the women feel good about themselves as mothers and as students they are able to affirm their alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student as set out in chapters six and seven respectively. The ideological work they do is to legitimate the alternative definitions that suit their circumstances. In this study the women defined the good mother and the good student as someone who is balanced and the ideological work they do is to support this perspective. As Berger (1981) pointed out, ideological work can be used to delegitimate the dominant definition of the good mother and the good student. This is evident when the student mothers assert that the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student are too narrow and even unhealthy.

However, ideological work requires energy to sustain it and is seldom total and sometimes these student mothers have moments of doubt, when they just do not have the energy to sustain their ideological work. In moments of doubt, circumstances are acting upon the women in such a way as to hamper or inhibit ideological work that supports alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student; circumstances or influences such as, prior socialization including dominant ideologies, emergencies, feelings, such as guilt, as well as assumptions and pressure from others all make ideological work more difficult. In these moments of doubt, the women tend to return to
the dominant ideology viewing themselves through those lenses, before they are able to work their way back to their alternative perspective.

**Motherhood**

"When I'm happy, my children are happy"

The employed mothers in Hays' (1996) study tended to use a set of standard explanations when they affirmed their mothering. These explanations included a variety of arguments explaining why being employed outside the home was good for their children. The simplest explanation was the benefits for the children of the additional income. Beyond the financial rationale, the mothers believed they appreciated their children more. Seeing their children less meant they better utilized their time with their children, and so they were better organized and the time was more precious. They argued that childcare offered the chance for their children to play with other children and was developmentally beneficial. Most importantly, they argued that *their children's* happiness depended on *their* happiness. Beyond these explanations Hays found that the employed mothers in her study used child-rearing methods that were as child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive, as the stay-at-home mothers. She concluded that the employed mothers did not put their interests ahead of their children’s (Hays, 1996: 148).

In chapter six I outlined the alternative definition of the good mother espoused by the women in this study. While these women define the good mother as someone who is loving, caring and looks after her children’s emotional and physical needs, it was as important for the good mother to take care of herself and have a balanced life.
When the women had a strong sense that they were good mothers, the ideological work they did was to strengthen the correspondence between their professed beliefs — their alternative definition — and their day-to-day behaviours, and to weaken the correspondence between the dominant ideology and their day-to-day behaviour. While it is difficult to quantify the percentage of time the women are feeling positive about their mothering, this is the situation for the vast majority of the women, most of the time.

Only Barbara explicitly identified the correspondence between her alternative definition and the reality of her life as a student mother. She recognized the fact that, defining a good mother as someone who is balanced opens the door to the possibility of student mothers being recognized as good mothers. If the women were to define the good mother in terms of the dominant societal view, accepting that the only way to raise a child is to follow the rules of the ideology of intensive mothering, then as student mothers they could never be good mothers unless they were Supermoms.

However, their ideological work tended to be similar to Hays’ participants, in that they referred back to the ideology of intensive mothering to defend their alternative and in so doing, their arguments returned to the very ideology they sought to change. The women explained how their alternative definition of the good mother was ultimately better for their children. Their reasoning always went back to their children, because, as good mothers, their children were their top priority. Each seemingly selfish choice — being away from their children to go to school, seminars or to study and write papers — is transformed into something that is good for their children.

The women contend that mothers need to be balanced because happy mothers make happy children. Children need happy mothers. Outside interests make mothers
happy and healthy people, which make them happy mothers. Therefore children need their mothers to pursue outside interests, which, in the case of these women, included pursuing their doctoral degrees.

For the majority of women, going to graduate school was something they did for themselves. Barbara believed she was a better person and that she was happier with herself when she was pursuing her studies. For Tassie and Angela, cultivating adult relationships was as important as their relationships with their children. They both expressed a need to meet people and talk about ideas that went beyond a preschool level. To be able to spend even just “one evening once in a while talking to smart people who use big words” (Tassie) was very important for their well-being. Taking time for themselves in this manner was important to ensure their happiness which, for Angela, was a defining quality of the “good mother.” Alice, set aside one evening a week to be with friends saying, “I’m realistic… I realize I do need time for myself… as a woman, as a person.”

A second rationale for their alternative perspective was that it was important for children to see their mothers doing something that gives them fulfillment. Participating in the public sphere and broadening their horizons was important. Over half of the participants argued they needed to be balanced for their children, rather than just for themselves, because they were role models. Expanding horizons beyond the role of mother who cares for children and family was important. They wanted their children to see them as more than just mothers, to see them as “real people.” “I don’t want to be seen as… [just] the chauffeur.”
The desire to do something for themselves and the desire to be a role model for their children were often intermingled. It was important for Carol that her children saw her involved in an intellectual project which excited her and had the potential of making a contribution to society. The need to be a role model could often balance out the more difficult times when she was not able to be there for them.

Then you talk about the sort of long term...I think it's good for my children to see me...intellectually involved in an activity that excites me and that I feel is of greater worth to society as a whole...that...I have a contribution to make and they see me working hard to accomplish something that will contribute. So then what I have to do, is say, do all these difficult, or bad or terrible moments, do they add up to be greater than this greater good? And sometimes you wonder. And other times there's no question about it. So, I guess that's why every year I keep paying those fees and going back. But, it certainly is a question of trying to balance it out. (Carol)

Francine said a mother needed to move beyond the home so she can present an image of an individual, not just a mother.

I think it's, it's a person who...does not give up their individuality to be nothing but a diaper changing machine...Also presents a role as...an individual...beyond just changing diapers and putting the cereal on the table. (Francine)

Francine was one of the strongest of the mothers in her conviction about the alternative definition of the good mother. Part of her strength came from her own mother modeled for a loving mother, but also a strong woman. Francine was able to withstand the pressure from the dominant ideology of mothering when, for example she felt she should make cookies for her son to take to school. While other mothers might express considerable guilt, Francine realized she was not able to take on this project. Her definition of the good mother did not include the necessity of baking cookies, although it did not exclude the possibility of baking, if she had the time. Ideological work is a way for mothers to maintain their sanity, and since Francine's financial resources were not
enough to purchase the requisite ingredients for cookies, it was better not to define
herself as someone who bakes *for her children*. Certainly, in this case, Francine’s
ideological work allowed her to sustain her definition of the good mother and resist what
could be regarded as the unreasonableness of the dominant ideology.

One third of the women indicated the desirability of a mother maintaining or
displaying an individual identity separate from their identity as mothers. Their arguments
were based on the impact this would have on their children. As role models for their
children, they believed it was important to be more than family-focused mothers.

[M]y notion of a good mother is someone who isn’t entirely devoted to her
children...it’s somebody who does have a life on her own, whose kids see her
go out and pursue her own life and feel good about herself and certainly to me
that’s part of being a good mother is still have a sense of identity... and you
know dreams in life and achievement etc. outside of the family and not that the
family isn’t part of that and can’t share in that but you, you have a sense of
achievement that isn’t connected necessarily or solely with being a mother.
(Barbara)

Being part of the public sphere was important for Judith, not just for her own
personal gain but because she wanted to know about the world beyond her home.
Knowing about the outside world meant she could talk with her daughter about a broad
range of things and be able to deal with situations that might be seen as beyond the scope
of the private sphere of the home.

It means...not just being the person who is at home...but, who also knows
about the world, so that when my daughter is asking me questions about how
the world works...I’m not just [saying] “go ask your father,” or “I don’t
know.”...Especially raising girls, I think it’s really important that we raise
girls to think of themselves as decision makers and as leaders. And that boys
can recognize girls as decision makers, and leaders....And so...if boys can’t
see their dads being nurturing and their moms being decision makers then how
are they ever supposed to understand that as adults...the thing that makes it a
complete parent...includes a lot of things that wouldn’t ordinarily be in the
description of work women do in families. (Judith)
The rationale related to priorities was, for the most part, relatively simple. A mother’s first priority is her child. This argument, as with the arguments around balance, related directly to the notion that good mothering is child centred. This would suggest that studies could never be their first priority, because that would not be a child centred approach. However, Tassie argued that a mother must put her studies as one of her top priorities, because she is a role model for her children and she cannot give up that part of herself. In essence the argument was, it would be harmful to your children if your studies were not a top priority, as your studies are all about doing something for your children.

Over half of the participants stated explicitly that their children were their top priority. Lan and Annie, responding to the questionnaire, said their children came second only to their partner and their relationship to God, respectively. Even when there was conflict, the children were more important. For both Annie and Lan, excelling in their studies at any cost was not an acceptable approach. Annie was struggling because she used to put her school first.

I even remember back in the fall saying to one of my professors...the struggle I was having...saying I really...need to remember that if I get higher marks in this Ph.D. than anybody in the world ever got before, and lose my kids in the process it’s not worth it. (Annie)

Lan, on one occasion, cancelled plans to work with some colleagues so she could spend time with her family. Although she was concerned about putting off the work, she knew in this instance she had done the right thing because at the end of the day they were all refreshed and there had been lots of laughter.

Alice’s son is her top priority at the moment, but she recognizes his needs will change with age. Leah and Tassie said both family and work were their top priorities. Children came first for almost all of the women. For Barbara, the priorities were clear.
In terms of the mothering student thing, the side that wins hands down all the time is mothering. I mean... if I have to make a choice... Absolutely! And it's not even something I would consider really or I'll just hold off till later or hand in a lousy essay if I have to. (Barbara)

One third of the women cited being “in tune” with, or connected to their children as evidence they were good mothers. Judith and Annie both commented on the strong connection they have with their children, while Debbie used the term “in tune,” to describe her relationship to her son. Spending time with children on an ongoing basis is how Leah connects with her children and learns about their lives, as well as teaching them about herself. Barbara was very comfortable about her mothering because she is “available” to her children, one of the hallmarks of a good mother. She said, “I’m there every morning, I’m there on weekends.” Having a strong connection with their children was a clear indication that they had spent considerable time with their children, getting to know them. They argued a mother could not possibly have a connection with her children, if she were an absent mother.

The special things they do for their children, whether on an ongoing basis or on occasion, also provided proof they were good mothers. Reni’s practice of ironing her children’s clothing every morning was a good example of an ongoing special, but not strictly necessary, task. Putting on warm clothes in the morning was not necessary for her children’s growth, and Reni could certainly have used the time to prepare herself for her day. But the gesture was a loving one, and indicated she was putting her children’s needs first.

Carol would occasionally pick up her daughters at lunch or take them from out of school care to spend some time with them because these were, “really fun, special times”
for her and her daughters. Doing special things with her daughters made up for all the times when she could not be there for them. Doing special things was consistent with their alternative definition of the good mother, because special things were "special" rather than required. This reinforced their feelings about being good mothers.

Judith felt very good about herself as a mother when she was able to positively affect her daughter's sleep patterns. Judith borrowed a bed from a friend and, with considerable effort was able to have the bed brought to her house and set up with special sheets her daughter received as a Christmas present. There was an immediate change in her daughter's sleep pattern, which made a difference both for Judith and her daughter. This was an especially important moment for Judith, as putting together a bed was something Judith perceived to be outside of the traditional mother's sphere, but within her alternative definition of the good mother.

Part of the ideological work the women did was to support their alternative perspective of the good mother by delegitimizing the dominant view. They identified two approaches to motherhood that they perceived as not being balanced, the "Supermom" and the stay-at-home mother. These are the only approaches to motherhood that Hays (1996) identifies as being acceptable, as both reinforce the ideology of intensive mothering. The women criticized these approaches as not being balanced and not benefiting the mother, therefore indirectly not benefiting the child. Judith argued women get caught up in the idea they can do everything and hesitate to delegate responsibilities. The end result is an exhausted and unhappy mother, who does not have the energy to be a good mother.
With the exception of Vicki, none of the women said they would want to be stay-at-home mothers. Initially, Vicki stated being a stay-at-home mother was out of the question because she did not believe it would make her happy and so it would not be good for her daughter. Six months after the first interview, Vicki spent the summer caring for her daughter and enjoyed the experience so much she did not want to return to her studies. She wondered if being a stay-at-home mom might have been better for her daughter and said it took considerable effort to feel positive about returning to school.

A third of the women said absolutely they could never be stay-at-home mothers, although not all of them had actually spent any extended time at home. These women all loved their children very much, but did not think they would be happy or fulfilled staying at home. When Barbara, Annie and Lan were new mothers they thought they would like to stay at home, however within a short time they found it was not to their liking. Barbara, who was a stay-at-home mother for only a few months, attributes her failure to the very romantic and unrealistic image she had of staying at home with her children. She imagined herself baking bread every day and playing with her children, an image that was soon replaced with the reality of day-to-day coping with small children, and the desire for intellectual stimulation. Annie and Lan both stayed at home for one year. Annie, like Barbara, based her desire to stay at home with her first child on an idealistic view of the stay-at-home mother.

