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Date August 15, 1983
Abstract

This qualitative study was undertaken for the purpose of answering the following two research questions: (a) What is the personal meaning and experience of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the Western dominant discourse on mothering?, and (b) How are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants’ personal contexts as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices? Fifteen women ranging in age from 23 to 46 years, who self identified as actively resisting the dominant discourse, were interviewed about their mothering experiences. Their interviews were transcribed and analyzed following a critical interpretive approach (Cushman, 1995; Packer & Addison, 1989). In answering the first research question three themes were identified: (a) resisting is rewarding and liberating, (b) resisting entails juggling and balancing, (c) resisting entails cognitive work, reframing, and reconciling. Although acknowledging the pragmatic and cognitive challenges inherent in so doing, the women in the study experienced a sense of empowerment and pride in their choice to resist.

In answering the second question, participants’ identified concrete structural barriers to their efforts to mother differently and acknowledged the importance of supportive partners, friends, extended family members, education, financial resources, and flexible employment as critical in their efforts to resist having their own needs completely subjugated to those of their children. Participants drew on the discourses of feminism, achievement, individualism, collectivity, self-care, science, attachment, and alternative medicine in supporting their efforts to resist. They positioned themselves as caring responsible mothers, independent women, educated/professionals, critical thinkers, and activists. The findings suggest that in positioning themselves in opposition to the dominant, ‘selfless mother’ discourse, the participants were faced
with negotiating between multiple and often contradictory discourses. In particular, the women in the study struggled to negotiate between the selfless mother and the individual rights/self actualization discourses. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the perception of resistance may be as important in engendering a sense of agency for women who mother, as the actual manifestation of resistance in their mothering practices. These findings are discussed in terms of their implications for research, theory, and clinical practice.
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To my life companion and partner,
Humberto,
You enriched the journey.

And to my daughters, Stephanie and Leigh-Ann,
May you be free to be.
I want to thank the members of my committee for their amazing support and dedication to their work. Dr. Judith Daniluk and Dr. Bonnie Long worked beyond the call of duty in guiding and supporting me through a very rewarding but arduous process. Dr. Daniluk, thank you from the bottom of my heart for being such an inspiration and for being there for me in my darkest moments with your words of encouragement and your guidance. I am truly grateful for having had the opportunity to be your student, I learned so much! Dr. Long, thank you for your ongoing support, you are a true role model. I deeply appreciate the hours that you spent with me turning the light on along the way. I admire your dedication, your knowledge, and your commitment to your students, you are a true teacher. To Dr. Jack Martin, I am very grateful for your presence in my life as a graduate student. You have inspired me to learn to think outside the box. Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of my committee this time, your participation truly enriched my process and my work. I also want to express my gratitude to the 15 women who agreed to participate in this study. Your stories touched me deeply.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

There was a young man loved a maid
Who taunted him, “Are you afraid,”
She asked, “to bring me today
Your mother’s head upon a tray?”

He went and slew his mother dead.
Tore from her breast her heart so red,
Then towards his lady love he raised,
But tripped and fell in all his haste.

As the heart rolled on the ground
It gave forth a plaintive sound.
And it spoke in accents mild:
“Did you hurt yourself, my child?”

Jean Richepin

This old Victorian poem speaks of unconditional maternal love. In the 18th and 19th centuries, motherhood was regarded as a noble calling where taking care of children became the exclusive responsibility of mothers (Arnup, 1994; Comacchio, 1999; Thurer, 1994). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Industrial Revolution brought about major social changes that shattered the traditional structure of the family in which fathers, mothers, and children had worked jointly in the production of domestic goods (Comacchio, 1999; Thurer, 1994). At the time of the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of families moved to urban centres and fathers left home production to work in the factories. These changes worried moral reformers who pushed for mothers to remain in the home, to avoid paid employment, and to become the main caretakers of children. It was during this historical period that a mother became the ‘True Woman’ who was virtuous, gentle, all loving, devoted, and whose interests were limited to creating the best refuge for her family and to raising her children with extra care (Thurer, 1994).
Hence, the image of the all-sacrificial, dedicated, committed mother whose needs are rarely considered was born.

The North American social fabric and family life have changed significantly over the past 100 years. One might expect that the messages to, and the expectations of mothers, are different now. However, mothers today continue to live under the influence of a mothering discourse that promotes unconditional love, sacrifice, and the exclusive care of children (Coontz, 1992; Eyer, 1996; Forna, 1998; Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1984). Although it appears that many mothers (and society at large) continue to believe that they are the best sources of affection and guidance in their children's lives (Coontz, 1992; Hays, 1996), there are other mothers who are searching for alternatives to this dominant discourse on mothering (Edwards, 2000; Gordon, 1990). The present study was aimed at exploring the experience of the latter group of women by investigating: (a) What is the personal meaning and experience of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current Western dominant discourse on mothering?, and (b) How are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants' personal contexts as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices.

Discourse can be defined as a specific structure of statements, terms, and categories that are historically, socially, and institutionally specific (Foucault, 1984; Scott, 1990). Like stories, they "create a communal understanding of power in relationships and appropriate rules of conduct" (Robinson & Robinson, 1998, p. 64). There are many myths and messages contained in the current dominant discourse on mothering (Badiner, 1981; Rich, 1986; Thurer, 1994). The main message of this discourse is that mothers are solely responsible for the physical, spiritual,

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1 Please note that throughout the manuscript, I use the term 'dominant discourse' to refer to the current Western dominant discourse on mothering, unless otherwise specified. The definitions and myths relating to this discourse are described in detail later in this manuscript.
and psychological well being of their children and, therefore, are held responsible (i.e., blamed) for their children’s difficulties (Baber & Allen, 1992; Chodorow & Contratto, 1982; Forna, 1998; Thurer, 1994). This sense of responsibility puts mothers under pressure to be perfect mothers (Contratto, 1984; Croghan & Miell, 1998; Thurer, 1994) and can engender strong feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Bernard, 1974; Eyer, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002; Thurer, 1994). In addition, the dominant discourse also promotes an image of mothers as sacrificial and all loving, which leads to the expectation that they will be all giving, selfless beings (Thurer, 1994).

Finally, mothers are also influenced, to varying degrees, by the working/professional woman discourse (Baber & Allen, 1992; Hays, 1996; Maushart, 2000). Studies have found that mothers who work are torn between their obligations at work and at home, whereas mothers who stay home often feel deficient because they are not pursuing a career (Hays, 1996). Furthermore, the discourse suggests that children should come first so that women who try to integrate their work and mother roles often feel strained (Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1999). In sum, the dominant discourse posits that mothers should be sacrificial and place their children’s needs ahead of their own.

It is important to note that society creates a multitude of discourses, some of which are dominant and central and some that are not (Foucault, 1984; Little, 1999). It is through this multiplicity that people are able to encounter contradictions and gaps within dominant discourses that may allow them to challenge some of the dominant messages. By drawing on alternative discourses and by engaging in agentic activity, some people are able to resist society’s dominant discourses. For example, feminists drew on discourses of equality and human rights to challenge aspects of the dominant discourse. They critiqued motherhood as an oppressive institution that limits mothers to the private sphere and keeps them from influencing public processes or policies that affect their lives (e.g., Rich, 1986).
Furthermore, discourse theory posits that discourses are socially and historically specific. For example, in colonial times families believed that fathers were the best nurturers of children. They carried and rocked their babies more often than mothers did (Eyer, 1996). In the United States, many African-American women today view parenting as a collective endeavour and rely on the assistance of ‘othermothers’ who are part of their community and who provide care giving support (Thomas, 2000). In Japan, in the village of Taira, Okinawa, people believe that the care of children should be shared between parents, parental grandparents, aunts, and uncles (Bernard, 1974).

Given that there are multiple discourses and that resistance to discourses is possible, the focus of the present study is on the process of how resisting the dominant discourse on mothering is experienced by women. Furthermore, given that discourses are culturally and socially specific, I aimed at identifying some aspects of the participants’ contexts that allow this resistance to occur. An examination of current statistics provides a partial picture of the current context in which mothers in Canada live. For example, 70% of Canadian mothers are in two-parent families, 61% of single mothers are employed outside of the home, and 71% of all working mothers are employed full-time (Statistics Canada, 2000). Even though mothers are working outside of the home in record numbers, their obligations in the home have not changed significantly. According to Statistics Canada (2000), working mothers work at least 90 minutes a day more in unpaid labour than their partners. This translates into 61 extra eight-hour days a year! Furthermore, Statistics Canada (2000) reports that women are absent from work an average of 6.7 days a year due to personal or family responsibilities, compared with 1.1 days for fathers. Moreover, 33% of women ages 25 to 44, who work only part-time, do so because they need to care for their children, compared with only 2% of men. In sum, mothers are burdened
with the responsibility of childcare whether they must work or they choose to work, or whether they stay home to care for their children. This pragmatic aspect of mothering becomes more difficult for women when the dominant discourse comes into play by pressuring them to take full responsibility for the well being of their children and to be perfect mothers.

In addition to working mothers, mothers who chose to stay home and care for their children or those who are on income assistance and do not work for pay are also unable to live up to the socially constructed ideal of the perfect mother. Some middle-class mothers who choose to stay at home often find themselves overwhelmed with the expectations that are placed upon them (Hays, 1996). Some of these expectations include maintaining a clean home, volunteering at school functions, driving children to school and on field trips, taking them to after school activities and to sports, and stimulating them by reading to them or playing with them (Thurer, 1994). Some of these women feel obligated to be perfect wives and mothers and to ignore their personal needs and interests. However, they often feel deficient when they interact with their employed counterpart because they are not pursuing a career in a society that promotes self-actualization and career achievement (Hays, 1996). Some low income single mothers may also be unable to live up to the expectations of the dominant discourse because they often lack resources, are often isolated, and find themselves under such financial strain that they are often unable to be the loving, caring, empathic mothers of the 20th century (Croghan & Miell, 1998; Thurer, 1996).

We can conclude, then, that motherhood is a complex experience. The dominant discourse, the high demands on mothers today to be ever-present and available (whether at home or at work), their paid work obligations, the pragmatic needs to support and contribute to their families economically and the lack of community support, create a tension that makes it more
difficult for mothers to negotiate their way through motherhood without feeling guilty, deficient, depressed, or stressed (Baber & Allen, 1992; Eyer, 1996; Hays, 1996; Stoppard, 2000).

Those who study mothers are often interested in how being a mother impacts women (Krause & Geyer-Pestello 1985; Mauthner, 1999; Nicolson, 1998; Polasky & Holahan, 1998; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002; Stoppard, 1999, 2000). Depression in women has been linked to aspects of the mothering experience (Mauthner, 1999; Nicolson, 1998; Stoppard, 2000). In 1996, 6% of women in Canada experienced an episode of clinical depression, compared with 3% of males (Statistics Canada, 2000). Women under 55 tend to have the highest risk of depression in Canada. In addition, as many as 1 in 5 women suffer from post partum depression (Kruckman & Smith, 2001). Nicolson (1998) links the experience of depression after childbirth to shared problems surrounding the conditions of motherhood in the context of loss: loss of physical integrity, time, sexuality, work, status, autonomy, and male company (Nicolson, 1998; see also Maushart, 2000). Stress, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy have also been identified as some of the negative consequences of the dominant discourse in the lives of many mothers in North America (Contratto, 1984; Horwitz & Long, in press; Maushart, 2000; Morse & Furst, 1982; Polasky & Holahan, 1998; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). Mothers today report having too many responsibilities and feeling overwhelmed and stressed (Maushart, 2000). Guilt has also been identified as a common experience for mothers (Eyer, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). Experts advise mothers to provide their children with stimulation, love, attention, patience, empathy, and loving discipline (Arnup, 1994; Hays, 1996). Yet, mothers are unable to keep up and often fall short of these expectations. The failure to meet the criteria of the ‘perfect’ mother often results in feelings of guilt and inadequacy for many mothers (Contratto, 1984; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002; Thurer, 1994).
However, not all women subscribe to the beliefs and expectations of the dominant discourse to the degree that they are promoted and perpetuated in Western society (Baber & Allen, 1992; McMahon, 1995; Thurer, 1994). The empirical literature that explores the experience of resistance to the dominant discourse and its consequences on mothers is very limited. Researchers have found that some mothers engage in the process of resistance (Croghan & Miell, 1998; Gordon, 1990; Little, 1999). Gordon (1990) explored mothering from the perspective of feminist mothers. Her study suggests that women resist the societal expectations set forth by the dominant discourse. However, the study was limited in its focus on women who consider themselves feminist. Gordon did not explore the consequences of resistance on her participants' lives and experiences, and she did not explore the discourses in which her participants' narratives were grounded. In the present study, I aimed at building on Gordon's results by including mothers who may not see themselves as feminist, by exploring the consequences of resistance on mothers, and attempting to identify the various personal contexts and socio-historical discourses that interact in order to allow this resistance to occur.

Summary and Conclusions

Current statistics show that many women experience the burden of a double shift, and that regardless of their employment status, mothers are still doing most of the childcare in society (Hays, 1996; Maushart, 2000; Sangster, 1995; Statistics Canada, 2000). The practical demands on some mothers along with the expectations set forth by the dominant discourse create tension in the lives of mothers who find that the standards set forth by the discursive ideal are largely unattainable and impossible to achieve. On the other hand, it is possible that by drawing on alternative discourses, women are able to resist the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1984). In other words, by questioning the status quo and the context in which they live, mothers can
construct different definitions and beliefs about mothering (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Exploring the unique ways in which some mothers resist these messages and construct alternate mothering practices and beliefs may provide useful information to other mothers who are living under the burden of the dominant discourse.

In sum, there is little knowledge to date about the experience of women who are actively resisting the dominant discourse. We do not know how they mother in light of the considerable pressure of the dominant discourse. Furthermore, the literature has not yet explored the current historical and social discourses that may provide an opening for women to resist the dominant discourse and create new meanings. The proposed study is aimed at filling this gap. The questions that guided this research are: (a) What is the personal meaning and experience of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering?, and (b) How are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants' personal contexts as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices?
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

What fabrications they are, mothers. Scarecrows, wax dolls for us to stick pins into, crude diagrams. We deny them an existence of their own, we make them up to suit ourselves – our hungers, our own wishes, our own deficiencies. Now that I’ve been one I know.

_The Blind Assassin_, Margaret Atwood.

The purpose of the present study is to explore the personal meanings and experiences of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering. The participants’ personal contexts as well as the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices that allow this resistance to occur are also considered. The aims of this chapter are as follows: (a) to review the literature on the concepts of discourse and resistance in order to provide a theoretical framework for the study; (b) to describe the messages promoted by the current dominant discourse on mothering; (c) to explore the research on mothering in order to illustrate how women experience mothering and how the dominant discourse impacts their lives; and (d) to review the literature on mothers’ resistance to discourses in order to situate the present study and its importance.

_Discourse_

In this section, I explore the concept of ‘discourse’ and the theoretical framework behind it to provide the rationale for the conceptualization that guides this study. For the purpose of the present study, _discourse_ is defined as a set of tacit rules and understandings that regulate practices. The Foucauldian school of thought defines discourse as a specific set of statements, terms, and categories that are historically, socially, and institutionally specific (Foucault, 1984;
This conceptualization also suggests that some discourses become legitimized by their claims to truths (Foucault, 1984; Scott, 1990). In this sense, particular discourses are assigned a status of objectivity and, therefore, legitimate knowledge. This Foucauldian school of thought posits that there are multiple discourses, which are often contradictory and often shift (Foucault, 1984; Little, 1999). This multiplicity yields a series of alternative discourses to those discourses that are socially dominant. Finally, this perspective on discourse posits that discourses are institutionalized in social practices and it is through social practice that people make meaning of their shared world.

Feminists and sociologists have also contributed to our understanding of the term discourse (Fraser, 1997; Robinson & Robinson, 1998; Weingarten, 1995). Some feminist definitions of discourse suggest that discourses are “stories that create a communal understanding of power in relationships and appropriate rules of conduct” (Robinson & Robinson, 1998, p. 64). Robinson and Robinson (1998) posit that discourses are generalizations that are often viewed as stereotypes or myths that are culturally entrenched and therefore invisible, so that members of society are not even aware that most of what they assume to be real is culturally created. Weingarten (1995) explains that a discourse can be so familiar and so powerful that it shapes how we construct the stories of our lives and how we hear the stories of others. In this sense, discourse works through language in that discourses manifest themselves in what we know and what we learn. This conceptualization of discourse complements the Foucauldian definition by emphasizing that culture is an important channel through which discourses become promoted and engrained.

Sociologist Dorothy Smith (1993) expands on these two definitions by suggesting that discourses are mediated by texts, and are not conceived as:
Culture, meanings, significations or chains of significations, or texts without located readers, but as skeins of social relations, mediated and organized textually, connecting and coordinating the activities of actual individuals whose local historical sites of reading/hearing/viewing may be geographically and temporally dispersed and institutionally various. (p. 51)

Smith highlights the importance of addressing how people internalize discourses, how discourses order people’s practices and actions, and how dominant discourses affect and coordinate the activities of one person with those of another person.

Smith (1993) suggests that there are ideological codes that order and organize texts across discursive sites. To illustrate her point, she explains that the term Standard North American Family (SNAF) is an ideological code that orders discourses such as the mothering discourse, the child discourse, and the discourse on school success. One can think of ideological codes as the containers where discursive movement among people occurs. In other words, ideological codes contain the various discourses that direct cultural practices among and within people.

Others use the term discourse more loosely to mean all forms of talk and writing or the way talk is meshed together (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In these definitions there is little reference to the social or cultural aspects of discourse so that discourse only refers to the acts of talking, writing, and conversation. These definitions are somewhat limited with respect to their usefulness to the present study because they do not explicitly stress the social and historical implications of discourses, which are important for the present study. By uncovering the personal contexts and the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which the participants’ experiences are grounded, we can enhance our understanding of how context affects experience.
The conceptualization of discourse that best serves the main purpose of the present study must also account for agency. Agency refers to an individual's ability to make choices that may or may not be aligned with dominant discourses. Foucault (1978) argues that people are able to navigate within a web of discourses, some more dominant than others, and this allows them to exercise agency. However, he maintains that people can only exercise agency to the extent that they draw on alternative and multiple discourses (Foucault, 1978). Other theorists have expanded on this view.

Davis and Harré (1991) suggest that choice and agency are possible through the availability of various subject positions. Subject positioning implies that one's identity is relative to the central meanings and the social context in which it exists (Cochran, 1985; Madill, in press). In other words, the person an individual can be is influenced by the various cultural definitions and descriptions that are available in certain sociocultural settings, and at historical times. Some of these may be more acceptable than others, but the diversity of possibilities allows individuals to exercise choice to varying degrees. Martin and Sugarman (2001) suggest that because human beings are self-referring, self-knowing individuals who care about their own lives, they can exert significant influence on society and culture through their "informed actions and activities" (p. 194). Human beings are feeling and desiring agents within a shared, practical life world that promotes a series of common discourses. According to this view, agency is exercised through interpretive activity so that individuals engage in circular interpretation between the multiplicity of social discourses and subject positions available to them, and the pre-understandings, experiences, and values that they hold. This interpretive activity leads different individuals to make different choices within their social context.
Finally, Cooper (1994) suggests that discourses interact with physical conditions, practices, and relations in a manner that produces specific effects for individuals at different points in history and time. It is the combination of these factors that allows individuals to exercise a certain degree of agency. The concept of agency is central to the present study because it is important to understand how mothers may not be passive victims of discourses but active agents in their own lives. It is through this agency that women are able to resist the dominant discourses that negatively impact their lives.

To summarize, in the present study a dominant discourse is construed as a set of tacit rules and shared understandings that regulate practices. For example, what can and cannot be said, who can speak with authority and who must listen, whose social constructions are valid and whose are unacceptable and unimportant are regulated by discourses (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Dominant discourses create consent of the status quo by encouraging people to adopt certain meanings and by establishing what appears to be normal (Code, 1991). In other words, discourses are “multifaceted, public processes through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved” (Davis & Harré, 1990, p. 46). Furthermore, by drawing on alternative discourses, people may resist the hold of more dominant discourses. And yet, because discourses inevitably are multiple and interactive with the particular cumulated life experiences of the individuals embedded in them, human agency is possible and strong sociocultural determinism is thereby thwarted.

**Discourse, Knowledge, and Subjectivity**

In this section, I explore the relation between discourse, knowledge, and subjectivity to illustrate how these constructs are conceptualized in the present study. Women come to know in terms of one or more discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990; Ruddick, 1983). Discourses are present
in human sociocultural practices as well as language and various linguistic symbols and expressions. They thus direct social practice. It is through such practices that subjective thought is formed and meaning exists (Davies & Harré, 1990; Ruddick, 1983). Social practices are responses to a discourse that appears to be a ‘given,’ and to certain demands. In response to these demands, people develop internal, subjective, cognitive tools that guide their practices (Ruddick, 1983). Davies and Harré differentiate between someone’s internal conceptual cognitive tools and discourse. This is an important distinction, because the former relates to the internal subjectivity of individuals and the latter relates to the multifaceted public processes (e.g., discourses) that organize meanings. The latter influences the former by organizing what we consider meaningful. That is, discourses influence “what we know and not know, see and not see, say and not say in complex ways” (Weingarten, 1995, pp. 12-13).

In answer to the risk of strong social determinism in which women are viewed as entirely subject to a series of discourses, one can reconceptualize female subjectivity in terms of agency, knowledge construction, and subject positionality (Alcoff, 1988; Belenky et al., 1986; Code, 1991; Davies & Harré, 1990; Foucault, 1984; Little, 1999). Based on their ground breaking research with women, Belenky et al. (1986) suggest that some women’s ways of knowing are passive in that they just take in knowledge without actively involving themselves in questioning or choice. Other forms of knowing, according to these authors, are focused on internal intuition. These women rely on their internal ‘gut feeling’ to know and understand the world. Finally, Belenky and her colleagues suggest that there are some women whose ways of knowing are through an understanding that knowledge is constructed and that there is no expert truth or one psychological reality. These women come to know the world through questioning the status quo and the context in which claims to truth are made. I anticipate that women who resist the current
dominant discourse may be in a process of questioning the ‘truths’ about mothering, and constructing their own alternate maternal realities. In this sense, women whose personal epistemology is one of construction of knowledge, engage in a process of discourse deconstruction where they question socially constructed conventions (Robinson & Robinson, 1998).

Davies and Harré (1990) explain that the way people come to understand and experience their social identity, the social world, and their place in it, is discursively constructed. This constructivist paradigm recognizes that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to social discursive practices. In other words, people are able to negotiate which of those practices they wish to exercise. According to Davies and Harré (1990) this is made possible because there are various subject positions available to them. Alcoff (1988), Code (1991), and Little (1999) agree that subject positionings are an important aspect of subjectivity. According to Little (1999), discourses offer social identities in which subjects are positioned within multiple, contradictory, and shifting discourses. In other words, subject positions are social identities in which people are positioned within multiple, contradictory, and shifting discourses. It is discourses that offer these social identities. A person relates to the world from the vantagepoint of the positions she has taken. The particular images, metaphors, story lines, and concepts through which a person relates to the world are contained in those positions, which are directly related to discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 1990). Individuals are not fixed and static but are produced and reproduced through the discursive practices in which they engage (Code, 1991; Davies & Harré, 1990). For example, a mother who lives in English-speaking North America may be influenced by the discourse of social justice, which posits that all human beings have rights that should be respected (Rich, 1986). This woman may draw on this discourse to then see
herself as an activist, a subject position that involves fighting for the rights of mothers to have access to quality daycare for all children because children have a right to safety and care. This subject position allows her to view the world through that vantagepoint and be an agent in fighting for social change.

Positions provide the means by which people are active in the construction of meaning (Code, 1991). Because women are feeling and desiring human beings who care about their own lives, they are able to exercise this agency through interpretive activity (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). Human beings engage in agency through their deep and concerned absorption in current situations and because their existence is at stake, they are moved to interpret the context within which they live and make of their lives what they may (Heidegger, 1962).

In sum, through the construction of knowledge and interpretive activity women are able to exercise choice and agency to varying degrees. This agency is made possible by the provision of subject positions within the various social discourses available to them. These concepts are important to the present study because they help explain how women come to know and how they are able to engage in agentic processes of resistance to the current dominant discourse on mothers. Little research has been conducted on the topic of mothers’ resistance to the dominant discourse on mothering and on how these women construct knowledge and interpret their lives. Therefore, in order to fill this gap in our knowledge, the present study was aimed at exploring the experience and meaningful construction of mothering for women who resist the dominant discourse. I now turn to a discussion of discourse as it relates to power and resistance in order to clarify how the present study construes the concept of resistance.
Several authors provide evidence that mothers in Western societies are influenced by a dominant mothering discourse that is based on patriarchal, male-dominated structures (Arnup, 1994; Boulton, 1981; Rich, 1976; Thurer, 1994). Gordon (1990) offers a definition of male dominated structures as “those objective aspects of anyone’s life-situation which appear beyond the individual’s control, having their resources in the distribution of power and wealth in society” (p. 8). She argues that these male dominated structures are constructed within a patriarchal, capitalist, and oppressive society. Moreover, Nicholson’s (1993) feminist analysis of the conditions of motherhood describe the mothering discourse as reflective of other institutions such as marriage, heterosexuality, monogamy, and economic viability. Thus, the dominant discourse on mothering is socially constructed within patriarchy by a complex process that involves power relations, which ensure that mothers mother in a particular way (Nicolson, 1993).

The present discourse on mothering is a direct product of the scientific medical/biological and psychological/social claims made by experts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Arnup, 1994; Gleason, 1999). Nicolson (1993) describes how these experts and those who report their views have bombarded mothers with social prescriptions in the guise of science, and how these experts’ versions are socially received as wisdom. The claims that are favoured and are given priority are those that serve the needs and values of those who are able to influence society because they hold positions of dominant power; for example, politicians, academics, and physicians (Foucault, 1984; Nicolson, 1993). These claims take on a life of their own through the power of dominant discourses and come to represent our every-day understanding of what is perceived to be true or factual (Nicolson, 1993).
In this manner, dominant discourses serve the purpose of controlling and disciplining populations (Code, 1991). By establishing what is accepted as normal, dominant discourses construct criteria that lead people to regulate their own behaviors without the presence of force or coercion. The manner in which this power is exercised without force is based on the dominant discourse manifesting itself as truths, prescriptions, and prohibitions under real and imagined structures of legitimated knowledge (Code, 1991). Cooper (1994) suggests that compliance to dominant discourses occurs when people internalize the dominant discourse, and therefore become self-monitoring subjects. Force is rarely necessary to maintain the status quo because individuals ensure their own conformity to social norms.

In Western society, social and political power has been dominated mainly by white males (Scott, 2001). At the same time, it is important to recognize that not all power is oppressive and that those who do not hold social positions of power can also exercise power and influence social processes. For example, women activists who may not have had access to official political power have influenced policy related to women's and children's rights (Scott, 2001). One can then say that power involves "the capacity to shape, facilitate, and generate practices, processes, and social relations" (Cooper, 1994, p. 436). According to Cooper, power is exercised rather than possessed and it can be productive as well as repressive. Power is not held by only one segment in society but it is present throughout society within various social relations. This view of power explains the possibility of resistance to dominant discourses because it explains how those who may not hold authorized positions of power in society are able to struggle against those discourses that limit their experiences.

The concept of resistance has been linked to the existence of power differentials in society. For the purposes of this study, resistance is defined as the effort of oppressed groups to
challenge and act against aspects of the dominant discourse (Scott, 1990). In other words, resistant groups exploit inconsistencies and tensions within and between discourses to transform the meaning and influence of the discourses available to them (Croghan & Miell, 1998). Foucault argues that “where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). Cooper (1994) explains that resistance can take many forms; for example, resistance to the organization of certain power structures (e.g., challenging men’s rights rather than women’s rights); resistance to differential access to power (e.g., work, money, management positions); or to the existence and/or nature of certain power-forms (e.g., disciplinary structures like schools, prisons, and factories). Thus, when individuals or groups find themselves limited in some way by those who hold more power in society, it is possible that they may resist, to different degrees, the pressures or limitations they encounter.

Code (1991) suggests that the epistemic-political challenge for women is to find strategies to claim their “cognitive competence and authority” (p. 218), their ability to know, and their right to know. Although mothers may not hold dominant positions of power, they are able to exercise agency and resist to various degrees the different discourses that oppress them. Mothers have a number of subject positions and alternative discourses available to them. For example, the woman’s movement has promoted the discourses of equal rights, women’s rights, and human rights so that particular women may position themselves as empowered women, activists, and so on (Gordon, 1990). Once a mother has taken new or different subject positions, she may reject other positions and the discourses that accompany them. Contradictory discourses are helpful in that they allow women to gain an understanding of their positions in society (Davis & Haré, 1990).
Several authors suggest that positioning and resistance occur within interaction and conversational encounters where discourses are constructed and rejected (Code, 1991; Davies & Harré, 1990; Mahoney & Yngvesson 1992). As a consequence, some women are able to be both inside and outside of the ideology of gender at the same time, to have an awareness that they are in both milieus, to be conscious of both, and of the division between the two (Code, 1991). For example, a mother may be the main caretaker in her children’s life but she may also be aware of the possible injustice of this arrangement and of the lack of social responsibility toward children. Being inside the role of mother and outside of it because of her awareness may allow this woman to find alternative ways of raising her child. According to Code, this division is what allows women the agency to develop the strategies necessary for resistance and construction of their own actions and life stories.

Finally, the concept of niche that was advanced by Hacking (1998) is helpful in that it suggests that different types of phenomena act in different ways to form a possible niche, or container, in which a social phenomenon may thrive. In other words, many phenomena, or as he called them, vectors, interact in a manner that forms a container of sorts that somehow facilitates the occurrences of a social event or experience. For the purposes of the present study, I identified two niches, one relating to the participants’ personal context and one relating to the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which their experiences appeared to be grounded. The personal niche included the participants’ social supports, educational backgrounds, access to financial resources, access to flexible employment, access to social services, the use of the Internet, their experiences as mothers, and their early life experiences. The discursive niche, on the other hand, included the discourses and subject positions present in their narratives. Subject positions are grounded within multiple discourses. By drawing on a
variety of discourses and positioning themselves within them, the participants were able to engage in agentic processes of resistance. In summary, discourses provide certain rules and definitions of what is considered normal, subject positions are social identities that are directly connected with discourses, and niches include certain discourses and certain subject positions that when combined they form a type of "container" in which resistance or experience thrives.

Conclusions to sections on discourse, subjectivity, and resistance. To summarize, a dominant discourse is defined as a set of tacit rules and shared understandings that regulate practices. Furthermore, the way individuals come to know and understand their experiences is discursively constructed (Davis & Harré, 1991). This process is made possible by the availability of various subject positions. These subject positions offer social identities in which people are positioned within multiple, contradictory, and shifting discourses (Little, 1999). In other words, subject positions draw on various discourses to form different social identities. The present study aimed at identifying the possible discourses and subject positions that acted together to form a discursive niche within which the participants' experiences and resistance occurred.

Considerable literature indicates that women may not always be passive recipients of discourses and that to varying degrees, their ability to exercise their power and agency allows them to resist the discourses that oppress them. Although this theoretical literature suggests that women resist the dominant discourse on mothering, empirical research that has explored the experience of mothers who resist is very limited. In the present study, I attempted to address this gap in our knowledge of mothers' resistance by investigating how women experience mothering while they engage in a process of resistance to the dominant discourse. The next section describes the myths contained in the current dominant discourse on mothering.
Discourse on Mothering

We all know the ideal of the good mother. Above all, she is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally yet she is careful not to smother them with love and her own needs. She follows the advice of doctors and other experts and she educates herself about child development. She is ever present in her children's lives when they are young, and when they get older she is home every day to greet them as they return from school. If she works outside the home, she arranges her job around her children so she can be there for them as much as possible, certainly whenever they are sick or unhappy. The good mother’s success is reflected in her children’s behavior – they are well mannered and respectful to others; at the same time they have a strong sense of independence and self esteem. They grow up to be productive citizens. (Chase & Rogers, 2001, p. 30)

This quote summarizes much of the current dominant discourse on mothering. This discourse promotes motherhood as a natural condition for women (Boulton, 1993; McMahon, 1995). Motherhood is seen as an extension of a woman’s femininity. Moreover, the discourse communicates to women that they are expected to be fulfilled solely by their roles as mothers while ignoring other desires and needs (Eyer, 1996; Thurer, 1994).

The social construction of motherhood posits that mothers are responsible for the physical, spiritual, and psychological well being of their children (Gleason, 1999; Thurer, 1994). They are expected to be ever present, sacrificial, and all loving. The discourse on mothering promotes the idea that mothers should be the central caregivers of their children because ‘mothers know best’ (Ranson, 1999). Mothers are expected to meet their children’s needs before their own. Failing to do this is regarded by others as selfish and uncaring (Gleason, 1999; Maushart, 2000). Furthermore, mothers are held responsible for the child’s psychological difficulties. The power of this discourse has led mothers to aspire to be “perfect mothers” and to avoid making mistakes while raising their children (Contratto, 1984; Croghan & Miell, 1998; Thurer, 1994). Mothers, therefore, are viewed as powerful forces that can harm their children.
(Coontz, 1992; Thurer, 1994; Weingarten, 1995). They are perceived not only as the primary agent in their children’s development but also as the primary obstacle and blaming them is very prominent in the current dominant discourse on mothers (Thurer, 1994). Thus, the mothering discourse posits that mothers are potentially harmful to their children but that they may raise well-adjusted children if they sacrifice their needs.

There are other messages implied in this “mother as powerful agent” myth. Because mothers are viewed as overly responsible for the fate of their children, they are told they must learn how to parent (Hays, 1996). In order to satisfy this expectation, mothers are supposed to turn to an endless list of experts such as psychologists, physicians, and educators (Arnup, 1994; Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1994). They are expected to seek the advice in countless books, manuals, and parenting courses. The information in childcare manuals, for example, is often conflicting and overwhelming but always carries one overall message: It is up to mothers to nurture, love, care for, and stimulate their children, or the children will be greatly damaged (Contratto, 1984; Eyer, 1996; Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1994). This vast amount of mothering advice has left mothers feeling inadequate and unable to trust their instincts given the potential harm they could cause their children if they do not follow ‘scientific’ or ‘expert’ advice (Thurer, 1994). In sum, the impossibility of living up to the ideal set forth by expert advice places mothers in a constant state of self-doubt.

One of the factors that promoted mother blaming during the 20th Century was the advent of attachment theory. Expert advice, based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1991) informs mothers that bonding with their children is essential. Mothers are told that spending copious amounts of time developing this bond is very important because when it fails to form, children are at risk of developing serious psychological problems (Thurer, 1994). Mothers today
endeavour to dedicate time and energy to the formation of this bond and often wonder if they have covered all the basics. Many mothers anxiously evaluate on a daily basis whether they are parenting adequately or whether their children are developing successfully (Contratto, 1984). At the same time, mothers are expected to encourage independence and to avoid over-nurturing because this can lead to immaturity and dependence in their children (Chase & Rogers, 2001).

The ideas behind attachment theory have led some mothers to worry about not being with their children all the time. Many mothers who work outside of the home have to deal with the ongoing guilt of leaving their children in the care of others (Bernard, 1974; Coontz, 1992; McMahon, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). Mothers have been told over and over that children left at day-care centres run the risk of “insecure attachment” as well as low self-esteem (Coontz, 1992; Eyer, 1996; Karen, 1990). This type of message can create tension for a woman who has chosen or needs to work.

Although society appears to value children, it does not take responsibility for supporting mothers who are often solely responsible for the care giving of children. Moreover, most mothers raise their children in isolation from others and, therefore, with little or no support. For example, even though current Canadian childcare policy provides daycare subsidies for low income families, mothers are still expected to pay a percentage of child care fees resulting in more limited financial resources (Beaujot, 2000). In the 1980s, the federal government explored the possibility of establishing a national child-care program, but never established it. The trend in the 1990s was to increase funds for child benefits and provide deductions for child-care expenses rather than to establish a universal daycare program (Beaujot, 2000). Beaujot reports that most parents want to have more options, such as good quality daycare centres and support for staying at home with children. Many parents complain that there is not sufficient, good
quality childcare available to them. Statistics Canada (2000) reports that in 1996, there were approximately 300,000 day care spaces available for preschool children in Canada. At the same time, there were 900,000 dual earner or working sole support parent families who had at least one preschool aged child. These numbers illustrate the lack of child support for mothers and children, leaving mothers struggling to provide or access quality care for their children. This results in many mothers experiencing increased pressure, guilt, and self-doubt about the choices they make (Seagram & Daniluk, 2002).

Mothers have also been told that stimulating their infants to enhance their development and learning is essential to healthy development (Thurer, 1994). Many experts promoted this belief after the popularization of Piaget’s (1952, 1960) theories. These experts have suggested ways for mothers to talk to their babies, play with them, and encourage their intellectual growth so that the children grow into intelligent adults (Eyer, 1996; Thurer, 1994). Many mothers are often left wondering how much “stimulation” is enough.

The idea that childhood problems may create a wounded inner child further compounds the pressures on mothers (Coontz, 1992). John Bradshaw (1993) claims that the major source of human suffering is this “neglected, wounded child.” Today’s mothers have been told that their own mothers are to blame for their psychological distress. This blaming, in turn, places the present generation of mothers as the potentially blamed mothers of the future.

Mothers are simultaneously influenced by other discourses that interact with the mothering discourse to influence their practices. For example, related to the mother discourse is the child discourse (Contratto, 1984; Coontz, 1992; Hays, 1996). The belief that children are pure, unspoiled, and good-natured places a strong pressure on mothers to avoid hurting them, to ensure that they are doing well, and that their self-esteem is being protected. Children, under this
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discourse, are viewed as emotionally priceless, and as objects of sentiment (Thurer, 1994). They are regarded as beings who deserve to be protected from all harm and indulged to enjoy their childhood (Thurer, 1994). Parents are also expected to treat and love all their children equally. Finally, adults are told that they must handle all children with patience regardless of their behaviour because children need to be properly guided by positive models (Arnup, 1994). In sum, these messages exaggerate "both the power of the parent and the passivity of the child" (Coontz, 1992, p. 225) and place many mothers in a constant state of self-doubt.

To complicate matters, given the necessity for most women to work for pay, the contradictions that the working/professional women discourse creates for mothers exacerbates their ability to mother without guilt and stress. The messages contained in the paid employment discourse are often contradictory to the mother discourse (Baber & Allen, 1992; Hays, 1996; Maushart, 2000). Many mothers who work are torn between their obligations at work and their obligations at home. At the same time, some mothers who stay home often feel deficient because they do not pursue a career (Hays, 1996). Furthermore, the philosophy of the workplace is based on a self-interested, profit-maximizing utility (Hays, 1996). Many mothers are led to believe they must perform to their maximum potential in the workplace. In addition, they must act quite differently when playing both roles of employee and mother, competitive and tough-minded at work, and warm and loving at home. In trying to integrate both their mothering and working roles, the discourse suggests that children should always come first (Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1999).

In conclusion, the current dominant discourse on mothering promotes a series of messages that lead many mothers to struggle to make sense of the discrepancy between the expectations of the discourse and the situations in which they live. Maternal caregiving is
viewed as essential to the “healthy” development of a child. This discourse suggests that mothers should be the central caregivers of children. Paradoxically, mothers are offered little support to carry out this endeavour (Baber & Allen, 1992). They live by the ideology of “intensive” mothering (Hays, 1996). According to Hays, intensive mothering involves mothering that is child centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive. One can conclude that many mothers are consequently left with strong feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and may view themselves as deficient (Eyer, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002, 1999). So much emphasis is put on their relationship with their children in a society that tends to be individualistic and lacks community support, that the exclusivity and isolation of the mother-child relationship becomes problematic for both the mother and the child (Contratto, 1984). Regardless of whether mothers are employed or at home, they appear to be impacted by the expectations set forth by the mothering discourse and the multiple roles (e.g., mother, employee, wife) that influence them.

Given the demands that the dominant discourse places on mothers, women may find that they are unable to live up to the ideal of the perfect mother. Therefore, they may search for alternative ways to mother and to live their lives. The empirical literature on mothers’ resistance is limited. We know little about mothers who resist and how they experience mothering. In the present study, I endeavoured to identify some of these alternative choices and the experience and meaning of mothering for women who, in making these choices, resist the dominant discourse on mothering. Furthermore, because discourses are historically and culturally specific, I also attempted to identify the current dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices present in the participants’ narratives.
Alternative Discourses

A review of the history of motherhood (Thurer, 1994) and an exploration of mothering from a cultural or feminist perspective (Gordon, 1990; Huggins & Huggins, 1994; Mawami, 2001; Thomas, 2000) reveals that there are alternative discourses and practices relating to mothering. This is important for two reasons: (a) mothering discourses and practices are relative to specific historical and cultural contexts and, therefore, variable and multiple; and (b) given that there are alternative discourses to the idealized discourse on mothering, mothers may then be able to resist by drawing from these or other alternatives.

Historically, the beliefs about how mothers should mother have been quite diverse. For example, during the Middle Ages childhood was not a separate stage, and families were not conceived as the nuclear family of modern times where a family resides isolated from the rest of their community (Badinter, 1981; Thurer, 1994). Furthermore, mother love was not what it is today. The high infant mortality rates may have led mothers to avoid an investment of love in a child (Thurer, 1994). According to historian Elizabeth Badinter (1981), there is no evidence that mothers loved their children (the way mothers love today) during the Middle Ages. During the 17th Century, sending newborn infants to a wet-nurse for up to 3 years was viewed as "excellent for infants" (Thurer, 1194, p. 175). In Colonial times, it was fatherhood that carried the value and importance attributed to motherhood today. For example, fathers rocked, walked, and cuddled their infants when they traveled (Eyer, 1996). In sum, different beliefs and practices have been present in various historical periods in many Western societies. At the same time, other cultural groups also practice and frame motherhood in ways that differ from the current dominant Western discourse on mothering.
There is no single way to define mothering across cultures. Mothering discourses range from communal mothering in Africa (Bernard, 1974; Mawami, 2001) to the exclusive, intensive mothering in North America (Chase & Rogers, 2001; Hays, 1996; Rich, 1986). The Nyansongo mothers of Kenya, for example, work in the fields and around their home while a child nurse carries and cares for their infant children (Bernard, 1974). This child nurse is usually the infant’s sibling who is 6 to 10 years old and plays an important part in the infant’s life. These mothers are usually burdened with intense agricultural work so that they reduce their maternal role to the “bare essentials” (Bernard, 1974, p. 7). Another example is from Japan where the care of children in the village of Taira, Okinawa is shared between parents, paternal grandparents, aunts, and uncles. The Tarong in the Philippines do not allow mothers to have sole responsibility for their children; to them, this would be “unthinkable” so that fathers, siblings, aunts, and grandmothers are involved in caretaking (Bernard, 1974, p. 7). The mothers in these societies are guided by discourses and practices that are promoted by their social groups and their context. One need not go too far to find cultural or ideological groups who practise mothering in ways that depart from the Western dominant discourse.

In North America, for example, many African American women, who have been exposed to the dominant discourse, hold values and beliefs that are different from the Western dominant discourse on mothering. For example, African American mothers are often viewed as a source of growth, hope, status, and power in their community (Thomas, 2000). Many African-American mothers believe that the black community should work together to raise their children and that motherhood should not be the exclusive responsibility of one mother (Edwards, 2000; Thomas, 2000). This group of mothers practises what Edwards (2000) calls othermothering. Othermothering involves the provision of care by extended family and other nonblood friends or
neighbors (Edwards, 2000). Moreover, the view that motherhood is “one’s true and only occupation is a view that few African-American women have wanted to adopt” (p. 59). Many value self-sufficiency, independence, and personal accomplishment, as well as nurturing and caring. Even though they have been exposed to the ideal of self-sacrifice, many African-American women do not embrace this view (Edwards, 2000). For many of them, guilty feelings are absent when, for example, they leave their children to go to work. For African-American mothers, employment is a way of life, not a choice that can harm their children. In sum, many African American mothers appear to have found ways to mother that are influenced by their history and societal conditions and that challenge the current Western dominant discourse on mothering.

One can also find diverse mothering practices and beliefs in Canadian society (Mawami, 2001). For example, many mothers from various cultures draw from their religious beliefs to guide their mothering. Mawami reports that Muslim parents from various countries who now live in Canada follow their religion’s dictates when it comes to the values they transmit to their children, or how they interact with them. Some mothers from India and other Asian countries sometimes leave their children behind in their countries when they immigrate to Canada. Even though these mothers report that they love their children, leaving them behind is necessary for them because they feel their children will eventually benefit when they join their mothers in Canada. Many immigrants to Canada also believe that childcare is the responsibility of the community. Mawami quotes a mother saying:

In my home country, neighbours took our children for a while. There were more people to shower love on a child. Here there is only the father and mother. And they are too busy. There are only the parents to show bonding to a child. (p. 35)
Other immigrants believe that extended families can be helpful in mediating relationships between mothers and children. In other words, they welcome the input and interventions of others after giving birth and throughout the development of their children. They do not believe in the exclusivity of mothering.

Finally, one last example of women who hold alternative views of mothering to this ideal of the intensive, exclusive mother is that of feminist mothers. Many feminists view the institution of motherhood as oppressive and controlling of women’s potential (Rich, 1986). Although they suggest that the conditions that maintain the institution of motherhood will not change until power differentials in society are modified, they believe that they can resist and challenge the myths by engaging in practices that are more supportive of their experience as women and mothers (Gordon, 1990). For example, some feminist mothers may involve others in the care of their children when it is possible; they also challenge the discourse of the successful career woman. For example, some enjoy working but dislike competition. Some feminist mothers have been found to acknowledge that motherhood limits their independence, self-determination, freedom, and space, which are values they hold as important (Gordon, 1990). Finally, some of these women claim that the search for alternatives to the dominant discourse on mothering is difficult in a society that endeavours to push them to live by the middle-class ideal (Gordon, 1990).

In conclusion, discourses on mothering and the practices that accompany them are historically, socially, and culturally bound. The literature suggests that there is no one right way to mother and that there are multiple discourses available, so that one can assume that even though there is a dominant discourse on mothering, that women can engage in alternative ways of mothering. Given that women practice alternative ways of mothering and that the empirical
literature on this topic is limited, in the present study, my aim was to explore the meaning and experience of mothering for women who practice alternative ways of mothering by resisting the dominant Western discourse on mothering.

The Experience of Mothering

In this section, I present literature that illustrates the experience of mothering for women in the Western world and the impact that the dominant discourse has on the lives of many mothers. It is aimed at providing a context and illustration of how being a mother is experienced and not as a thorough critique of the literature that informed it.

Mothers and multiple roles. Most mothers in the current historical period find themselves “juggling” two or more roles at once. The roles of mother and worker or employee appear to be the most significant for most mothers (Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning, 1981; Polasky & Holahan, 1998). Many women appear to accept that the burdens and expectations placed on them are to be expected. Therefore, mothers often find ways to accommodate the many demands placed on them by their various roles (Gilbert et al., 1981; Polasky & Holahan, 1998). For example, some mothers may redefine role demands and involve others in fulfilling those demands, or they may attempt to meet the various role demands by increasing the energy, time, and commitment to fulfilling those demands. Furthermore, some women also juggle their time in order to maintain their identity as good mothers (Garey, 1995; Krause & Geyer-Pestello, 1985). For some women, their role as mother takes precedence over their role as employee. According to Krause and Geyer-Pestello, the mothering role becomes a source of strain when mothers endorse traditional expectations of the female role. In other words, women who believe they belong at home with their children experience more distress because they tend to want to meet their children’s needs while also being employed. In the following study, Gary (1995)
examined the experience of mothers who rearrange their schedule in order to maintain their identity as good mothers.

Anita Garey (1995) explored the experiences of a group of working mothers. She located her qualitative study within the context of the cultural definitions of a good mother and conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with 18 nurses, 2 nurses aids, 6 clerical workers, 4 janitorial service workers, and 5 administrators who choose to work the night shift in order to maintain their identities as “stay at home” mothers. The sample included 13 European-Americans, 13 African-Americans, 5 Filipina first generation immigrants, 3 Mexican-Americans, 1 Chinese-American, and 1 African-Caribbean immigrant. The research method was that of “nonparticipant observation.” Garey not only interviewed the participants but also observed them in the hospital ward where they worked, a setting they shared in common. Garey explained that this approach helped her to contextualize the data into a network of meanings and interactions. The purpose of her study was to discover the strategies that employed hospital workers (who have children) use in order to construct themselves as stay at home mothers.

Garey (1995) found that the mothers she studied used the night shift work to de-emphasize their employment status and to make their identities as mothers more highly visible. In other words, the mothers in this study used activities as symbols to construct their identities as stay at home mothers by being at work at night and being at home during the day. Garey identified the sacrifices that some women make in order to live up to the standards of the dominant discourse of the ‘good mother.’ For example, the women reported feeling sleep deprived and fatigued, being alienated from the professional aspect of their careers, and lacking couple time.
Garey (1995) concluded that the participants construct themselves as “stay at home” mothers in three major ways: (a) they restricted the perceptibility of their employment in the public sphere and to their children; (b) they made themselves available to their children and their activities; and (c) they positioned themselves in the culturally acceptable place for a mother – the home. Neither Garey’s discussion of her findings nor a thorough review of her results revealed instances of resistance to the dominant discourse by her participants. However, it is possible that these mothers resisted some of the myths of motherhood but Garey did not report them because they were not the focus of her study.

A limitation of Garey’s (1995) work is that she did not describe her method of analysis, which makes it difficult to evaluate her findings and conclusions. She also failed to mention the ages of her participants, which limits the interpretation of her findings and how they may relate to other mothers. Furthermore, even though the study only included women who worked night-shifts at a hospital, other literature supports the fact that many mothers juggle their lives and schedules to be home as much as possible (Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1989).

On the other hand, Garey’s (1995) findings are useful because they reveal the sacrifice some mothers make in order to achieve the ideal set forth by the dominant discourse on mothers. One can conclude that women manage their lives in interaction with dominant cultural conceptions of mother-appropriate attitudes and activities. Garey’s study illustrates how women struggle to meet societal expectations to be home with their children when they choose or need to be employed, even at the risk of sacrificing their health and well being.

In this section, I explored how mothers in the current historical period juggle various roles and how their maternal roles often take precedence, which illustrated some of the issues that mothers face today. Given that mothers in English speaking North America experience
these pulls, and that many are unable to meet the demands of the various roles they play to the degree set out by the ideal (i.e., the dominant discourse), one can assume that some mothers find alternative ways of meeting role demands or define their roles.

The lived reality of mothering. The experiences of mothers may not equate with the ideal set forth by the discourse (Boulton; 1983; Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995). Mothering is about loving and caring for children but this process is often affected by the mothering discourse (Bernard, 1974; Rich, 1986). The tension between these two forces leads mothers to experience not only love for their children but also strain and difficulties that are opposite to the fantasy of the happy mother. In this section, I review literature that illustrates how many women experience mothering. This literature does not explore resistance and, therefore, is intended as contextual material.

In her qualitative study on the experience of women as mothers, Boulton (1983) interviewed 25 working-class mothers and 25 middle-class mothers. She determined class by using the occupation of the participant’s husband. The women’s ages ranged in age from 22 to 34-years old and their children ranged in age from 11 months to 12 years. Boulton did not mention the ethnic background of her participants. Her interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Her aim was to explore women’s experiences of motherhood and to provide a detailed description, from the women’s perspective, of the way they experienced their lives as mothers. Furthermore, within this main goal, Boulton explored the differences in the experience of working-class and middle-class women.

Boulton (1983) found that more than half of the women felt irritated while performing their mothering duties. Furthermore, over half of the working-class mothers in her study said they did not derive a sense of meaning from being mothers. Boulton’s study identified four
types of experiences: 38% of the women were found to be “fulfilled” (i.e., they had a strong sense of meaning and significance in their mothering), 10% were “satisfied” (i.e., they were happy as mothers and accepting their role, but without a high sense of meaning), 20% were “in conflict” (i.e., they had a positive commitment but did not enjoy child care and felt frustrated at not being able to engage in other activities), and 32% per cent were “alienated” (i.e., they had a weak sense of meaning related to mothering). Boulton’s findings suggest that many women’s experiences of motherhood are not always positive. This is important to note, given that the current dominant discourse communicates that motherhood is ‘always’ a fulfilling and positive experience. Furthermore, the discourse often silences women from voicing the negative aspects of their mothering experiences because, according to the discourse, speaking out could not only be harmful to their children but also to their images as good mothers.

Even though Boulton (1983) did not identify resistance on the part of her participants, some of her findings hint at instances of resistance to the dominant societal mothering discourse. For example, the middle-class mothers who felt irritated with looking after their children described their motherhood endeavours as “inhibiting their personal freedom and autonomy and as replacing their identity as individuals with their identity as mothers” (p. 95). In other words, they saw that the solution to their childcare difficulties related to how the care of children is organized at a societal level. Only two working-class mothers viewed motherwork in this way. These findings not only point to possible class differences in how women experience mothering, but more importantly, they point to how some women do not agree with taking all of the responsibility for the care of children. These views may represent resistance to the dominant myth of how mothers are supposed to be the sole caretakers of children. It is unclear from Boulton’s report if her participants engaged in any practices that related to this resistance.
Boulton suggests that “motherhood is neither ‘naturally rewarding’ nor ‘inherently frustrating’ but, rather, a woman’s experience as a mother is the product of a complex set social and psychological factors” (p. 62).

Boulton’s (1983) study with working and middle-class mothers revealed that women differ in how they experience motherhood. It is possible that different women may have different experiences of mothering and various opportunities for resistance. The generalizability of her results is limited but at the same time, her findings suggest that the experience of mothering might vary for different mothers. Boulton did not describe her method of analysis clearly, which makes it difficult to assess her findings. However, her study revealed that motherhood is not always enjoyable and that some mothers may not experience fulfillment when mothering their children. In contrast with the dominant discourse, some women may perceive their bond to their children as a symbol of their commitment but not of enjoyment.

Similar to Boulton (1983), McMahon (1995) explored the meaning that women give to motherhood and identified what mothers see as the rewards and costs of having children. In addition, she also analyzed the impact of motherhood on women’s identities. McMahon conducted in-depth interviews with 59 mothers in Toronto, Ontario. McMahon’s (1995) sample, like Boulton’s, was limited to women who work. Her comparison focused on working-class and middle-class White mothers. Her sample also included women whose children were only of preschool age and excluded mothers whose children were older. McMahon explained that she chose this sample to reduce variation, and to carry out her exploration with mothers who are at a particularly demanding stage of motherhood.

McMahon (1995) based her methodology and theoretical analysis on symbolic interactionism (LaRosa & Reitzes, 1993). McMahon explained that symbolic interactionism
Mothers' Resistance uses meanings, identity, and experience of everyday life as central to our understanding of human beings. She suggested that culture is an important factor that influences the formation of identities. Her study involved interviews that she analyzed through a "grounded approach" (p. 31) in order to extract theoretical categories. She found that respondents saw motherhood as a positive experience because of the connection they had with their children. She also found some differences between middle- and working-class women. For example, working-class women reported growing up as a result of having a child. Conversely, middle-class women reported that they had to be grown up before having children.

McMahon’s (1995) results indicate that only the middle-class women in her sample had the economic and cultural resources to claim the identity of ‘good mothers,’ which is promoted by the discourse on achievement and promotes success as well as reaching one’s potential. McMahon explained that both the middle and working-class women in her study experienced a transformation in their sense of self, self-conceptions, and moral guidelines when they became mothers. The working-class women were less likely to be surprised by motherhood and they reported experiencing fewer costs than the middle-class women. They did not see the work and time pressures related to child rearing as disadvantages. All participants described that watching their children grow and learn and their closeness to them were among the greatest rewards of being a mother. This closeness was connected to the generation and maintenance of their sense of self as mothers.

In addition, McMahon (1995) found that one of the worst features of being a mother for these women was the burden of responsibility they experienced. McMahon’s analysis focused on the redefinition of women’s identities as mothers and how motherhood provides opportunities to claim personal growth and development. Her study is a description of this process and how
women, through this process, produce and reproduce much of the ambivalence and pressure women feel about motherhood.

The results of McMahon's (1995) study suggest that the dominant discourse on mothering is present in the lives of some mothers. Her approach to the study of motherhood focused on the construct of self and identity. McMahon argues that the self and identity exist within the context of social discourses, which are complex structures that influence the values of human connectedness, caring, and interdependence. Her findings point to the importance of considering the contextual aspects of women's lives that limit their options and place them in confining social roles.

Boulton's (1983) and McMahon's (1995) studies begin to paint a picture of maternal experience under the dominant discourse on mothering. They alert us to the complexity of factors that influence a woman's experience of motherhood. Furthermore, they suggest that women do not always enjoy mothering and that mothering can be frustrating, isolating, and conflictual. By investigating the experience and meaning of mothering for women who are resisting the discourse, we can begin to explore whether resistance leads to alternative experiences or meanings.

_Impact of the dominant discourse on the lives of mothers._ In this section, I illustrate the impact that living under the demands of the dominant discourse on mothering has on many women. This segment of the literature does not address resistance but it explores the consequences that the discourse has on many mothers. The literature on mothers also addresses some of the negative aspects of mothering. For example, guilt has often been reported as a common experience in the lives of mothers (Eyer, 1996; Gordon, 1990; Hays, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). For example, Seagram and Daniluk (2002) carried out a qualitative
phenomenological study that was aimed at exploring the meaning and lived experience of maternal guilt for women who had preadolescent children. They interviewed 8 mothers who were partnered and who were parenting children between the ages of 2 and 12. They found that these women experienced a sense of complete responsibility, a sense of depletion, a sense of inadequacy, fear that their children can be harmed, a strong desire to be a positive influence on their children, a sense of profound connection, and a sense of loss. Seagram and Daniluk’s results revealed that these mothers experienced significant strain and guilt and they suggest the presence of the current dominant discourse in these women’s lives. They concluded that:

Interestingly, even if one were to be able to eradicate the myths of motherhood and cultural norms that impact upon mothers, the findings suggest that the women in this study would still experience feelings of guilt. (p. 132)

They went on to explain that a “very basic and yet very powerful bond to their children informed their desires, efforts, and commitment to be good mothers” (Seagram & Daniluk, 2002, p. 132). Seagram and Daniluk explained that this bond was very real, very strong, and intensely personal. This position appears to ignore the power of the dominant discourse on mothers in the lives of these women. They appear not to have taken into account that discourses are often outside of our awareness. Bonding and loving are not only experiences but are also loaded with discursive influences that make it very difficult to distinguish between what is ‘natural’ and what is culturally dictated through discourse. Seagram and Daniluk’s study, however, does support the idea that mothers’ experiences are greatly influenced by their historical context and the myths of motherhood. Finally, their results indicate that the dominant discourse may influence mothers feelings of intense guilt and feelings of inadequacy.

In her book *Motherguilt*, Diane Eyer (1996) discussed maternal guilt from a political and cultural perspective and addressed how these forces propel the discourse on mothering. Her
book did not intend to describe the experience of guilt, but to expose the socio-cultural forces behind this phenomenon. Eyer examined the popular and empirical literature that burdens mothers with blame. She argued that this burden should be borne by a society that refuses to take responsibility for the well being of its children. Eyer critically evaluated the factors that lead to mother blaming in our society. She described the burden on women who work outside of the home in record numbers and who are also responsible for most of the childcare and housework. Eyer also suggested that women’s paid work is exploitative because women make much less than their male counterparts. She gives the example that in the United States women make 71 cents for each dollar a man makes. Eyer took a political stance and argued that mothers are burdened with the responsibilities that belong to the larger society.

Eyer’s (1996) work is useful in that it described several societal conditions within which the discourse on mothering is maintained and strongly suggests that the guilt that mothers experience cannot be solved only at the individual level; but, rather, must be addressed at the social structural level. Eyer’s focus was on the larger social context and what changes need to occur at the societal level in order for mothers to be liberated from the blame that has been placed upon them and that they tend to place on themselves. At the same time she indirectly acknowledged that mothers can resist the discourse by becoming activists. She suggested that mothers, along with fathers, can form groups to gather critical information and to work with political leaders. Eyer suggested changes to the way social scientists do family research, and to the way society supports mothers calling for political and legislative reform. She also recommended that fathers become equally involved in childrearing. Eyer’s arguments raise the question: if the problem is not individual but socio cultural, is there something mothers can do at the personal level to change their maternal experience into a more positive or satisfying one?
Exploring the personal experiences of mothers who are resisting the dominant cultural discourse may begin to shed some light on how mothers can construct their lives differently from those who hold the myths of mothering as truths.

Eyer (1996) and Seagram and Daniluk (2002) contribute to our knowledge of mothers' experience by exploring the presence and social aspects of guilt in mothers' lives. They jointly illustrate the contextual and personal factors that are related to the dominant discourse on mothering and how these often manifest as guilt in the lives of mothers. However, guilt is not the only way in which the discourse impacts the lives of mothers. Depression has also been linked to the maternal experience.

Researchers have directed some of their attention to the experience of depression in women and mothers (Mauthner, 1999; Nicolson, 1998, 1999; Stoppard, 2000). A review of the literature on depression is beyond the scope of this study. However, the studies I review here were selected because they take into account the dominant discourse on mothering and the social context as conditions that contribute to the experience of depression in some women. These studies have found that some mothers experience depression shortly after the birth of their infants (Mauthner, 1999; Nicolson, 1998; Stoppard, 2000). Nevertheless, these authors argue against the medical model that posits that women experience depression due solely to biological factors. They suggest that depression in new mothers relates to experiences of loss (Nicolson, 1998, 1999); to lack of supportive, accepting, and non-judgmental interpersonal relationships; and to cultural contexts (Mauthner, 1999), or to the lived experiences of women in the context of historically specific, socially prescribed practices (Stoppard, 2000).