[My desire to stay at home was] I think, just, um, a sense of idealism not based in reality It’s easy to talk about how to be a good parent when you don’t have children. (Annie)

A few of the women were quite harsh in their rejection of stay-at-home mothering. Debbie and Lan even questioned the commitment of some stay-at-home
mothers to their children in that, despite the fact that they may be physically near their children, they may not be engaged with them. Judith and Francine both felt that being a stay-at-home mom was neither a well rounded, nor a balanced approach to mothering. For Judith, stay-at-home mothers are not “complete parents.” The negative perceptions of stay-at-home mothering supported their alternative definition of the good mother and ultimately their decision to become students.

“I could go on and on about how I’m not a good mother”

Even those who believed themselves to be good mothers, tended to remember the times they lost their patience, yelled at or did not pay enough attention to their children. Often these momentary lapses overshadowed years of carefully nurturing their children. The hegemonic nature of the ideology of intensive mothering results in the women internalizing the ideology, to some extent regarding it as natural and right. They experience the normative pressure of the dominant North American ideology even if they were not born and raised in North America. Sometimes the feeling of not being a good mother was a general unease with their mothering, but the women also described situations in which they felt they did not respond well to their children, certainly not as a good mother would have responded.

In these moments of doubt, the women’s self-judgements reinforce the directives of psychologists and child-rearing experts who state mothering epitomizes only good characteristics such as patience and nurturing. Mothers are subject to impossibly high standards set by the ideology of intensive mothering from which women learn that a good mother is a good mother, all the time (Birns and Hay, 1988; McMahon, 1995).
Despite their questioning of the dominant definition of the good mother, the women still experienced the normative pressure of the ideology of intensive mothering and, in these moments of doubt, ended up feeling inadequate as mothers. The feelings of inadequacy relating to mothering had several sources. For example, some felt they were not spending enough time with their children, or not being child centred enough. Some attributed their inadequacy to their personality, feeling like an “unnatural” mother because they were not interested in playing games all the time, reading books at bedtime every night or being totally enthralled with everything their child said and did.

Some thought their children were spending too much time in the care of others, including day care and out-of-school care programmes. There were also those whose upbringing, or external pressures, led them to take on extremely stereotypical expectations of mothers such as good mothers cook everything from scratch, good mothers always take children to doctor’s appointments and good mothers always take children to get their hair cut. Finally, the opinions of others, or comparing themselves to others, affected their ability to do the necessary ideological work to support their alternative perspective.

All the women have experienced moments of doubt at some time, but few experienced them on a continual basis. The moments of doubt appear to be related to times when they were tired, stressed, ill, when they have put off being with their children for an extended period, or when they are feeling the pressures of the dominant ideology through others. Unexpected events also triggered moments of doubt. For example, Frances’ sense of being a bad mother was triggered when her son unexpectedly had to go to the dentist and undergo a serious treatment. At that time she felt she had to be with
him because that was a mother’s place, although she was repulsed by the thought of attending the procedure. In this situation, Frances did not have the time to engage in the necessary ideological work to accept that her son’s father could accompany her son and she would still be a good mother. Instead, she went back to her socialization from which she learned it was mother’s job to take her children to the dentist.

Only Lan and Mercedes did not say they were good mothers although both did indicate actions and situations in which they felt they had put their children’s interests first. Mercedes describes herself as the most unnatural mother, and comments on the way she has mothered her three children. She was very hard on herself and really questioned her ability to be a good mother. When she first had children she said she never thought to read books, she said “I don’t know what I thought I was gonna do with them... God I’m stupid!”

I think I’m probably the most unnatural mom as far as knowing instinctively what to do (long pause) I’ve now I look at, like I look at other people and I think, oh yeah, that makes a lot of sense, how come? But that kind of thing just never occurred to me...I know that they say that, you know, children need a parent and not a friend and stuff, but I did sort of do the, the friend thing with the kids as opposed to the parent thing I think mostly because I...didn’t know how to be a parent. (Mercedes)

Most often it was simply a generalized feeling of unease with their mothering. Angela said there are times when you just do not feel you are mothering well. This sense of general unease or vague questioning is noted in the qualifying comments made after stating they were good mothers. Comments such as “My ideal mom is probably something I try to follow and yet, you know...”(Vicki) or “I feel like I’m a good mom, but then sometimes I don’t. You know?” (Frances).
Beyond the generalized feeling, most of the women described situations when they felt they were bad mothers, or what made them feel like bad mothers. The women often did what Mercedes referred to as "painting the negative spaces." Frances said, "It is easier to get into when it is that I feel like I'm not [a good mother]." Similarly Barbara stated, "I could go on and on about ways that I don't think I'm a good mother." The result is, in addition to having a line drawing of the good mother we also have the good mother painted in relief.

Other general indicators are when they feel they are not giving their children enough attention. Frances described the time when she was over extended at work and she would go into what she referred to as "minimal mode." She resorted to feeding her son Cheerios and milk for dinner for a couple of weeks. Although she reasoned, because it was a short-term situation, it was passable but it was important that no one should know about it. If anyone found out, they would think she was a terrible mother.

A third of the women did not think they were spending enough time with their children, triggering feelings of inadequacy. Vicki said, since going to a parenting class in which the facilitator told her to "make more time" to be with her daughter, she had been "haunted" by the fear she was not spending enough time with her daughter. In this case, the facilitator of the parenting class acted as the conduit for the dominant ideology of the good mother. Vicki, feeling insecure as a new mother, saw herself through the eyes of this facilitator and accepted she was not doing enough for her daughter.

Only two of the women were concerned about the long term ill effects of their mothering. Njeri felt her children have had to grow up too quickly, taking on more responsibility than other children their age normally would. For example, if her children
were at a party and something spilt, her daughter would take responsibility by getting a
cloth with which to wipe up the mess. Njeri sees this behaviour as uncharacteristic of
such a young child. Njeri said her daughter’s actions come from the way she has been
raised. She believes she has raised her children to serve, because they have always been
expected to pitch in at home. Frances was concerned with the long-term effects of her
son being in daycare for an extended time. Frances is worried about what she referred to
as the “what ifs.” “What if” she regrets her decision later, when he is grown, and she
finds his development was affected by being in daycare for long days every day? In both
these case, the mothers were feeling guilty about their children. On another day, Njeri
might have seen her children’s responses as independence and Frances would be able to
assert that her son has had opportunities to be with other children. These situations might
have been painted in a more positive light.

A third of the women described moments of doubt when they referred back to
stereotypical characteristics of the good mother. Carol and Annie both had times when
they felt they were bad mothers because they did not read to their children every night at
bedtime, despite the fact that child rearing experts say it is important for children. Tassie
too, had times when she did not think she was a good mother because she lacked a real
interest in watching children’s videos hundreds of time over. In addition, she admitted
sometimes when her daughter is repeating comments as they drive in the car she feigns
interest.

Judith felt inadequate in the area of food and cooking stemming from her
experiences as a young girl. Judith grew up in a Father-custody household in which the
housekeeper took on the figure of the mother. She was an extremely domestic woman
who cooked everything from scratch, creating a "Norman Rockwell-like" atmosphere. Judith has never been able to replicate that kind of domesticity in her own household. She would like all her child's food to be made from scratch, but is unable to do this due to health and time constraints, as well as the fact she just does not feel at home in the kitchen. She has friends who are able to cook with ease, which makes her feel inadequate.

I have a really hard time cooking. It's just not something that comes easy to me. And I have lots of friends that can step into a kitchen and say oh let's put in a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and see what happens, And I just can't do that. (Judith)

The isolation of the women is highlighted when they compared themselves to other mothers. Although some felt judged by others, Frances and Maurilla remarked that the judgements are often their own voices rather than the voices of others. This projecting seems to indicate successful indoctrination into the hegemonic ideology of the intensive mothering, as the women act as judge without having anyone actually make negative comments. This is not to say these women were not, in fact, judged, but nothing has been said to them directly. Frances said, "I feel judged, I guess. And I don't think they were judging me." It could be they felt judged because they themselves have made judgements about other mothers. Maurilla said she had judged other women's mothering when she saw what she considered to be badly behaved children. She said, "Sometimes I think [they are] worse kids than mine...oh boy, if that [child] would belong to me so I can say that. They do that, I probably do that."

It is significant that the women's judgements tend to be based on the dominant societal definition of the good mother. For example, Tassie had a different perspective on the accepted wisdom about bedtime routine for children. She has had other mothers
comment on the “right way” to put a child to bed and has read the child rearing books.

She felt these mothers judged her when they spoke about the way in which they deal with bedtime.

I know that every other mother on the face of the earth sticks their kid in a bed or a crib somehow manages to close the door and lets their child go to sleep on their own, and that all the parenting books say that this is the way to go. I’ve never done that. I go into the bedroom with my daughter at about eight o’clock and however long it takes for her to go to sleep, that’s how long I’m there and... I don’t know that but every other mother that I’ve spoken to... they all tell me... my son goes to sleep so well... and I think... okay!...[Interviewer: How does that make you feel... as a mother] Superior. (both laugh)... I don’t tell them because... I don’t really want another lecture on what I’m doing wrong. (Tassie)

Comparisons to other mothers included the amount of time they spent with and away from their children as well as how they mother in general. Childcare was a source of comparison for both Debbie and Frances. Debbie compared herself to another mother whose child is in out of school care only two to three times each week, while Debbie’s son is in out of school care every day. Frances put her son in full-time daycare so she could focus on a particular programme requirement and finish it in one year. She compared herself unfavourably to another mother who chose to spread this requirement over two years and so could spend more time with her child. Frances wondered whether she was doing the right thing, or if she should have taken the same approach as the other mother.

Alice compared herself to another mother at her child’s daycare noting the woman was not only involved with the daycare, but was focused on her studies. Alice was in awe of this woman and wondered how she was able to do it all when she, herself was not able to. Angela said when she saw, what she referred to as “the stereotypical perfect mom,” or a mom with kids and they are having fun, you cannot help but compare
yourself to them. She also finds herself wondering if she should be like the mom with the kids having fun together.

The result of comparing themselves to others, is some of the women end up feeling inadequate relative to the other mothers. Although there are times, as in the case of Tassie and Debbie, when some of the women have come out of the comparison feeling positive about themselves, for the most part this is not the case. Mercedes, who considered herself to be the most "unnatural mother," said she felt "crummy" about not spending as much time with her children as other parents do. She does not feel she is "there" enough for her children compared to others. She tends to berate herself especially when she sees other ways of parenting and wonders why she does not think of these things. As noted earlier she compared herself to her sister who she felt is the "natural" mother and she thought she was "stupid" for not having thought to seek advice on how to mother or to research child rearing practices.

Vicki felt inadequate when she compared herself to her baby-sitter. She said her baby-sitter would, on occasion, cook extra food and send it home. But this friendly gesture was full of messages for Vicki.

So this is where I compare and there have been many times where she’s ... cooked stuff at home, and she sends it home for dinner with me. I mean, and I get the feeling she’s saying... maybe you might not have enough time to cook, or what, so she sends home spaghetti sauce and all this and...I’m thinking, geez, I should, should I be home cooking and stuff. (Vicki)

One incident that particularly affected Vicki was a day when the baby-sitter took Vicki’s daughter to get a haircut. The fact the babysitter took the child for a haircut was not the problem as she had done this before. The problem was that Vicki had not noticed
her child’s hair had been cut. The next day the baby-sitter asked Vicki what she thought of the haircut

I brought my daughter back to the baby-sitter, and she said to me, what do you think of her hair cut? (sounds chagrined) I hadn’t noticed!...I was, like, oh, God! (Laughter) I felt so bad! And a lot of it was because the night before, after she had it cut, it was wet, and she went to bed. I mean, I didn’t...so...I did feel it that time, yeah. Yeah. I was thinking oh god, I didn’t even notice she got a haircut. (Vicki)

Vicki took her daughter for her next haircut and as she sat there she reflected it was the first time she had watched her child get her haircut. Vicki acknowledged the haircut was not of concern but it was a passage in her daughter’s life she had not shared; it was the babysitter who was witnessing and sharing those milestones with her child. This incident caused intense feelings of inadequacy for Vicki as well as a questioning of her values and priorities.