Stoppard (2000) argued that just as there is a dominant discourse on mothering, there are also discourses available to women in order for them locate and describe their experiences of
depression. Her book, *Understanding depression: Feminist social constructionist approaches* (2000), is an in-depth critical review of mainstream approaches to understanding depression and its treatment. Even though her book is focused on women generally, she specifically addressed the experience of motherhood. She suggests that women are burdened by the discourse of ‘intensive’ mothering. For example, she explains that a woman often will strive to engage in the practices of the good mother and interpret her chronic physical and emotional fatigue as part of the price of being a mother. Her examination of the literature reveals that women who are unable to meet the demands set forth by the discourse are more likely to experience stress, guilt, and possibly depression. Stoppard argues that “a woman’s subjective and embodied experiences which may be labeled as depression by mental health professionals can be understood as arising in the context of the lived experiences of being a mother” (p. 159).

Stoppard’s (2000) work supports the contention that the mythical truths of the dominant discourse masks the deeper socio-cultural issues present in the lives of mothers. Her contribution is important because she provides us with a greater understanding of how the dominant discourse can impact mothers. She points to how women’s experiences are influenced by the physical and social conditions in which they live. In other words, she argues that women’s experiences of depression are not always biologically based but that by experiencing the pressures, responsibility, and blame that accompany the dominant discourse, mothers call upon the discourse of depression to describe their experiences.

Mauthner (1999) conducted a study that focused on an exploration of women’s views of motherhood and postpartum depression. Like Stoppard (2000), Mauthner suggested that experience and mental health are more than physiological processes. She explained that factors related to the social, political, cultural, and relational contexts within which women live are
implicated in depression. Mauthner conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 40 mothers of young children (12 months to 7 years) who are living in England. Her sample was composed of 39 White women and 1 Afro-Caribbean woman. Her findings classified her sample in three categories: those who found motherhood unproblematic (17 women); those who described it as difficult but rejected the label post-partum depression (5 women); and those who described their experience as problematic by using the term post-partum depression (18 women). The latter group experienced conflict between the mother they wanted to be and the mother they experienced themselves to be. This self-discrepancy increased their struggle. Each of these mothers experienced a different set of conflicts reflecting her own notion and construction of the "good mother" (e.g., breastfeeding correctly, having a drug free delivery, being a supermother). Mauthner explained the discrepancy in their experiences as deriving from two sources; the cultural pull due to norms and values surrounding motherhood, and their actual, concrete, everyday experiences. During depressive episodes, these women found it difficult to let go of their images and ideals of motherhood and tried to live up to them to avoid being labeled bad mothers. Mauthner found that the impact of the cultural pressures to be good mothers was mediated by their interpersonal context. In other words, if their relationships supported and promoted the cultural myths, mothers were more likely to feel depressed. Moreover, negative spousal relationships made them feel inadequate because the lack of support left them alone in their attempt to 'do it all' for their babies.

In her conclusion, Mauthner (1999) discussed agency and resistance as possibilities for mothers. She explained that mothers are not passive victims of social discourses because she found that the women in her study were actively struggling with themselves, the people, and the social world around them. This struggle of resistance was more successful for those mothers
whose expectations of themselves as mothers were not unrealistic and who were able to let go of some societal standards. For example, some women resisted by modifying their picture of the good mother into a more realistic one that did not lead to heightened internal conflict.

Mauthner’s discussion suggested that mothers may resist by modifying their views of the good mother. This point has implications for the present study because it suggests one possible way in which mothers may resist – by changing their definitions about their roles as mothers.

Mauthner (1999), like Stoppard (2000), contributes to our understanding of how discourse impacts the experience of mothers. Her analysis suggests that contextual factors can affect our experiences and perceptions of our surroundings and of ourselves and it reveals the presence of dominant discourses in the lives of new mothers. Mauthner’s analysis acknowledges agency and resistance as important factors in mothers’ struggles to make sense of their experiences as mothers. She conceptualizes this resistance as a struggle to make meaning of various contradictory discourses and to women’s situation. Other researchers have also explored how contradictions in the dominant discourses impact maternal experience.

Two qualitative studies were conducted to investigate the pressures that mothers experience as a result of the contradictions between opposing social discourses such as the dominant discourses on mothers and the working/professional woman (Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1999). Ranson (1999) conducted a secondary data analysis of interviews that had been conducted for a study on the educational choices and occupational experiences of university women. She was interested in identifying what organizes mother’s conversations and what effect this has on what they do as mothers. Out of the original 45 women in the first study, 24 were mothers. Ranson focused on 9 mothers: 3 who worked full time, 3 who worked part-time, and 3 who were home-based, White, and had University degrees. Ranson did not report the ages
of her participants. All of the women in her study held the belief that the best care for children should be done exclusively by the mother. These mothers made great efforts to balance paid employment and time with their children and felt compelled to live by the full-time mother discourse. Ranson found that these mothers were rarely able to live up to the standard of the full-time mother because even those mothers who were home full-time, did not spend all of their time caring for, or attending to, their children. Ranson reported that for these full-time mothers, the discourse served to structure and organize their day in a particular way by dictating that they fit other activities or housework around the needs of their children. She suggests that some mothers are forced to live within these contradictions when they want to be identified as full time mothers even when their lived experiences speak to the contrary. Similar to Garey (1989) who found that some nurses work the night shift to maintain their identities as stay at home moms, Ranson found that women struggle to make sense of the contradictions between their experiences and the cultural expectations placed upon them.

Ranson’s (1999) study makes an important contribution by providing evidence that mothers aspire to live up to the discourse of the full-time mother. Regardless of their employment status, the women in her study felt that they must aspire to be with their children all the time and to schedule their lives around them. They only differed in how much flexibility they had in terms of being able to be home and in how “balanced” they felt their lives were (p. 161). Balance here referred to the balance between pursuing employment/career and raising their children. These women felt that they were obligated to provide their exclusive love and attention to their children at all times.

One limitation of this research is that Ranson did not describe the criteria she used to chose these 9 women from her original study. This methodological factor may have impacted
her findings. Another limitation is that she failed to describe how she conducted her analysis. It is not clear how she identified the themes she reports in her article. These limitations make it difficult to assess her findings and conclusions. Finally, Ranson analyzed interview data that were collected for a different study. This limits the usefulness of her findings because the secondary analysis that was aimed at answering a particular research question was not conducted on data collected for that purpose. Nevertheless, her results reveal that women will endeavour to maintain identities that comply with the dominant discourse on mothering by attempting to preserve their images as full-time mothers.

Hays (1996) also explored the contradictions of motherhood present in two opposing discourses: the mother discourse and the discourse of self-interested gain. In order to understand the bases for these contradictions, Hays drew on three sources of data. She analyzed the history of childrearing, conducted a textual analysis of the best-selling contemporary child-rearing manuals, and interviewed 38 mothers of children between the ages of 2 and 4. Hays found that both working and stay-at-home mothers shared a strong commitment to the ideology of intensive mothering. They experienced the pushes and pulls of a no-win situation. If a mother stayed home with her children in order to live up to the discourse, she was then treated as an outsider of the public realm. If a mother pursued paid employment, she paid the price of a double burden when she returned home to fulfill the demands of the mothering discourse. In both cases, mothers were pressured “to maintain the logic of intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996, p. 149). Hays explained that the complex strategies these mothers developed to manage the contradictions in their lives emphasized the emotional, cognitive, and physical consequences that these women experienced. Hays found that these women experienced strain because they were constantly making efforts to live by the ideology of intensive mothering.
Hays' (1996) study reveals that the experience of mothers is largely influenced by the cultural myths contained in the dominant discourse. She suggests that mothers are ultimately committed to the tenets of the ideology of intensive mothering. She explains that:

There are significant differences among mothers – ranging from individual differences to more systematic differences of class, race, and employment. But in the present context, what is most significant is the commitment to the ideology of intensive mothering that women share in spite of their differences. (p. 150)

However, some mothers question the dominant myths and are making different choices by constructing their lives and views differently (Gordon, 1990). Hays (1996) did not explore resistance on the part of mothers and how some of them may construct their identities and experiences differently. She suggested that middle-class mothers could be in the vanguard of transforming ideas about child rearing because they have more to gain from a change in the dominant ideology of intensive mothering. For example, these mothers are committed to their careers and the dominant ideology tends to interfere with their career paths.

Thus, it is apparent that the dominant discourse on mothering impacts the lives of mothers in many ways. Many mothers experience guilt (Eyer, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002), and depression (Mauthner, 1999; Stoppard, 2000). Moreover, mothers strain to maintain a close physical presence to their children and to their status as full-time mothers (Ranson, 1999) and feel pressured to live by the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996).

This sampling of the literature suggests that mothers experience both positive and negative consequences as a result of the influence of the dominant discourse on their lives and that mothers may be able to decrease or eliminate the impact of negative consequences if they draw on alternative discourses. There is some evidence that there are mothers (women who have been exposed to the Western dominant discourse on mothering) who hold beliefs and values that
differ from the current dominant discourse and whose practices as mothers are not always in accordance with those promoted by such discourse (Gordon, 1990). Furthermore, there is a paucity of empirical data that has explored the consequences of resistance on the lives of mothers. It is possible that resistance leads to unique consequences for mothers. Therefore, by exploring the experience of women who resist the dominant discourse I endeavoured to uncover some of these consequences.

Resistance by mothers. Although the literature on resistance to the current dominant discourse on mothering is limited, there are a handful of studies that explore resistance by mothers. In this section, I discuss how some mothers are able to engage in a process of resistance. These studies directly inform the present study and are, therefore, critiqued more in depth. Three studies illustrate how resistance is employed by mothers who reject being labeled bad mothers, or by mothers who define mothering in alternative ways (Croghan & Miell, 1998; Gordon, 1990; Little, 1999). Only one study (Gordon, 1990) explored resistance to dominant discourses on the part of mothers. I have included other research that illustrates how mothers engage in a process of resistance to discourses but not necessarily the dominant discourse on mothering.

The first study explored how mothers, who have been labeled as problem mothers by welfare professionals, resist these definitions of themselves and how they position themselves within existing frameworks of good mothering in order to gain the right to be heard (Croghan & Miell, 1998). The authors defined resistance as “a form of identity work in which individuals make use of the discursive resources available to them while at the same time positioning themselves in ways that represent the least risk in terms of challenges to existing systems of knowledge and belief” (p. 449).
Croghan and Miell (1998) used interview data from a previous study that explored the experiences of women who had suffered childhood abuse. Out of the original 53 participants, they selected 44 who were mothers and who were in the welfare system. Croghan and Miell conducted a discourse analysis of the interview data. Their analysis focused on: "(a) The extent to which the women engaged with or resisted professional definitions of their mothering; (b) the strategies which they used to resist the imputation of 'poor' mothering, and (c) the way in which the features of 'good' and 'bad' mothers were constructed within the accounts, and the extent to which the mothers drew on existing representations of 'normal' mothering" (p. 450). The mothers' resistance involved an effort to construct and maintain a maternal identity that was within the dominant discourse.

The women's accounts revealed the limited options available to them in their efforts to deal with the welfare system. In this study, mothers employed resistance and positioned themselves within existing discourses of good mothering to challenge the label of problem mother (Croghan & Miell, 1998). In other words, they provided alternative explanations to the labels of 'bad mother' to argue that they were 'good mothers.' The authors found that these women not only described times when they were good mothers but drew attention to social and material circumstances that had prevented them from parenting successfully. These women pointed to the stress of mothering in conditions of disadvantage and how this was overlooked by the professionals who labeled them. For example, one woman described how living with a drunk husband made it difficult to be a good mother because it was hard to protect her child from the impact he had on her.

The authors also found that some women resisted professional definitions of mothering by pointing to the lack of financial stability and resources needed to provide the best care for
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their children or by pointing to psychological issues. For example, playgroups for their children were inaccessible unless they were “falling apart” (p. 452). Others explained how social workers “punish” (p. 453) them for having been disadvantaged in their childhood and how they believe social workers are not helpful but hurtful. Furthermore, others suggested that their own backgrounds of childhood abuse had had long term damaging effects on their ability to relate to their children.

Croghan and Miell’s (1990) study called attention to the power of dominant discourses and how mothers construct their realities to reconcile their identities with it. The authors concluded:

While these strategies were functional for the women involved, in that they provided ways in which they could parry the assault upon their self-esteem associated with the interference that they were ‘bad mothers’, they were also problematic in terms of the women’s ability to secure meaningful support (p. 461).

They also argued that these women resisted in order to safeguard their identities as good mothers and suggested that feminist approaches to social work practice may be most suited to work with this population because they take into consideration women’s oppression within the family. The authors did not mention the possibility of resistance to the dominant discourse as another way in which these women can dispute the labels of bad mothers. The professionals labeled these women as bad mothers based on the expectations set forth by the dominant discourse.

Several limitations are worth noting. Although the authors explained that they focused their analysis on instances of resistance, strategies that the participants used for this purpose, and the constructions they used of the concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothers, they failed to describe the method they used in order to identify these factors. Second, the researchers carried out a secondary analysis of data collected for a different purpose (i.e., how women who have suffered
childhood abuse and/or a breakdown in their families view their experiences). It is very possible that this sample may present characteristics that are not present in other groups. For example, women who are from more privileged backgrounds may have access to legal advice, professional counselling, or paid childcare. Finally, the authors did not discuss the ages and ethnic background of the participants limiting our ability to evaluate the transferability of their findings to other settings or populations.

Similar to Croghan and Miell (1990), Little (1999) explored the effect of dependency discourse in a welfare-to-work program in the United States. She identified how staff and welfare clients (mothers) manipulated the discourse, creating space for resistance. Little did not provide a clear definition of resistance but she explained that resistance relates to the production of an alternative power laden discourse to the discourses promoted by those who hold social power. She explained that dependency discourse posits that being independent economically is more desirable than depending on the state. Dependency is likened with weak, disreputable, colored, and/or female characteristics; whereas independence relates to strong, virtuous, White, and male characteristics. The study involved participant observation in a state-agency-run vocational course that assisted and directed clients in vocational planning. Her sample included clients and staff from this agency. The clients were Latina and African American women who were single mothers on assistance. The staff also included Latina and African American women. Little did not clarify how many women in total participated in her study.

The author organized her findings into three categories: “others” are the real dependents; “there are no jobs for us;” and “mothering is work” (Little, 1999). The participants rejected the label of dependent by pointing to others who were the “real” dependents such as men who have no children to take care of, or women who continue to have more children to claim more money
(i.e., downward comparison). They resisted also by pointing to failed family supports and/or failed labour as the reasons that pushed them into asking for assistance. This argument, according to Little, draws on the gender discourse that posits that a mother belongs at home with her children. Little’s analysis suggests that the mothers in this study drew on a liberal feminist discourse to explain that they saw themselves as independent because they were not under the control of a man. The participants resisted the label of dependency by explaining that there are no jobs available to them. As minority women, they had experienced discrimination and found it difficult to access employment. Finally, the women in this study drew on the mothering discourse that says that a mother must be the main caregiver of her children. Thus, their decision to stay home with their children was viewed as a responsible choice because mothers who are not dedicated to their children and let them run around are considered irresponsible. Little explained that in asserting the primacy of mothering, these women use gender discourse to resist state requirements because a mother’s work is to take care of her children (p. 184). The author concluded that:

These women draw from various cultural meanings that make sense of their situations while not explicitly rejecting the dominant discourse of dependency. It is reframing and subversion of hegemonic discourse, one in which new lines of demarcation are drawn. (p. 179)

Little’s (1999) study reflected how minority mothers may challenge one discourse by drawing on other discourses. One shortcoming of the article was that the author does not explain what she means by nonparticipant observation. Even though this methodology is common, I can not assume that I know how she carried out her study, or how she collected, recorded, or analyzed the data. Furthermore, Little did not describe the ages of her participants or of their children so that the reader is unable to acquire a full understanding of who participated.
Nevertheless, Little’s study suggests how resistance to discourses can occur by drawing on other discourses.

Both Croghan and Miell (1990) and Little’s (1999) studies have implications for the present study because they suggest that resistance is possible, that the process of resistance can involve the inclusion of other discourses, that the process of resistance may be present in many social interactions, and that under certain social pressures, women will find ways to resist in order to strengthen their sense of identity or their place in society as ‘good mothers.’ Therefore, one can conclude that if women who are labeled under the discourses of ‘the bad mother’ or ‘dependency’ engage in resistance, then other women may resist other discourses, including the dominant discourse on mothering. In the present study, I investigate how mothers resist the dominant discourse on mothering and what the meaning and experience of resistance is for them. Gordon’s (1990) study, discussed below, illustrates how some women indeed resist the current dominant discourse on mothering.

The final study reviewed in this chapter investigated resistance by mothers who considered themselves feminist. It investigated what happens when women who hold an alternative ideology live their lives within a society that promotes the institution of motherhood (Gordon, 1990). Gordon (1990) interviewed 52 feminist mothers in order to explore how women construct their lives within the norms and structures of society when they hold alternative ideologies and theories. Most of her participants were in their 30s but the youngest was 24 and the oldest a grandmother. Their children ranged in age from 2 months to adulthood. Eighteen of the women were married, 17 had partners, 17 were single parents, 9 were lesbians, 3 were bisexual, and 1 was a woman-oriented celibate. Her method included interviews that were transcribed and analyzed in order to identify themes. She carried out a grounded theory analysis.
She explained “the interviews were read and recorded in various ways, so that new themes and issues embedded in them could emerge” (p. 6).

Some of the themes Gordon (1990) identified include the decision to have children, the positive aspects of motherhood, motherhood as responsibility, motherhood as obliteration, being at home, being with children, motherhood as social, work and careers, children and partners, guilt, pain, public motherhood, and anti-sexist childrearing. Gordon found that many of the mothers she interviewed were aware that they carry the social burden and responsibility in a social, material, and cultural environment that does not privilege mothers or their children, and in a world that is centred around production, not reproduction. The guilt that many of these mothers experienced was related to their concerns about the world in which their children were growing up and their feelings of powerlessness about wanting to change the world. Many women experienced guilt about their many roles and how these divert their attention from their children.

Gordon (1990) found that many of her participants experienced motherhood in positive terms. For example, they experienced motherhood as growth and as a new dimension in life. They did experience some confusion about liking motherhood because certain feminists may have been critical of them. Being responsible for their children was, for the most part, viewed as a positive experience for many of Gordon’s participants.

Although seeing children as central in their lives, these women experienced frustration in terms of the limits that motherhood imposed on their independence, self-determination, freedom, and space. Gordon also found that her participants engaged in a dialectic process by questioning the choices they made relating to paid employment and home. For example, many of the women in this study differentiated spending time with their children from the frustrations of being at
home. Gordon explained that "having a feminist orientation meant that [these] women could perceive, analyze, and criticize the social construction of motherhood. But such awareness does not necessarily make the search for and development of alternatives much easier" (p. 62). In other words, the women in this study were aware of the social pressures placed upon them but still struggled to live by their alternative choices. Many agreed that communal living, where not one but many mothers were involved in the upbringing of the children, would be ideal. At the same time, many found that it was difficult to create such a community within our present social structures.

Another interesting finding in this study was that these women were interested in work but not in careers. It appears that they were also resisting the discourse on 'success and the career woman.' Gordon explained that "they have vocations not careers" (p. 71). Their work was important to them because of its intrinsic value and not because it would lead to a career. Given that they cared about their employment, good childcare was very important to them and they complained about the lack of government support for childcare. These women viewed themselves as strong, as being able to achieve their goals, and not as victims. At the same time, they had a sense of moral ambiguity related to their alternative views about women and mothers. For example, they experienced some guilt when taking care of their own needs, but believed that if they did not attend to their needs they would be irritated around their children. In sum, the women in Gordon's study engaged in a process of resistance that created ambivalence and confusion in their lives as well as space for different meanings and actions.

Even though these women identified themselves as feminists, they were, in some instances, still experiencing the pushes and pulls of intensive mothering (e.g., guilt, ambivalence; Hays, 1996). However, Gordon (1990) found that the guilt and pain they experienced mobilized
them to work towards changing their lives and the world. Although Gordon addressed anti-sexist childrearing and described how these women made an effort to raise children who were not bound by sex-roles and sexist stereotypes, she did not discuss how the ‘children’ discourse influences the way these women organized their lives. These women were aware that the dominant discourse on mothering places sole responsibility on mothers, yet some of them still struggled in allowing others to take care of their children. Gordon suggested that these mothers were trying to integrate several dimensions into the way in which they construct their lives.

What was different about this study is that it was based on the accounts of women who were aware of societal expectations and influences and who were striving to counteract them through a variety of strategies.

Gordon’s study (1990) tells the story of some women who hold different ideologies from the dominant ones. The study described the thoughts, beliefs, and practices of a group of mothers who are aware of the social restrictions placed upon them by patriarchal and material structures. However, there are some important limitations to her study. She did not address specific issues that may be unique and different to each of the groupings in her sample (e.g., single mothers vs. partnered mothers, heterosexual vs. homosexual, or bisexual mothers, and so on). Second, Gordon did not describe the criteria she used in selecting her participants. She only mentioned that they had to view themselves as feminist. This appears to be vague and can affect the way each of the women interpreted her questions. Moreover, it would have been useful for her to explore the discourses on children that influenced these women’s choices. Finally, the author did not address how the confusion and strain that her participants experienced may have been related to the contradictions between the feminist discourse and the dominant discourses.
Notwithstanding these limitations, Gordon's (1990) study is an important contribution to our understanding of women who resist the current dominant discourse. Her results indicate that some mothers are in a process of resisting the social institution of motherhood. Her findings suggest that mothers can hold beliefs that are not in agreement with those promoted by the dominant discourse on mothers. Gordon alerts us to the possibility that the process of resistance entails making different choices about how one wants to practice mothering. Because her study used feminism as the framework to identify the participants, mothers who may not view themselves as feminist but who may be resisting the institution of motherhood were excluded. In the present study, I focus on mothers who identified themselves as mothering in ways that differ from those promoted by the discourse but who may or may not have considered themselves feminist (i.e., they had some awareness about wanting to depart from what is expected of them by society).

I reviewed three studies that explored the process of resistance, which shed some light as to how the process of resistance occurs and how mothers may experience it. The study by Gordon (1990) provided many clues as to how some women who resist and who consider themselves feminist experience mothering in their lives. In the present study, I expand our knowledge of the process of resistance by focusing on mothers who may not consider themselves feminist, by exploring the consequences of resistance, the personal and social contexts that interact in order for resistance to occur, and by revealing the current dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices that appear to be part of their experiences.

**Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have presented relevant literature that provides the context for the research questions by locating the study within the framework of discourse theory (Foucault,
Discourses are tacit rules that regulate practices and are socially and historically specific. Although the theoretical literature (e.g., Cooper, 1994) reveals that women can exercise power and agency in a process of resistance, empirical literature on mothers’ resistance to the dominant discourse is limited. In the present study, I investigate the experience of mothers who exercise their agentic power by engaging in alternative mothering practices; that is, they resist the dominant discourse on mothering.

Given that the literature on mothers’ resistance is limited and that we do not yet know the types of alternative discourses mothers ascribe to, and how ascribing to these discourses affects women’s experiences, one goal of the present study is to identify the various discourses present in the stories of mothers’ who resist. Furthermore, the literature to date has not explored how women who resist construct meaning out of their experience. By examining the participants’ stories of their resistance, I aimed at uncovering how they construct meaning out of their experiences as mothers. I also sought to explore the participants’ personal contexts as well as the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which their experiences are grounded.

An examination of the current Western dominant discourse on mothering revealed that the ideal of motherhood was unattainable and out of reach for most women (Arnup, 1994; Chodorow & Contratto, 1992; Thurer, 1994). Given the impossibility of attaining the ideal, women struggle to find alternative ways of mothering and living their lives. Therefore, in the present study, I endeavoured to identify these alternative choices and the experience and meaning of mothering for women who resist the dominant discourse on mothering. Moreover, the literature revealed that there is no one right way to mother, and that women in other cultures or historical periods have mothered and continue to mother in ways that differ from the Western
dominant discourse on mothering. Therefore, my goal was to explore how some women experience mothering when they practice mothering in ways that depart from the dominant discourse on mothering. A second aim was to identify the personal contexts and the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices within which their experiences are grounded.

Based on the literature (Boulton, 1983; Garey, 1995; Gilbert et al., 1981; McMahon, 1995) we know that the experience of women who ascribe to the dominant discourse often involves role strain, frustration, isolation, lack of fulfillment, or not always enjoying mothering. However, we know little about the experience of women who resist the dominant discourse on mothering. To fill this gap in the literature, I examined the experience of mothers who resist in order to not only reveal their experience but also to explore the possible consequences of resistance in the lives of mothers.

Finally, Croghan and Miell (1990), Little (1999), and Gordon’s (1999) studies revealed that given certain social pressures, mothers will resist discourses that may be oppressive toward them. None of these studies explored resistance to the dominant discourse by mothers who did not consider themselves feminist. In the present study, I include mothers who did not self-identify as feminist. Moreover, Gordon’s study did not explicitly explore the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices that may have influenced her participants, nor did she identify specific discourses present in her participants’ interviews. In the present study, I attempt to expand our understanding of this population by including an analysis of discourses and discursive practices.

In conclusion, my goal was to examine the personal meaning and experience of motherhood for mothers who are in a process of resistance to the current dominant discourse on mothering. Their stories are important because they may reveal alternative discourses and
constructions of mothering that may help some mothers to resist those aspects of the dominant discourse that limit their experience. My aim was to discover the strategies and beliefs about motherhood, children, and society that guided their practices as mothers, and how they interact with a society that counters their efforts. It is possible that within these restrictions and limitations, mothers may ease some of the guilt, stress, and struggle by resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering. It is also possible that the process of resistance to dominant discourses creates other consequences for mothers.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

If the unity and uniqueness of the self is achieved through the process of narrativity and if one conceives of one’s own particular existence as a special story and not as a physical or mental thing, then the more adequate, hermeneutically oriented research tools will be needed to study personal identity. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 151)

This study was aimed at exploring the meaning and experience of mothering for women who are actively resisting the dominant discourse on mothering, and to identify the personal contexts as well as dominant and alternative discourses in which their experiences of mothering are grounded. A qualitative method was used to explore how the participants understand their experiences of mothering in everyday life (Sarbin, 1986). A critical interpretive approach grounded in critical theory and hermeneutics guided the interpretation of the data (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Martin, 2002; Packer & Addison, 1989a). The present chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the methodology and the procedures of data collection and analysis.

Framework

A critical interpretive approach recognizes that psychological phenomena are interpretive in that humans, including researchers, inevitably attribute significance and personal meaning to their experiences as they attempt to understand them (Polkinghorne, 1991). The strength of this type of research lies in its consideration of the context and the setting of the focal phenomenon, and its search for a profound understanding of the participants’ lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). To understand human psychology we must consider behaviours or experiences within the sociocultural and historical contexts in which they occur (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). For example, to understand what it is like to be a mother who resists the dominant discourse is also to understand the sociocultural forces that help to create, support, and
complicate her experiences. Critical theory, hermeneutics, and social history provide the philosophical and methodological frameworks for addressing the research questions: (a) What is the personal meaning and experience of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current dominant sociocultural discourse on mothers?, (b) How are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants' personal contexts as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices?

Critical Theory

The present study is grounded in a critical theory framework. This approach is based on the theoretical tradition of the Frankfurt School of theorists who developed an approach to cultural criticism (Habermas, 1992). Critical social theory focuses on issues of power and justice and "the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). This theory provides the underpinnings for this study because it posits that rather than only reporting the participants' experiences as themes, a critical interpretive researcher must engage in an exploration of the social forces that inform, influence, and affect human experience. The ultimate goal is that of exposing the "silent" or covert social currents that impose control over the lives of individual members of society. Critical theory encourages the analysis of competing power interests between groups and individuals in order to "uncover the winners and losers in particular social arrangements and the processes by which such power plays operate" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). Critical theory seeks to understand the ways in which power operates to dominate and mold consciousness. For instance, those members of society who hold the highest levels of power shape the discourses that are dominant. These dominant discourses, in turn, shape our collective vision of truth. The
The purpose of most critical theory research is to bring about more just, democratic, and egalitarian societies by developing a cultural criticism that reveals power dynamics in social and cultural discourses. It is aimed at the empowerment of individuals. The present study challenges some of the dominant discourses that promote stereotypes of mothers by pointing to the resistance of mothers who are activists, analytical thinkers, questioners, and active agents in their own lives. It also points to the power that society and the dominant discourse exert on mothers, which limits their ability to emancipate themselves in order to live their lives as they might wish. According to critical theory, "domination limits self-direction and democratic community building, whereas emancipation enables them" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 290).

A very important aspect of critical theory-informed qualitative research is its focus on the interpretation of information or hermeneutics (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Hermeneutics explores the context within which the phenomena under study occurs and reveals the meanings and possibilities available to the research participants. This type of inquiry does not follow a step-by-step approach, but rather suggests that researchers should grapple with the text (or social, interactive context as text dialogue) and explore the contextual dynamics within which the text exists. In other words, the purpose of hermeneutic analysis is to engage in a form of cultural criticism that reveals power dynamics within social and cultural contexts (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). This method contributes to our understanding of the individual in the context of the social and psychological forces that shape him or her. Finally, in the tradition of the ‘personal as political,’ hermeneutic researchers endeavour to connect the everyday problems that individuals face to public issues of power, justice, and democracy.
Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics refers to the art and science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting texts and other cultural artifacts such as art, literature, history, and narratives (Hein & Austin, 2001). Hermeneutics originated with the interpretation of biblical texts for the purpose of identifying subtle or hidden messages. Current psychological hermeneutic inquiry is concerned with the study of human phenomena by treating human experience as semantic and textual structures (Hein & Austin, 2001). This type of research is based on the assumption that interpretation is essential to the existence of humanity because human beings are embedded in cultural and social interactions that require such interpretation (Packer & Addison, 1989a). This interpretive practice is not only related to our everyday action and sense of who we are, but also to the process of research where researchers engage in all sorts of interpretive processes (Packer & Addison, 1989a). Hermeneutics is concerned with our way of being in the world and our actions and interactions as we move through our life in a specific sociocultural context. It advances our understanding of a certain phenomenon by exploring human activity in sociocultural and historical context (e.g., institutions, histories, accounts, records, texts, stories, and lives) (Packer & Addison, 1989a). Hermeneutics posits that people both constitute and are constituted by their sociocultural context. Interpretive research attempts to understand this ongoing process of interactivity.

According to Martin and Sugarman (2001) interpretation always begins with concerned engagement, “What is crucial to interpretive inquiry is to uncover focal phenomena in ways that they can be dealt with, not as timeless, universal essences, but according to the perspective assumed in the inquiry” (p. 202). Hermeneutic inquiry is interested in advancing understanding in a manner that is grounded contextually in a larger understanding of the social forces that
influence the phenomenon under study. In other words, a good interpretation does not provide us with general or universal truths or validations but with an answer to the concern that motivated the inquiry (Packer & Addison, 1989b).

Rather than distancing oneself from previous assumptions and pre-understandings, the hermeneutic researcher endeavours to make use of her situatedness in the social context that she shares with her research participants as a means to enter the hermeneutic circle (Martin, 2002). A researcher can only understand someone’s personal meaning by placing it within its larger context in a circular analysis that involves tacking back and forth between the object of study and the researcher’s preunderstandings and his or her familiarity of the context within which they both live. At the most basic level, the hermeneutic circle creates a tacking back and forth between the full text and its parts in such a way that the whole text informs the interpretation of its parts and vice-versa (Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argyris, 1989).