This section has described the ideological work in which the women engage because their professed belief about the definition of the good mother differs, to varying degrees, with the dominant North American definition of the good mother. The ideological work supports their professed belief that the good mother is balanced not only for herself but also for her children, but also devalues the dominant perspective as when Alice said she wanted to be more than a chauffeur. Moments of doubt about their mothering arose because the circumstances made it more difficult to sustain their ideological work such as when they were tired or stressed. Difficult circumstances often resulted in feeling like they were not doing a good job of mothering. The next section will examine the ideological work in which the women engage in relation to their studenthood.
Studenthood

"I'm not so narrow as a student because I'm a mother"

In an earlier chapter I argued that the ideology of the good student is authoritative, in that one could not modify the definition and still be considered a good student. If you resist the ideology or try to modify it to make it relevant to your life, you put yourself at risk of being accused of not being committed to your education. But these women do resist the ideology; they do modify it to fit their lives. When the women had a strong sense of being good students they were able to affirm their alternative definition of the good student, as was outlined in chapter seven. They were able to strengthen the correspondence between their professed belief and their day-to-day behaviour, and weaken the correspondence between the dominant idea of the good student and their day-to-day behaviour.

The majority of the women thought they were good students, most of the time and the ideological work in which they engaged not only support this feeling of being a good student but also served to delegitimate the dominant definition of the good student. The women took issue with the narrow definition of the good student, as they identified it in the university, and provided an alternative definition. They defined the good student as someone who is dedicated and committed to their studies but who is also balanced.

The women appeared to be quite comfortable challenging or resisting the dominant definition of the good student, a finding I would argue that is most likely related to class, age or maturity, and level of education. While these women are not all from middle class backgrounds, they will be part of the middle class when they finish
their doctorates. At that time they will be considered professionals, and so have earned a
certain respect and sense personal autonomy in their professional lives.

The age or maturity of these women may influence their ability to resist the
ideology of the good student. The women range in age from thirty-three to forty-seven
years and so have reached a certain maturity, which may facilitate resisting the dominant
definition of the good student without questioning their worth. They do not seem as
insecure as the young student mothers in Kelly's (2000) study, who were regularly
subjected to verbal slurs such as “stupid slut,” a comment that attacks not only the girl’s
sense of who she is as a woman but also her intellectual capabilities (While this insult
may not be intended as a comment on the young woman’s intelligence per se, that is
often its effect.). This group of women have reached the doctoral level of post-secondary
education and therefore have likely been told along the way that they are smart, although
Frances says it wasn’t always this way. While the data does not indicate how many of
the women have been told they are smart, aside from Tassie and Debbie who were “star
students,” one could assume they are aware of the difficulties of reaching the Ph.D. level.

The ideological work involved in supporting their alternative definition took
several forms, beginning for some with an a priori decision to do their studies in a way
that fits their lives. While recognizing the importance of marks, they acknowledge the
limitations of their life; therefore they minimize the importance of marks when arguing
that they are good students. They do consider themselves to be dedicated and committed
to their studies, although not in the narrow sense they perceive in the dominant definition
of the good student.
In addition, they use their alternative definition to delegitimate the dominant one which they believe is narrow, rigid, and too focused on product, in the form of marks and scholarships. They reframed the definition of the good student using descriptors such as balanced, creative and breaking boundaries, all of which served to frame the dominant definition as something that is narrow, not creative, unhealthy and undesirable. Those who aspire to the dominant definition then, are framed as only technically good students. The good student, according to the dominant definition, is taking an easy way out, rather than breaking new ground. As in the case of the communards’ alternative definition of good child rearing practises (Berger, 1981 & 1995), the alternative definition of the good student allows these student mothers to define themselves as good students. At times they felt superior to non-mothering colleagues, and sometimes even faculty, who they believe are narrower because they have not had the experience of mothering. Some of the women even suggest mothering is an asset, especially in the area of education.

Barbara and Leah both made *a priori* decisions to do their studies in ways that fit their lives as a wives and mothers. They made the decision not to accept the dominant definition of the good student. Barbara said if she did not, she was simply setting herself up for failure, precisely the situation ideological work is meant to prevent.

When I decided to do the Ph.D., I put a lot of thought into it and realized that I wasn’t going to judge myself...as much as possible, by the grades I received, by the scholarships I did or didn’t receive, or any of that, because... my situation is one in which I think I would be setting myself up for...disappointment if I was to do that, and for me my goal was to, obviously, get through the programme [laughs], to pass it, but also to learn as much as I could and to do things because I wanted to do them, not because I thought I should do them. And sometimes that’s been difficult for me because, like most people, I’m sure, I’m highly cognizant of the politics of the department, and I’m acutely aware of the fact that if I want there is a game out there that I could play and I’m just not playing it and in much of my life I do play that game because I know...it works. (Barbara)
By creating her own definition of doing well, Barbara anticipated the accusation of being an uncommitted student. She used the term “game” to delegitimate the dominant perspective of how one ought to pursue one’s studies. By trivializing the perspective of the opposition, she neutralized its impact on her to some extent. She decided not to play the game before being told she was not playing by the rules.

Leah and Judith both wanted to be creative and break boundaries in their work. “Breaking boundaries” and “being creative” are phrases that distinguished their work from traditional academic work and in this way they created a situation in which their work was outside the norm of academe and so could not be evaluated using the same criteria. Leah said, “I get the feeling sometimes that… work that is different is regarded as fringe, and … people say, ‘well that’s nice and that’s very interesting, [talking in deep voice] but let’s get to the real stuff.’” Although it was received politely, it was not mainstream enough to be accepted as legitimate. By defining the work she did as “creative” and “breaking boundaries” she was able to maintain her belief she was a good student; a good student most certainly did work that was both.

Judith, like Leah wanted to be creative and break boundaries. According to Judith, it was difficult to make comparisons between those who she referred to as being technical or having mechanical mastery (i.e. knowing the ropes, perfecting papers, perhaps working on less controversial/innovative topics or who use a professor’s project for their thesis topic), and those who were higher in creativity, who were willing to take risks with their work, and who were working in new areas.

While the women agreed the good student needed good marks to win scholarships and so must be focused to receive good marks, they tended to believe the
dominant definition is too rigid and, especially in the case of student mothers, unrealistic and even unhealthy. Annie had changed her attitude toward her studies after being very driven during her Master's degree. Being a student was how she defined herself; it was her source of identity and self-esteem. She wanted her doctorate to be different so she would not end up at graduation feeling disappointed as she had when she finished her Master's Degree. Being balanced, as a student meant not being totally wrapped up in their work. Annie described being totally immersed in studies as "not a very balanced life."

The day I graduated with my Masters, it was a really down day I had the realization that didn't do it, I'm still not good enough...since then I've really done a lot of work. That's...not where life is at for me. (Annie)

A third of the women argued mothering has helped them be better students by grounding them and enhancing their perspective in their studies. Motherhood has benefited their studenthood. They valued the non-academic experiences they had as mothers and tended not to place a greater value on their studies. Barbara believed that students needed to have interests beyond their studies. She did not believe that having a family was the only way to have a well-rounded life, instead she emphasised involvement in one's community or neighbourhood. "Expanding horizons" (Barbara), or having a "broader range of experiences" (Alice), were two ways of describing the need to go beyond the "narrow focus" of being a student.

Instead of being first, foremost and always a student, these women believed a student should broaden their horizons and have a wider range of interests not only for personal fulfillment but also for professional enrichment. Their responses concurred with the participants in Harris, Thiele and Currie's (1998) study who view those who were not
so narrowly focused as better academics. Balance was very important for these women, both as mothers and as students and it was one of the most important elements of their ideological work.

To argue for balance, the women reframed the definition of the good student while keeping with the original spirit of the definition, to become an educated person. The women argued, moving away from their studies to deal with family responsibilities and pursue other interests meant, when they returned to their studies, they were enriched and they enriched their work with these new perspectives. Leah described how being a mother added to her wealth of experiences which she brought to her studies.

The benefits are...the experience that you come with...I always say that I’m not just a graduate student. It annoys me so much to go to a conference and have them designate you as a graduate student, as opposed to anybody who’s finished their Ph.D. and is a professor. And I usually start out by saying, I’m not just a graduate student, I’m a writer, I’m a mother I’m a teacher and I brought this whole wealth of experience with me to graduate school when I came. It’s not quite the same, I think...when you’ve gone from your high school, to your undergraduate, straight into graduate school. There’s been...all these years of living and being, and, yeah, I think they definitely are a benefit. (Leah)

For Barbara, being a mother grounded her and helped her survive the often narrow and “self-obsessed” world of academe. Her home was a refuge. For Barbara, children were more tangible, and tucking them into bed was a physical experience, which countered the exclusively cerebral experience of studying.

One of the things I want to say about mothering is that...I don’t know how I would survive being a student if I wasn’t a mother, because this academic world I find so stifling, so narrow, so self-obsessed. For me to be able to go home and be with my kids, and go out to the park and throw a Frisbee around or cheer them on in their soccer games is real life. And if I didn’t have that to kind of - to use an expression I don’t usually use but - to ground me, I think I would find this all really difficult to deal with in that I’d take it far too seriously like the rest of them! [laughs]...It’s also more immediate. Out here, you’re doing the research and stuff and it’s all...but there, I mean, you can tuck the kids into bed at night... It’s...much more tangible. And I like that about it too. (Barbara)
The upshot of being enriched by their outside interests and enriching their work was that the women defined their non-mothering, more traditionally-defined student colleagues as narrow. Some of the women took an almost superior attitude toward non-mothering colleagues thereby increasing the status of mothering. By inflating the status of mothering within academe they legitimized their place in the university. Leah said her work had greater depth than many of her non-mothering colleagues because they did not have the same kinds of experiences to bring to their work.

I felt this in particular when I took courses...where there was this lovely mix, not just of younger men and women, there were also, you know, mature students like me but it was very interesting because wonderful as some of the young men and women were in their writing they hadn't had the experiences with which to write about or maybe the maturity and the wisdom that comes along with them and I really noticed the difference, I mean sometimes I felt like I was from another planet (laughs) but it was really interesting, too, so there are lots of benefits I think, that way. (Leah)

Mercedes believed, as a mother, she had a better understanding of education. Because she was a mother she saw things differently; she had an additional lens through which to view the world. She said, despite the difficulties of combining mothering and studies, this lens allowed her to see things non-mothering students could not.

The thing that I want to add, I guess is that I can bitch and complain and criticize till the cows come home but I know that I have a better understanding of education because I'm a mother and my children are in the public school system you know, I know that when I sit around those tables and have discussions, I've got a whole different layer and perspective to bring to that stuff that those other people don't have. It's not their fault. (Mercedes)

This sense of superiority that Mercedes expressed here helped her feel that she was not out of place, but that she had something very important to add to the university,
something these other students, some of whom may well fit the good student profile, did not have.

As stated earlier, the dominant definition of the good student was not dismissed completely. Included in their alternative definition of the good student was the belief that the good student is dedicated, focused and committed. Two thirds of the women in this study identified themselves as being focused, dedicated or committed to their studies. Some of the women spoke of committing most of their lives to their studies, of giving their all to their studies, and of being dedicated. Angela said she was “serious” about her studies, taking courses for a reason rather than because she has to have a specific number of credits. Francine said she was an “overachiever,” and Reni said she was “somewhat obsessive-compulsive.” Tassie referred to herself as “a really driven individual.” Annie said, although she was driven during her Master’s degree, she was not driven for her doctorate. Reni said she was focused and hardworking.

...I was really focused, and I was there to go to school. I wasn't there to waste...time. To me, right now, at the moment, means to socialize, it really does...I wasn't there to socialize. I was there to get my degree and get into a profession that I really wanted to be in badly. (Reni)

Vicki said anything that is not related to schoolwork is cancelled so she can focus.

...the biggest part of my life that I just sort of...cancel immediately is social life with my family or dinners or whatever, that has nothing to do with school, it's just about going out with, you know, friends or something. I immediately cancel all those things if I have a need to gain some time. (Vicki,)

When asked how much time a good student would have to spend on their studies to be considered a good student, Francine replied,

A lot! In order for me to say that I think I'm a good student. I can say that I spend virtually all of my time on my studies, except for what it takes to keep the house...rolling. I have...no social life. My social life is the grocery store! (Francine)
Carol said the time she was really focused was when she first came back to school to do her Master's degree, when she had only one small child. At the time of the interview Carol had two school age children and was not able to focus as much. She attribute part of this to the length of the programme. Having to maintain a focus for this extended period is very difficult.