Interpretation always stems from the interpreter’s everyday, common understanding of what is going on. Unless a focal phenomenon is completely alien to us, we usually have some preliminary understanding of what it is, and what may happen to it. Hermeneutic researchers suggest that “hermeneutic inquiry depends on our ability to recognize that our ‘truths’ are made possible by a shared background” (Martin & Sugarman, 2001, p. 197). In the process of interpretation, practical knowledge is the starting place and this understanding undergoes corrections and modifications (Packer & Addison, 1989a). Heidegger (1962) proposed that there is circularity to understanding, which refers to the fact that we understand in terms of what we already know (Packer & Addison, 1989a). This circularity is not ‘vicious,’ however. It is not there to confirm our prejudices but it involves both the use of, and constant revision to, one's constantly unfolding understanding. When we hear other people’s narratives, we attach meaning
to their stories through the linguistic and relational processes with which we are familiar due to the construction of our own narratives. According to Polkinghorne (1988), this type of understanding, which involves hearing the meaning of a story, is called hermeneutic understanding. Human existence unfolds through a hermeneutic structure that is sustained by our caring about our own lives (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). Gadamer (1994) expanded on Heidegger's hermeneutics by exploring how our background of historically mediated pre-understandings is directly linked to our understanding and interpretation of our context and experiences. Martin and Sugarman (2001) suggest that “it is through this background that we identify things, pose questions, and know what kinds of answers make sense” (p. 196). It is through this process of interpretation that human beings exercise agency.

Interpretive inquiry posits that there are a series of vantagepoints, or horizons, from which one can study a phenomenon (Gadamer, 1994). Understanding occurs when various horizons intercept. The assumption here is that there are many possible perspectives on a phenomenon so that a full understanding is not possible. In sum, the inquiry is circular, there is no possible final analysis (Cushman, 1995; Hein & Austin, 2001).

Martin and Sugarman (2001) posit that psychological being grows out of its sociocultural context but it is not solely determined by it (2001). Human beings are embedded in certain sociocultural contexts that promote particular forms of personhood or identity. Because human beings are self interpreting beings who care about their own lives, their context may influence their actions and experiences but it does not constrain and determine them completely (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). In other words, subjectivity is influenced by its sociocultural context and practices but it also has the potential to influence those same contexts and practices. Hermeneutic inquiry seeks to engage in the ongoing process of interpretation that acknowledges and includes
insights and pre-understandings in a dynamic interpretive process that challenges "our existing understanding, even as it makes use of it" (Martin & Sugarman, 2001, p. 197).

Hermeneutic understanding uses certain processes such as analogy and pattern recognition in order to uncover the meaning of linguistic messages (Polkinghorne, 1988). Following the hermeneutic tradition, in this study, I engaged in an interpretive analysis of the interview data. The study aimed not only at uncovering the meaning and experience of mothering for women who are resisting the dominant discourse on mothering, but also at exploring the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which their experiences are grounded. In order to achieve these goals, a hermeneutic, critical interpretive method was useful because this type of method allows the researcher to examine the data by tacking back and forth between the themes found in the participants’ stories and the researcher’s understanding of the context within which they occur (e.g., current discourses, practices, and so on). This circular, critical analysis may enhance our understanding of how resistance is experienced by a group of mothers and how the historical socio-cultural context within which they live enhances or limits their ability to resist.

Social History

Any social phenomenon must be understood in its historical context. To grasp historical information, one must have a point of view, including an interpretive framework that includes some notion of the meaning of history (Tuchman, 1989, p. 306).

All that we consider as normal, ideal, or true is a product of both historical and contemporary processes (Cushman, 1995; Gleason, 1999; Tuchman, 1989). The task of the critical interpretive researcher is to explore the multifaceted meanings of social phenomena, including an analysis of how they interact with one another. In order to understand a phenomenon, one needs some background in the relevant historical period. The story of lived
experience posits that we all live history as "we live out the assumptions of our époque in the most mundane aspects of our daily lives" (Tuchman, 1989, p. 313).

Interpretive history is an analysis of how various aspects of the social fabric are connected and how they politically reinforce, reproduce, collude with, resist, and reshape one another (Cushman, 1995). This type of analysis allows us to understand how the foundation of our social discourses is constructed and how it influences social life. The interpretive history approach is committed to a consideration of the lived context of those one is studying. Part of the contribution of this approach is that it views the self as a construction of the era in which it exists. Social history theorists encourage the exploration of how discourses influence the participants' construction of their identity by placing this identity construction into its larger historical context (Freund & Quilci, 1995). For example, when a mother describes herself as a "good mother" she may be drawing from the historically specific myth that mothers should always be good and sacrificial. It is important to engage in an analysis of relevant current and past historical contexts in order to explain how the factors that are present today influence this woman's experience. This is vital because the present study is not descriptive but interpretive. It aims to interpret the experiences of resisting mothers, and to uncover possible dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices that have influenced their resistance and experience.

In the present study, I endeavoured to locate the participants' experiences and narratives in the present historical context in which they occur by identifying the discourses and subject positions that were present in their narratives. Thus, this analysis may enhance our understanding of the contemporary idea of what it means to be a mother, and challenge the idea that there is one natural, proper way to mother.
Research Design

Pre-understandings

Hermeneutic inquiry recognizes that interpretation utilizes the interpreter's everyday, common understandings of the phenomenon under study (Packer & Addison, 1989a). In addition, this type of investigation emphasizes that a researcher must acknowledge and make explicit the assumptions and perspectives that he or she brings to the investigation. Hermeneutics recognizes that it is very difficult for a researcher to bracket or ignore his or her implicit assumptions and perspectives, so making them explicit is essential. Therefore, in the following section I describe my pre-understandings and presuppositions about mothering in terms of my personal experience and standpoint, and theory.

Personal experience and standpoint. My research and clinical expertise is in the area of family counselling/research, particularly mothers. My M.A. thesis was focused on the experience of remarried mothers and was entitled “Mothers in Stepfather Families” (Horwitz, 1998). I have been involved in clinical practice for the past 15 years and a large portion of my clientele has been mothers. I have been a parent educator for the past 13 years. I am a mother of two girls, ages 17 and 13. As a mother, I have struggled to keep up with the social expectations placed on me to be a ‘perfect’ mother. More recently, influenced by my academic studies, I have been rethinking and re-negotiating my role in my daughters’ lives and my responsibilities not only toward them but to myself. I am aware that my own experience as a clinician and mother are part of what I bring to this study. As a qualitative researcher and human being, I know that my experiences are possibly, but not certainly, the experiences of others. This awareness forms part of the hermeneutic circle and influences and was influenced by my analysis.
Theory: Knowledge of the field of motherhood as a subject of study. The second aspect of the perspective that I bring to the present study is my knowledge of the psychological, sociological, historical, and popular literature on the subject of motherhood and mothering. My knowledge of the subject is present throughout this manuscript and it is important to note that this in-depth knowledge has guided me in developing the research questions, selecting the methodology, and choosing the framework for the study. Moreover, I endeavoured to attend to how my presence affected the data collection so that I could note how my presuppositions and preunderstandings entered the hermeneutic circle. Below, I describe presuppositions that I have developed as a result of my knowledge of the relevant literature on motherhood.

The first presupposition addresses the place of mothers in the current sociocultural context. I believe that maternal experience is strongly influenced by the context within which mothers reside. For example, a mother can have the best intentions to be kind and caring toward her children. Nonetheless, if she is on income assistance and struggling to pay her bills while she has no partner and no other social supports, she may find herself yelling at her children or without the patience to be a “supportive” mother. A mother in this scenario is often perceived as a bad mother (Croghan & Miell, 1988; Little, 1999). Western society at present does not take into consideration the context when evaluating a mother’s performance as a parent. Mothers are expected to perform perfectly regardless of their situation. Furthermore, the historical context is an important factor that influences beliefs and practices about mothering. For instance, mothers in the 1700s sent their infant children to be raised by wet nurses for the first 2 or 3 years of their lives. Almost 90% of babies were sent to wet nurses during that historical period in England (Hrdy, 1999; Thurer, 1994). Today this practice would be unthinkable in Canada because of the current discourses on mothering and childcare.
The second presupposition is that mothers cannot resist the discourse completely because they are embedded in a society that promotes it. For example, a mother may still feel that she must take care of all of her children's needs (dominant discourse) even when she believes that her own needs also count (alternative discourse). This may be due to the fact that most mothers in Western society do not live in communities where children are parented collectively. Modern societies have isolated families into self-sustaining units. A mother may not be able to rely on others to attend to her children's needs and, therefore, she may believe that it is all up to her. What this may mean is that women who do not want to live under the oppression of the dominant discourse, may find themselves in a constant negotiation of their beliefs, lived experiences, and the pressures of society to conform.

The third presupposition is that mothers who resist the discourse may experience different degrees or types of guilt. If a mother does not believe that she is solely responsible for how her children turn out, she may feel less guilty when something goes wrong. This presupposition follows from a deductive analysis of the literature on maternal guilt and discourse theory. If the guilt mothers feel is related to their belief in the myths of motherhood, one could argue then that those who question the myths experience less guilt or different types of guilt. An example of the latter is presented by Gordon (1990) who found that feminist mothers sometimes experience guilt because they are raising children in a world where power differentials limit people's choices and places in the world.

The fourth presupposition is that there are some women who have been able to navigate motherhood differently and who can provide others with a different picture of motherhood. I anticipate that there are various degrees to which different women resist the current dominant
discourse, and wonder what it is about them and their lives and the present historical period that has allowed them to challenge the established institution of motherhood.

Finally, the fifth presupposition is that resisting the discourse has positive outcomes for mothers. I assumed that if the discourse is oppressive and women are resisting, that they should be living lives that feel less oppressive and more emancipated.

Procedure

Participants

The present qualitative study was based on the interview data of 15 participants. Volunteer participants were recruited through flyers, word of mouth, and email lists (see Appendix A). I posted notices on the following email list-serves or websites: The Association of Research on Mothering, the Parents’ Association of the University of British Columbia, the Department of Women Studies at the University of British Columbia, and hipmamma.com. Some members on these lists forwarded the email to other women. I also posted flyers at two women’s centres in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver and at a career exploration program for young unwed mothers at the YWCA in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In order to identify the participants, a clear description of the purpose and goals of the study was provided to potential participants. The number of participants was determined after the data were saturated (for a detailed description see data analysis).

Ten participants made the first contact via email because they found out about the study through various email lists (4 from The Parents’ Association of the University of British Columbia; 3 from the Association of Research on Mothering; and 3 from hipmamma.com). Of the remaining 5, 1 found out about the study through the YWCA program, and 4 by word of mouth in the community. These last 5 contacted me via telephone. When the potential
participants offered to volunteer, I contacted them by phone and determined whether they met the recruitment criteria by asking a series of questions (see Appendix B for the recruitment protocol). The participants were mothers who considered that they practice motherhood and hold beliefs about motherhood and children that depart from the dominant beliefs about motherhood in our society. They had at least one child under the age of 13 who resides with them. I included only mothers who have at least one child who is under 13 years of age because the literature indicates that mothering is most intensive when children are young (Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995). Furthermore, the literature indicates that the needs of adolescent or adult children are qualitatively different from those of younger children (Heatherington & Park, 1986). The final criterion for inclusion was that the participants were from Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, or Hispanic countries. The literature on mothers has identified these countries as having similar views and discourses on motherhood (Boulton, 1983; Chase & Rogers, 2001; Reed, 1999). Twelve participants were Canadian, one was from the United States, and two were from Great Britain.

To determine whether the respondents met the criteria, I asked them to tell me why they thought they mother differently from the commonly dominant beliefs about motherhood. I used the word "belief" because I expected that some of the participants would not know the meaning of the word "discourse." Using the word "belief" facilitated communication. The mothers who explained that they mother in at least one way that challenges the dominant discourse on mothering were included (the number of ways in which they resisted ranged from 6 to 10). The respondents' resistance was based on the dominant discourse on mothering that has been identified in the literature (Contratto, 1984; Hays, 1994; Rich, 1986; Thurer, 1994). Once the respondents agreed to participate, a date and time were agreed upon for the first of two
interviews. Note that the participants' names were substituted with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Forty-four women made contact offering to volunteer for the study. One of these women, who lived in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver, had only been a mother for 2 months. After a brief telephone conversation, she did not think she had enough experience to share and decided not to volunteer. A second woman did not identify herself as resistant. She explained that she misunderstood the advertisement and, therefore, was not included. Two women did not return my messages after they had left an initial message showing interest. Another woman had made an appointment to meet for an interview and cancelled twice, after the second time she never contacted me again. The remaining 24 women who contacted me did not live near the Vancouver area and were not accessible to be interviewed. Women from other provinces in Canada as well as the United States offered to be interviewed. I asked them if I could contact them at a later time if my research expanded to include women who lived further away. They all agreed.

Sample Size

In order to engage in a preliminary exploration of the question under investigation, 11 participants were interviewed and their interviews were transcribed and analyzed (Ranson, 1999). To identify whether the data were saturated or whether there were other important themes that had not emerged, an additional 4 women were interviewed. Their interviews were then transcribed and analyzed. I concluded that the data were saturated and, therefore, no more participants were needed. I included all 15 interviews because each of the stories contributed rich data that added to the findings.
Data Collection

Interviews

The interview was used as a means of exploring the personal meaning and experience of the participants' resistance to the dominant discourse on mothering (Van Mannen, 1990). In an effort to discover and understand the participants' experience, I asked each participant, in a semi-structured interview, to describe their experience of mothering (Packer & Addison, 1989a; Van Mannen, 1990). I conducted all the interviews in a respectful, empathic, and trustworthy manner in order to build rapport with each participant. In creating a trusting environment, I expected that the participants would feel encouraged to share their stories.

Twelve of the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. One was conducted at a private office at the University of British Columbia, one at the participants' office, and one in a small coffee shop in Vancouver. Two interviews were conducted with 10 participants. Five participants were unable to meet for the second interview (intended to allow participants to add or modify their initial account and for clarification), so we communicated either by email or phone conversations. Before any communication via email was initiated, I asked for their permission to do so. The first interviews were audio-taped and ranged from 1 to 2 hours whereas the second interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes. Only the comments that the participants made in order to add or clarify were audio-taped from the second interview.

Prior to beginning the initial interview, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form informing them about confidentiality, of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, that their participation was voluntary, and of the possible emotional impact of their participation (see Appendix C).
A series of guiding questions were used in order to focus the interviews. It was my intention to allow the participants the freedom to provide the narratives that most represented their unique experiences. At the same time, it was of utmost importance to keep the focus of the inquiry closely related to the original purpose, therefore, I used the list of guiding questions to aid me in this process.

I began each interview by describing some of the common myths within the discourse to each participant and invited her to add any others that she was aware of:

"I thought we could start by briefly talking about those beliefs that say that mothers should be perfect. Some of the common expectations on mothers include the belief that mothers are supposed to always be around their kids. In other words, mothers don't have the right to take care of their needs or pursue what is important to them if it means not spending time with their children. Also, mothers are often blamed for what goes wrong with children. They are expected to be fulfilled by their roles as mothers and not to need anything else. Finally, mothers are not supposed to "lose it" and are always supposed to be calm and understanding toward their children. Are there any others that you can think of?"

Some participants added some additional beliefs and some said they could not think of any others. Immediately after the description of the myths, I asked the guiding questions (Appendix D). The guiding questions were not always asked in the same order and were used mainly to guide me in assisting the participants to tell their stories. At the end of each interview I also asked the participant if the interview process had upset her. Only one participant was emotional when retelling the story of her mother's death, but at the end of the interview she assured me that she felt fine.

The second interview was conducted after the initial interview was transcribed. It was during this meeting that the participants had an opportunity to add to or modify their initial accounts. A second purpose of this interview was for me to clarify any points that were unclear. Upon my arrival to the interview, I provided the participant with a series of verbatim statements
from her transcripts that summarized what she had said during the first interview (Appendix E). I asked them to read over these statements and to let me know whether the statements were accurate and whether she had anything to add or modify. Twelve of the participants had nothing to add, while the remaining 3 expanded on some of the points they had made and/or only changed the language in the summary of their interviews.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions

I transcribed each audiotaped interview verbatim into “idea units” (Chafe, 1980). Idea units are identified by listening closely to the intermittent properties of speech. These spurts of language can be recognized by paying attention to intonation, pausing, and to the words “and,” “but,” and “so.” According to Chafe, “the clause final rising or falling pitch is the single most consistent signal of what we would intuitively like to call an idea unit” (p.14). These idea units were separated by commas, and united into sentence-like equivalent propositions with each resulting proposition placed on a single line of text. The latter step was aimed at simplifying the reading of a text. Each of these propositions was numbered to facilitate later reference. Specific notations were employed in order to aid the analyses and reading of the text. Capital letters (CAPS) mark extra stress, (...) indicate pauses, utterances in parentheses alone indicate the other speaking, parentheses indicate that the words could not be identified from the audio-tape, and commas indicate grammatical pauses as well as idea units and propositions ending. Periods indicate a clause final. For example, see Appendix F for a sample of a transcription. Note that the numbers in brackets indicate the line number in the transcript.
**Analysis Part I (What is the meaning and experience of mothering for the participants?).**

Part one of the analysis was intended to uncover the meaning and experience of mothering for the participants and to the way they positioned themselves. In other words, it aimed at answering the first research question: What is the meaning and experience of mothering for women who are actively resisting the current Western dominant discourse on mothering? Table 1 summarizes the steps in the data analysis (Part I).

**First reading of the interviews.** To become immersed in the data, I carried out an in depth analysis of each of the participants’ interviews. I kept in mind the context of the interview, the individual participant, my experience of her, and so on. This was important because it provided a rich interpretive background from which to develop the analyses. My experience of each of the participants was recorded in a journal format. For example, I noted that Louise was an educated woman who had many social supports around her. She was calm and content with her life. As I engaged in the analysis of her interview, these points allowed me to have a deeper connection with her story and possibly to develop a better understanding of her experience and her circumstances. The first reading involved paying close attention to the text to gain an overall sense of the participants' experience (Brown et al., 1989; Hein & Austin, 2001) and to familiarize myself with the interview data (Brown et al., 1989). I listened to each tape closely while reading the transcriptions. I carefully attended to statements that were repetitive, specific words that indicated resistance or compliance, and statements about self and others. It was during this first reading that I identified the ways in which the participant resists the dominant discourse.

**Thematic Analysis**

**Central theme.** A second reading focused on identifying a general theme or plot, which served as a central, organizing theme for each of the interviews. This central theme was used to
Table 1

*Steps in the Data Analysis (Part I)*

- First reading of the interviews
  - Identify ways in which participant resists.

2. Thematic Analysis
   - Identify central theme (second reading of the text)
   - Identify secondary themes (third reading of the text)

3. Identify possible subject positions (fourth reading of the text)

4. Cross check of the coherence of the central theme and subject positions (fifth and sixth readings of the text)

5. Develop a narrative account of the central theme and its relations to the secondary themes and subject positions.

6. Conduct Micro-analysis
   - Possible inconsistencies and contradictions (seventh reading of the text).
   - Revision to the main theme.
organize the analysis of the interview data by asking whether the various experiences were closely related to it or not (Mishler, 1986). In order to identify this theme, I engaged in a holistic approach where I asked, what phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole (Van Mannen, 1990)? In order to identify this theme, I also asked, what aspects of this story are representative of this woman's experience of resistance? What is the essence of this experience? How can I capture the essence of what she is trying to convey by a thematic reflection (Mishler, 1986; Van Mannen, 1990)?

My task was to listen/read closely and, by way of interpretation and inference, formulate the central point of the story (Mishler, 1986). It involves reflectivity in order to uncover, to clarify, and to make explicit the structure of meaning of the experiences described by the participants (Van Mannen, 1990). Through careful interpretation and inference I formulated the central point of the story. Whether this was indeed the central point or not became apparent later when I conducted an in depth interpretive analysis where smaller selected extracts were examined in detail (Madill, in press). The purpose of the latter was to ensure, as much as possible, that the central point of the story I identified was indeed representative of the main message the participant was trying to convey.

Secondary themes. The third examination of the interview data was conducted to identify other themes (secondary themes) related to the participants' mothering experiences. Extracting additional themes was important to make sense of the stories told in each of the interviews. The purpose here was to identify the various aspects of personal perspectives that may not have been central, but to which the participant in question attached significance.

To extract secondary themes, I used a modified version of Van Mannen's (1990) highlighting approach. First, while reading the transcriptions and listening to the tapes I asked
what statements or phrases seem particularly revealing of how this woman experiences motherhood? These statements were noted by highlighting them in different colours. Particular attention was paid to repetitiveness and affective emphases. Once the entire transcription was examined, I clustered the statements into themes by grouping them. In order to formulate each theme, I identified those statements that belonged together because they conveyed the same or similar information. Repetition, affective emphasis, and meaning were useful in identifying which statements belonged under the same category. Each of these groupings became a secondary theme. The number of secondary themes for each participant ranged from two to four. An example of a secondary theme is “I believe in co-parenting so even though I am child centered, I don’t believe in being the sole caregiver. Furthermore, I believe that she needs many other people in her life.”

Subject positions. Subject positions can enhance our understanding of how the participant experiences herself within her social context and how she navigates within it. Subject positioning implies that identity is relative to the cultural meanings and the social context in which these exist. The concept of subject position is based on the view that subjectivity and identity are linguistic constructions (Davies & Harré, 1990). In other words, the acceptable cultural definitions and descriptions that are available at a certain point in history limit the identities one can take. Subject positions are social identities in which people are positioned within multiple, contradictory, and shifting discourses (Little, 1999). In other words, subject positions derive from various social discourses to form different social identities. The present study aimed at identifying the subject positions and possible discourses that acted together to form a discursive niche within which the participants’ experiences and resistance occurred. Even though the subject positions were identified in answer to the second research question and are
part of the discursive niche, I identified them in this part of the analysis because I was immersed in the data in a manner that facilitated this step in the analytical process.

In order to identify the subject positions, I reviewed the transcription and the audiotapes while asking the following questions: How does this woman see herself? What aspects of her identity has she revealed in her account? I attended particularly to components of the participants' accounts that conveyed images of self or that indirectly pointed to the identities to which they laid claim. For example, Jane repeatedly explained that many of her choices to pursue what mattered to her were based on whether these choices supported her in being a ‘good mother’: “if I don't get out there and get recharged then I can't be a good mother.” The repetitive nature of this utterance along with the rest of her story led me to identify “responsible, caring mother” as one of her subject positions. Not all subject positions, however, could be identified in such a clear, encapsulating manner. To identify some subject positions, I had to infer from the participants' accounts how they viewed themselves. Each analysis identified anywhere from two to four subject positions.

Cross check of main organizing theme and subject positions. Next, I undertook an analysis of the global level of coherence of the themes. It was important to check whether there was coherence in the central theme and each of the subject positions. Coherence here is taken to mean that parts of the story are connected together to make a unified, meaningful whole (Mishler, 1988). The global level of coherence relates to the process of finding parts of the account that exemplify or move forward the overall intent or point of the story. This process is achieved by identifying a series of statements made by the participant that support the general point made by the central theme and each of the subject positions. In order to undertake this part of the analysis, I examined the transcripts and identified statements that were representative of
each of the central themes and positions. The themes and subject positions were coded as theme A, position B, position C, and so forth. The representative statements were then numbered in order of their appearance as A1, A2, and so on. Each of the themes and positions contained more than one statement. Below is an excerpt of the cross check of the accuracy of Louise’s analysis (note that I am presenting only a sample of statements and not the totality of statements that I identified):

A. The way I mother makes sense to me, it’s true to me, and it comes from my essence. It is important that I love and care for my kids but it is equally important that I pursue and claim what matters to and benefits me (athletics, graduate school, friendships).
   A1 (105) And my athletic side of my life and competing when she was born,
   A3 (113) That I did pursue things for myself.
   A4 (114) And I knew as a competitor, it didn’t really matter if I fell.

B. Independent woman (athlete, student, community citizen, friend).
   B1 (81) And I, we just went out, did a lot of athletic things together.
   B2 (88) And ah, so, in all of that I was doing my sports.
   B3 (106) I went back to ski racing.
   B4 (122) And I was getting in the top 10, and it was looking exciting.
   B5 (132) I had done a lot of things on my own as an individual.

C. Caring, responsible mother.
   C1 (59) I am going to spend the rest of my life getting to know her.
   C2 (76) And then being with her, I got to be home with her.
   C3 (79) So it was just Molly and I.
   C4 (80) And we had a lot of fun.
   C5 (81) And I, we just went out, did a lot of athletic things together.

Even though these statements convey some meaning on their own, they each form part of the full meaning that Louise was trying to convey. Clustering these statements involved identifying statements that were connected to one another.

Written narrative account. Prior to engaging in a subsequent micro-analysis proper, I wrote a brief narrative account of the central theme and its relations to the secondary themes and the subject positions. The purpose of this process was to ensure that there was as clear a connection as possible between the main theme and the other parts of the analysis thus far. This
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narrative account included basic demographic information. The resulting narratives ranged from two to three pages in length. The following are excerpts from Aibrean's (pseudonym) narrative account (note that the numbers in parenthesis correspond to line numbers in the transcript):

Aibrean is a woman who has two children (7 and 5 months), she has been together with the father of her second child for 3 and half years. She is 27 years old and has chosen to be a ‘stay at home’ mother. The main organizing theme in her narrative is: I have experienced many pressures to do what I am ‘supposed’ to do or be, but I am a ‘questioner,’ so as a mother, I question beliefs and options, I counter the expectations, and then I make the choices that are right for me. She sees herself as someone who has never liked to follow what appears to be “fake” and has always questioned what people say is supposed to be right (583).

The second secondary theme is ‘mothers should not have to sacrifice themselves all the time, I have needs and I have wants.’ This theme relates to the main theme in that Aibrean has questioned how her mother sacrificed herself and she never pursued what she really wanted and arrived at the conclusion that she does not want to do the same.

Three subject positions were identified: The questioner, the caring responsible mother, and the self-assured woman who is who she is. In the case of the questioner, I found that this characterization by the participant is consistent with the main theme in that she described herself as always questioning what is supposed to be right, and all through her narrative she described herself as a questioner, or someone who always asks “why?” She questioned her mother as she was growing up (598), and also explained that if something is what you are supposed to do, she has always asked, “why?” (624).

Micro-analysis

In the micro-analysis, the transcript and audiotape were examined several more times to identify the aspects of the story that were inconsistent with the main theme. This step in the analysis was important because it identified inconsistencies in the participants’ accounts, it provided possible explanations for them, and then integrated these into the overall meaning of their experience by revising the main theme. In order to identify the contradictions (a contradiction here is regarded as a statement that appears to be inconsistent with the overall theme of the account), I engaged in a process of comparison between the central theme and how some specific statements appeared to be contradicting it. I maintained a list of these contradictions and provided possible explanations of how and why these inconsistencies
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contradicted the central theme. By asking, "What do I think prompted the inconsistency?" I was able to arrive at possible explanations for each of the inconsistencies. Madill (in press) suggested that we draw on our "knowledge as members" (p. 25) in conducting such analyses. In other words, as members of the same culture, we are used to making sense of textual material in every day life. Madill explained that "producing possible explanations within a discourse analysis is therefore an articulation of a sense-making process most of us are involved in every day of our lives" (p. 25). Below is an example of one inconsistency and possible explanation for it in Aibrean's account:

Main theme:
I have experienced many pressures to do what I am "supposed" to do or be. But I am a 'questioner,' so as a mother I question beliefs and options, I often counter the expectations, and then I make the choices that are right for me.

Inconsistent statements:

(220) I've had lots of moments, "OH, my God, what if I'm not a good mom?"
(302) So I mean, maybe I'm just in denial, and I don't want it to be about me if that is possible.
(323) I still do question myself sometimes (but I am just a lot better at countering it.)

These comments point to the possibility that Aibrean does experience self-doubt and that she sometimes has a difficult time countering some of the dominant expectations. It may be that because she holds the belief that she should be the best mother she can be and that children deserve the best, she encounters self-doubt.

The inconsistencies above point to possible contradictions to the main theme in that she may have not questioned these beliefs as belonging to the dominant discourses. At the same time, she believes that "...in certain ways, we all buy into myths." (932). What may be contradictory in her account is that in some of instances she may not view her beliefs/experience as part of the discourse.

Through a method of comparing and contrasting between the central theme and the inconsistencies, the main theme was revised and refined several times until no further revisions seemed necessary. At this point, I formulated the central theme that I considered was
representative of the narrative as a whole. Below is an example of how Aibrean’s main theme was revised:

1. Some of the many pressures (to do what I am ‘supposed’ to do or be) have led me to experience self-doubt. But because I am a questioner, I naturally question these pressures, I often counter them, and then make decisions that are right for me (and my family).

Here Aibrean is acknowledging the pressures as in the original main theme, but acknowledges that she does experience self-doubt at times. Furthermore, the word “often” has been added to illustrate that she does not always counter the myths, given that some of her beliefs suggest compliance to some aspects of the discourse.

Second revision:

2. I have experienced many pressures (to do what I am ‘supposed’ to do or be) and these have sometimes led me to experience self-doubt. But because I am a questioner, I naturally question these pressures, I often counter them, and then make choices that I think are right for me (and my family).

This revision is more precise because it acknowledges that she experiences self-doubt only sometimes. Furthermore, it suggests that she ‘thinks’ that her choices are right for her and her family but that she does not have a guarantee that they are.

Third revision:

3. I have experienced social pressures about what I am supposed to do or be and these have sometimes led me to experience self-doubt. But because I am a natural questioner, I question these pressures, I often counter them, and then make choices that I think are right for me (and my family).

This version of the main theme addresses that the pressures she experiences are social (myths, people’s expectations), which narrow down the scope. It also addresses the fact that she describes herself as a natural questioner, which then ties into how she is not fully responsible for all of who her children are, given that some of who she is, she believes was innate.

The revision to the main theme concluded the first part of the analysis, which provided the foundation from which the second part of the analysis was conducted. The findings in this
first part of the analysis identified the meaning and experience of mothering for each of the participants. The critical interpretive analysis that followed was aimed at identifying the discursive niche formed by dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which the participants’ experiences were grounded.

Analysis Part II (Critical Interpretive Analysis)

In order to uncover the various personal social, historical, and cultural influences on the participants’ experiences, I carried out a critical interpretive analysis (Table 2). Given that this study was not only aimed at discovering the meaning and experience of mothering for the participants but also to explore the personal context as well as the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which their experiences are grounded, I explored the elements that were present in their personal lives as well as in their social context that created a container for their experience to occur.

The different discourses from which the participants drew, along with their personal life experiences were regarded as vectors that intersect to form a niche within which a mother is able to resist (Hacking, 1998). This suggests that different kinds of phenomena, acting in different ways, result in a possible niche in which an individual’s experience may thrive. In addition, I carried out a comparison with earlier historical discourses to support the argument that maternal practice and experience historically specific (analysis of presence and absence, see below).