I don't remember feeling terribly guilty or terribly unhappy for my children at the beginning. But I think that the Ph.D. experience is different, because of the length of time involved you can’t keep up that intensity for all those years... Then you start to look back on, for one year, I’ll get together okay - we can survive this one year. Or even two, but when it starts to be - like this is the sixth year, and I look back and I think 6 years you know, ever since my older daughter was one, ever since my other daughter was born I’ve been subjecting them to this and trying to work out the intensity of trying to do those two things at once. I think that’s very difficult, that long term. (Carol)

In much the same way as they argued they were good mothers in comparison to other mothers, to be a mother and advance into a doctoral programme, or to do well in the doctoral programme is an obvious indication they were smart. A third of the women looked at their position in academe and came to the conclusion they must be good students. Frances thought she must be a good student because she has reached “a point now where I think, well I must have been good.” Annie said, although she did not see herself as an intellectual she thought she was “intelligent enough.” While Carol reasoned, “I’m a good student in the sense that most of the time I do what’s expected of me, and I’ve managed to get this far and nobody has asked me to leave... so therefore I must be a reasonably good student.”

The only conclusion they could come to was they were good students otherwise their continued attendance at the university did not make sense. Carol was not sure if she
would say she was a good student. She said it depended on how you defined good student. In response to the question, "What is it that makes you think you're not a good student?" she replied,

Well, I think there's two, there's maybe two things happening here. There's the good student in terms of doing the right things. Having good work habits, and...portraying the, following through with the activities that one should do. One should...take lots of classes, one should write lots of papers, one should present them, one should...undertake the kinds of projects and participate in discussions and those are being a good student. And I guess I do those things. (Carol)

By modifying the definition of the good student the women were able to affirm their studenthood. While they acknowledge the structural realities of the university and feel relatively powerless within that structure, their ideological work supports modifying the ideology to suit their lived reality and even to delegitimate the dominant definition of the good student.

"I'm not the brightest one in the class"

Almost all the women said they were good students and were able to sustain the necessary ideological work to support their alternative definition of the good student most of the time. As in the case of their motherhood, there were times when they experienced moments of doubt. Some of the women, for example Tassie or Francine, were able to sustain their ideological work to a greater extent than others, like Njeri or Mercedes. Most of the time it was specific instances when they did not feel they were doing very well, but for some it was a generalized feeling of not being a very good student or when they compared themselves to their student colleagues.
A variety of circumstances or influences made ideological work more difficult. Being turned down for a scholarship, feeling stressed and tired, feeling like they have been away from their work for too long, can all be disheartening. In addition, the competition of doctoral studies as well as working in isolation, result in them losing faith in their alternative definition. In these moments of doubt they used the dominant ideology of the good student to evaluate their performance, compared themselves to others and then identified what they must change to be more like the good student.

Maurilla did not feel like a good student compared to the idea she said was “out there,” meaning the dominant definition. Frances does not speak out in class, and so described herself as “too understated to be a good student.” Carol was not able to integrate, with ease, the jargon used in her department. Vicki and Mercedes did not feel like good students when they left papers to the last minute. Angela felt badly when she had not read all the articles for class. Alice felt inadequate when she ran out of time before completing a grant application.

Only Njeri provided a thorough rationale for not considering herself a good student.

I haven’t been at the centre of academics. I’m unable to attend the [lunch seminars], depending on the times, because of the time. I haven’t made a lot of presentations and conferences, I’m not well published. I’m published in newsletters...And...one of the good indications of...not being a good student in the [university] is I don’t have a [university scholarship]. The two times I applied I didn’t get it...So that shows there is a part of me that is not very good. (Njeri)

Comparing themselves to what they thought others were doing, Frances and Njeri said they were not diligent in doing their course readings. Frances grasps the ideas in the readings but she does not feel as if she knows the material. She refers to herself as an “ideas person” not a “details person.” She said, “I’m time restricted and I’m not diligent,
diligent in that you know like I read a chapter and then I underline and then I take notes.”

Njeri skimmed her readings first thing in the morning, picking out a couple of important points so she would be able to participate in class.

Having to do readings of like, over 50 pages one morning you know? And then going to participate in, the classroom. For a person to be able to participate effectively, you should be able to have read not just - gone through. Which in most cases I did...just checked for...just skimmed through and picked out a few points which I now present, show the professor that I...[makes a gesture like she knows what she is talking about or is intelligent]... You are doing it. (Njeri)

Annie and Mercedes were concerned that they did not understand the work in one of their classes as illustrated by Mercedes’ comment, “I’m certainly not the smartest one in my classes.” Both she and Annie thought they were the only ones in the class who did not understand what was going on, or felt that it was easier for everyone else. Annie remembered back to her Master’s programme when she felt “like the dumbest person in the class” but after a few weeks she found out that there were only a few people in the class who really understood what was going on. Mercedes was surprised when she found out she was not alone. “Some people feel the same way as I do about things and yet, to me, they look incredibly brilliant.”

The critical point here is that both Mercedes and Annie assumed everyone else in the class understood; everyone else in the class was smarter than they were. This is a typical result of the isolation of doctoral studies (Ridding, 1996). This isolation, combined with Frances’ charge that professors only tell the students the ideal – what they would like them to do – rather than what is realistic, can result in students operating under the assumption that they are the only ones in the class who are not smart enough to understand what is being said. However, they do not wish to show their ignorance so they tend not speak out or ask questions.
Carol commented on, what she perceived as the relative powerlessness of students in affecting change in the university. She acknowledged that, while she might not use the dominant definition of the good student to measure herself, she was aware that the university did. Specifically, the women were judged on the marks and scholarships they received. Njeri and Carol both had excellent marks although they did not perceive themselves to be excellent students. For Carol, A grades are the norm.

I've always gotten well yeah in the A range. I don't think I've ever gotten a B....{Interviewer: A: So how would you feel if you got a B? }I would wonder what was wrong....With me. Or with the way that I had interpreted what was...what the assignment was. (Carol)

The upshot of an A being the average is that the difference between an A and a B gets magnified out of proportion such that a B is seen as a failure. Njeri's reaction to her grades is a good illustration of this distortion. She did not think she was a good student, "Well, um, I'm not that really, really, A student. I've got a few As and a few Bs". She went on to explain that the few As were in fact seven and "a few Bs" turned out to be only one. From her initial statement one would assume she had more than one B leaving her with less than an A average for her courses; but this is not the case. By stating her marks in this way, she downplayed her achievements. Unless Njeri is being humble, her perception of the good student has distorted her view of her average and contributes to her sense of being not a very good student as was described earlier.

But excellent marks are not enough. According to Carol, you must also have a scholarship or bursary to be a good student.

I don’t feel...in terms of achievement I'm a good student, because I don’t feel that, I don't get the top marks, I don't get - I’ve never received a bursary or funding...me personally. (Carol)
While defending their studenthood by modifying the definition of the good student, here we see the women have reverted back to the ideology of the good student when they evaluate their studenthood negatively. They do not use their alternative definitions of the good student to bolster their confidence or rationalize their feelings of inadequacy. When evaluating themselves positively, marks were not very important, but negatively evaluating their studenthood, marks take on meaning they did not have. Much of their negative evaluating comes from a sense of being out of place as mothers.

Cultural Differences In Experiences Of The Contradiction

The cultural differences noted in chapter six, underline the specific historical, cultural, social and political context of intensive mothering. For some of the women the ideology of intensive mothering or the ideology of the marketplace are unfamiliar, in that during their formative experiences, in their country of origin, they were not subject to these ideologies. While acknowledging the dynamic nature of culture, and the limitations of the sample for drawing conclusions about cultures, I observed some differences in the experiences of the contradiction between the two ideologies for four women in particular which draws attention to the specific geographic location of the contradiction. Lan (Asian), Maurilla (African), Njeri (African), and Reni (South Asian) all grew up in cultures that did not espouse one of these ideologies. I highlight how this may affect their experiences of the contradiction between the two ideologies.

The cultural differences of experiences with the ideology of intensive mothering underscore the historical, cultural and social specificity of the ideology of intensive

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10 Lan, Maurilla, Reni and Njeri described working and mothering in their respective cultures.
mothering. Where the ideology of intensive mothering, as described earlier, is absent, the women experience the contradiction differently than those growing up with intensive mothering. For Lan a stay-at-home mother is unusual and not respected. Being an employed mother, on the other hand, is natural, as is having a nanny to take care of the children. The mother's role was to work and after work spend time with her children. For Lan, the ideology of the marketplace is strong and day-to-day mothering is something that is more properly left to a nanny.

While the ideology of the marketplace was strong in her country of origin, the ideology of intensive mothering was virtually nonexistent. According to Lan, mothers were expected to be employed and to hire nannies to look after their children; stay-at-home mothering, however, was a more traditional Asian way of mothering.

Most people in [country of origin] will work, and some women will work and we earn money and then it’s very common to have a live-in nanny and the nanny will, take care of all the housework and prepare the food, so after work it’s our quality time with our kids. (Lan)

According to Lan, a woman staying at home to care for children was unusual and in some ways suspect. She noted, “It’s quite normal for people [in Canada] to stay at home but in [country of origin] if I stayed at home it would seem abnormal.” Stay-at-home mothers had, perhaps undeservedly, a reputation for “just hanging out with their friends” and not looking after their children. Lan said it was assumed stay-at-home mothers were doing things with their friends or watching television all day.

Although the ideology of intensive mothering is relatively new to her, Lan noted some transfer of the North American ideology has occurred through films and other North American cultural exports. One of the ideas from the ideology of intensive mothering that has been exported is the idea that the first years of childhood are precious
and should be cherished. Raised by a stay-at-home mother, Lan has always put her studies ahead of her family and although she does experience some guilt, it tends to be around her studies more than her family.

[I] always put studying as my first priority...because I [want] to be a good student...and I think that good students should be like that, so I will sacrifice something that I feel is important, for example, my family life...for me being a good student, I commit my time, my energy, and my thoughts towards what I enjoy. (Lan)

Since arriving in Canada Lan has begun to feel the pressure to conform to a more intensive way of mothering. One particular incident followed a church service in which the minister had been giving a sermon about divorce and the importance of family.

And this Sunday...I had an appointment with my friends to do a project together at three...but...this Sunday was...a very sunny day...and I went to church, and we were talking, something about divorce (laughs)... I think Oh, I should put my family as my first priority...if I got my Ph.D., but if I get divorced, or my kids don’t want me...it doesn’t mean anything to me...So...I asked them, “What if mom went to work at three, what would you think?” And they said, “Oh, no, mom, don’t go,” so I decided that maybe I would like to be with them as a family. So we spent some time just outside riding the bikes, and... I felt good because...we haven’t been together for a long time. (Lan)

The contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student did not exist for Lan before coming to Canada. She considered her education something she did for herself as well as for her family. Much in the same way that the traditional definition of the good father is someone who focuses on his work in order to provide for his family and so is complementary to the ideology of the good student, Lan’s perception of the good mother does not conflict with the ideology of the good student.

For Maurilla and Njeri, coming from cultures where community responsibility for children is the norm, the ideology of intensive mothering is a foreign concept. While
mothers do care for children, they also may be caring for the children of their family and
their neighbours. Although Njeri and Maurilla were raised in different African countries
they both described child rearing as a community responsibility, although the bulk of the
work was still done by women. Because of common cultural values the community
would take responsibility for all aspects of care.

How the children behave, is moulded in my culture by many people. The
grandmothers would be there for them, their grandparents and if my mother
looked at my children and thought they were misbehaving she would - she
would discipline them. With feeling no problem you know? (Njeri)

Children were well cared for by several caregivers including the extended family
so mothers did not have exclusive responsibility for childcare.

At home...the children would go and visit an Auntie, even if you’re a single
parent there would be an Auntie who would maybe have a spouse who would
[take] the responsibility of that man to put in where the child has been missing.
So everybody plays a significant part in the life of this child. (Njeri)

Mothers worked, but the guilt that often accompanies leaving children to go to work in
the North American context, was absent because of the support.

There’s a lot more support. Mothers usually don’t...stay off work. You...don’t
stop work because you have kids. Moms have always worked whether educated
or not educated, we’ve always worked...The grandparents do, the aunts do the
uncles chip in and so it’s a collective effort...there’s a lot more community effort.
(Maurilla)

It is not clear from Njeri if, in her country of origin, the ideology of the
marketplace was as strong as it is in North America, however, Maurilla presented a
picture of a society in which the North American drive to “get ahead” was generally
absent. Family was accepted to a greater extent in the workplace and the separation of
spheres was not as strict. Maurilla was raised by two educators, which may account for
her perception that there was not a strict separation of spheres. Although when asked to
reflect on her country as a whole, beyond her family’s occupations, she explained her country generally did not have the same need for competition (field notes, June 1999).