In order to aid this process, I casually inserted probes during the interviews to try to identify what sociocultural discourse the participants were drawing from. For example, I asked, “what do you think influenced your views in this particular instance?” Furthermore, during the analysis I identified that certain statements that a participant made in opposition to the dominant
Table 2

Steps in the Data Analysis (Part II): Critical Interpretive Analysis

1. Personal niche within which experience occurs
   a. Present personal and social situation
   b. Experience as a mother
   c. Early life experience
   d. Awareness of social structures

2. Discursive niche
   a. Possible discourses from which participant may be drawing
   b. Instances of Compliance: Analysis of presence and absence
discourse were consistent with various kinds of alternative discourses (e.g., feminist, human rights, and so on).

*Personal niche within which experience occurs.* In carrying out this part of the analysis, I explored for each of the participants what aspects of their experience were related to their present personal and social situation; for example, her family (present and extended), socio-economic status, educational level, housing, friendships, place of employment, and hobbies. These aspects acted together and in different ways to form a personal niche within which the participants’ experience thrived. In the present study I identified two niches, one relating to the participants personal context and one relating to the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices in which their experiences appeared to be grounded. In this section I describe the procedures to identify the former, which was contained within the discursive niche.

While examining the transcripts and themes, I asked the questions: What did the participant identify as present in her life that may allow her to resist and make the choices that she has made? (Some of these factors were clearly outlined by the participants and others were implicit in their accounts). I used my knowledge as a member of the same society and culture to explore the possible aspects of each participant’s situation that related to this question (Madill, 1997). I then asked: What did the participant identify as influential of her present experience (regarding her mothering experience, social supports, financial situation, and early life experience)? In order to answer these questions, I examined the central themes, secondary themes, and subject positions along with the supporting statements from their transcripts. To ensure that I was not ignoring important data from the original transcripts, I also examined these in detail while endeavouring to answer the questions at hand. What resulted from this process was a series of statements identifying the various aspects of the participant’s account that
pertained to each of the following categories: (a) participant's present social situation; (b) participant's experience as a mother; (c) participant's early life experience. Below is an example of the findings from Louise's analysis in these categories:

**Present personal and social situation:**
1. Husband, although absent because of work travel, supportive, admiring, trusting.
2. Financial situation: house paid for, her contribution. Financially able to remain home.
3. Family of origin supportive, close, helps with childcare.
4. Social position
5. Physical capabilities
6. Education: currently in MA program.
7. Great, supportive friends.

**Experience as a mother:**
1. “Pseudo-single parent,” she has made a conscious effort to build community and support for herself and her kids.
2. Realizing that she did not “know” her infant baby, and she would spend the rest of her life getting to know her. She realized mothers are not these creatures that know everything about their kids.
3. Spanked once, did not like it, never did it again.
4. The difference between her daughters taught her that children are “50% hard drive” (1033) and she is not the whole influence.

**Early life experience:**
1. Very significant.
2. She learned from her mother, admires her mother, sees a lot of her mothering modeled after her mother.
3. Father, admires, good role model in the community.
4. Parents marriage, never saw them fight, father did not give the mother ‘permission’ to pursue her masters degree.
5. Close relationship with her siblings.

*Discursive niche: Discourses from which participant may be drawing.* In this section I described the niche that is formed by the dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices present in the participants' narratives. A dominant discourse is defined here as a set of tacit rules and shared understandings that regulate practices. These discourses are closely related to the subject positions I identified in the first part of the analysis. Multiple, contradictory, and
shifting discourses offer social identities in which people are positioned. In the present study I aimed at identifying the possible discourses and subject positions that acted together to form a discursive niche within which the participants’ experiences and resistance occurred.

In this section of the analysis, I made efforts to identify the most significant discourses that were supported by the participants’ accounts. The lists of possible discourses I identified are not exhaustive but are representative of what appeared to be most significant in each of their stories. While examining the participant’s central theme, secondary themes, and subject positions I asked: From which possible social discourses is the participant drawing? In addition, I examined the original transcripts while asking this question in order to ensure that I was being as thorough as possible. What resulted was a list of discourses that were followed with statements that were representative of what the participant had said. The latter was done in order to support my analysis. The following is an example of some of the discourses (and supporting statements) that were identified in Catherine’s account:

**Discourses participant is drawing from:**

1. Feminism:
   (a) Equality for women: Access to careers, access to male dominated fields.
   (b) I can achieve in any field I want to.
   (c) Equality in marriage, equal partnerships.
   (d) You can have it all.
   (e) I have a right to my interests and leisure.

2. Self-care discourse:
   (a) It is important to take care of yourself.
   (b) If you do not take care of yourself, you can not take care of others.

3. Expert discourse:
   (a) There is an expert with good answers. Read books to be a better parent.

**Discursive niche: Instances of compliance.** A further examination of the participant’s accounts focused on identifying instances that related to compliance to the dominant discourse. The purpose here was to explore whether the participant was complying with any aspects of the dominant discourse on mothering. I assumed that most of the participants would comply with
the discourse to varying degrees because theoretically, competing discourses often exist alongside each other, and the influence of dominant discourses is rarely absent in the practices of most members of society (Foucault, 1984). For example, all the mothers in the study believed that they must maintain a close bond with their children. This is an aspect of the current dominant discourse on mothering (Comacchio, 1999). However, this discourse was not present during the 1700s where mothers sent their children to be raised by wet nurses at least for the first few years of their lives. These mothers rarely visited their children (Badinter, 1981; Hrdy, 1999).

During the analysis, compliance became evident in statements that represented beliefs, practices, or words that were in agreement with the dominant discourse. I asked: In what ways is this woman complying to aspects of the discourse? In order to answer the question I closely examined the central theme, secondary themes, subject positions, and the transcript in full. I developed a list of the instances in which the participant appeared to be complying (often these were related to some of the contradictions identified earlier, but in many cases new examples were identified).

Once these instances were identified, a hermeneutic analysis of presence and absence was carried out (Packer & Addison, 1989). Heidegger (1962) coined the term ‘clearing’ to illustrate the background of common understandings (e.g., discourses) that people share with others. It is this clearing that allows for members of a community to have a shared meaning of their world. One way to illustrate the concept of the clearing is through the metaphor of a clearing within a forest (Cushman, 1995). According to Heidegger, a cultural framework is drawn from a large number of possibilities. In the forest metaphor, the cultural framework is the clearing and the large number of possibilities is the forest. It is through this clearing that common cultural
practices and discourses come to exist. Hermeneutic researchers often explore both aspects: The clearing (what is present in the text) and the forest (what is absent or excluded in the text). The purpose is to “un-conceal” what is not considered or valued, or what is tacit in the text under study (Martin, 2002). By identifying the instances of compliance (presence) and what is absent from these, I endeavoured to call attention to other possibilities or to other discourses from other historical junctions. In doing this, I hoped to emphasize that discourses and their accompanying practices are culturally and historically specific.

In order to complete this task I asked: What do these instances of compliance exclude? What do they ignore? I used my knowledge as a member of this socio-cultural context to answer these questions. What resulted was a list of instances of compliance with statements representing what is absent. Astrid’s account yielded the following two examples of instances of compliance (note that the analysis of presence and absence is in brackets):

1. Mothers know what is best for their children. Mothers should take over when the father is doing it wrong [Fathers used to be the caretakers of children in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Thurer, 1994). Mothers today often see themselves as knowing what is best for the child]
2. Mothers are the best caregivers for children. [Astrid may have contradicted herself on this one, she said that mothers are the best because of their connection, the pregnancy and birthing process but that society should take responsibility for the care of children. This belief is a Western model of mothering of the 19th and 20th centuries and is not universal. This statement ignores that in other cultures or periods in history, children are cared for by elders or older siblings, ‘othermothers’ as is the case in the black culture in the United States (Edwards, 2000).]

A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Initial Presuppositions

A second hermeneutic interpretation involved a ‘toing’ and ‘froing’ between the resulting interpretations and my initial presuppositions in order to modify the latter accordingly. I asked if the interpretations I uncovered were consistent with my initial presuppositions. It is important to be open to barriers or blocks in our understanding so that the initial presuppositions can be
modified and, therefore, one can enlarge the scope of the interpretation (Packer, 1989). It was through a critical “toing” and “froing” between my interpretations and the initial presuppositions that new understandings emerged.

To carry out this step in the analysis, I first asked of each of the participant’s accounts: “Is theme “X” consistent with my presupposition that context affects experience? Does it agree with my assumption that this woman may be both resisting and complying with different aspects of the discourse? Is this woman’s experience of guilt different from the one described in the research literature?” In asking these questions, I found tensions between my interpretations and my initial presuppositions (Packer, 1989). My task was to revise, modify, and question those initial assumptions in order to bring about a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. What resulted from answering these questions was a brief reflection on how each particular individual account/analysis had confirmed or disconfirmed my presuppositions. In order to illustrate this part of the analysis, I present an example from Madelaine’s account:

_Hermeneutic interpretation #2_

Are my interpretations consistent with my presupposition that context affects experience?
It appears that in this case context is important because Madelaine has feminist views about raising her children but her context has prevented her from having her life the way she would really like to, which is to co-parent and have both parents work part-time. She has had to struggle to do both. She also has had the financial ability to stay home and work from home even though sometimes it has been difficult because she and her husband are limited financially. She is educated and has had access to feminist circles and knowledge.

Do my interpretations agree with my assumption that this woman may be both resisting and complying with different aspects of the discourse?
1. It appears that Madelaine resists the following societal expectations:
   - The mainstream medical model is the best for your family.
   - Women do not have a right to mother their way, they must follow the norms.
   - Mothers do not have a right to take care of their needs.
2. It appears that Madelaine does comply with some aspects of the dominant discourses:
   - Mothers should juggle their schedules to be there as much as possible.
   - Feels guilty if she places her needs in front of her children’s needs.
   - Children are the most important.

Is this woman’s experience of guilt different from the one described in the research literature?
No, she expressed feeling guilty if she took care of her needs before those of her children (189), this is one example of compliance. She appears to struggle between meeting her needs and those of her children because she is often the only one taking care of them.

Does the experience of resistance lead to positive outcomes for the mother?
In this case it is mixed. She explained that she feels pretty good (566) to have made the choices that she has made (567). Her understanding of the social structures and lack of options for mothers is one aspect that appears to be frustrating for her. She also acknowledged that the judgement of others makes it difficult and that her husband’s judgement on her closeness with her children has also challenged how she feels, and that she has questioned herself sometimes.

**Collective Analysis**

The analysis accomplished thus far focused on the individual participants independently of each other. In order to develop a collective analysis, I engaged in a process that allowed me to create collective categories in order to present the common features among the participants’ accounts and critical interpretive findings. This process is helpful because it can create conceptual tools to compare important and essential features of the various analyses (Dey, 1993). This part of the analysis involved coding categories according to their similarities and differences.

In this analysis, I identified categories by inferring from the data, by intuition, and by previous knowledge (Dey, 1993). A preliminary collective process was carried out throughout my work in analyzing the individual data as I began to notice patterns and similarities or differences among the participant’s analyses. I maintained a log of my observations that
included pseudonyms for each participant and examples of statements that supported the emerging categories. This log provided the initial grouping of categories.

This process of categorization was based on a “middle-order” approach (Dey, 1993). Dey (1993) suggested that the researcher extract broad preliminary distinctions within the data. These are based on common sense categories used to organize data. Once the data were organized into broad categories, they were integrated and linked by examining similarities and differences among them.

In the collective analysis proper, I examined each of the instances of resistance, central themes, secondary themes, subject positions, discourses, contradictions, personal experiences (social situation, experience as a mother, early life experience), instances of compliance, and the analyses of presence and absence. During this examination, I noted and coded new emerging categories. It is important to note that some of the themes often contained more than one possible category. These themes were broken down into components or bits of data (Dey, 1993). A component refers to an aspect of a theme or “bit of data” that can stand on its own (Dey, 1993; Horwitz, 1998). For example, a central theme may have had two parts to it, and each of these was considered one component. The next step involved grouping the components of each of the participant’s accounts by assigning them to a category on their own (if it did not match any other) or to a category already identified in another of the participants’ themes or positions. For instance, Louise’s central theme was “The way I mother makes sense to me, it’s true to me, and it comes from my essence. It is important that I love and care for my kids but it is also important that I pursue and claim what matters to and benefits me. This however, is an experience of constant shuffling because my husband is often away.” This central theme yielded three possible categories: I care about my kids, I have a right to pursue what matters to me, and I have to do
some shuffling. As similar categories emerged, I kept a detailed log of each of the participant’s data that supported each of the categories. What emerged were a series of categories. I then identified the supporting transcript line number along with the participant’s pseudonym for each category. Only one or two supporting statements per participant were identified for each category.

I allowed the data to inform the relationship between the categories by paying attention to similarities and differences. As I worked with the data, I grouped the categories under larger categories that worked as large umbrellas under which various groupings of categories fell. This yielded three main themes relating to the first question and various other categories that attempted to answer the second question.

The collective analysis was cohesive and valid because I was thoroughly familiar with the data after having engaged in the various individual analyses (Dey, 1993). I was also flexible and open to extending, modifying, or discarding categories based on their relevance to the research questions. I kept a close eye on possible connections among categories and endeavoured to avoid needless overlaps.

**Auditability, Credibility, and Fittingness**

Research must have some accountability or rigor. In the naturalistic sense rigor is related to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). There are ontological, epistemological, and methodological differences between the conventional and naturalistic paradigms so that ensuring trustworthiness in the latter must differ from how validity and reliability are achieved in the former. Those involved in field research have coined the following terms to describe how they engage in the process of validating and ensuring the overall clarity of their research: audibility, credibility, and fittingness (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).
First, auditability or replication in qualitative inquiry refers to “the ability of another investigator to follow the decision or audit trail” (Beck, 1993, p. 264). The decision trail is the series of decisions made by the researchers during every stage of the data analysis. This is achieved by providing a detailed description of the methodological procedures so that other researchers can understand the themes and arrive at similar conclusions. In the present study, the following steps were taken in order to ensure the auditability of the study: (a) an in-depth description of the strategies used to collect and analyze the data was provided in the final manuscript; (b) the characteristics of the participants and how they were selected was also described in detail; (c) examples of the participants' voices were provided by quoting from their interview data; (d) the social, physical, and interpersonal contexts of the interviews were discussed (Beck, 1993).

Qualitative research does not intend to be strictly replicable because qualitative research often calls for a flexibility that allows for the altering of research strategies as the investigation progresses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This evolving process in qualitative research may prevent replicability given that different researchers working with different data may find themselves having to be flexible given the data they are analyzing. Having indicated that there are limits to replicability, the present study endeavours to achieve auditability by providing a careful and detailed description of the procedures employed and the interpretations made as outlined above.

Second, credibility is achieved by ensuring that the participants’ narratives were accurately represented (Beck, 1993). In the present study, credibility (internal validity) was accomplished in several ways. First, I kept in-depth field notes regarding my relationship with the participants to explore how my participation may influence the respondents. These guided
mothers' resistance

me in subsequent interviews to ask for clarification from the participants rather than in making further assumptions about their experience. Second, I endeavoured to attend to how my presence affected the data collected so that I could continue to note how my presuppositions and preunderstandings entered the hermeneutic circle. Third, I kept field notes of my actions, interactions, and subjective states during the study. This facilitated the consideration of my preunderstandings and how they may have changed throughout the study. Fourth, I endeavoured to validate the findings by involving the participants in a process of corroboration. Such corroboration was accomplished by inviting each participant to voice their reactions to the initial analysis of their narratives (see Appendix G for an example of the cover letter I sent to the participants). In addition, members of my dissertation committee reviewed three of the transcripts and discussed with me the procedures to ensure I have analyzed and presented these data vividly and fairly. Finally, a fellow graduate student, experienced in qualitative research, examined four of the analyses in full, to ensure that my analyses were as closely related to the data as possible. She agreed with my analyses of these data and suggested that she would only reword two themes in order to shift the emphasis of the meaning of the sentence.

Finally, fittingness (external validity) refers to how well the research question fits into a context other than the one from which it was generated (Beck, 1993). The present method of investigation does not aim at generalizing the findings of the inquiry but rather at providing an analysis of the experience of a limited number of mothers. Therefore, the generalizability of the present study may be modest. At the same time, the present study can begin to tell a story that has only partially been told (Gordon, 1990). Its transferability to other settings is possible if one takes into account the theoretical parameters of the present study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). For example, the literature suggests that resistance is possible and that it often occurs as a result
of tensions and contradictions between social pressures and the actual situations within which people live (Croghan & Miell, 1998; Gordon, 1990; Little, 1999). In other words, maternal experience rarely matches the ideal set forth by the discourse and, therefore, may possibly lead to resistance. It is possible that in a clinical setting where mothers present issues related to social pressures that are associated to dominant discourses, clinicians may explore the possibility of resistance in order to help mothers deal with those pressures (Weingarten, 1995).

In order for clinicians and others to make judgements about the degree of fit or similarity of the findings to other settings, I provide thick, descriptive data, which is presented as a narrative developed about the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Furthermore, feminist theories of counselling encourage the consideration of contextual factors in helping women achieve change (Worrel & Remer, 1992). The results of the present study may be applicable to counselling settings by informing counsellors and therapists about possible ways in which mothers may change their views about mothering and, therefore, their practices.

**Summary**

I collected data through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants who self-identified as resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering. The framework for the method is based on critical theory, hermeneutics, and social history (Martin, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Tuchman, 1989). The first step in the analysis was to analyze the interview data for themes (Van Mannen, 1994). The present study was not phenomenological in that it did not accept the participants’ narratives as final and true, however, it borrowed from Van Mannen’s approach in order to answer the first research question: what is the experience of mothering for women who are actively resisting the dominant discourse on mothering? and to conduct the interviews. Finally, this approach was helpful in identifying themes within the participants’
stories. A second step involved a critical interpretive analysis of the data to identify possible discourses and socio-historical contextual factors found in the data (Martin, 2002; Packer & Addison, 1989b). Finally, a collective analysis was conducted in order to identify similarities and differences among the individual analyses.
We are allowed a choice in our own prescription. It is a basic right of every human being.

Virginia Wolf's words, *The Hours*

The experience of mothering for the women who participated in this study was filled with joys and sorrows, with frustration and peace, and with integrity and confusion. These mothers, who consciously resist the current dominant discourse on mothering, all had an awareness of society's expectations of them. Their stories provide us with a window to the complexities of their experiences of resistance. The findings suggest that the experience of mothering for women who resist is complex. Their attempts to integrate various discourses with their personal experiences appear to be at the core of this complexity. The analyses suggest that mothers who resist have experiences that are at times liberating and positive whereas at other times conflictual and difficult. The present chapter presents findings that attempt to answer the research questions: (a) What is the personal experience and meaning of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering?, and (b) How are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants’ personal contexts as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices? The collective findings are presented under the following categories and subcategories:

- Experience and meaning
  - Experience as rewarding and liberating
  - Juggling and balancing
  - Ideological work
- Personal and historical factors
• Personal Niche:
  - Niche within which experience occurs (participants' experience as mothers, personal present situation, early/life experiences/influences, and awareness of social structures).

• Discursive Niche:
  - Possible discourses influencing experience
  - Historically specific subject positions
  - Instances of compliance (analysis of presence and absence) and their relationship to our current historical period.

In the first part of the analysis, I endeavoured to capture the essence of the experience of mothering for the participants. This part of the study was intended to answer the first research question: what is the meaning and experience of mothering for women who actively resist the Western dominant discourse on mothering. I identified three themes that attempt to answer this question: (a) experience as rewarding and liberating; (b) experience entails juggling and balancing; and (c) experience involves ideological work. The first theme (experience as rewarding and liberating) suggests that these women found that resisting aspects of the dominant discourse on mothering was rewarding and liberating; they felt empowered, proud, and convinced of their choices while enjoying more freedom and feeling little or no guilt. The second theme (juggling and balancing) indicates that although convinced that they had a right to meet their own needs, the participants found that mothering involved juggling and balancing between meeting their children's needs as well as their own. The third theme (ideological work) suggests that this process involved ideological work in order to reconcile the contradictions they
encountered between their needs and experience, the demands placed on them, and the various 
options available to them.

The second part of the analysis focused on the second research question: How are the 
participants' meanings and experiences of mothering grounded in their personal contexts as well 
as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices? The findings suggest that 
certain personal factors impacted the participants' ability to resist. These include social supports, 
education, access to financial resources, flexible employment, easy going children, social 
services, access to the internet, early experiences, and awareness of how society is structured. In 
order identify the discursive niche that was influential of the participants’ experiences, I also 
identified several possible discourses, subject positions, and instances of compliance to the 
dominant discourse on mothering. The discourses that were identified include the discourses of 
feminism, achievement, individualism, self-care, collectivity, science/expert, 
attachment/attachment parenting, and alternative medicine. Although the subject positions were 
identified in the first part of the analysis, I report them in this section because they are intended 
to answer the second research question. The subject positions included the caring, responsible 
mother, independent women/individual, educated/professional, critical thinker, and activist. 
Finally the instances in which the participants complied or adhered to the discourse include: 
mothers should be present; mothers are role models, best caregivers, calm, good mothers, and 
influential; strong attachments and love are important to children; expert advice is valuable; 
daycare is not the best option for children; and the child discourse.

Participants

In this section, I provide an introductory description of each of the 15 participants whose 
names have been replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity. These descriptions include
their demographic information (see Appendix H for a summary of the participants’ demographic information) and ways in which they believed they resisted (Appendix I provides a table and description of each of these modes). Note that the modes of resistance are not independent from one another and often overlap.

Louise

Louise is 46 years old and has two daughters who are 9 and 14 years old. Louise has been married for 21 years. She is enrolled in a masters degree program. Her annual family income is in the $61,000 to $75,000 range. Louise has spent most of her adult life participating in competitive sports even while having young children. Louise feels that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she does not believe that she should be around her children all the time. In addition, she makes time to pursue her athletic career, which means that at times she is away from her children. Louise does not believe that mothers are the only ones who can care for and guide children; she believes that others can contribute to their development. Finally, Louise does not feel solely responsible for how her children turn out; she recognizes that there are other factors that impact their development.

Anna

Anna is a 39-year-old mother of two, a 12-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy. She has been married for 16 years and works as a professional in a college setting. Anna has just finished a master’s degree. Her annual family income is in the $46,000 to $60,000 range. Anna believes that she resists the discourse because she does not feel that she has to be with her children all the time, she likes involving other caregivers so that she can pursue her career. Anna believes that mothers are not the only ones who can nurture children and does not find motherhood completely fulfilling. She explained that she needs other experiences in her life to
feel fulfilled. Finally, Anna does not believe that she is to blame for all of her children’s
behaviours or how they ‘turn out.’ Anna explained that she has learned that each parent and her
children are unique and this has led her to make unique choices that work for her family. Anna
does not like being a full time mother and is aware that she has been able to make the choices
she has made because of her position in society, and because of the historical times within
which she is mothering.

Carla

Carla is a 27-year-old mother of a 1-year-old girl. She has been in a heterosexual
common-law relationship for 4 years. She is a full time student enrolled in a Ph.D. program.
Her family’s annual income is in the $46,000 to $60,000 range. Carla identified herself as
resistant because she relinquished the main caregiving role to her partner. She is caring and
involved but does not mind being away from the baby when her husband or in-laws care for her.
She does not feel solely responsible for how her daughter ‘turns out.’ Finally, Carla strives to
meet her needs or interests while also meeting those of her daughter.

Astrid

Astrid is a 30-year-old mother of a 3 ½ year-old boy and an 8-month-old baby girl. She
has been married for 8 years. Astrid is a not employed outside of the home. She is an artist
whose art she says is not commercial or “saleable.” Astrid is involved in La Leche League as a
group leader, she is a parent group leader, and an active participant at her son’s preschool.
Astrid clarified that all these activities are volunteer but questions others that say that she
“doesn’t work.” Astrid feels that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering by not
following the dictates of the mainstream medical model of childrearing; she has practiced
extended breastfeeding, for example. She also resists individualistic parenting strategies that
suggest that children need to be independent and sleep in their own beds, and separate psychologically from their parents at an early age (she practices attachment parenting\(^2\), Sears & Sears, 2001). She resists the idea that mothers should sacrifice their needs but has found that the only way mothers can avoid sacrificing is by having a close knit community of supportive and emotionally invested people, which she lacks. Astrid defines herself as a feminist who honours not only her needs but also the needs of her children in a society that does not. She believes that mothers should not be the only ones to care for children but that in individualistic societies, women are isolated and therefore, the only ones ‘mothering’ children.

**Aibrean**

Aibrean is a 26-year-old mother of a 7-year-old boy and a 5-month-old baby girl. She had her son when she was 19 and single. She was a single mother for 3 ½ years until she met her present husband. She has been married for 1½ years. Aibrean is not employed outside of the home. Her annual family income is in the $15,000 to $30,000 range. Aibrean says that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she does not believe in sacrificing her needs; she will attend to things that matter to her even if it means not washing the dishes or cleaning the house. She will let her baby cry for short periods while she paints her nails because she does not think this will harm the baby. She does not take sole responsibility for how her children behave. She believes that there are other factors (e.g., biology, school) that affect who her children are and who they become. Finally, Aibrean explained that she voices to others that she does not like being a mother all the time, and that even though she loves her children, she

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\(^2\) Some had chosen a very specific way of mothering based on the philosophy of attachment parenting advanced by Sears and Sears (2001). This type of parenting suggests that parents maintain close physical proximity with their children as often as possible. In other words, children should be breastfed, should sleep with their parents, should be carried and held as much as possible in order for the mother to develop a closeness that will allow her to ‘read’ her baby’s cues well. This parenting practice promises content, well adjusted, happy babies and future adults (Sears & Sears, 2001).
does not ‘feel loving’ toward them all the time. She has encountered judgment for saying this, but believes it is important to recognize and voice it.

*Theo*

Theo is a 30-year-old mother of a 21-month old girl. She has been living with her husband for 10 years but has been married since 1998. Theo is a doula, group facilitator, and student. Her annual family income is in the $46,000 to $60,000 range. Theo indicated that she feels convinced of the choices that she makes related to her daughter.

Theo feels she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she believes that mothers need to acknowledge the hardships that come with being a mother. She has made it a point to speak out about the ‘dark’ side of mothering infants and how a mother can experience anger toward her children. She has resisted the mainstream medical model by giving birth at home and practicing extended breast-feeding. She also believes that mothers have a right to pursue their interests and does not find mothering fulfilling on its own. At the same time, she has found that because her child is very young, it is very difficult to balance between her child’s needs and her own. Theo does not see herself as being responsible for all of her child’s behaviours. Finally, Theo believes that it is very important to involve others in raising children, that being close to many others exposes a child to different experiences and more affection.

Theo dislikes that people expect her to feel a certain way in relation to mothering became her actual experience is very different. She explained that she does not always feel happy to be a mother or always feel loving toward her child.

*Alice*

Alice is a 31-year-old mother of two boys who are 7 and 3 years old, respectively. She has been married for 8 years. Alice is not employed outside of the home, but she is a fiction
Mothers’ Resistance

Alice is a 36-year-old writer who works late at night or when her husband takes the children out. Alice began writing again when she realized that motherhood had become too absorbing for her. Her annual family income is over $75,000. Alice feels she resists because she recognizes that mothering is not completely fulfilling for her. She loves her children but she needs to pursue other interests. Alice resists the mainstream medical model; she gave birth to her sons at home, and chose not to vaccinate them. Alice does not believe that there is only one way to mother. She resists the “new ideal” that is encouraged by “Hollywood mothers like Madonna and Demi Moore” who promote the belief that “mothers can do it all, be thin, beautiful, and dedicated.” Finally, Alice questions the societal discourse that suggests that children are innocent and should be sheltered from what is real. She believes in open discussions about any topic with her sons.

Madelaine

Madelaine is a 36-year-old woman of two boys who are 6 and 10 years old. She has been married for 13 years. Madelaine is a writer/editor who works 30 hours a week. Up until last year, she did most of her work at home. She now goes to an office two days each week. Her family’s annual income is over $75,000. Madelaine says that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she does not follow the mainstream medical model of parenting. She chose not to vaccinate her children and practiced extended breast-feeding. In addition, she resists individualistic strategies of parenting children and she practices attachment parenting (e.g., family bed, see Sears & Sears, 2001). Madelaine does not find mothering fulfilling on its own; she has always needed to pursue other interests such as writing, yoga, etc. She does not believe that all the caregiving of children should be carried out by the mother alone, but in her circumstances, she has had to take on that role (i.e., complying to the discourse because when she first became a mother she had few resources to carry out alternative practices). Madelaine
believes that she has a right to mother her way rather than having to follow the dictates of the dominant discourse on mothering. Finally, Madelaine has been a political activist and participated in activism to establish recognition of the fact that the work mothers do is work.

**Lilith**

Lilith is a 23-year-old mother of two girls who are toddlers. She is a single mother and a full time undergraduate student. Her annual family income is in the $15,000 to $30,000 range. Up until 2 years ago, Lilith had a grade 10 education. She has since completed her high school equivalency and has started a degree in the social sciences. She lives alone with her daughters.

Lilith feels that she resists the discourse because she does not believe she should be with her daughters during all of her free time. Even though she is busy with her university studies, she goes out most weekends dancing with her friends or on dates. She is very active in political issues that affect her and other mothers. Lilith questions most of what is expected of her and rebels against the status quo. She does not feel guilty for having fun or for taking a smoking break outside on her front porch and away from her children. She does not believe that mothers are the only possible caregivers of children, she believes that daycare providers can contribute significantly. She does not follow the medical model; for example, she did not vaccinate her daughters. Lilith does not view her role as a mother to be a perfect housekeeper who should clean and cook constantly.

**Jane**

Jane is a 37-year-old mother of a 3 ½ year old girl and a 7-month-old boy. She has been married for 6 years. Jane has been a health worker in the past and is currently teaching at a college while completing a graduate degree. A year before the interview, Jane’s family was struggling financially. She explained how painful it was not to have money to buy small
Christmas gifts for her children. Since then, Jane has found a job that pays "well." Her annual family income varies but at the time of the interview it was $61,000 to $75,000. Jane resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she believes she has a right to take care of her needs and pursue her interests. She has relinquished the primary caregiving role to her husband who has taken most of the parental leave to stay home with the children while she pursues her graduate degree and works outside of the home. Jane does not believe in remaining in the private sphere, she is an activist. She considers fathers to be as good as mothers in caring for children. She does not believe that she is solely responsible for how her children turn out, she explained that there are other factors involved. She resists the medical model of birth and care. She is active in promoting the benefits of extended breastfeeding.

Jane explained that she does not pay attention to the dominant discourse on mothering most of the time because she endeavours to do what is best for her. She said that making her own choices has eliminated her experience of guilt for the most part. Jane sees her role as having to set the structure for her children but not to have to be around "micromanaging" by being there all the time. She believes that it is important for children to be close to many adults, not only the mothers. Finally, for Jane it is very important that her work contributes to the welfare of mothers in general.

Catherine

Catherine is a 33-year-old mother of a 7-year-old girl. She has been married for 12 years. She works full time outside of the home in a professional occupation, but recently has been able to work from home 2 days a week. Her annual family income is $75,000 or more. Catherine says that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she has relinquished the primary caregiving role to her husband. Because he is able to work from home
they decided that he should be the one to take on the role of primary caregiver. Catherine sees him as the better parent, and she is happy with her choice to not take on the primary role. She, therefore, does not believe that mothers should always be the main caregivers of children. Moreover, Catherine believes that her needs and her relationship need to be nurtured so that they as a couple can then nurture their child. She is not completely fulfilled by her role as a mother. Finally, she does not believe that mothers should do it all.

Alexandra

Alexandra is a 41-year-old mother of an 8-year-old girl. She has been married for nine years. Her family annual income is more than $75,000. Alexandra works in a professional occupation that is very demanding. Alexandra feels that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she has relinquished the primary caregiving role to her husband whose work allows him to stay home. Alexandra is very involved in her daughter’s life but does not view herself as her daughter’s main caregiver. Alexandra does not believe in sacrificing her needs for her daughter, she sometimes places her needs ahead of her daughter’s. Finally, Alexandra explained that she does not always want to spend time with her daughter.

Nancy

Nancy is a 46-year-old mother of three children, a 16-year-old girl and 2 boys, 12 and 8 years old. Nancy has been married for 20 years. She is a professional who works part time during evenings and school hours. She enjoys athletics. Her annual family income is above $75,000. Nancy believes that she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she believes in voicing and recognizing that mothering can have negative aspects and is not always enjoyable. She agrees that it is fine to sleep in the same bed with children when they are young. She is convinced that mothers have a right to take care of their needs and sometimes to put these
ahead of the children’s as long as it is safe for the children and not neglectful. Nancy does not see herself as solely responsible for how her children ‘turn out.’ She considers that she and her partner are co-parents who share the responsibility for their children. Finally, Nancy does not find motherhood to be fulfilling on its own, she needs to be involved in other interests.

Kate

Kate is a 36-year-old mother of two boys who are 4 and 6 years old. She has been married for 12 years. She works 20 hours a week as a fundraiser. Her annual family income is in the $61,000 to $75,000 range.

Kate feels she resists because she does not believe in having to watch her children at all times. She thinks that the media has “overblown” the dangers for children. She believes in participating in a community that supports each other in raising children (e.g., she lived in a family co-op where children played unsupervised in closed courtyards and other parents were always available in case of an emergency). Kate does not believe that mothers are the only ones who can influence and care for children. She believes that children are safe if left at daycare or with other caregivers and she does not feel guilty about doing so. She does not think that mothers should cater to children and that children should cooperate with the running of a home and she makes sure this happens with her sons. Kate does not feel solely responsible for how her children turn out. She considers that mothers should voice their frustrations and that they do not always like being mothers. Finally, Kate believes that her needs are important, she sometimes places them ahead of her children’s but often tries to achieve a “win-win” situation where both parties have their needs met. Kate emphasized that she does not believe in taking responsibility or credit for how her children behave. She explained that her children’s personalities are ‘easy’ and that this contributes to her performance as a good mother.
Lisa

Lisa is a 33-year-old, single mother of a 4-year-old girl. Lisa recently separated from her husband of 8 years. Part of the reason for this separation is that she recently came out as a gay woman. Her family’s annual income is in the $15,000 to $30,000 range. Lisa feels she resists the dominant discourse on mothering because she co-parents with her daughter’s father and does not consider herself the only caregiver for her daughter. She does not believe that mothers should do it all by themselves. Lisa resists the individualistic perspective in our society that excludes children from many activities. She does not believe in having to constantly choose between spending time with her child and being involved in other activities that are of interest to her. She often feels guilty about having dissolved her marriage and about not being domestic enough to teach her daughter about those aspects of life.

*Experience and Meaning of Mothering*

The first research question was: What is the personal experience and meaning of mothering for women who feel they are actively resisting the current dominant discourse on mothering? The findings revealed that the experience of mothering for the participants was complex. The analysis yielded three themes that include:

- Experience of mothering as rewarding and liberating
- Juggling and balancing
- Ideological work, reframing, and reconciling

*Experience of Mothering as Rewarding and Liberating*

Most of the participants found that mothering by resisting the dominant discourse on mothering was rewarding and liberating. The benefits manifested themselves in a sense of pride and conviction, in their experience of added freedom, in feelings of empowerment and integrity,
in seeing their children doing well, and in feeling little or no guilt. The participants felt good about the way they have chosen to mother. They felt convinced that the choices they have made were the best for them and their children.

All the participants experienced a sense of conviction and pride about their views and their choices around mothering. Mothering in their unique ways led these women to feel empowered, and with a strong sense of integrity. This sentiment is captured well in the words of Lilith:

I don’t have the guilty mamma feeling, you know, I live by my convictions and I don’t allow myself to fall into doing whatever everybody else says. And I don’t guilt myself for the fact that I’ve gone out this weekend. I don’t guilt myself for the fact that I did a homework assignment when I should have been playing with my kids. It’s also, like I do think that I am going to raise two of the COOLEST people, and that shows that I’m doing it right. (527-534). I live by my convictions, and I am very proud of myself for that (529-530).

Conviction and commitment to their choices is central to the process of resistance for these women. For the participants, being convinced of their views and choices contributes to a sense of integrity and to staying true to the self. This conviction provides these women with a foundation to continue to follow through with their choices even when they encounter challenges. Being convinced about their beliefs led to feelings of pride for many of the participants.

All of the participants were convinced that they were not solely responsible for how their children behaved or for how they turned out. They acknowledged that they are one of many factors that influence their children’s development. Lilith, for example, said:

And, cause like some studies are saying, the parents are actually like 13 % of control over the future of the kids. I mean, that was the lowest number I saw, but that was the one I liked the best (laughs). I only have 13 % of control. (432)
She explained that while she believes that there are other influences that impact children’s development, she nevertheless makes efforts to teach her daughters to act with respect and to be well behaved. The other participants shared similar stories. They stated that biology is a strong influence. For instance, Aibrean stated that her son has been diagnosed with ADHD and that she does not feel responsible for that. In sum, being convinced that they were not to blame was experienced as liberating by these women.

These participants stated that making alternative choices made them happy; they felt good about themselves as mothers. They expressed that mothering their way means that they stay true to themselves and to who they are while feeling empowered. Anna’s words exemplify how many of the participants did not feel like they had to follow the social expectations on them as mothers. She explained that she felt empowered by her choices:

> I had to take care of myself here...To me it has been empowering. I have always thought it was the right thing to do that. That my needs and my career and my happiness, if I was going to be a good mother, that I have to fulfill that side of me. (350-358)

Anna explained that making the choice to pursue her work outside of the home and her interests were key in her having a good quality of life:

> And it’s enabled me, I think, to have a higher quality of life than I would have had... because you only live one life and I have to, and I have to be happy in that life. I have to mother the way I mother to be happy. You know, and as I did that though, you know, always balancing my happiness with theirs. And it would, we talked about this before, I could continue what made me happy, because it wasn't in my view, it wasn't affecting them. As long as it wasn't adversely affecting them, it felt OK to do what I had to do. (365)

All the participants expressed feeling confident that the way they have chosen to mother is beneficial to their children. Catherine is a case in point. She explained that making the choices she has made was rewarding when she observed her daughter was “doing so well.”
Catherine was pleased about how her daughter was “turning out.” She believes that “relinquishing” primary care to her partner has been the right choice for her daughter:

[What do you find rewarding about the way you’ve chosen to mother?]

Seeing her (laughs). I think that’s the big thing is just knowing that, it didn’t have to be me. Just relinquishing that, and I do believe that it was a better choice, it was a BETTER CHOICE. Yeah, she’s thriving in every facet of her, She loves school, she loves piano, she loves baseball, swimming. Like she loves life. She’s got aspirations. I mean she’s 7 and she’s…reading about, she wants to be a marine biologist. She has huge aspirations. So I, I think, we’ve accomplished that. (586-590, 592-598)

In addition, many participants felt that one of the rewards of mothering the way they have chosen to mother is the positive influence they are having on her children. In relation to this experience, Nancy said:

I guess I know ultimately that my children are going to be competent adults, competent employees, competent relationship partners by their experience of my husband’s and my relationship with each other, and our relationship with them, as individuals and as parents. So I guess in general, what I find rewarding, is knowing that overall, they’re getting a pretty damn good education in that area. (610-615)

The participants also felt that mothering by resisting some of the social expectations on them is liberating because it allows them to have more freedom. Taking care of their needs, eliciting the support of others, and relinquishing some of their responsibilities to their partners was “like having the best of both worlds”. For example, Carla explained that parenting this way was easier because she was able to do things she likes. She does not mind that she is not her daughter’s “main person.” She explained, “It doesn’t bother me when people think that…she’s very comfortable with me too, I mean we are very close” (93, 98). For Carla, co-parenting and having her partner as the main caregiver is “easier than any other possible way because I get the best of both worlds, I get to be a cross between a mother and a father” (307-309).
However, it is important to note that for those participants who were willing to give up the main caregiver role, relinquishing this role was conditional to the alternative caregiver being someone who was emotionally invested in their child. All of the women who have partners/husbands who are viewed as co-parents, except for Alexandra, did not agree with taking their children to daycare. This is significant because having partners who are involved allows them to pursue their interests/work without having to resort to leaving their children at daycare, which would translate into feelings of guilt or sadness for them. In other words, they preferred to have one parent or someone who is a close, loving adult or relative be with their children.

These women are resisting the dominant discourse on mothering by not viewing themselves as the indispensable caregivers in their children’s lives, they do not believe that it has to be the mother who cares for all the needs of children. They believe that fathers are as good as mothers in the care giving of children. At the same time, they are complying with the dominant discourse on mothering that suggests that children need to be loved consistently and that daycare experiences may not meet this need.

Most of the participants either did not mention guilt at all as part of their experience, or explicitly voiced that maternal guilt is not significant for them. Lilith’s narrative illustrates this point well. She mentioned guilt several times during the interview. For the most part, she emphasized that she does not feel guilty and that she is proud of her choices because she is guided by her convictions and this prevents her from experiencing guilt most of the time:

I don’t guilt, I don’t fall into the trap that other mammas do. I don’t know, I have a really strong conviction in myself. Which is why I step outside the line. But stepping outside the line it gives me those convictions and the esteem in myself. (897-899)

Jane also explained that choosing to resist the expectation that she has to be there all the time by letting her partner be the primary caregiver eased her experience of guilt because leaving her
daughter at daycare made her feel very guilty. She said, "But I don’t feel guilt at all, I don’t think I feel guilt at all when I leave them. Compared to what I felt when I was leaving Mary at daycare" (133-134).

Two participants were exceptions in that they did experience guilt. Alexandra explained that she feels guilty not only in relation to her mothering but also around her professional work because she feels she never does enough. She said, "I feel guilty much of the time because my work has taken up a lot of my energy in the last 8 years...the fact that I don’t love my work...somehow makes it worse that I have expended so much energy on it rather than on my daughter." Lisa said, "I have a lot of guilt" (248). She explained that she is aware that “that’s stupid” but that she still feels very guilty mainly because she recently separated and is depriving her daughter from the opportunity to live in an intact family.

In sum, the participants found that mothering by resisting the dominant discourse on mothering was rewarding in many ways. They felt convinced that their choices were based on thorough thought and consideration. This allowed them to endeavour to meet their children’s needs as well as their own. However, as was apparent in some of their comments, this process although rewarding, also entailed juggling and balancing. The following section illustrates how this juggling was partly due to the participants’ belief that only someone invested in their child should take over a care-taking role and to the consideration that their choices had to be beneficial or not harmful to their children. In other words, freedom for themselves was contingent upon knowing that their children were loved, safe, cared for, and turning out well.

**Juggling and Balancing**

The experience of mothering for the participants often meant that they had to struggle to balance between meeting their needs and the needs of their children. The participants juggled a
variety of tasks in an effort to meet both their needs and those of their children. What was important to them was to keep a balance between meeting their own needs and the needs of their children. All of the participants believed that they have a right to meet their needs. These women indicated that by meeting their needs, they found balance and contentment. The philosophy behind this choice was “if mom is happy, the children will be happy.” Jane’s narrative captures this experience well. She said that by doing what she wants to do, she is a better mother:

Yeah, I find that when I am all in one or all in the other, I am just not happy. It drives me smoothly mad, actually...If I can’t be good to myself, it just kind of all, the walls come tumbling down...So for me it’s imperative, to be the kind of mother that I want to be, to not be a mother all the time, I guess that sums up a lot of my beliefs about mothering. (65,66,90, 563-565)

Madelaine concurred with these sentiments when she said:

Well, I mean, I certainly believe that in any kind of situation you have to consider your own needs. I mean you have to sort of feed the cook, kind of thing. If the cook is being starved, you’re not going to be able to cook for everybody else.” (112-113).

Aibrean explained that she deserves to paint her nails, so that sometimes when she does it, her baby daughter cries in her crib. Aibrean does not feel like she has to go and attend to her right away, “she can wait.”

Although making sure that they attended to their needs, the participants expressed that it was important for them not to hurt the children in the process. They made efforts to take the well being of their children into account when making decisions. This led to the struggle of balancing between their needs and their children’s. For example, Louise found that following through with making choices that work for her was a constant “juggling” because her partner travels all the
time. The juggling involved an exploration of the choices available to her, and of being attentive to not only her needs but her children's and her partner's needs too. She explained:

So you know it's a constant shuffling. Then, when I finish school, will I be able to turn it into something that is, you know, contributing to our family, and if I do that, am I going to take away from my kids? You know because, our rhythms, are only by the school year, they are not by my mate's job. I mean, he doesn't work a nine to five job, he's either gone or he's here. Will I be able to remember my scenario? So you know it's a constant shuffling. (1299-1307)

Even though the participants expressed conviction and commitment to doing it their way, the process was not always simple, it called for the resolution of many questions about doing the right thing for themselves and their family. At times they felt torn and found it challenging to balance both demands. In choosing to mother in a way that works for them, these women found that they had to consider many factors. Their decisions were not automatic but rather entailed thought and reflection. Trying to evaluate each situation and deciding how to meet both theirs and their children's needs was a challenge for them. A good example of this challenge for the participants is illustrated in Theo's narrative. Theo experienced turmoil because she was very interested in her field and in doing her Ph.D. She explained that she believes that she needs to be more than a mother, but that at this point in her daughter's life it is very stressful to try to pursue other things. Theo said, "I feel damned if I do and damned if I don't." At the time of our interview, Theo was deciding whether to continue her Ph.D. or to quit. She felt she was torn between her family obligations and her love for her work.

Being able to achieve this balance seemed for some to be related to the age of their child. Some of the participants explained that the younger the child the more difficult it is to take care of their needs, but that as children get older it becomes easier. Carla said, "I think it's challenging when you have a newborn or a small infant in front to do what, to get that time to take care of yourself but..." (116-117). Many of the participants explained that when their
children were very young sometimes they had to wait to address their needs because more immediate needs had to be met for the child (e.g., feeding, changing, comforting). Some explained that they did not have a community to support them so that when their partners were away at work, they were unable to attend to their needs for space and time.

For the women in this study, this process became one of balancing between being ‘selfish’ and being ‘self-less’ and was impacted by the presence of structural supports such as community support, partner collaboration, flexible employment, support from extended families, and access to information. Astrid’s words illustrate this point well. She said:

The problem is not being with your children; it is being with your children in isolation from others, it is being with our children all the time, it is having to choose between the two, it is not having a good enough childcare alternative, it is not having a community of caregivers who are emotional vested in our children (rather than financially), it is living in a society that does not value or support mothers mothering. (731-753)

Those participants who were the most content and experienced the least guilt were those who had been able to rely on the consistent collaboration from partners and family. Catherine’s narrative illustrates this point well. Catherine has chosen to pursue a career in a male dominated and demanding field while her husband has stayed home with their daughter. She said, “It’s pretty good, I feel like I’ve got the best of everything” (396-397). Having structural supports made it easier for these women to be ‘selfish’ and attend to their needs.

In sum, even though these women hold a conviction that taking care of themselves by meeting their needs is their right, they find challenges when trying to put this value into practice. This process then is one of struggling to balance between taking care of their children and pursuing what is important to them. In order to make sense out of their experiences and to make sensible choices, the participants engaged in a process of questioning, researching information, and pondering over various options and discourses.
Ideological Work, Reframing, and Reconciling

The experience of mothering for the participants was strongly coloured by a process of ideological work, reframing, and reconciling conflicting discourses with their present and past experience. I selected the term ideological work in this context to illustrate the process of thinking and questioning that the participants engaged in. I borrowed from the concept of ideological work used by Hays (1996) and Sears (2001) in that it provides a way to conceptualize the thinking work that mothers engage in when trying to reconcile competing discourses. Most of the participants expressed that their experience of mothering has often been contrary to what they were told or what society claims it should be. This contradiction often left them feeling incompetent or with self-doubt. For example, Anna explained that following the social “norms” was impossible with her first child who was very demanding and cried constantly. She was unable to apply what she had read in the “baby books,” so that she had to find ways to feel competent outside of motherhood. Anna described how her first exposure to motherhood compelled her to question if she could be a full-time mother. This questioning process led her to conclude that she needed to continue to pursue her interests and her work because it was through these pursuits that she felt competent. Anna decided to end her maternity leave much earlier than planned to return to work. After pondering over what was best for her, she felt convinced that leaving her child in the care of others was what was best for both of them.

In a similar vein, Alice also expressed that being completely immersed in motherhood was not as fulfilling as she was expecting it to be. After careful consideration, she had to start writing again (she is a fiction writer) and to focus more on her own needs even if it meant not spending all of her time being a mother. She felt that if she did not change the way she was mothering she would become “clinically depressed.” Alice explained:
My feeling about it [having to take care of my needs] is that it was do or die. Like I had to do that, or I was going to become clinically depressed. Like I was, it was almost like I was, the torso of my life is motherhood. But I also have these important limbs that also need exercise. I felt like I was cutting them off. Which was not helping my torso at all, you know what I mean? And so, I felt that I had to. (Alice, 400-406)

The experience of these women was one that involved questioning and critiquing the status quo, the societal expectations of them as mothers, and how others viewed them. Some of the participants were convinced and committed to their choices and felt good about themselves as mothers but also found that those choices were difficult to implement. Astrid and Madelaine are cases in point. Both of them described their experiences as being difficult or hard. They both questioned society’s individualistic, patriarchal structure (e.g., lack of community, lack of recognition of mothers’ work as work, lack of social responsibility for the well-being of children and mothers) as limiting their ability to feel happy.

These women questioned their experience and compared it to the larger social discourses in an attempt to reconcile conflicting messages and experiences. For Madelaine, the lack of social supports, the lack of recognition that mothers’ work is work, and the understanding of feminist thought all interacted to make her question where she stands:

So I struggle with the notion of... do I think of motherhood as being work in the sense that, work is work, or is it somehow separate from being a writer and being a researcher and all of that? And it's hard to integrate it. Even though I spent all those years researching and writing about it and talking about it as work is work. And for me, I have never been able to relate, I don't believe that. But I'm affected by the negative feedback I get about that. People still see mothering or parenting as something that is completely separate from what you do in the rest of the world. And at kind of another level I don't agree with that, I think that it's not healthy. And it's led to the structures in society that we have that makes it hard for parents to be the parents they want to be. And yet I can't quite stand up and... you know... (282-293)

These women struggled to make sense of the contradictions between their experiences and the social expectations of how mothers should act. Many of the participants who mentioned
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experiencing guilt, for example, experienced it early in their lives as mothers. By questioning societal expectations and challenging these, they were able to make choices that felt most sensible. Catherine's comments illustrate this point well:

> I think there is an element in society that if you're not present that there's an element of guilt surrounding that as well. And I think a lot of people impose that on mothers as well, huge...I felt guilty leaving her with someone else. [So] we came to an agreement that we did not want someone else to raise her...I felt terribly guilty initially, and people were telling me that it was wrong. That how could you leave, including our family; his parents, my father, what are you doing, he's not capable of raising a child. You know, bla, bla, bla, and you know, I said, I just don’t accept that. I don’t believe that’s true. I've seen him in action and he’s calm and he’s patient and I’m more, you know. (16-18; 49-50; 141-147)

These examples illustrate some of the struggles that the participants experienced in endeavouring to make sense of the contradictions between their experiences and the social expectations on how mothers should act and feel.

For most of the mothers in this study, questioning and critiquing societal expectations also led to strategizing; they strategized about what to say and to whom and about who should take care of their children. Many of the participants experienced anger at their infants/toddlers from time to time and questioned whether to express this to others. Many chose to be vocal about it and to challenge the expectation that mothering is always a positive experience. Some of them encountered support whereas others encountered negative reactions from others.

Aibrean's story captures this point well. When Aibrean was participating in a mother/play group, she said, “You know, I don’t like to be a mom all the time.” (181). She found that some mothers reacted negatively and left the room saying, “Oh my God, Oh my God!” (183). But others were supportive and shared her feelings, “And there were three other moms who were like, ‘Yeah, sometimes you know, it really sucks!’ Being a mom really sucks! And it was the first time that I was able to say that!” (185,186). She described how the group
leader normalized the experience for her, “And the parenting instructor was like, ‘Yeah, parenting isn’t always exactly fun.’ You know, she was able to carve that up for me. And after that, I was, ‘OK, I don’t have to love this all the time’ (187-189). These women challenged the expectation that mothers should never express any negative feelings toward their children and found this to be helpful. They reached out to friends who understood, which allowed them to vent their frustrations, rage, and anger.

On the other hand, some of the women strategized by choosing to silence their views and experiences to avoid judgment or criticism. For example, Alice does not appreciate having others judge the way she has chosen to mother. She explained that most of these alternative choices were made after researching and considering various options:

I chose not to vaccinate. That was a major one, I was so SURPRISED at the people that came at me for that. Doctors, giving me lectures about ‘stewardship’ as a parent, how they are not my children. You know, they are my, “I am the steward of these people, and I owe it to them to, so on an so forth.” As if I had not carefully decided, as if I had not really gone through, you know, difficulty as to what to do with them” (150-153).

Alice explained that her family of origin has been a major source of criticism about her choices, “I feel like my family is the embodiment of society and, they are frowning on me” (215). She also shared that she does not like being judged, “Cause I don’t want the judgment, and I don’t want to get on the podium for them” (526). Alice has found that in order to avoid judgment she has to ‘strategize’ how she acts, leading to strategic friendships. She said, ”I’m NOT sort of sitting in my life, going, why do I feel so alone (in a quiet voice). I KNOW why. Because these strategic friendships that I have, that I have to have. I have no patience for them.” For Alice the fact that others have judged her in the past and may judge her in the future has led her to become silent and distant, and therefore, isolated.
The participants also strategized as to who should take care of their children. Most resisted the discourse that suggests that it is the mother who should be present at all times. Many of them chose to share, to different degrees, their care giving responsibilities. Two thirds of the participants did not believe in leaving their children at daycare. They believed that those who take care of their children should be emotionally invested; in other words, relatives or close friends. Carla, for example, believes that having other “loving adults” who are willing to help with the care of her daughter is important. For those who knew that they did not want to be the main caregivers of their children, exploring the best alternative meant resisting the idea that the mother should be the primary caregiver but it also meant finding an “acceptable” substitute. The remaining participants, in contrast, resisted the anti-daycare discourse and felt that daycare providers can be great contributors to their children’s lives.

In sum, the participants engaged in a process of questioning and reconciling contradictions that affected their experience. They challenged many of the tenets of the dominant discourse on mothering and struggled to make meaning out of their beliefs and their experiences. Their stories suggest that they questioned the dominant discourse on mothering while complying with some of its tenets. These women struggled to change what was expected of them when mothering led them to experience guilt. They questioned and pondered over what was best for them and their children. They often strategized to ensure that their children were well taken care of as they tried to balance between their belief that children need to have loving adults around and their belief that they deserve to meet their needs and pursue their interests. These contradicting forces resulted in the participants searching for ways to reconcile them in order to make choices that were meaningful to them.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the experience of mothering for women who believe they are actively resisting the discourse is complex. It is rewarding while at the same time challenging. The women who participated in this study derived satisfaction from the conviction that their choices were based on thorough thought and consideration. They were convinced that their needs were as important as their children's but found that meeting their needs was not always a simple endeavour. It took ideological work, involving others (preferably loving and invested adults), and juggling to meet their needs and make certain choices while making sure their children were loved and nurtured. The analysis revealed some factors that interacted in order for the participants' experience to occur.

Personal Niche Within Which Experience Occurs

The participants' narratives revealed a niche of vectors that appear to interact in a manner that promotes their experiences. Borrowing from Ian Hacking's (1998) concept of "niche," I identified several "vectors." Vectors are different kinds of phenomena that act in different ways but whose interaction results in a possible niche where the experience of resistance may occur. In other words, there are various factors that come together and interact to create a 'net' or 'container' where the experience may occur. In the hermeneutic analyses, I identified the following personal factors that form a niche within which resistance occurred for the women in this study: participants' experience as mothers, their present situation, their early life/past experiences, and their awareness of social structures (see Table 3).

Resistance is Influenced by the Experience and Practice of Being a Mother

The analyses of the participants' narratives revealed that the experience of becoming a mother influenced their practices and beliefs. Many of the participants described their first infant
Table 3

*Personal Niche*

1. Resistance is influenced by the experience and practice of being a mother

2. A mother’s personal situation impact her ability to resist:
   a. Partners
   b. Friends
   c. Supportive extended family
   d. Education and access to information
   e. Access to financial resources
   f. Access to supportive/flexible employers-work
   g. Easy going children
   h. Social services
   i. Good daycare services/or caregivers
   j. Internet

3. Early experiences
   a. Mothers
   b. Fathers

4. Awareness of social structures
as “difficult,” “demanding,” “colicky,” “would not stop crying,” or “high strung.” These women explained that they re-evaluated their beliefs about their power to understand, soothe, control, or influence their child soon after becoming a mother. Experiencing their children as difficult influenced these women’s views about child development. All the participants disagree with the belief that mothers are always to blame or are solely responsible for their children’s behaviours and/or personalities. For instance, before Alice had her child, she believed that by reading many books she could learn how to raise her son into “The Messiah.” However, experience impacted her belief, so that she became resistant to the myth that mothers are solely responsible for how their children turn out:

Here I had this baby that I was molding into the new Messiah, and I was thinking, “Wow (laughs)!” And then of course the Messiah grows up to be a holy terror! (laughs). And yet I have done everything right up to that point, like spanking was a no-no, and yelling was a no-no, and everything was a no-no. And we must absolutely raise him perfectly, and he was just like this holy TERROR! And I was thinking, “you know, maybe he’s just the way he is.” Maybe it’s not, you know, it was nurture vs. nature. Maybe nature has a little bit more of a say. In some really weird ways...So it changed my mind about nurture vs. nature...He’s him, he’s like, he’s who he is. (799-811,819)

For these women being the ever-present mother who is indispensable turned out not to be an option. They resisted this aspect of the discourse because they learned early on through their experience that being that type of mother was difficult for them.

Being a full time mother was difficult for many of the participants. Ten participants were explicit about their dislike for being the exclusive caregivers to their children. They did not like being mothers all the time. For example they said things like, “I would go crazy, I would put my head through the wall,” “it was hell,” or “it would mean loss of identity.” These mothers expressed that being a full time mother exclusively and not engaging in other work or other interests would be very difficult for them.
Some participants chose to be home with their children but did not necessarily agree with being focused only on their children. Other participants believed that if they lived in more supportive communities, they would not have to be isolated or dedicate themselves exclusively to the care of their children. In sum, the actual experience of mothering influenced the participants' views and practices around mothering. These experiences led them to resist the dominant beliefs that mothers should be ever present, feel loving toward their children all the time, and feel solely fulfilled by being mothers.

A Mother’s Personal Situation and History Impact Her Ability to Resist

Several factors were identified by the women in the study as being supportive and/or helpful in their ability to resist and the degree to which they could resist. Social supports such as partners, extended family, and friends, along with education, access to information, access to financial resources (not necessarily wealth), supportive employers and flexible work, easy-going children, access to social services, and use of the internet were identified by these women as helpful in being able to resist social expectations.

Partners. Partners appeared to be key supportive factors in the process of resistance for these mothers. Partners provided support in a variety of ways. Having their partners provide financial support freed some participants to practice attachment parenting, to have the time to research information in order to make informed decisions, to home-school, to avoid sending their children to daycare, or to resist the “cult of materialism.” These women were committed to sharing responsibility and viewed themselves as co-parents rather than mothers in the traditional sense of the word. Carla’s words illustrate this point well: “I mean it's not like being a mother it's like being a parent.”
Some of the participants stated that they co-parented their children. Their partners were equal partners and equally responsible for the care of their children. In other words, neither was viewed as the primary caregiver. The participants in this case resisted the dominant discourse on mothering because they did not feel that their role was to be the sole caregivers of their children. They believed that having both parents involved is not only beneficial to the children but to them as well. Viewing themselves as co-parents freed these women not only to relieve themselves of some of the responsibility for their children, but to resist the dominant discourse on mothering by questioning and researching information that allowed them to make alternative choices.

Partners were also described by many of the women as a source of emotional support. Partners in many cases were viewed as supportive of the choices that were made by the participants in relation to raising the children and to their careers/interests. Having their partners respect the way they mother was described by many of the women as supportive of their resistance because it gives them a sense that they are doing the “right thing.” Louise’s words illustrate this example well. She considers that her husband’s trust in her ability to parent their daughters in his absence allows her to feel free to continue to mother in the way that works for her:

You see, he’s not here all the time, so parenting is basically, that the leading role comes from me. AH...he doesn’t fight that. He’s not, “oh you don’t know what you’re talking about, bla, bla, bla.” He, gives me a lot of respect about that. (1389-1393)

In sum, partners who were supportive were viewed as helpful to the participants’ resistance because by sharing the responsibility for the care of their children or by being emotionally supportive, they were freed to play other roles outside of mothering and to engage in other pursuits.
**Resistance is facilitated by access to friends.** For most of the participants having like-minded/supportive friends facilitated their resistance by providing support and “an ear” regarding their experiences or their views. Friends helped by listening to their frustrations without being judgmental and by providing emotional support and words of wisdom. Some of the participants called a friend to say that they were angry and could not bear the frustration toward their child. For example, Kate said, “Thank God, this one friend of mine, Mary, who, took care of Ian, before Brad was born. She was the most sane and positive, so every time I lost it, she would not see me as less of a being” (323-324). Being able to have someone listen and not judge them was invaluable for these participants. Furthermore, being able to rely on the support of friends to take care of the children allowed these women to have time to themselves and to meet some of their need for time on their own. Bonds with friends were also viewed as important relationships for the children who could benefit from the influence and love of other adults in their lives. For example, Theo explained that having other friends in her daughter’s life was very important, “And so to make myself go do something so she can have a relationship with others is really, really important” (136). Those women who lacked like-minded friends or whose friends were not always available often felt isolated and judged.