She recounted an incident when her father, a school principal, interrupted a meeting with school board officials to change the diaper of one of his children for whom he was caring that day. She said he simply changed the diaper on his desk and when he was finished the meeting resumed. Maurilla’s mother was a schoolteacher who sometimes had to take her children to school with her. Beyond children being welcomed into the class, Maurilla said children were taught how to behave in these settings. They would be given things to do at the back of the room and were expected to be reasonably well behaved. This merging of the private and public spheres is unusual to the North American context, despite the fact Maurilla’s supervisor allowed her to bring her children to meetings.

Maurilla became a mother only after immigrating to Canada but she continued the communitarian approach to child rearing by having her mother, mother-in-law and sister-in-law all take turns caring for her children instead of having them go to daycare. Maurilla said her conception of the family included all these people and so her children were still cared for by her family. The absence of the ideology of intensive mothering resulted in a lack of contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace in their countries of origin. However, Njeri, who became a mother before coming to Canada, feels she had been indoctrinated to the North American ideal of motherhood in which the mother is held solely responsible. Her perception was that mothers are held completely responsible to the point where a mother might be physically harmed if she allowed anything to happen to her children.
Reni is a Canadian raised South Asian woman whose cultural ties are very strong. Living in a large house with her extended family facilitates the continuance of the cultural value of communitarian responsibility for children (Reni’s story is highlighted in the family support section of chapter nine). Because of the communitarian nature of Reni’s culture she is aware of the ideology of intensive mothering on an intellectual level but her experience has been that the responsibility for caring for children is a shared responsibility in the extended family. As in the other communitarian societies, women may be responsible for childcare but they are not given sole responsibility.

For Reni, the cultural contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student is limited. Her mother-in-law and father-in-law have taken on most of the day to day reproductive work related to her children while she and her husband take on the emotional and social work that she believe her in-laws, because they are not of the North American culture, are not well equipped to address.

In [our] culture...mothering is a shared responsibility. Physical needs are often shared by others...But the mother is generally seen as responsible for the provisions of values and morals to her children...I believe it is difficult for [our] grandparents in the Canadian context to effectively meet all the emotional needs of their second generation grandchildren. If we were in [country of origin] where my in-laws understood the larger culture, I might [not] have to be as concerned about these needs. (Reni)

The stories of these four women all highlight the importance of context to this contradiction. While they are only illustrative rather than conclusive, it appears that if one of the ideologies is removed, then the contradiction lessens or disappears. For Lan there was no contradiction because the ideology of intensive mothering did not exist; women were expected to work outside the home and were subject to censure if they did not. For Maurilla, Njeri and Reni, as with Lan, the ideology of intensive mothering did
not exist but in its place was a communitarian society in which the community took
greater responsibility for children. However, Njeri’s comment about feeling it was all up
to her and her sense of being indoctrinated into conforming to the dominant definition of
the good mother, speaks to the hegemonic power of the ideology of intensive mothering.

Consequences

According to Hays (1996), employed women are acting “irrationally” when they
devote so much time and energy to their children, often at the expense of career or
professional progress. Using parallel rationale, student mothers could also be said to be
acting against their own best interests when they mother “intensively.” Although, one
could also argue that devoting time to children is a very rational choice as children can
bring great joys as some indicated having children grounded them. The point to be made
here is that combining motherhood and studenthood can have a number of consequences.
Some of the more significant, for these student mothers, include guilt, financial
difficulties, as well as emotional and physical strain.

The stress of trying to live up to the image of the good mother and the good
student can affect their health. One third stated their health had suffered as a result of
combining studenthood and motherhood. Both Judith and Frances had chronic medical
conditions that were aggravated with stress.

I have a chronic arthritic condition and it is exacerbated…when I don’t take
care of myself and being a student and being a mother has necessitated,
through the first three years of my doctoral programme, that I…didn’t take
care of myself. (Frances)
As they worked harder they forgot about themselves and personal care was always a low priority. This not only exacerbated existing health problems it also created new ones as in the case of Carol who developed an ulcer.

Half the women talked about their energy level, but only Frances and Judith indicated this was a serious problem for them. Judith commented on the magnitude of this issue for her because of her medical condition of which chronic fatigue was a part. She said, “the fatigue thing, it’s like this monster that lives in my closet and you know what, it’s got me, you know it’s got me.” For other woman, lack of energy, while not as overwhelming, did hamper their ability to be the kind of mother and student they would have liked to be. Carol said she did not have enough energy to do all the things her children want. Mercedes said her lack of energy has made it difficult for her to separate her personal concerns and stresses from her children so she could be calmer and better able to deal with issues as they arise.

Lack of energy also affected the women’s abilities to study. Alice said after dealing with her son all morning - “between six and noon I’ve put in almost a whole day” - she had little energy left to do her own work. She said it was hard to give 100% because of the “fatigue and...tiredness that you go through.” Njeri said she was too tired at the end of the day to even open a book, hence her decision to get up early to study.

Family finances suffered for all of the women, although for some it was more critical. Insufficient financial support for student mothers may hinder their completion, while lack of respect for their responsibilities as mothers may cause them to take on low status jobs that they can fit in around their mothering responsibilities. The end result is they are able to balance their responsibilities as mothers and as students but their income
is low. Financial strain was generally seen as a short-term problem, although those students with loans understood the extra burden - such as large student loans - of prolonged education caused by family demands pulling mothers away from their studies. For those married women whose husbands were employed there was some easing of the financial burden, although Njeri’s husband often had to take on two jobs in order for the family to survive.

Lie & O’Leary (1996) argue women end up with a cumulative deficit because of the time taken to care for children. In terms of childcare for women whose work requirements are similar to doctoral students, time taken to care for children means time taken away from writing, doing research and getting the necessary qualifications for tenure and promotion. Sometimes the demands or needs of children, especially young children, are so time consuming that student mothers may feel they are “fitting school into the cracks in [their lives]” (Lavell, 1998).

Children’s demands, coupled with the time limit for doctoral studies, means that doctoral student mothers must be ruthless in scheduling their time. Some employed mothers have been found to use time management strategies “reminiscent of managerial efficiency” (Duffy et al., 1989), to meet all the demands for both home and work. Time is needed to get good marks, write papers, attend seminars and win scholarships. Referring to the cyclical relationship between time, marks and scholarships Mercedes and Maurilla argued that having a scholarship would free up time to get the good marks which are needed to get the scholarships, and so on. Time taken for intensive mothering is time taken out of this cycle. There was a strong sense of time being a finite commodity amongst these student mothers. As Annie noted, there is “only so much time.” For Njeri
"life is a schedule...and one minute of that taken away means that I have to fit it somewhere else."

Carol, on the other hand, is concerned about taking time away from her children. In order to avoid her moments with her children being about house cleaning, Carol does the house cleaning chores her daughters might otherwise perform. Time is at a premium so “it’s so much easier to rush around and clean...up their rooms, and do all their laundry and put their clothes away.” Overall the study revealed that student mothers do not feel they have enough time to deal with their home and school responsibilities, certainly not to the level they feel is acceptable. The external demands from two greedy institutions and the internal demands of competing urgencies leave them feeling guilty about their children and their studies.

Almost all the women talked about feeling guilty in some way. While some indicated guilt related to partners, half of the women experienced guilt because they did not think they were spending enough time with their children. Carol and Njeri both said they are not mothering the way they would like to, certainly not the way the good mother would. Both are trying to live up to the expectations of intensive mothering but find they fall short.

It’s a time thing. It’s being able...to do it from a pre-schooler’s perspective where time is totally elastic and being able to say to them, let’s go and look...and take all the time that you need to do that, and poke in the mud, or whatever it is that you’re doing, bake cookies, make a huge mess, and not have to contain those kinds of activities within – okay we’ve got half and hour, before...bedtime so we have to fit it all in there. And it ends up becoming much...sort of a tension filled episode...And I know that doesn’t really fit with, the typical life of a working or a student mom and ...that’s...difficult. Maybe that’s where the idealism comes in. If you were really good you would be able to do that. You would be able to fit all those things in. (Carol)
The guilt Vicki experienced stemmed from the parenting class she and her husband attended. The instructor told the class they needed to spend a sufficient amount of “quality time” with their children each day and went on to define quality time as time focused on the child, not opening mail or answering the phone. Vicki questioned this advice.

I put up my hand and asked her... how can you do all these things?... I don’t have time, and I heard myself say it in front of everybody and I was thinking, Oh, god... I should have more time, right?... {Interviewer: What was her reaction?} I needed more time! Make the time! (Vicki)

The impact of the instructor’s response was significant for Vicki. She said, “Since that workshop, I’ve been trying desperately to make more time.” But it was not just a matter of being with her child; Vicki had to find “quality time” for her child as per the instructor’s directions. Following the workshop she said, “For... a couple of days, I have been making a big effort... to spend quality time defined by this lady... with my daughter.”

Guilt also stemmed from sending their children to daycare or out-of-school care. Of those with school age children, not one spoke of feeling guilty for sending their children to school. It seems clear that, because school is mandatory, guilt was not an issue. Debbie said she felt guilty sending her son to out-of-school care and felt he was being shaped by the experience. Some of the other children at the centre had made fun of her child and this concerned her.

Well you see [son]’s still young he’s five... so there’s all this guilt I mean I can do the guilt... {Interviewer: What things do you feel guilty about?} Oh I feel guilty about him being in school... it’s mostly when I talk to people who don’t do that. So... Well see [son]’s in kindergarten so his hours at school are quarter to 9 to 11:20 and most of the children go home and they have lunch at home, they have a nice time at home, they can go out... {Interviewer: So your guilt is not about the
For Debbie, the teasing her son received was not terrible but she felt guilty because she was making him go to out of school care rather than letting him be at home with her.

Even if the children were in a good quality daycare the women felt guilty because they were studying instead of caring for their children themselves as they are supposed to according to the definition of the good mother. Alice said, even though she knows he was well taken care of and she understood the necessity of him being in daycare in order for her to finish her work, she felt terribly guilty. What made it worse for Alice was that just shortly after the interview her son was changing from part-time daycare to full-time daycare, increasing his time away from her by about four to five hours. On the evenings Alice’s takes for herself she generally has a friend take care of her child; someone he knows. Even then Alice feels guilty.

Alice thinks part of the guilt would be alleviated if she had a partner. If her son were staying at home with his father, it would be a very different; she would be free of guilt.

According to Marshall (1993) guilt should be seen as a red flag that we should heed. Annie saw guilt as a sign of being stressed or over-committed, signalling a need to review what she is doing. She said, “There’re still times I feel guilty so maybe...the guilt’s probably a sign I’m not living up to what I think I should be doing here.” Annie’s response to her guilt is to assess what she is not doing. She is spending a great deal of time studying and is not taking time to focus on her children. It is important to point out
that Annie's children are twelve and fifteen years of age, they are not young children.

Yet Annie responds in the same way as Carol, whose children are five and seven. Reni commented on her own children’s difficulties dealing with the demands on her time saying, “Kids don’t see deadlines.” At what point can a mother reasonably expect her children to “see deadlines?”

Guilt is not only linked to the choices the women made in the present but the potential impact of these choices in the future. Frances feels guilty when she thinks of what she called the “what ifs”; what will happen in the future.

I guess the thing when I feel badly about is the ‘what ifs’? You know, we don’t know. I mean... what if I feel like when he’s twenty that I’d wish I’d spent those precious years home with him when he was... a child or something. (Frances)

From reading Dr. Spock, Frances is aware of the psychological damage having an employed mother can allegedly have on their children. Her comments not only related to her child’s welfare, but potential feelings of regret for having missed out on the “precious” years of her child’s life, as defined by the child rearing experts such as Penelope Leach.

Lan was the only woman who spoke about guilt related to her work. She described an incident in which she was to be working with some colleagues but had chosen to spend time with her family. She said in the back of her mind, she felt guilty because she was not doing her work. As noted earlier in the section on cultural differences, Lan has been subject to the ideology of the marketplace but the ideology of intensive mothering is relatively new to her. Because of this she did not respond in the same way as the majority of the women. While she sometimes felt guilt relating to her children it was mostly because of the North American environment. Debbie, too felt
guilty when she was not spending time on her work, but the guilt was actually not about work but about her son. Having put her son in out-of-school care for the express purpose of giving her time to get her work done, when she was not being productive she felt guilty.

When I'm thinking about it I'm thinking okay here I have six hours let's do stuff and I feel very guilty if I'm not doing stuff it's like “Ooooh you left him there and now you're not doing ...what you're supposed to do”.... (Debbie)

**Summary**

As mothers and as students, these women engaged in ideological work to support their alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student. Their ideological work takes two forms, supporting their alternative definitions of the good mother and the good student and delegitimating the dominant ideals. An example of the former is when some of the women argued for the necessity of self-fulfillment, rationalizing their studying as something that is ultimately good for their children. While some might suggest that these arguments are self-serving and therefore invalid, I would agree with Berger (1991, 1995) who points to the need for professed beliefs to be self-serving. If these student mothers were to accept that, in order to be good mothers, they had to take on sole responsibility for caring for their children and do it in an intensive manner, they might never be students. Arguing for balance as a mother is the only way they can perceive themselves as good mothers.

In a similar manner, to be able to perceive themselves as good students, they must define the good student as a balanced person. Not only do they believe it is important for
themselves to be balanced, but they believe that all students must be balanced. This perspective not only fits their lives but also makes them good students, while those who follow the dominant definition of the good student are not. In fact, there were times when it seemed some of the women felt superior to their nonmothering colleagues. Another part of the alternative definition was the idea of being a creative student. By arguing they were creative, while defining the dominant perspective of the good student as more technical mastery, they cannot be evaluated using the dominant definition. If they do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the dominant perspective then they do not accept the legitimacy of its evaluation.

According to Berger (1981, 1995), ideological work is never really complete and so it was for these student mothers. While they were able to sustain their ideological work most of the time, there were times when circumstances thwarted their efforts and they went back to the dominant ideologies. In these moments of doubt the women did not think they were very good mothers or good students. They spoke in general terms about their weaknesses and failures as well as some concrete situations when they yelled at their children or skimmed their readings instead of doing a thorough job. Generally these moments were not long lasting. The data does not allow for reliable estimations of frequencies of these moments of doubt nor for their duration but this might be a question for future research.

I have stated earlier that the ideologies are powerful and authoritative. However, I believe there is a fine line between arguing the hegemonic nature of the ideologies and false consciousness, and acknowledging choices that reflect a real desire on the part of these student mothers to partake of the joys and responsibilities involved in caring for
children and engaging in their studies. These women are in the position of recognizing the ideologies at work in both areas of their lives and being able to resist, challenge and sometimes modify them.

The final part of this chapter examined some of the consequences of combining studenthood and motherhood including guilt, health issues, financial concerns and lack of time. The most predominant of these consequences was feeling guilty in relation to their children. They did not feel they had enough time to spend with their children, they were not paying enough attention to their children, or the women were getting angry when they, themselves were stressed or tired. Most of the women with children in daycare or in out-of-school care facilities experienced some guilt while sending their children to school did not cause guilt feelings.

Although a minority of the women experienced health problems this is significant as it indicates potential harm from the stress. In addition, health problems tend to be invisible to the university. Health issues ranged from gaining weight because of lack of exercise to exacerbating existing health problems to developing an ulcer. Another stressors was financial concerns. Although most of the women did not experience severe financial problems for a few it was a constant worry. These are both important considerations when studying the lives of student mothers.
CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

This study began with a desire to examine and document the experiences of doctoral student mothers living at the intersection of motherhood and studenthood. As such, the focus has been on studying motherhood and studenthood from the women's perspective guided by three research questions:

1. To what extent do the women in this study perceive and accept the dominant ideology of intensive mothering?
2. To what extent do the women in this study perceive and accept the dominant ideology of the good student?; and
3. Do the women experience a contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student? What are the consequences of this contradiction for the women as students and as mothers?

The first two research questions are examined in chapters six and seven. The last research question is examined in chapter eight. The ideologies representing opposite sides of the cultural contradiction were vital to understanding the lives of student mothers. In this analysis the ideology of the good student replaced the ideology of the marketplace used by Hays (1996) in her study of the cultural contradiction of mothering in North America. The ideology of intensive mothering used by Hays (1996), was a useful tool in understanding the context within which these women mother. The two ideologies identified the various elements of the good student and the good mother and were utilized to compare the experiences of participants to the dominant definitions. As
expected, the participants recognized and were able to articulate the dominant definitions of the good student and the good mother and were able to identify their contradictory nature.

I began this study taking a more structural approach, expecting the women to accept the ideology of the good student and the ideology of intensive mothering and feel oppressed by them. This research, however, supports Thomas’ (1990) contention that despite being socially constrained, women’s actions are not socially determined. Both ideologies are hegemonic in that their control lies with the women viewing their compliance with the ideologies as their choice rather than having anything necessarily to do with the university or their family. The university and the family make their demands seem natural. It makes sense to be focused at university. The university cannot lower standards to accommodate students’ limitations because it would be unfair to those who are able to focus. With regard to family, it makes sense to focus on your children, after all the early years are the most precious and you did bear the child and you can feed her with your own body, so naturally it should be you to care for her. Because they seem natural and taken-for-granted, the arguments are difficult to deconstruct. Teasing out and exposing the underlying assumptions, particular values and worldview represented by the ideologies is difficult.

Chapter six discussed at length the findings with regard to the ideology of intensive mothering. No matter their cultural background the women were able to articulate the dominant North American definition of the good mother. While they may modify the definition to make it more human and more accepting of differences in temperament, philosophy and cultural perspectives of child rearing, they still felt the
pressure to behave in the way set out by the ideology. They still judged themselves using many of the measures that make up the ideology. The ideology of intensive mothering influences their perceptions of themselves at the micro level. They judge their day-to-day mothering often very harshly. As a hegemonic ideology, the ideology of intensive mothering is effective to the extent these women do not always feel they are good mothers and know what they should be doing. However it is not always effective as a social control, hence the conclusion that the women’s mothering is socially constrained but not socially determined. If these women were truly controlled they would not suggest the good mother is also balanced.

The ideology of the good student was used as the basis of the analysis of the women’s perspective on the good student. As with the ideology of intensive mothering, the women were able to identify the ideology of the good student. According to Njeri, it is what is expected of them at the university, not necessarily what they believe. The women tended to reject the rigid dominant definition of the good student, modifying what was acceptable so they too could be considered good students. As with the ideology of intensive mothering, the ideology of the good student is hegemonic. The women were aware of and would compare themselves to the dominant definition but indicated it was not what they believed was a good student. Referring to their alternative definitions, some of the women described students who fit the dominant definition of the good student as narrow or lacking insight.

Despite advocating an alternative definition of the good student, some of the women perceived themselves as powerless to change the dominant definition of the good student within the university. Simply creating a new definition of a good student does
not mean that they will be acknowledged as good students. The university may not accept their alternative definition of the good student. They continued to make choices that fit their lives within the context of the dominant definition of the good student. They accepted that, for the most part, they could not compete for scholarships and marks. They accepted that it might take longer for them to finish papers, which might not be as perfect as other students' papers. They knew they might miss some of the informal and formal academic conversations that they would otherwise have found interesting. While they may accept an alternative definition of the good student, others may not, and in the end they are judged by the same criteria as nonmothering students and they are well aware of this.

The last of the research questions guiding this study related to the mutual impact of motherhood and studenthood; the consequences of combining the two. In answering this question I highlighted the contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student. "Greedy institutions" and "competing urgencies" as well as the notion of public and private dichotomy, were useful tools in this analysis. The women experienced the cultural contradiction of the two ideologies when they felt they could not be a good mother and a good student at the same time. They questioned their abilities as students and as mothers as well as their devotion to their children and their seriousness as students. The women attempted to reconcile their choices and their desires by altering the definitions of the good student and the good mother to include their own choices, as mentioned earlier. However, they were often left feeling like they were not excelling at either.
Student mothers dealt with the competing needs of home and family by attempting to be balanced but also by setting priorities. Balance was viewed as a desirable characteristic of life as a student and as a mother. The consensus was that those who lived a balanced life were well rounded and less narrow. Despite the desire to be balanced, almost all of the women said their top priority was their children. While they acknowledged it was good for their children to see them actively involved in interests outside the home, if a child was in need, the child always came first. It is clear from the data that these women felt the influences of the public and private dichotomy as they often noted, specifically as related to the university, they felt it was desirable to keep the spheres separate. They experienced the effects of the university being a greedy institution, which wanted their exclusive attention, while they described the pressure of the family as a competing urgency, a more internal pull.

The cultural contradiction is described as two opposing ideologies coexisting in the same person. According to Hays (1996), every mother living in North America, regardless of race, ethnicity, class or employment status, will experience the contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the marketplace. As expected, the student mothers experience a similar contradiction between the ideology of the good student and the ideology of intensive mothering. While Hays (1996) confines herself to a discussion of the contradiction in terms of mothering, I have examined the contradiction for these women as students and as mothers.

In her analysis of the contradiction, Hays (1996) found her participants engaged in ideological work to reconcile their lived reality to the ideology of intensive mothering. Ideological work, as defined by Berger (1981, 1995) and used in this study, is how one
reconciles professed beliefs to day-to-day behaviour. In the case of these student mothers, they professed a belief in a definition of the good mother and the good student that were different from the dominant definitions, specifically that good mothers and good students must be balanced. The ideological work they did was to support these professed beliefs. Moving beyond reconciling their lives to the dominant definition of the good mother, I wanted to understand the ideological work involved when they evaluated themselves as mothers and as students both positively and in moments of doubt.

As mothers, these women engaged in ideological work both to support their alternative definition of the good mother, which suited their lived reality and to delegitimate the dominant definition which did not. As students, they engaged in parallel ideological work to sustain their alternative definition of the good student. However, there are circumstances which hinder their ideological work, and during these moments of doubt the women tended to refer back to the dominant definitions and question themselves as mothers and as students.

The most common modification to the dominant definitions of the good mother and the good student are that, to be a good mother or a good student, one must be balanced. Clearly, defining the good mother and the good student as being balanced is self-serving because it fits their lives. To take on the dominant definitions unmodified is to court frustration and disappointment. It would be unrealistic for these women to mother intensively or to be totally focussed on their studies.

However, when they engage in ideological work they tend to go to the essence or the spirit of the definitions to support their alternative. The good mother should be
balanced for the good of her children. They argue that for their children's sake they seek fulfillment, because a happy mother makes for happy children. They also perceive themselves as role models for their children and an integral part of being a role model is to model outside interests and engagement in the community. The other way of supporting their alternative was to devalue or delegitimate the opposition, in this case the ideology of intensive mothering. Corollary to their desire for balance, the women did not have a great deal of respect for the notion of stay-at-home mothering. They want to be seen as more than just a mother.

The alternative definition of the good student, as with the good mother, seems to strike at the essence of what is a student. They argue a good student must be balanced, this time for the sake of their studies. While some suggested that as educators, being mothers was especially important generally they believed being balanced gave them a broader outlook on life and enhanced their studies. They looked at the dominant definition as it was manifested in the nonmothering students around them and said it was too narrow and focused, sometimes sounding a bit superior. By delegitimizing the dominant perspective, they supported their own professed belief and so were able to view themselves as good students.

When the women were not able to sustain their professed beliefs, when they were tired or stressed, they tended to compare themselves to the dominant definition, referring back to the ideology of intensive mothering to point out the ways in which they were not as good mothers as they would like to be. They were not patient enough, or not interested enough in what their children were doing every moment or not giving their children the kind or amount of attention they need to grow into healthy and happy people.
They generally thought they were not doing a good job of mothering or at least not as good as the woman they saw at the daycare or the mothers they saw at the park. These moments of doubt were, for the most part, short lived and the women were able to get back to feeling good about themselves as mothers.

As students, their moments of doubt left them with a general feeling of not being very good, even if they had excellent marks or other outward markers of being a good student. Achieving a scholarship seems to be one of the more important markers of a good student and those who did not receive one would often refer back to this when suggesting they were not very good students.

Cultural differences were also highlighted in the nature of ideological work because some of the women such as Lan, Njeri and Maurilla had not been exposed to the ideology of intensive mothering until they moved to Canada and others while raised in Canada, live in a culture that does not espouse intensive mothering. These women were not raised with the idea that the mother was the sole caregiver or the person primarily responsible for the welfare of her children. Reni, Njeri and Maurilla had all been raised in communitarian cultures where there was a collective responsibility for children.