**The ability to resist is enhanced by having a supportive extended family.** Four participants had families who helped consistently or occasionally with the caregiving of their children. Members of their extended families were available to baby-sit, pick up children at school, drive children to activities, and to provide emotional and sometimes financial support. For example, Anna’s in-laws pick up her children from school at least once a week, “They know that on Thursday Grandma and Grandpa pick them up from school” (499). Having supportive family members freed these participants to spend time away from their children, to pursue their
careers, or to go out for an evening with their partners. Extended family was viewed as important for their children’s development in that these women believed those who are invested in their children and have a bond can be very positive influences in their lives.

Even those who did not have access to extended family at the time of the interview believed that having family nearby would be helpful in terms of freeing them to meet their needs. Many of the participants stated that their families were in other provinces/countries and, therefore, unable to provide support. In many of these cases, this fact affected their ability to live by their beliefs, and, therefore, resist the discourse. For example, Astrid believes in pursuing her interests and being involved in the community as an activist. She explained that if her mother and her sister lived in the same town, they would participate in her children’s lives and this would free her to pursue some of those interests. In sum, having members of their extended family as supports was viewed as freeing by the participants in the study. They were able to share the responsibility of care-taking with others, which allowed them to focus their attention on other endeavours besides mothering.

_Education and access to information is an important aspect of being able to resist._ Being educated was a factor that all but one of the participants mentioned as one of the things that enables them to challenge the expectations placed on them. Their education levels ranged from first year community college to Ph.D. student. The women believed their education allowed them to know where to research information in order to make informed decisions or to understand their experience better. Being educated also meant that they were able to evaluate the information they researched and discard what was not useful or realistic to them. Education also opened the door to specific types of employment that allowed some of the participants to pay for good daycare/babysitters, to work some days at home, or to work at home. Education, then, was
viewed as supportive of the participants’ resistance. They felt that being educated was an important aspect of their ability to question and critique information (ideological work) and of their being able to find and research information.

**Access to financial resources.** All the participants considered that they had enough financial resources to make the choices to mother the way they had chosen to. Their income levels ranged from $15,000 to over $75,000. Three of the participants were at the lowest end of the range and 5 at the highest. For some participants, part of their resistance was not to buy into the “cult of materialism.” In other words, they did not believe in pursuing lucrative careers at the expense of spending time with their children. All the participants were above the poverty line so that their basic needs for food and shelter were met. None of the participants mentioned lack of financial resources as a problem at the time of the interview. Lilith, however, was concerned about losing her daycare subsidy due to ongoing government cutbacks. Her annual income was between $15,000 and $30,000. She worried that she would have to withdraw from continuing her studies if the government did not provide her with the subsidy and if the peer support program where she worked was also eliminated. She was able to resist being a full time mother by pursuing her interests because of this financial assistance. Having access to enough money – whether provided by a partner, personal employment, or government subsidies – allowed these women to make choices that worked for them; in other words, they were able to meet their needs, pursue careers, or stay home with their children.

At the same time, resistance to the dominant discourse on mothering and the ideological work that accompanies it was not conditional on having a high income. Those mothers with low income (e.g., Lilith, Aibrean, and Lisa) engaged in a process of resistance and did not appear to identify lack of financial wealth as affecting their ability to resist.
Access to supportive/flexible employers or work can be helpful in the process of resistance. Having an employment situation that is flexible allowed some of the participants to “balance” pursuing their careers/interests and spending time with their children. In other words, having flexibility as it related to employment allowed these women to have more time to meet their own needs, which was central to their resistance. In sum, being able to work at home every day, or some days of the week, or to work part-time at a job that relates to one’s career was important to feeling like “having the best of both worlds” particularly when it was combined with partners who co-parented.

Having children who are ‘easy going’ makes resisting easier. The personality/temperament of children was acknowledged by some participants as being an important factor that facilitates the flow of their experience. Easy going personalities, not disliking daycare, keeping themselves entertained, and being independent were all descriptors used by the participants to illustrate how the way their children behaved “made it easier” for them to continue to resist (e.g., by making sure they took time for themselves, by not having to watch the children all the time, and by freeing them to pursue their interests without feeling guilty). Kate, for example, said, “I give a lot of credit to my kids for making it work too” (614). These women believed that having children who cooperated and were easy going facilitated their ability to resist because they did not have to attend to them all the time.

Having access to social services or outside resources supports the process of resistance. Several of the participants had access to support groups for mothers and their children. La Leche League was a source of support for the mothers who chose to breastfeed. These participants found this type of support helpful particularly when they breastfed their children for an extended period of time (i.e., breastfeeding longer than one year is considered extended breastfeeding).
Many of the participants believed that practicing extended breastfeeding was resistant to the mainstream expectation that a mother will not breastfeed longer than a year. They found that La Leche League was supportive of their resistance by normalizing this choice for them. Nancy met some very supportive friends at La Leche League in Washington, D.C., “I ended meeting these woman, the most amazing group of women, that I have to this day met” (714-715). Parent and tot playgroups also provided a source of support for some of the participants. These women found that the groups were forums to discuss and vent their frustrations in non-judgmental environments. For some of these women, these early group experiences shaped their views of motherhood and encouraged them to continue to resist and question societal norms and expectations.

There were two mothers who disliked parent and baby groups. These women felt that group participants only talk about topics that relate to babies and this limits them when they want to engage in other types of conversations. For example, Theo chose not to go to baby groups because she wanted to talk about other issues that did not related to mothering or children and found that other women were unwilling to do so. In conclusion, for some mothers, social services and resources were helpful because they allowed them to explore alternative ways of mothering or not to feel isolated while mothering.

*Access to good daycare services/or caregivers.* Some of the participants preferred not to take their children to daycare. Five of the participants, however, were comfortable with taking their children to daycare. Nonetheless, it was important to them that daycare providers were qualified and caring. For Kate, if her children liked the sitter, she was happy to hire them. “They may not be the most experienced, but if they really click with my kids they will baby sit” (487). She described herself as easy going and not needing to be ‘picky’ about it. For these
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women, having access to good paid caregivers meant that they could then pursue their interests and careers without worrying about their children. These women resisted the dominant discourse on mothering because they did not see themselves as having to be present all the time (i.e., having to be full time mothers or the ever present mother). To conclude, having good alternative caregivers freed the participants to balance between being with their children and pursuing personal interests or needs. These women also believed that exposing their children to other adults was a positive experience for their children because the children could then learn from many different adult styles and caregiving patterns.

*Use of the Internet provides a forum for resistant mothers to find support.* The Internet provided many of the participants with a sense of connection to other like-minded women. Various websites such as hipmamma.com, youarestillhere.com, and ezboard.com were mentioned by the participants. They visited the websites as an opportunity to meet other women, to voice their concerns and frustrations as well as their joys as mothers. Their use of the internet facilitated these women’s resistance because it allowed them to communicate with others whose views about mothering were similar to theirs. They found that they did not have to sensor what they said to others because other users were understanding and like-minded. Furthermore, these websites allowed many of the users to question and learn about social issues that relate to mothers and their children. Alice also belonged to a writers’ website where she shared her work and talked with other writers. Aibrean mentioned that when she was a single mother and university student it was the Internet that “saved her life” because she felt lonely and isolated. Some of the women also use the Internet as a source of information. All the participants had email addresses and used this service regularly. Using the Internet, then, was supportive of the
participants’ resistance because it provided a forum where they could share their views without judgement and where they could share with like-minded mothers.

*Early Experiences May Influence Resistance*

*Mothers.* All the participants mentioned some sort of early influences on the way they mothered. None of the participants were prompted to speak about their mothers, but when asked what they thought had influenced them in terms of their own mothering and in particular their resistance, they mentioned their mothers. For some, their mothers were a source of inspiration and guidance. These women described their mothers as “fair,” “inspirational,” “just,” as someone “who valued equality between men and women,” or who “was not in your face.”

Other participants perceived their mothers as “sacrificial,” as someone who “gave and gave and gave,” as “not doing what she wanted to do but what others expected her to,” as “being too focused on me,” as “screwed up,” or as being overly focused on “cleaning and cooking.” These women did not want to make the same choices as their mothers. They often engaged in the questioning and exploring of the options that were available to them as mothers with the purpose of not being as sacrificial as their mothers. This supported their process of resistance because by questioning their mothers’ sacrifice or choices, which they viewed as limitations, these women refused to give up all of their needs for their children. They believed they had a right to take care of their needs and to pursue what mattered to them as women not just as mothers.

There were some unique stories relating to how early life experiences were influential on their mothering experience. Two of the participants were adopted. They both sought their biological mothers after they themselves became mothers. They were the only two participants who said that caregivers should be blood relatives if possible because in this way they are more
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invested in the children’s well being. Three of the participants’ mothers had passed away. The death of their mothers also influenced these women’s choices and experiences. These three women expressed that it was important for them to see that their children had connections to others beside them. They felt a significant loss when their mothers died and feared that this could happen to their children. This experience influenced their views on being the main, central person in their children’s lives. They resisted the belief that mothers should be the main and sole caregivers because this limits the bonds that children can have with others should their mother die. They felt it was important that others be close and influential in their children’s lives because as Jane said, “Just in case it happens to me and I don’t think about it all the time but I do think about it. I don’t want the bottom to fall out of our lives, the way it did for me.” To summarize, the participants’ mothers influenced their mothering practices to varying degrees. They often resisted the idea that mothering should be sacrificial in part because of how they viewed their mothers.

Fathers. Fathers were mentioned only by two participants and parents were mentioned by four participants. One participant perceived her father as a good role model, while for another participant, her father was a negative presence. Parents were mentioned as being a good influence, “with a wonderful foundation of values,” as being good cooks and housekeepers, as never fighting, or as “very screwed up people.” Participants stated that in some cases they wanted to emulate their parents/father but in many other cases they wanted to ensure that they did not make the same mistakes. Catherine, whose father was a negative influence, made an effort to choose a different kind of partner, one who would be supportive, involved, and a good influence on her children. For these participants, thinking about their families and how these impacted them influenced their mothering practices and their resistance. It appears that this
process contributed to their conviction that what they are doing as mothers is good for their children and for them.

_Awareness of Social Structures was Influential in the Desire/choice to Resist_

Many of the participants demonstrated awareness of various concepts/theories related to social structures and discourses. Some indicated that their choices were either supported, limited, or blocked by the way society is structured. Anna’s words illustrate this point well:

I guess the one thing that I guess is influential as well, is the period of time in which I’m being a parent. Just the fact that it was socially acceptable for women to work, made it, you know...on the whole, I mean other women work...so it didn’t feel like it was abnormal or the wrong thing to do. And I believe that 50 years ago it would have been a different story. (792-801)

Some participants voiced their frustration with society’s belief that what mothers do is not considered ‘work,’ with how patriarchy places mothers in a position to have to choose between being with their children and working, and with the lack of a community of caregivers. This sentiment is captured well in Madelaine’s narrative. She expressed that it is difficult for her to make sense of her mothering work as work. She believes that her experience is affected by society’s lack of mechanisms to allow women the freedom to make the choices that work for them:

I don’t know women take on this role and they don’t like it and they're expected to, although they are, you know, it’s again kind of a mixed message. Feminism has allowed us to think that, you know, given us the power to realize that this is not how it has to be. But it has yet to have the mechanisms in place to allow it to be different. (147-150)

Many of the participants also emphasized the lack of community and social support for mothers and children. They stated that staying home with children is not what oppresses women. To them it is society that isolates them and does not consider their work as a valuable contribution. For these women, society does not provide them with quality care or communities where a
variety of caregivers would be available. Kate’s story illustrates how community support can free mothers from having to be ever present. When Kate lived in co-operative housing in East Vancouver, she experienced a sense of support and freedom for her children, for her and her partner:

We lived in a co-op with enclosed courtyards. And it was really like the best possible set up for little kids. Because from a really early age, they would just go out the door. And, I kind of checked in on them, or checked up on them. (82-85)

Kate explained that having this type of community allowed children to be free to play, families to have spontaneous potluck dinners on an ongoing basis, and parents to have contact with other parents who were willing to exchange babysitting often without much warning. For Kate this was the ideal living situation for mothers because they received ongoing support from others in the community. She explained, however, that this type of community is not available for most parents. Kate stated that the lack of community for most mothers is what makes it stressful to be a mother. Being aware of social structures and social discourses led these women to look outside of the private sphere (resistance) to understand their experience and to place some of the responsibility for the limitations in their lives on the larger society within which they live. Their resistance in this case was related to being active in questioning the status quo and not feeling that they are to blame for everything relating to their children or for their failure to always meet the demands placed on them.

In conclusion, there are a variety of elements that appeared to interact to form a niche where these mothers were able to resist. These elements relate to their own experiences of mothering, to their current personal situations and early experiences and in some cases to their awareness of social structures and discourses. Their resistance was not only influenced by these factors but also by the types of discourses from which they drew.
Discursive Niche

Possible Discourses

As part of the critical interpretive analysis, I identified a series of possible discourses from which the participants may have been drawing. The purpose was to identify the current discourses that appear to be most influential of their experiences of mothering and resistance to the dominant discourse on mothering. The findings suggest that the process of resistance is complex in that it involves drawing on both alternative and dominant discourses on mothering. It is important to remember that various discourses interact with one another and often in contradictory ways. This part of the analysis revealed that not only did they resist the dominant discourse on mothering but also complied with it. This is critical because it suggests that mothers resist to different degrees by drawing on a variety of discourses. The findings I present in the remaining sections help to illustrate this overarching finding.

The various possible discourses I identified include the discourses of feminism, achievement, individualism, self-care, collectivity, science/expert, attachment/attachment parenting, and alternative medicine. I present these in order of significance based on the number of participants who ascribed to them. Finally, I present each discourse independent from others even though they interact.

Feminist discourse. All participants appeared to be drawing on various aspects of feminist discourse. Feminist theories and philosophies are diverse but they share some common characteristics (Ramazanoglu, 1989). For example, all versions of feminist thought maintain that the current state of the relationship between men and women where women are subordinated to men is unsatisfactory and must be changed (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Most feminists agree that feminism aims at changing the world and at transforming these relationships so that all people
can have the opportunity to fulfill their human potential. Furthermore, all forms of feminism are a set of principles that are intended to be put into political practice. All feminist thought also strives to break down the barriers that prevent women from having control over their own lives. Finally, some forms of feminism (Marxist and Radical feminism) also recognize the subordination of other groups in society and strive to achieve equal rights for all human beings.

The participants in this study all appear to be drawing on some aspect of feminist discourse. Some explicitly identified their thoughts as being feminist. Carla, for example said, “For some reason I've turned out with really strong feminist beliefs” (413). Carla has chosen to relinquish the primary caregiver role to her partner in order to pursue her interests. She explained that she never imagined herself having to take on that primary role and that this way of thinking was clearly informed by her feminist beliefs. Astrid was another participant who clearly identified herself as a feminist:

So ah...my beliefs about feminism are that part of being a woman, and that the struggle against patriarchy is the struggle of, of care giving and children. Because that's what women have done historically, and will continue to do because we have babies (laughs) (hmm,hmm). And ah...and on the other hand, and so that’s you know, the inclusive part about feminism. But on the other hand, all those other things that feminism is about, you know, being a human being, and NOT BEING the doormat, and not completely losing yourself to your kids. (416-422)

Astrid draws on feminist thought in order to explain her position as a mother, a woman, and a human being to elucidate that she does not see herself as a doormat just because she stays home:

It’s difficult for me to find the venues, or the opportunity to actually position myself, and say, ‘you know, I am staying at home with my kids, and I’m doing that because I believe in it, and it works for us, but on the other hand I am not a doormat. (59-64).

Some participants emphasized that the rights of all human beings need to be honoured. Their feminist views were clearly in support of the idea that all human rights are worthy of respect. This influenced their resistance by confirming to them that they, as mothers and human
beings, have rights too. Their desire to balance between meeting their children's needs as well as their own was also influenced by their belief that all human beings have the right to be respected and to have their needs met. Louise, for example, explained in her second interview, “I don’t consider myself only a feminist but a humanist. I believe that all human beings deserve respect.” Some participants also believed that they should not restrict themselves to the private sphere, but rather to be involved in the public sphere as activists for women and children. For example, Lilith explained that she is an activist for ‘social justice:’

But I’m also a person for social justice and social fairness. (742) Ah, I mean, I’ve always have had very deep beliefs in social justice, and everybody being equal and every body having the right to opportunities and stuff like that. (796-797)

In sum, all the participants appeared to draw on feminist discourse. They resisted the idea that mothers should sacrifice their needs all the time and strongly believed that mothers have rights. They believed that women are human beings and as such should have these rights respected. Many of the participants also adhered to the discourse of achievement, which feminists have fought for so that women can have access to opportunities.

Discourse of achievement. Many of the participants explicitly or implicitly appeared to draw on this discourse. This discourse is quite widespread in Canada and the United States of America. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is an example of a theory that describes self-actualization and the reaching of one’s potential as a need (Hethernigton & Park, 1986). The philosophies of winning and competing are part of our cultural beliefs. The idea that our self-esteem is connected to achievement and productivity is common. Productivity is not only about survival but about achieving one’s potential. These philosophies are related to the individualistic, materialistic, and capitalist structures of English speaking North America (Kim et al., 1994). This discourse is not about collaboration among people but about individuals
pursuing their dreams and having a right to do so (Kofodimos, 1993; Rountree, 2000).

Rountree reports that women in their thirties tend to have high expectations to achieve successful careers and to raise children. Many of the women I interviewed were similar in their desires and expectations. They resisted by being convinced that they have a right to pursue their interests and to meet their needs. Holding this belief supported them in achieving in areas they considered important because, contrary to what the dominant discourse on mothering promotes, they did not believe they had to be the 'ever-present mother.' For example, Catherine, who wanted to spend time with her daughter and had chosen to pursue her career, mentioned in her second interview that she is planning to go to law school in the near future.

For other participants, achievement was not as important. They spoke of “interests” rather than careers. They spoke of contributing or giving back. In conclusion, the participants adhered to the discourse of achievement to different degrees and in various practices. This discourse is in opposition to the dominant discourse on mothering in that it does not promote selflessness (Hays, 1996). At the same time, the discourse of achievement is another dominant discourse on mothering in our society that many mothers, whether they resist or not, ascribe to (Hays, 1996).

**Individualism.** Most participants appeared to be drawing from the discourse of individualism. This discourse promotes the idea that people should be independent, self-sufficient, and self-realized (Myers, 2000). This discourse influences beliefs such as “doing it my way,” I will do “what works for me,” I need to “question authority,” and I will “do my own thing” (p.162). Canada and the United States are individualistic societies. By drawing on the discourse of individualism, the participants believed that they had a right to be independent people and thinkers and that their children would benefit from learning to be independent. This
idea supported their resistance in various ways: (a) independent children are comfortable when
they are left in the care of others; (b) viewing their children as independent people freed the
participants to be ‘selfish’ and pursue what matters to them; and (c) independence gives people
the freedom to question societal discourses and expectations and make their own choices.

The participants believed that they had a right to make choices that “worked for them”
and their families. This type of statement is consistent with the individualistic mentality of
doing what is “best for me” (Myers, 2000). Some participants spoke about independence and
taking care of themselves as being important (which is contrary to the dominant discourse on
mothering that promotes sacrifice on the part of mothers).

Other participants spoke about how having independent children supported their
resistance because it allowed them to seek other activities and interests away from them. Lilith’s
narrative illustrates this sentiment well. Lilith explained that she stayed at home with her
daughters for a year and a half but that as soon as they appeared to be more independent and able
to socialize with others, she decided to leave them at daycare in order to pursue a career
exploration course and later an education: “And at a year and a half, I figured they are pretty
independent, they like do stuff, they are pretty independent to go and socialize, you know, that
way I can go and do something better” (41-43).

For most of the participants being individuals with unique interests and a right to those
interests was important. This particular view was in contrast to the dominant discourse on
mothering that promotes the idea that mothers should be ever present and sacrificial. However,
some participants struggled because they believed that everyone has rights but that for mothers to
claim those rights, either their children, their family life, or their health, had to be compromised.
For example, Astrid and Lisa were not willing to sacrifice time with their children in order to
have what they wanted. This choice resulted in a process of intensive mothering, which is often
the result of the influence of the dominant discourse on mothering (Hays, 1996). They both saw
this inescapable fact as a failure of society to be more communal and supportive of mothers
rather than as a failure on their part to be more independent and less sacrificial. Individualistic
discourse has influenced the belief that each person is responsible for his or her own well-being
because of the idea that individuals should be self-reliant and, therefore, in charge of their own
self-care (Myers, 2000). The participants’ experience was influenced by this individualistic
discourse. They resisted the dominant discourse on mothering by claiming that they have a right
to meet their needs while also holding that they are the ones responsible to meet them. While
some of them believed that there are aspects of mothering that could be shared with others or
communally, their resistance was often a solitary/individual endeavour.

Self-care. Most participants spoke about the importance of taking care of themselves.
This discourse is closely related to individualistic discourse in that it promotes individual
responsibility for people’s psychological, mental, and physical health (Combs, 1983; Horwitz &
Long, in press; Pollock, 1988). Collectivist discourse, in contrast, promotes collective
responsibility for the health of their members (Kim, 1994; Meyers, 2000). The women who
participated in this study endeavoured to take care of their health by exercising, athletics, taking
breaks away from their children, travelling, reading, talking to friends, doing yoga, taking care of
their needs so that ‘they can then take care of others,’ and keeping a balance. For example,
Catherine’s words emphasize the importance of taking care of herself:

I just think in order to be whole, you have to be healthy and happy and take care
of yourself. Physically, and mentally, emotionally, before you can give to your
spouse and then as a couple you give to your children. (271-272)
Many of the participants believed that it was important to take care of themselves so that they could then carry out their mothering duties well. Jane's words capture this sentiment well:

I wanted to make sure that I was looking after myself as I was raising my children. It was very important for me to have children, but I also knew that if I didn't recharge over the years, I did not want to turn into this burnt out person, and be resentful and angry. (326-328)

In sum, by drawing on the discourse of self care, the participants resisted the idea that mothers should forget their needs in order to take care of the needs of their children. While taking responsibility for their own self-care and the pursuit of their interests, some of the participants also believed that community and collectivity are desirable for women who are raising children.

Collectivity. Many of the participants' stories revealed that they believe in the support of a community to help them to raise their children and to have access to some personal time. Contrary to the discourse of individualism, the discourse of collectivism is characterized by cooperation, collaboration and interdependence rather than independence (Kim et al., 1994; Myers, 2000). To different degrees, the participants in this study described how community and friends can be very important for women during their mothering years. Many of the participants felt that community support can free mothers from having to be ever present, sacrificial, and overwhelmed with the sole responsibility for their children. Drawing on this discourse supported their resistance in that it influenced their views about mothers and the degree of presence and responsibility they must engage in. Some of the participants were active in pursuing community for themselves and their families. Some like Astrid and Lisa felt that the limited community that they had access to was insufficient to make a difference in their lives. They both felt isolated and with limited support systems.
Others like Kate and Louise explained that they had been successful at building strong, community supports around them. This relieved them of the practice of intensive mothering, which many of them resisted. For example, Kate had lived in co-op housing in Vancouver and found that this was the ideal community for raising children. For others, the idea of community was different. Anna, for example, believed that it was important for her to develop a community of support with daycare providers and extended family when they were available.

In conclusion, the majority of these participants saw the value of community as a way to avoid isolation and mothering alone. In relation to their resistance this meant that they rejected the discourse that suggests that mothers are the best and the only ones who can raise children.

**Science/expert discourse.** Most participants talked about how they consult "scientific" or "expert" literature in order to assist their decision making process, to make sense of issues they have encountered, or to learn parenting strategies. This discourse suggests that science has developed knowledge to guide our understanding and knowledge of our families and ourselves (Arnup, 1994). This discourse was influential both to the participants' resistance but also to their compliance of the dominant discourse on mothering. They resisted by consulting information that supported their challenging the dominant discourse on mothering. For example, Astrid consulted feminist literature in order to make meaning of the challenges she encountered when she became a mother. On the other hand, these women complied with the dominant discourse on mothering that suggests that mothering should be "expert guided" (Hays, 1996).

Many of the participants in the study explained that reading books was helpful in guiding some of their mothering (compliance). For example, Carla explained that she followed most of what the 'baby books' said: "I follow most of the things in the baby books. I take her to
a regular family Dr., gives immunizations, feed her what you're supposed to, and all those things” (121-123). Many were seeking answers to their experience as mothers. They found the initial experience difficult and confusing and this led them to read on topics such as motherhood and feminism, which was influential to their resisting the dominant discourse on mothering. They found that reading feminist literature freed them to perceive their experience as normal rather than deviant. Nancy’s story provides a relevant example. She described how she read a book that was very helpful to normalize her experience:

“One thing, that, there was a book that I read in those first few months. Ah, it’s called, it’s a novel, it’s called “The Mother Knot.” But I remember that reading that book, and thinking, “thank God!” And it was a book about this woman’s mothering experience, and it was very much about how, ah, you know, she had wanted to have the kid whatever, and yet, what it did to her to have the kids. And ah, and ultimately how she resolved it. And just seeing that in black and white, I knew that whatever the dominant ideas out there, there was at least one other person who had the courage to write about this. So that meant that there were many others. And like everybody, I was going to do what was right for me. Ah…it was a really very powerful book. (148-162)

Some participants emphasized that they consult the literature when they are faced with certain dilemmas or decisions. This is consistent with the dominant discourse on mothering in that it encourages mothers to be well informed and to consult experts for answers to their questions. Theo’s narrative illustrates this point well. Theo explained that she has engaged in ‘researching’ information in order to make sense of the many options that are available to her, “But we did the research, we did all the reading, and we discovered it was perfectly safe. And we felt really confident with our decision” (316-317). In sum, many of the participants consulted various sources of expert information for various reasons. This practice appears to be common in the current historical period in Western cultures, when people encounter difficulties, are curious, or motivated to learn, they tend to seek the expertise of others (Arnup, 1994;
The participants sought expert knowledge in part as compliance to the dominant discourse on mothering and in part as support for their resistance.

*Attachment/attachment parenting.* Every participant expressed their commitment to loving and being close to their children. This experience may be influenced by our current discourse on attachment and love toward our children (Bowlby, 1991; Sears & Sears, 2001). The degrees to which the participants complied with this discourse varied. All of them expressed deep love for their children. For example, Jane expressed her love for her children in the following words:

> To know that this person is someone that my husband and I created, I love him to bits, I’m going to love my child. That was one of the things that midwife said, when Mary was about to be born, she said, you know, just love them and everything else kind of falls into place. That really hits home for me a lot of the time. I just keep thinking I am just going to love them. (200-205)

Others were committed to the practice of attachment parenting. Consistent with this perspective, Aibrean explained that she sleeps with her baby: “We sleep together, not because I don’t like it, I like it. I’ve talked to parents who don’t like it, but do it because it’s, you know, the whole sacrifice thing. I sleep fine. I sleep wonderfully” (314-316). These examples illustrate how these women have drawn on the discourse of love and attachment in order to practice mothering in this manner. This discourse manifested itself as an important factor in the process of juggling and balancing between their needs and their children’s. Their love for their children was central in how they spoke about their children and how they wanted to mother them.

*Discourse of alternative medicine.* Finally, many of the participants adhered to the discourse of alternative medicine. These women argue that the mainstream medical model of birth and baby care is not always the best for their children and their families. This discourse encourages people to challenge mainstream medical practices in order to make informed, and
what is construed as more "natural" choices (Arnup, 1994). Many of these women did not vaccinate their children, they chose to give birth at home, to practice extended breastfeeding (breastfeeding over one year), and to eat organic foods or only vegetarian meals. Alice, for example, gave birth to her children at home and chose not to vaccinate them. She explained how in making these choices she encountered many criticism and pressures from others to do it "right." She explained, as did all the others who engaged in these practices, that making these decisions was not easy. She read and researched the topics extensively. Madelaine felt similarly:

The other area was I decided not to vaccinate. And that's also something where you're going against the medical model, which says that that's the right thing to do. It is your responsibility not only to you own child, but to the community because you're protecting, you know, you're building community immunity to something. And after the first three immunizations I decided to stop because of all this information I read. (86-90)

These women drew on the discourse of alternative medicine, which may also be an aspect of their feminist views and resistance of mainstream expectations on how mothers should care for their children. Feminists have argued against medical experts taking control over how women give birth or how they care for their infants (Arnup, 1994).

Subject Positions

In this section, I present the subject positions I identified from the participants narratives. As discussed on Chapter II, subject positions are social identities in which people are positioned within multiple, contradictory, and shifting discourses (Little, 1999). It is through subject positions that people are able to exercise choice in relation to social discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 1990). The particular images, metaphors, story lines, and concepts through which a person relates to the world are contained in those subject positions, which are directly related to discursive practices. The subject positions, along with the discourses I
identified, are part of the discursive niche wherein the participants’ experiences and meanings thrived. Therefore, in order to identify how the participants situate themselves in their societal context, I identified a series of subject positions to which they adhere:

- Caring, responsible mother
- Independent woman/individual
- Educated/professional
- Critical thinker
- Activist

These are discussed in order of significance based on the number of participants whose analyses revealed that they located themselves within that position.

*Caring, responsible mother.* All the participants positioned themselves as caring and responsible mothers. This subject position is influenced by the current dominant discourse on mothering and children. Mothers may not have identified themselves in the same manner at other times in history or even in modern times in other cultures. For example, in colonial America, fathers were the ones who were expected to be the main influences and responsible presence in their children’s lives (Thurer, 1994). In our current historical period, mothers are expected to take on the main role or to view themselves as responsible. This discourse also interacts with the discourse of individualism, which has resulted in families acting as independent units where the mother is expected to take the main responsibility for children.

The way that being a caring, responsible mother manifested itself in the lives of the participants varied based on their views and practices of mothering. For example, some participants believe that pursuing their interests and meeting their needs is not only beneficial to
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them but also to their children. In this manner they view themselves as being caring and responsible mothers. For example, Jane explained:

So for me it's imperative, to be the kind of mother that I want to be, to not be a mother all the time (laughs). I guess that sums up a lot of my beliefs about mothering. (563-565)

As an illustration of caring as a mother, Jane said:

But I think, overall, I feel like I'm a pretty good mother. They are loved, they're being clothed and fed to the best of our ability right now. And quite often that's how I feel. There's these two people out there that if anything happens to them. (424, 426, 448-449)

Similar to many of the other women, Jane felt intense responsibility for her children. Others, like Louise, also expressed their sense of responsibility and interest in their children, "My job as a mom is a job that has to be done, and it's one that I LOVE, I love it, it's a big part of me... So parenting is basically, that the leading role comes from me" (376-377, 1390). The participants' stories revealed that they took their role as mothers very seriously. They often took the time to make decisions that would be positive for their children. These examples illustrate these women's sense of commitment to doing what is best for their children. Their commitment to this subject position illustrates the point that resistance occurs in conjunction with other factors and discourses. Some of their experiences and views are consistent with those of the dominant discourse on mothering. The image of the caring, loving mother has been identified by some historians and academics as a phenomenon of modern times and not an absolute truth for mothers throughout history (Thurer, 1994).

Independent woman/individual. All the women who participated in the study appear to identify themselves as independent women. This subject position is possibly influenced by feminist and individualistic discourses, which are very significant in our present historical period in English speaking North America. These discourses promote the idea that women have
a right to pursue careers, to be financially independent, and to "be all that [they] can be" (Meyers, 2000). The participants in this study adhered to this subject position to different degrees. Carla and Catherine, for example, relinquished the main caregiver role to their partners in order to pursue their careers. Some statements that Catherine made illustrate this point: "And I don't know, I think I didn't want to be ever in a position where I was dependent upon anyone" (263). She remained very interested in participating in her child's life but without having to be present all the time, although this at times created some frustration in balancing concurrent demands on her to be at work and to be with her child.

Being an independent woman did not always mean pursuing a career for the women in the study. For some of the participants being independent meant that they had rights to pursue other interests that mattered to them, or to be independent thinkers. Astrid, for example, is not pursuing a career, but has explored feminist thought by reading and researching the topic. She is an artist, considers herself a social activist, and is involved in various non-profit groups as a volunteer. In sum, the participants' position as independent women supported their resistance because it freed them to have their own, independent beliefs, and to claim that as independent women they have rights to make their own choices and decisions.

_Educated/Professional._ Even though most of the participants had some post-secondary education, not all of them appeared to claim this factor as a position in society. Some of the participants were identified as positioning themselves as 'educated/professional' women. In other words, these women spoke at length about how their education or professional interests were an important aspect of their lives. They were committed to their careers or education even though they encountered some tension in carrying out their professional/educational endeavours
because of the demands of mothering. For example, Carla went back to work 2 weeks after giving birth to her daughter. She explained how this was useful for her to maintain her identity:

You almost lose all sense of identity for a brief period. I think, a lot of people that I've spoken to, have found that too, maybe not everybody. And work is kind of something you can cling to. You go to work your baby's not there, and apart from any physical things that are still going on, you are yourself again. (214-218)

Carla was not alone. Other participants found that being with their young infants was not sufficient in their lives. They did not feel completely fulfilled by their roles as mothers (resistance) and found that their professional lives granted them other rewards like feeling competent or challenged (resistance). Other participants like Louise and Aibrean, for example, were educated with either Master's level education or a Bachelor's degree but during the interview they did not emphasize this aspect of their lives as being particularly significant.

Independent and critical thinker. Most of the participants' narratives suggest that they viewed themselves as independent and critical thinkers. These women described themselves as often questioning the 'status quo.' They explained explicitly that they questioned societal expectations even as young children. Lilith, for example, described how when she was a young girl she always questioned the way adults behaved. She has continued to question most of what is expected from her:

I mean, I've always challenged the status quo. And I think that it's also because of my own life experiences. (908-909) I think that a lot of my parenting has to do with the fact that I don't follow the status quo and stuff. So if I'm not following the status quo, I don't follow the status quo parenting styles either (hmm) you know. There's a lot of people now who were raised by moms from the 60s and stuff. Back when everything was all over the place and, you know, kids were being raised on communes, and we still have a lot of lawyers and doctors, you know. So I don't see how me, how I can possibly screw up my kids badly, from this lifestyle, you know. I mean, cause, like I love this nature nurture debate stuff. (422-428)
Aibrean also explained that she questioned many norms that she observed as a young child and has continued to be that way in her adult life. She defined herself as a ‘questioner:’

But I remember, or maybe I’ve just been a questioner. I remember a woman at our church, she breastfed her son until he was 4 or 5, and she just did it wherever. I remember my church being, “oh, my God, that’s so horrible! Horrifying, why would she do that?” And I thought, WHY does she do that? NOT, Oh MY Gosh it’s horrible, or my Gosh it’s good (hmm). Why does she do that. So I think I’ve always just been a questioner. And I’ve always looked at things, but I’ve always saw that this is the way is supposed to be, that this is what you’re supposed to do, and I’ve always said, WHY? Nobody taught me to do that. (615-625)

In sum, all of the participants engaged in questioning the mainstream expectations on mothering as part of their process of resistance.

Activist. Some of the participants identified themselves as activists. This positioning is related to feminist discourses that encourage women to become active in the public sphere by speaking up against women’s oppression. This is evident in their motto: ‘the personal is political’ (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Jane’s narrative illustrates the commitment to activism well. Jane did her master’s degree thesis on the topic of extended breastfeeding and she hopes to contribute to mothers by normalizing this practice for some women. In a similar vein, Lilith joins demonstrations to protest for the rights of single mothers in British Columbia. Finally, Madelaine has been involved in the movement to encourage politicians and members of society to acknowledge mothers’ contributions as work while struggling to make sense of her own work as a mother:

And I was doing policy research, so all my work through this time was around writing and researching, mostly, on unpaid work, which was the biggest area. I would give some talks about it and I would do this, and at the same time I was living the experience of being the mother at home, and you know, and, you know, struggling with the pressures to, you know make more money than I was making, (264-268)
Astrid clearly defined herself as an activist, “I am an activist for women, children and youth,” (715). For these women being actively involved in making a difference in the lives of mothers and trying to change the world was very important.

**Conclusion to SubjectPositions**

In conclusion, these subject positions were the most evident in the participants’ stories. They positioned themselves within currently available cultural definitions. Some of these positions were consistent with their resistance to the dominant discourse on mothering. On the other hand, some of these positions such as the caring, responsible mother, were related to mainstream, common positionings for mothers. These women did not live completely outside the dominant discourse on mothering. The types of positions they claimed illustrate the interplay of dominant and alternative discourses in their experiences and practices.

**Instances of Compliance**

It was assumed that the participants would not only draw on alternative discourses but that their stories would reveal that they are also influenced by the dominant discourse on mothering. The instances of compliance that I identified in the participants’ narratives included:

- Mothers should be present
- Mothers as role models, best caregivers, calm, good mother, influential
- Strong attachments and love are important for children
- Expert advice is valuable
- Daycare is not the best option for children
- Child discourse

In reporting what the participants’ stories revealed, I also include a discussion of possibilities they ignore by holding these beliefs (analysis of presence and absence). In other words, I
identified other possibilities or other discourses from other historical junctions in order to “un-conceal” what was not considered or valued, or what was tacit in the participants’ narratives (Martin, 2002). This step in the analysis was aimed at illustrating that discourses and their accompanying practices are culturally and historically specific.

The findings in this section are also helpful in illustrating how the process of resistance is complex. The findings also reveal that none of the participants was “radical” in their approaches to mothering. Their experience was influenced by both the dominant discourse on mothering and other alternative discourses to varying degrees.

*Mothers should be present.* Most of the participants drew strongly on this aspect of the dominant discourse on mothering. They all believe that mothers should spend time with their child. The degrees to which each of them believed this varied. For example, participants like Alice and Astrid act more fully on this belief in that they have chosen to stay home and be the primary caregivers of their children. Astrid explained that she wants to be around her children as much as possible:

> I feel that I must make it clear that I certainly do not condemn women who choose to work outside the home. There can be no doubt that she is entitled to that choice. And nor can I blame her for doing so. I certainly understand the need to 'do something else.' I do believe however that she compromises a lot to do so, including her kids interests and her own. She deprives her kids and herself of precious time together. Again I reiterate that she is not to blame for this impossible choice, it is only patriarchy. The question is not whether women should do work outside of caregiving; she must, but rather how will that work be accomplished in relation to her caregiving responsibilities. (739-747)

Several of the participants expressed that being away from their children was a positive thing to do, but that being away for too long was not acceptable. Jane’s narrative illustrates this point well. Jane explained that she does not want to be home with her children all the time, but
that she does not want to be away for too many hours either. Furthermore, she believes that a parent must “be there” for her children rather than having a paid caregiver to take care of them:

I don't want to be away from my children for eight never mind twelve hours, it is pretty well impossible when you're breast-feeding.” (Laughs) (46) “… I find that when I am all in one all in the other, I am just not happy. It drives me smoothly mad, actually. There was a time when my daughter was in day care, it was only a couple of days a week. But it just drove me mad that I was unable to be there for her. (65-68)

Like many of the women in the study, Jane struggles to balance her time with and away from her children. She has reconciled some of this struggle by having her husband stay home with the children while she is away.

Most of the other participants explained that they see their role as having to participate in their children’s lives by being around. Most people in our society assume that this aspect of the discourse is a ‘truth,’ most mothers in our current historical period believe that they must be present in the lives of their children. Western “research” has confirmed for them the value of close attachments as being essential to the psychological well being of children (Bowlby, 1991; Sears & Sears, 2001). By adhering to this discursive belief, society ignores that in more collective societies, children may not distinguish their biological mother from other ‘mothers’ (Bernard, 1974). For example, African American women in the United States practice othermothering by allowing other nonblood friends and neighbours to share in the upbringing of their children (Edwards, 2000).

Individualistic societies have provided mothers with “theories” that are consistent with individualistic mothering practices that exclude the involvement of others outside the nuclear family (Contratto, 1984). Some of the participants in the present study explained that community mothering would be the ideal but that they are unable to access this type of arrangement within current societal structures. These women believe that involving other loving
and responsible caretakers in raising their children and supporting them would significantly alleviate the intensity of their mothering.

*Mother as role model, best caregiver, calm, good mother, and influential.* All the participants held beliefs that adhere to this aspect of the dominant discourse on mothering. The discourse promotes an image of mothers as ‘special’ in their children’s lives. They are viewed as always calm and patient, the good ones, the ones who provide the best care, and as being important role models (Thurer, 1994). In this study, some participants saw themselves as role models, and therefore, believe they have a duty to behave and act in a manner that is positive for their children. Louise, for example, believes that children should learn to be independent, respectful, to pursue their interests, and to reach their potential. Given that her children are interested in athletics, she said, “Well, I am a bit of a role model, because they are also athletes, so, ah...I’ve had a lot of personal success, they see a lot of trophies and medals in the back there” (1318-1321). By conducting herself as an independent woman who pursues athletics, Louise is modeling independence and the possibility of being champion athletes to her daughters. Catherine also explained how she sees herself as a role model who should set an example for her daughter:

> My role.... I think the biggest part of it had been is just role modeling. What, how life can work, we talk about. WE talk to Alysia about how her grandmother, how she worked with me, and how she parented me, and how she was home all the time, and you know, she’ll sometimes ask, how come you don’t do that? We always have talked about it. So I think, probably the biggest thing is just setting an example for her. (661-667)

In sum, the participants adhere to the dominant discourse on mothering by believing that mothers are ‘special’ and that they have important things to contribute to their children. By holding these beliefs, these women ignore that these mothering practices are consistent with
individualistic philosophies that place mothers as being unique forces that must behave well at all times, and who are the most important influences in their children's development. More collective societies may not place such burdens on mothers because they more equally share the responsibility for raising children. The aboriginal people of Australia, for example, involve maternal siblings, grandmothers, and other elders as role models and wise influences for all children (Huggings & Huggings, 1996). Consequently, their children do not view their biological mothers as the only role models or influences in their lives. Other women who they call “aunties” provide guidance, discipline, love, and attention to several children at once. These children have ‘attachments’ to many ‘aunties’ so that even the loss of their biological mother is not experienced in isolation or in fear of loneliness (Huggings & Huggings, 1996).

English speaking North American individualistic, capitalistic, and democratic practices set the stage for mothers to hold singularly the burden of being models and guides for their children. Mothers may have no alternative but to take on such burden in the absence of a collective of maternal/paternal figures and in the absence of other structural supports.

*Strong attachments and love are important for children.* The discourse on mothering borrows heavily on the theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1991; Sears & Sears, 2001). Mothers in our current historical period are led to believe that they must love their children intensely, that this is the natural state of being, and that the loving and caretaking of children is essential to their well being and development (Contratto, 1984; Thurer, 1994). All the mothers in the study expressed that they love their children. Some of them also used the word “attachment” when describing their beliefs and practices around mothering. For example, Madelaine explained that the bottom line is that children “are the most important thing.” Aibrean, on the other hand, explained that she loves her children and this is important but that she “does not have to feel
loving all the time.” Anna expressed it simply, “I think they need unconditional love, which means, well that’s a huge thing.” (492-493).

This belief was also reflected in the women’s perceptions of who they are willing to leave their children with. Astrid believes that children should be taken care of by people who love them, “But there is a something to be said for close family and friends who have a long term investment that is not monetary” (172-173). Similarly, Carla also emphasized that having other ‘loving’ adults take care of her daughter is essential, she does not believe in taking her to daycare centers: “I am just one of the caring adults in her life” (128).

All the participants practice mothering by being loving and ‘attached’ to their children. We assume that this is the natural state, to love one’s children. However, some historians have argued that there is no evidence that mothers loved their children during the Middle Ages; at least not in the way that we love our children today. I do not dispute that this is viewed as a positive practice and experience, but I want to point to historical specificity to illustrate how even something as “true” to our experience can also be historically specific.

**Expert advice is valuable.** Many of the participants found the advice of ‘experts’ helpful. Most accessed this advice from written materials. The 20th Century was notable for placing science as the avenue to ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ (Arnup, 1994). Medicine and psychology became the sources of expert knowledge for mothers. Mothers today often read books to learn the right ways to parent and care for their children. The mothers in this study were no exception. Lilith, for example, explained: “Like by the time my daughters were born, I had spent $3000 on parenting books and pregnancy books and stuff. Cause I knew, that I really didn’t know a lot about parenting” (398-400). Other participants relied on ‘researching’ information in order to make the right decisions. Alice’s’ words illustrate this point well: “And that I have more time than my
mom had and more resources than she had, in order to research my choices and stuff like
that.” (242-243). Although Anna found that reading the ‘baby books’ was unhelpful when she
first became a mother because these were inaccurate in describing her experience, she consulted
books later on in search for ideas on how to deal with her preteen daughter.

These are some examples that illustrate how the participants have accessed “expert”
advice in order to ‘learn,’ to find ‘information,’ or to help them make decisions. This is a
phenomenon of the current times that became significant during the 20th century (Arnup, 1994;
Thurer, 1994). This aspect of the dominant discourse on mothering does not allow women to
realize that in other historical periods and in other cultures, wisdom and knowledge is derived
from other sources such as elders, intuition, religion, cultural practices, and so on (Badinter,
1981; Mawami, 2001; Thomas, 2000). I do not argue that consulting experts is ‘right’ or
‘wrong’ but that in our current historical period in English speaking North America, we often
ignore other sources of knowledge when they have not been ‘proved’ scientifically.

Furthermore, it may be important to question ‘scientific’ findings given that they have often been
used as proof to some of the very tenets of the dominant discourse on mothering.

Daycare is not the best option for children. Consistent with the perception that daycare is
not the best option for children, many of the mothers in the study avoided taking their children to
daycare. They believed that their children should be taken care of by people who love them and
who have an emotional investment on them and not by strangers. They believe that daycare
providers who are being paid are not the best people to care for their children. Catherine and
Jane, for example, briefly tried to take their respective daughters to daycare and experienced
significant guilt. They felt guilty because they felt that children need to be cared for by someone
who loves them and is invested in them. Both of them decided that they would find alternative
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Care and, in both cases, their partners took on the role of primary caregivers. This sentiment is evident in Catherine words:

And we tried daycare, it didn’t work, it wasn’t for us. I felt guilty leaving her with someone else. And we came to an agreement that we did not want someone else to raise her. (48-50)

Carla also described how the decision to have a child at the time that she made it was largely influenced by knowing that her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were willing to participate in caring for her baby:

Aaron's mother and sister look after Ellie a lot. And I think that had they not been around, and if we hadn't known that that's the way it would work, we would have waited and not had a child at this time. Because we can’t really take her to daycare, and I really didn't want to look after her all the time by myself and be the main person. (32-37)

Most of the participants believed that their children benefit from being cared for by people who love them. What complicates this assumption is that in current English speaking North America, most mothers do not have access to many other adults who ‘love’ their children. Some of the women in this study were able to share parenting with their partners to avoid taking their child to daycare whereas others did not have this option (thereby resulting in more intensive mothering). Furthermore, daycare centres are a way to access collective practices in individualistic societies. These contradictions are complicated by the fact that mothers are told of the dangers of daycare centres. They fear that their children may be sexually abused, or that their children might not be as close to them as they should be, or that daycare might affect their self-esteem negatively, and so on (Thurer, 1994). Consistent with these beliefs, the participants experienced guilt by leaving their children in the care of strangers because of their lack of trust in others, which is widespread in English speaking North American societies (Glassner, 2000).
Child discourse. All the participants appeared to adhere to aspects of the current dominant discourse on children. This discourse promotes a view of children as innocent, always good, deserving of love regardless of their actions, and so on (Badinter, 1981). The participants expressed this in various ways: children need to be loved; children need to be respected; children “need structure;” they “should not be spanked or yelled at;” they need their mothers when they are young; and children are the “most important thing.” These are some examples of what the participants said that reflect the dominant views about children.

One could argue that viewing children in this manner is “right,” they are indeed innocent and deserving of love, respect, and protection. However, it is important to point out that children have not been viewed in this manner throughout history. At different times in history, children were treated as little adults, they were involved in labour and production along side adults, and in fact, the stage of childhood as we know it today is a phenomenon of the 19th century (Badinter, 1981; Thurer, 1994). Affluent societies can afford to allow children a stage of innocence, protection, and play because they are not needed for the survival and production of goods for the family. Agricultural societies in the past, for example, involved children at an early age in production and did not view them as needing special love, attention, and protection (Thurer, 1994).

Summary of Discursive Niche

In sum, while questioning and resisting some of the tenets of the dominant discourse on mothering, the participants complied with other aspects of dominant discourse on mothering. Some of the ideological work for these women was aimed at reconciling the interplay of these various discourses into a cohesive whole that made sense to them. The exploration of the various discourses from which the women in the study drew illustrates how resistance was
complex and varies for each individual. None of the participants resisted all of the dominant discourse on mothering and none of them adhered fully with it.

The participants challenged different aspects of the dominant discourse on mothering to different degrees. The findings also reveal that none of the participants resisted all of the dominant discourse in their approaches to mothering. Their experience was influenced by both the dominant discourse on mothering and other alternative discourses. Interestingly, while resistance freed some of the participants, it appeared to lead to more intensive mothering for others. For some of the women, their choices to resist the dominant discourse on mothering involved attachment parenting, extended breastfeeding, and sleeping in the same bed with their children. Making choices based on the philosophy of attachment parenting was resistant of some the mainstream discourse that promote independence in children from an early age. These women were resisting individualistic discourses while engaging in what appears to be more intensive mothering. On the other hand, some participants ascribed to some aspects of the discourse of individualism, which led them to endeavour to raise children who were independent and this, in turn, freed them to have more independence and time away from their children. They resisted the belief that mothers need to be present at all times while holding the belief that children can be independent and develop relationships with others who care about them (compliance).

Another illustration of how resistance is complex and it entails the interaction of both the dominant and alternative discourses relates to the belief that daycare is not the best choice for the caregiving of children. Some of the participants believed in meeting their own needs and having certain freedom away from their children (resistance), but were only willing to leave their children in the care of other loving adults (compliance) and, in two cases, blood relatives
were the most desirable. Others, however, who also believed that meeting their needs and having freedom was important (resistance), felt comfortable leaving their children in the care of daycare providers or babysitters. These two groups of women drew on different discourses that affected their practices regarding their children and themselves. In conclusion, resistance appeared to occur in degrees and in different forms. The ideological work that the women engaged in (i.e., resistance) led them to different conclusions and practices.

Pre-understandings

At the onset of the study, I made explicit a number of my presuppositions. The findings supported my assumption that context strongly influences experience. The participants’ narratives revealed that the social and structural supports they had in their lives strongly influenced their experiences of mothering. Furthermore, the study confirmed my assumption that mothers cannot exist completely outside of the dominant discourse and that they struggled to reconcile 2 paradoxical competing dominant discourses. The findings added to my understanding by illustrating that the participants navigated between the dominant discourse on mothering and other alternative discourses but that these alternative discourses were still part of the larger Western dominant individualistic discourse.

I had assumed that the participants would experience less guilt. The findings partially supported this assumption in that many of the participants did not talk about their experience of guilt and many explicitly said that they did not feel much guilt. At the same time, a few others did mention feeling guilty in regards to their mothering.

Another of my presuppositions was that mothers who resist do so to different degrees. The study supported this expectation in that some of the participants departed from the dominant discourse to higher degrees than others. They drew on different discourses to different degrees.
in ways that manifested themselves in action as opposed to those whose resistance resulted in more intensive mothering practices. This speaks to the complexity of the process of resistance, which is influenced by a variety of factors.

Finally, I anticipated that resistance would be a positive experience for mothers. The study partially supported my assumption. These women found resisting the dominant discourse challenging at times. Resistance appeared to lead to ideological work and to turmoil for those mothers who felt limited by societal structures in how they were able to practice mothering.

Conclusion

The experience of resistance for the participants was complex, at times fulfilling while at other times challenging. The women in this study resisted the dominant discourse on mothering by making themselves count, by involving others in parenting their children, by actively questioning the status quo, by challenging mainstream medical models of child rearing, and by viewing their roles in ways that depart from those dictated by the dominant discourse on mothering. The findings revealed that some of the aspects of the experience of mothering for women who resist the dominant discourse on mothering are rewarding while others are challenging. Guilt was not part of the experience for many of the participants. Social supports from partners, friends, and extended family along with education, socio-economic status, flexible employment, social services, and the Internet were all identified as being part of the niche within which their resistance occurred. Discourses such as feminism, achievement, individualism, self-care, collectivity, science, attachment, and alternative medicine were influential in how the participants constructed the stories of their experiences of resistance. Several subject positions were also uncovered including ‘caring, responsible mother,’ ‘independent woman/individual,’ ‘educated/professional,’ ‘critical thinker,’ and ‘activist.’
Finally, some instances where the participants complied with the discourse were also identified including the ideas that mothers should be ever present, that mothers are important role models and the best caregivers, that strong attachments are important, that expert advice is valuable, and that daycare is not good for children.

The findings suggest that these women were active thinkers who often questioned what was expected of them and made choices that they believed were most suited to their needs and their families. Some women found it difficult to practice mothering the way that they believe is best because societal supports are absent and because they are pressured to act according to the mainstream discourse of how mothers should be. All the participants, however, were convinced that their choices and beliefs were valid and were willing to pursue their convictions even when it meant facing societal pressures and challenges.
CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Discussion

So for me it’s imperative, to be the kind of mother that I want to be, to not be a mother all the time. I guess that sums up a lot of my beliefs about mothering (563-565).

Jane

In order to examine the contribution of the study in regard to the existing body of knowledge about mothers’ resistance to the dominant discourse, in the following section I review the findings in light of the theoretical, research, and clinical perspectives out of which the research questions for the study initially evolved. In addition, I present the limitations of the study, the implications for further research, and conclude with a discussion of the implications for clinical practice.

In the study, I explored the following two research questions: (a) what is the meaning and experience of mothering for women who are actively resisting the Western dominant discourse on mothering?, and (b) how are these personal meanings and experiences grounded in the participants’ personal context as well as in dominant and alternative discourses and discursive practices? The analysis was carried out in two parts. In answering the first research question, I identified three main themes illustrating the participants’ experiences of mothering. These themes include: (a) resisting is rewarding and liberating, (b) resisting entails juggling and balancing, and (c) resisting entails ideological work, reframing, and reconciling.

For the purpose of answering the second research question, I identified the following niches that facilitated or limited the participants’ ability to resist: (a) personal niche, and (b) discursive niche, which included possible discourses, subject positions, and instances of compliance. The findings revealed that the personal niche included the participants’ partners, friends, and extended family, as well as their formal education, access to financial resources,
supportive/flexible employment, easygoing children, access to social services, and the use of the Internet. As part of this personal niche, the participants also identified their experiences as mothers, their early life experiences, and their awareness of social structures as being supportive of their resistance. The discursive niche included the discourses of feminism, achievement, individualism, self-care, collectivity, science/experts, attachment/attachment parenting, and alternative medicine. The subject positions that were also identified as being part of this discursive niche included the caring, responsible mother; the independent woman/individual; the educated/professional; the critical thinker; and the activist. Finally, the following instances of compliance were also identified as part of the discursive niche: mothers should be present; mothers should act as role mothers, mothers are the best caregivers, mothers should be calm, mothers are influential; strong attachments and love are important to children; expert advice is valuable; daycare is not the best option for children; and children are vulnerable and deserve to be loved and protected.

Conclusions: Experience and Personal Niche

The review presented in Chapter II indicates that much of the literature on mothering has focused on documenting that mothers live under a dominant discourse that promotes feelings of inadequacy (Thurer, 1994), depression (Mauthner, 1999; Stoppard, 2000), and confusion (Hays, 1996) in many mothers. This literature portrays mothers as powerless victims of the dominant discourse that encourages them to live up to an ideal that is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. In contrast, the findings of the present study suggest that by drawing on alternative discourses and positioning themselves in certain ways, mothers can engage in agentic activity. Specifically, in a process of ideological work, the women in this study questioned and critiqued social ideas and structures in order to make more satisfying personal and mothering choices,
while engaging in practices that reflected their agentic power. Consistent with Cooper’s (1994) theory of power that posits that women can be active in constructing their own views and choosing their practices, these women exercised their power in shaping their own lives by generating some of their own practices and social relations. Similar to the feminist mothers in Gordon’s (1990) study, these women did not see themselves as “downtrodden, depressed victims of circumstances; [or as] passive recipients of society’s dictums” (p. 64).

Unlike the mothers who endeavour to adhere to the dominant discourse and aspire to live up to the ideal (Garey, 1995; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002), the mothers in this study positioned themselves in ways that supported them in struggling against mainstream definitions and expectations of good mothering. By seeing themselves as independent women and critical thinkers they claimed their individual right to choose their beliefs and practices around mothering. They appeared to be resisting the dominant discourse on mothering by drawing on an individualistic discourse that promotes the rights of women who mother to have their own needs met, as opposed to subsuming or ignoring their needs in exclusive service to their children. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the participants were supported by certain personal and social resources (e.g., the support of partners, extended family members, friends; economic resources; formal education) in negotiating and weakening the dominant discourse opening up possibilities for resistance. This suggests that agency and indeed the ability to resist may be contingent not only on how a mother endeavours to position herself, but also on certain social and structural supports. These findings underscore that resistance on the part of mothers may be supported or impeded by the structural and personal resources and realities of a woman’s life. Positioning themselves in opposition to the “selfless mother” discourse appears to provide
women with the opportunity to engage in agentic action and to find more personally empowering ways of mothering.

The literature on mothering also suggests that trying to live up to the ideal may engender feelings of guilt for many mothers (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992; Eyer, 1996; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002; Thurer, 1994). Conversely, this study suggests that in resisting the dominant discourse, the participants reported rarely experiencing or being negatively impacted by feelings of maternal guilt. Rather than positioning themselves as sacrificial, self-less, all giving mothers, the participants located the problems they encountered outside of themselves and positioned themselves within discourses in ways that opposed the dominant discourse. The literature I reviewed in Chapter II implies that the discourse places mothers in a constant state of self-doubt in which they often question if their parenting choices are the most appropriate for their children (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992). In contrast, the participants in the present study were generally very comfortable with their choices and the mothering decisions they had made. They felt conviction in their own knowledge and expertise as a result of their critiquing of the dominant discourse.

This highlights the empowering nature of resistance. It is possible that by positioning themselves as critical thinkers and by engaging in a process of questioning and arriving at their own conclusions, they protected themselves from the degree of self-doubt that other mothers reportedly experience (Boulton, 1983; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002). This suggests that mothering does not have to engender feelings of guilt and inadequacy, and that these feelings can be reduced or eliminated when mothers challenge societal messages that communicate that they are solely to blame for how their children turn out. By rejecting the idea that mothers are always the best caregivers of their children, that there is a proper way to mother, that mothers should always
be present for their children, and by sharing the responsibility of raising children with others, mothers may reduce their self-doubt and sense of responsibility thus reducing their feelings of guilt.

According to the findings of Boulton (1983) and McMahon (1995), mothers often feel conflicted, alienated, frustrated, and inadequate, while at the same time they are afraid of harming their children. Boulton and McMahon’s studies also suggest that mothers frequently feel exhausted and depleted by the endless demands inherent in their mothering roles. In contrast, the participants in the present study felt proud of and empowered in their mothering roles. This enhanced sense of self appeared to be related to the fact that they perceived themselves to be resisting and questioning the dominant discourse on mothering, making choices about how to mother based on their own beliefs, not on the dictates of society. In some cases this meant they elected to engage in intensive mothering practices such as home schooling their children, while in others they elected to relinquish the primary caregiving responsibilities to somebody else (i.e., their partner). The critical issue for these women seemed to be feeling like they were making the choices that were consistent with their own beliefs, within the context of the structural realities of their own lives and given the societal context within which women are forced to mother (e.g., lack of community, exclusive mothering, etc.). This finding is consistent with the experiences of the feminist mothers in Gordon’s (1990) study who benefited from being able to perceive, analyze, and criticize the social construction of motherhood, but who also experienced considerable structural challenges in their attempts to find alternative ways of practicing motherhood. This suggests that the degree to which any mother can resist the “selfless mother” discourse and find alternate and more agentic ways to mother is limited by the context within which she lives.
A number of studies on mothers and multiple roles suggests that mothers in the Western world find themselves juggling among various roles to meet the demands of full-time employment and full-time mothering simultaneously (Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning 1981; Ranson, 1999; Geyer-Pestello, 1985). In other words, many mothers experience a tension between these competing demands. The present findings are consistent with this literature to the extent that the participants encountered tension among certain competing demands, specifically between how to meet their own needs while also meeting the needs of their children. It was the experience of this tension that appeared to be at the center of their juggling and balancing. These women juggled the various responsibilities inherent in their mothering roles, while still making space for their own needs and desires. In so doing, they felt they were making compromises and efforts guided by their own values and beliefs, and not because they were trying to be ‘perfect’ mothers or ‘perfect’ workers.

The values by which these mothers lived and conducted their lives appeared to be related to two competing, discourses, the selfless mothering discourse and the individual rights discourse. Two subject positions, that of the caring, responsible mother and the independent/individual woman were also at play. Having to navigate between these competing forces led these women to struggle in order to meet the demands of both. Thus, the findings of the present study suggest that mothers are forced to juggle among competing demands whether or not they resist the dominant discourse. The similarity between the present findings and what is suggested in the literature implies that mothers, regardless of the degree of their resistance or adherence to the dominant discourse, must find a way to negotiate between two very powerful discourses, one requiring the sublimation of their individual needs and rights in service to their children’s needs, and the other promoting the rights of every individual to self actualization.
What seems unique to the women in this study was their ability to bridge this divide, without feeling guilty about, or doubtful of their maternal roles and performance.

The research literature reports not only that mothers benefit from the support of kin, but also that they continue to express a strong preference to have their children cared for by relatives, particularly when their children are infants, toddlers, and in preschool (Hadadian, 1994; Kalmijn, 1999; Uttal, 1999). Similarly, the participants in this study, although convinced that they were positioning themselves in opposition to the dominant discourse, complied with the larger societal discourse that promotes the idea that loving adults and family members are the ideal alternative to maternal care. Those participants who had access to kin for childcare appeared to experience the least conflict between motherhood and their alternative ideologies. This finding is important because it highlights how the dominant discourse is a significant influence in the lives of mothers and how their resistance may be contingent on whether they perceive their children being loved by others. This is again significant because it points to the paradoxical nature of the mothering role in