In the same way as they had not encountered intensive mothering, Njeri and Maurilla had not been exposed to the ideology of the marketplace as it exists in Canada. Lan, however, had and described living in a culture in which mothers were expected to work and nannies took care of children. According to Lan, stay-at-home mothering was unusual and not well respected. While these women’s experiences and perspectives highlight the socially, and culturally specific nature of both the ideology of intensive
mothering and the ideology of the marketplace, they are not used as definitive statements of the cultures in which these women were raised.

Some of the women were more able than others to withstand the dominant definition of the good mother and the good student. While the data does not provide a clear rationale for why some are stronger, I would suggest it might have to do with age and personal characteristics. Certainly those women who seemed to have strong personalities such as Francine, Barbara, Alice, Tassie and Leah, presented themselves as better able to resist the dominant ideologies.

Several consequences of the contradiction between the ideology of the good student and the ideology of intensive mothering emerged from the data. The sense they were neither being a good student nor a good mother led many of the women to feel guilty. For the most part guilt was associated with family and focused on lack of time, especially time to spend with their children. Guilt seemed to be the inevitable result of attempting to fit all the expectations of the ideology of intensive mothering into the limited time available to students who are also mothers. Time was a constant enemy, "running out" or "being tight" just when the women needed more. Health concerns arose or were exacerbated for some of the women because of the stress of combining studenthood, motherhood and paid work.

The two accounts that began chapter one, the career success of the president of the University of Toronto and the beatification of Mary Powers' husband, in addition to pointing out the different expectations of men and women in relation to the family, both highlight the importance of support. The women were strong, intelligent, realistic, pragmatic, inspiring and sensible about their limitations while endeavouring to excel
within them. Beyond these personal characteristics it is reasonable to suppose support may be a pivotal factor in student mothers’ success. Support may act as a buffer between motherhood and studenthood moderating the effects of competing urgencies, greedy institutions and the two ideologies. This observation, its subtleties and forms, warrants further investigation in another research study, certainly any future investigation of students and how they engage with their studies ought to include support as an important factor.

The hegemonic nature of the ideology of the good student means accommodating nontraditional students is still equated with watering down standards. Acceptance of the ideology of the good student is evident in the way those within academe talk about students. Three examples of this immediately come to mind. The first was at a conference where I met two colleagues and a noted scholar at a social event, all philosophers, all white, all male. They asked me about my dissertation research and after I explained they inquired what it was I wanted the university to do. I explained I believed the university needed to be more aware of its constituency and take the extra responsibilities these women have into account. To which all three replied it was not the university’s responsibility. The requirements were clear, and if you could not meet them then you should not be there. Much in the same way as Brantlinger et al.’s (1996) “liberal” mothers considered themselves to be socially conscious, these men were aware of the social, economic and access inequalities in the university, but could not see how having the university make accommodations for women with childcare responsibilities was a positive thing. This kind of argument almost always comes down to standards. If you cannot meet the standards, you do not belong.
The second example was a recent student net discussion of residency requirements. One student suggested there should be strict requirements to deal with those students who do not progress in their programme at a "reasonable pace" and so take up space that could better be used by more eager students. The writer went on to say, we are limiting who can get into the university by not ridding ourselves of the "slow movers." On the face of it, this is a very reasonable argument. It is wholly unfair for seemingly uninterested students to take up space that could be filled by an interested student, and as Shils (1997) argues, some students, while passing the admissions requirements are simply not suited to academic life. Stated this way the assumptions are clear. Those who take a long time to finish their degrees are assumed not to be interested in their work. If they were, they would be working all the time and finishing within the university set timelines. When attention was drawn to this assumption, some support was forthcoming from others in the same situation, but for the most part there was silence.

In a third situation, also on a student net, a student made the comment that those who do not have financial assistance in the form of grants or scholarships are not spending enough time searching. The writer described a time consuming and complicated web search for possible funding agencies, assuming all students are able and willing to spend as much time on the net. When it was suggested that those who are not expending the same amount of time, energy and possibly money as this writer, might not be able to do so, the writer acknowledged there are people who cannot do the same kind of searching and expressed sympathy for the limitations experienced by some students. It is unfortunate this writer was not able to perceive his assumptions that all students were unencumbered, just like him in the first place.
The potential for changing the ideology of intensive mothering is difficult to judge. The ideology of the good student may be more easily addressed as one could look to the university as a site for change. However, despite the greater potential for change within the university there are obstacles to overcome. To change the definition of the good student from a gender neutral, but exclusive description of the job of student, to a definition that takes account of diversity and is therefore inclusive, means to lay bare assumptions about who should make up the student body. This type of change is not easy to accomplish. According to Oakley (1997), resistance to sex equality in the university is based on a concern that “too much equality is economically inefficient, not least because it serves to demotivate men” (p. x).

It has been argued that the unexamined set of practices and perspectives within the university, including the ideology of the good student, the perspective that the university is a meritocracy and the notion of individualism, all reproduce the status quo and render invisible non-dominant groups, including student mothers (Lincoln, 1991; Tierney, 1991). When the needs of non-dominant groups are noticed the inclusive measures tend to highlight their differences and the fact they do not fit the mould of the “normal” student. The changes SSHRCC and NSERC have made to take account of child bearing and rearing are commendable. Until these changes were made women either had to maintain their productivity at nonmothering levels or leave gaps in their output, which might affect their funding opportunities.

Including caring for children under “special considerations” and “career interruptions” however, highlights the way in which these women are different from the norm. Rather than changing the expectations around “productivity” or “output,” the
discussion revolves around how to accommodate “special considerations.” This research has indicated how student mothers did not feel included in the scholarship process and suggested how the university could become more supportive. Building on their research, it would be instructive to examine the scholarship process with a view to discovering who is included in, as well as excluded from the process. In addition, it would be valuable to interrogate practical ways for the university could support all students through this process.

Kanter (1977) referred to those in the minority as tokens and described tokenism as the pressure on the token to perform beyond the majority. Student mothers, as a minority of the graduate students, are unusual in higher education and feel pressure to do better than their nonmothering colleagues or to work hard to maintain their pre-mothering calibre of work. This was supported in this study when the participants stated they needed to ensure their mothering did not interfere with their studies.

The notion that standards must be lowered in order to accommodate the needs of students who are mothers is a common misconception. There is no desire on the part of student mothers to do less, or to do work less well, although this is often done out of necessity (Long et al., 1997; Sears, 2000). Student mothers desire to manage studies and family responsibilities by taking a little longer to write papers and perhaps not writing perfect ones for every course, skimming readings, bringing children to evening seminars, talking about children in class, bringing babies to lectures and participating, as much as possible, in the way their nonmothering colleagues do. But they wish to do all of this without the accompanying de-valuing of their efforts and degrading of their abilities. Instead they would like their views, ideas and skills to be valued and welcomed in the
academy. In essence, student mothers would like the university to modify the definition of the good student and change the ideology of the good student to allow them to be perceived as good students.

Lather's (1986) notion of "catalytic validity," although not a test for validity in this study, came to mind during conversations with some of the women outside of the research context. For those immediately involved in the study, including participants and the woman who transcribed the tapes, being a part of this study has been an opportunity to reflect on, and gain insight into their perspectives of themselves and the ways in which they have taken on, or are affected by the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of the good student. A few have reported spending a great deal of time thinking about our conversations. In addition there was a sense of camaraderie, of not being alone. They knew other women going through the same thing who were doing as well as can be expected, given the demands on their time. Vicki and Maurilla spoke with me several times after the interviews. It seems they had done a great deal of reflecting on their motherhood and studenthood after our discussions. The project seemed to touch them in ways that it did not affect the others.

For myself, I can see the impact on how I perceive myself within the university. This project has shed light on my previously unexamined experiences as a student mother and I find myself more often in the position of being able to challenge the "taken for granted" or "common sense" notions of the university as a meritocracy where anyone, even mothers, can be successful if they work hard. In addition, the women of this project have challenged my own perceptions of the good mother and the good student as I
outlined them in chapter one, and they challenged my assumption of how the two ideologies affect other student mothers.

Beyond the immediate sphere of this project I have seen a change in others. For example, one of my male colleagues, a participant in the conversation described earlier, who previously was a staunch believer that women who came to school with children should not be treated substantially differently from their unencumbered colleagues. For him, combining school and family was a choice these women made and he believed that he, and other non-mothers, should not have to take this into consideration. His rationale was "Your personal life is not the university's responsibility." After many conversations about his responsibility as a citizen, his views have softened. He is beginning to see the systemic discrimination he did not see before and he is beginning to understand what he previously thought were unreasonable demands on my part. In addition to this colleague, the project has touched the lives of others, such as the woman who transcribed the audiotapes for the project and a dear friend. Both of these women through discussions of the ideology of intensive mothering began to notice how the dominant definition of the good mother affected them and their mothering. These were all unintended outcomes of this project.

Without modifications to the ideology of the good student the university and all those who play a part in academe will continue to define the good student by standards student mothers cannot meet except at a sometimes considerable personal cost. If the university has unrealistic expectations of students, expectations that are not possible for a certain segment of the student population, then segments of the student population will experience not only personal disappointment but the university's disappointment as well.
If however, the university were to understand the lives of student mothers, and other nontraditional students it could modify the existing exclusive definition of a good student. Some would argue this is watering down the requirements and reducing the rigour of academe but there are many ways of modifying expectations without “lowering standards,” an allegation which has not been proven.

Student mothers will be the first to tell you they are neither as efficient nor as fast as other students and, as Judith pointed out, she can see the need for expediency in some cases. But what often gets forgotten are the qualities that the student mother can bring to her studies and her workplace responsibilities. Several years ago, I was hired to work on a study of student mothers from all levels of academe precisely because I was a student mother. The principal investigator believed that my colleagues (also student mothers) and I could bring a certain insight and empathy into the interviews that a non-mothering student might not have. In this case, the principal investigator understood the significance of the impact that being a mother has on one’s perspective of studenthood. In most other jobs at the university motherhood is not seen in such a positive light, certainly it is not embraced with enthusiasm.

There has already been considerable opening of academic subjects; mothering although still a relatively new topic for discussion is being validated in the university as is illustrated by this research project. Inclusion, however, is not just about fitting nontraditional students into the existing context. Instead what is required is a comprehensive change in the university. It is incumbent upon the university to not only recruit and accommodate nontraditional students such as mothers but to value their experiences and knowledge to such an extent that it becomes part of the accepted and
legitimate knowledge of the university. Given the path indicated in the University of British Columbia's Academic Plan, it may be that the university is moving in this direction.

The implications of this research for practice go beyond student mothers. Mothering faculty and staff, as well as other nontraditional students would benefit from a shift away from the dominant perspective of the good worker, as described by Acker (1990), and good student as described in this, and previous (Sears, 1998; 2001) research. Moving away from the dominant perspective could result in changes to class scheduling, increased/improved access to university daycare, access to funding opportunities. More fundamentally for student mothers, it could mean a change in perspective of what is legitimate knowledge, or what are legitimate fields of study affecting the kinds of research done in the university. This could also have implications for the practice of student advising, as well as teaching in the university. If the needs of student mothers are accepted as legitimate, then professors and advisors will need to accommodate these needs in their interactions with student mothers. This could lead to changes in the way supervisors do their job. Perhaps even the need for some university-wide standards for supervising replacing the current, more ad hoc, practices.

Looking to future, there were several areas I believe warrant further research. As part of a research programme on the topic of student mothers, I would propose shifting the focus to those student mothers who have withdrawn from their studies. Coupling a study of current student mothers, with a study of those who have left will enable us to explore the questions surrounding their withdrawal. While the current study was not
meant to address what causes student mothers to leave the university, a study with that purpose could offer insight as to policies and practices that facilitate retention.

I would also recommend a continued interrogation of the ideology of the good student. While the current research contributes to the literature taking the students' point of view, further study should be done from the perspectives of university administrators and faculty. This would enhance our understanding of the ideology of the good student as well as the dynamics of the university with a view to addressing how this ideology maintains or increase structural barriers for nontraditional students. Given the desire of the university to enrol more mature students and encourage diversity amongst its student population, it is essential to create an environment in which student mothers and other nontraditional students are included in the definition of the good student.


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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Alice is a 33 year old single Aboriginal mother of a 1½ year old son who was born in the midst of her Ph.D. programme. She is finishing her third year of doctoral studies, has completed her comprehensive exams and preparing to defend her proposal. When she became pregnant she had to make the decision whether to continue her studies or put her Ph.D. aside. She made the decision to continue and to get it finished. She said there were many things to consider such as the distance from family, but she felt it was the right thing to finish what she had started.

Angela is a 38-year-old Cree woman, married with a 2-year-old daughter. She came back to university with the intention of doing a "quick" Masters then going back to work. Instead she was encouraged to continue with a Ph.D. She began the first year doctoral seminar as she was finishing up her master’s thesis and is currently in her third year of doctoral studies. She became pregnant when writing her Master’s thesis and delivered her daughter at the beginning of her doctoral programme. She believes the fact that she didn’t change her expectations for herself and her studies after she became a mother was a contributing factor to her taking so long to prepare for her comprehensive exams.

Annie is a 45-year-old Caucasian woman, married with a 13-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter. She first became a mother when she was in her Master’s programme. She moved her family from out of province and is negotiating with her family for extra time to complete more of her studies. She is in her second year of doctoral studies. The way in which she pursued her Master’s degree is different from the way in which she is pursuing her Ph.D.. During her Master’s she was very focused on her studies. This did not make her happy and so she decided to do her doctorate with greater awareness of the impact on her family.

Barbara is a 38-year-old Caucasian woman, recently separated from her husband. She has three children, two sons, 10 and 7 and a 12-year-old daughter. She has combined motherhood and studenthood since part way through her Master’s degree so being a student mother has been a part of much of her educational experience. She finished her Master’s shortly after giving birth to her second child. She is in her fifth year of doctoral studies, her children were 2, 5 & 7 when she started her doctorate.

All women are identified by pseudonyms and have self identified their race/ethnicity or cultural background. These profiles were taken from the summaries, which the women had the opportunity to examine and approve for accuracy and completeness.
Carol is a 37 year old, white woman, married with two daughters ages 5 and 7. She entered her Ph.D. programme upon finishing her Master’s degree, when her eldest daughter was 10 months old. Her second daughter was born at the end of her first year. Previous to her Master’s, she was a teacher. Going back to school after her second child was born was very difficult because she had lost her great baby-sitter so her children were in daycare but she was not happy with the arrangements.

Debbie is a 36-year-old, South American white woman, married with one son aged five years. Since had a newborn following the interview. She was born, raised and educated in South America where she received two degrees. She was a teacher and upon finishing her Master’s degree in Education, she immediately started her Ph.D. Her son was born near the end of her Master’s degree. She is in her third year of her doctoral studies.

Frances is a 34-year-old white woman, married with one son who is 3½ years old. She is in her 4th year of doctoral studies and was doing her practicum at the time of the interview. She expected to finish her dissertation in a year and a half. She became pregnant while graduating from her master’s thesis and after her son was born she was accepted into the Ph.D. programme. Once she was accepted she felt that there was no choice but to accept. Since the interview she has had another child.

Francine is a 47-year-old white woman of Italian American decent, divorced parent of two children. Her daughter is in her early twenties and remained in the United States when she came to Canada to study. Her son who is ten, came with her. She said that a turning point for her was around 1987 when, in the period of a year she went through a divorce, a birth and her mother’s death. She felt she needed to “get her act together” so she decided to go back to school. She is in her second year of doctoral studies and will be writing her comprehensive exams in the next six months. After that she will have two years of residency after which she can leave campus.

Judith is a 41-year-old European woman, married with one 2½ year old daughter. She is the 5th year of doctoral studies and said that her life is not as she would ever have imagined it; she never thought she would be at school doing a Ph.D., let alone having a Masters degree. There was a large gap between her BA and her Masters degrees, but a short one between her Master’s and her Ph.D. programme.
Lan is a 35-year-old Chinese woman, married with a 5-year-old daughter and a 3-year-old son. She had her daughter in her last year of her first degree, her son was born during her Master's degree. She came to Canada two years ago, after finishing her Master's degree to begin her Ph.D. programme. She said she struggles in balancing her studies and her family. She doesn't want to miss the educational opportunities so she has difficulty deciding if her priority should be her family or her studies.

Leah is a 47-year-old Jewish woman, married with three daughters ages 8, 12, and 14. She is in the third year of doctoral studies and had taught full-time until she had children. Because she had children going back to school was delayed. She said that she had taught sessionally and really enjoyed it, but knew if she wanted to continue that she would have to go back to school and get her Master's degree. She started back to school part time with one course for her Master's degree and loved it. It was a way of getting out of the house more than anything, but it also fulfilled her desire to go back to school and continue her studies. When she was almost completed her Master's she knew she didn't want to stop, so she went straight from her Master's into her Ph.D. programme.

Maurilla is a 33-year-old African woman, married with three sons ages 8, 7, and 5½. She immigrated to Canada about 10 years ago because her fiancé lived here. She started back to school to do her Masters when her first child was 9 months old. She started her Ph.D. a few years ago but found it to be too much so she took a year and a half off and started again a year ago. She felt good about finishing her Bachelor's degree and said that if she had not continued up to this point it would not have been because she thought she was a bad student, it would have been a choice.

Mercedes is a 40-year-old Canadian woman, divorced with three daughters ages 15, 13, and 11. She became a single mother when her youngest was three years old. She is in her first year of doctoral studies. She said that between living in the suburbs and going to the university she never felt she fit in, in either place. In the suburbs there were the stay-at-home mothers with their mini-vans and at the university there were young women without children or older women with grown children.

Njeri is a 33-year-old African woman, married with two children, a daughter, 7 and a son, 9 years of age. She said that they have spent more time here than in their homeland in Africa. If she were to go back home when finished, she expects to work in a university setting. If she remains in Canada she is not sure what she will be doing. Her overall feeling about being a student mother is that she is doing both mothering and studenthood half way; she feels she is not excelling at either. She is her third year of her doctoral studies.
Reni is a 34-year-old South Asian woman, married with two daughters who are six and seven years old. She is in her third year of her doctoral programme and expects to graduate in November 1999. The most difficult thing for her has been being emotionally available to her children because she is constantly thinking about her studies. She said doing courses was especially difficult because she felt torn all the time between wanting to be a good mother and wanting to be a good student. She said that both of them are full time jobs; separate jobs requiring full time work.

Tassie is a 36-year-old Canadian woman of Eastern European heritage, married with a two-year-old daughter and pregnant with her second child. She has set high standards for herself, standards she used to expect of everyone else. Since she became a mother she is able to understand that the goals she set for herself may not be appropriate for others. Since the interview Tassie has taken an academic position at a Canadian university.

Vicki is a Chinese Canadian woman in her mid-thirties, married with a 26-month-old daughter. She is in the first year of doctoral studies. She adopted her daughter when she was in her Master’s programme. Her husband works full-time and she is a full-time student. She said it is a constant battle choosing between the student community and motherhood community. She said that she wants to do things like go to seminars and conferences but she also wants to be at the community centre with her daughter. She finds organizing around these competing demands very difficult.
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:
Of Diapers and Dissertations: The Experiences of Women Ph.D. Students with Child Care Responsibilities

Purpose of Project:
The objective of the study is to gain an understanding of women's experiences at the intersection of the two roles: mother and student, and to explore the social context within which Ph.D. student mothers live and study. This study will document and analyze the contradiction between the ideology of intensive mothering and the ideology of "studenthood" using the experiences of women doctoral students.

Procedure:
I am being asked to participate in two 60-90 minute individual interviews concerning my experiences as a Ph.D. student mother. The interviews will be held at a convenient place on or off campus and will be audiotaped. The data collected will be the basis for the doctoral dissertation of Allison Sears, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Studies. Allison Sears is the only individual who will have access to the tapes which will be destroyed at the end of the study.

This certifies that I, __________________________ agree to voluntarily participate in this project. I understand that I do not have to participate, that I am free to withdraw my consent and may terminate my participation at any time. Data that are collected will remain confidential with regard to my identity. My name will not appear with the transcription of my interviews. I will be identified by a pseudonym only and the data will be stored in a locked cabinet.

I understand that direct quotes from the transcription might be used in summary reports or articles describing the study. However, only pseudonyms will be used in identifying quotes. Confidentiality limits exist should a court subpoena be issued or should information I share reveal that myself or another faces immediate harm, or that child abuse or neglect exists.
APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
(You are not required to answer any of these questions)

1. Age : ____________ 2. Year : ____________

3. Race/ Ethnicity/Cultural Group : __________________________

   separated : _____ single : _____
   divorced : _____

5. Sexual Orientation : heterosexual : _____ lesbian : _____
   bi-sexual : _____

6. What is the make up of your household? Please include all relatives and non-relatives living with you, their relationship to you. Please include the ages of your children.

   Relationship to You (Age)

   1. __________________________________
   2. __________________________________
   3. __________________________________
   4. __________________________________
   5. __________________________________
   6. __________________________________
   7. __________________________________
   8. __________________________________
APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT SURVEY – JANUARY 2000

A. The following is the definition of the good mother coming from the interviews, could you please read it and make a brief response. The way you defined the good mother - your perceptions of what society sees as the good mother.

1. The good mother takes care of physical and emotional needs she is: nurturing, deals with day to day care or children, food, shelter and safety, being aware of children’s emotional needs, and caring for your children when they are upset.

2. The good mother is “loving” and “caring” i.e. “unconditional” or “unequivocal” love. She shows her children she loves them, that they are loved and model loving others, showing affection to one’s partner or to family and friends.

3. The good mother is supportive and encouraging by providing opportunities to grow, or letting her children grow.

4. The good mother is patient.

5. The good mother is a teacher and a guide,

6. The good mother is there for her children giving them an adequate amount of time.

7. The good mother is in tune with her children, there is a bonding and a closeness between the good mother and her children

Alternative view(The way you defined the good mother)

1. The good mother should lead a balanced life and have interests outside the home making her happier and healthier

2. The good mother is a role models

B. The following is the definition of the "good" student coming from the interviews, could you please read it and make a brief response. The way you defined the "good" student - according to what you see in the university

1. The "good" student is focused on their studies, she spends all her time on her studies, she “lives, breathes, eats school.

2. The "good" student is dedicated.
3. The "good" student is, "serious about her work", works until the work is finished, she is conscientious, responsible, disciplined and determined to meet personal goals.
4. The "good" student works hard, has good work habits, gets work done on time, does not procrastinate.
5. The "good" student knows the materials, is able to cite authors, reads everything connected to the topic.
6. The "good" student is curious for more than the required readings.
7. The "good" student achieves high marks; she is an "A" student.
8. The "good" student writes papers that are published or presented at conferences.
9. The "good" student wins financial awards.
10. The "good" student is on committees, goes to brown bag lunches and networks or talks with professors, attends special seminars and meetings.
11. The "good" student is able to set priorities, making her studies her top priority.
12. The "good" student has no personal life or is able to contain her personal life so that it does not interfere with her studies.

**Alternative View** (The way you defined the "good" student in response to the university's definition)

1. The "good" student balances her studies with a personal life, not solely focused on her education to the exclusion of all else.
2. The "good" student has a personal life and does not divorce it from her studies.

C. Cultural differences in mothering. Is there anything particular that we did not discuss in the interview (it would be noted in your summary) that you feel is important?

D. Priorities - most of you talked about making priorities and some indicated the ranking of priorities but I would like this clarified. I realize this is a bit simple and deciding what is a priority is often very complex but for the benefit of those who like simple answers could you **please rank order the following**. If you want to make a comment about extenuating circumstances etc. after the list please do.

- Children
- Partner (if applicable)
- Studies
- Extended Family
- Friends
- Self
- Community work
- University participation

Are these clear priorities?
E. How much is guilt a part of your life? **On a scale of 1-10** please indicate where you would place yourself - if you are no longer a student please think back to that time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling no guilt</th>
<th>Feeling extremely guilty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guilt around children
Guilt around studies
Guilt around partner(if applicable)
Guilt around friends
Guilt around extended family
Other?
Guilt about having no time
Guilt about having no energy

What is the most significant thing that contributes to your feelings of guilt(if you have them) or to negative feelings about yourself?

F. What would help or would have helped you the most? **Please indicate the support you had and did not have.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship</th>
<th><strong>HAD THIS SUPPORT</strong></th>
<th><strong>DID NOT HAVE THIS SUPPORT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from department</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from partner(if applicable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>Financial</td>
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<td>Child care</td>
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<td>Other specify</td>
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<td>Support from family</td>
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<td>Support from friends</td>
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<td>Support from supervisor</td>
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<td>Support from other faculty members</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

G. If you had to say what was the most significant impact of your studies on your family what would it be?

H. If you had to say what was the most significant impact of your family on your studies what would it be?

OTHER COMMENTS: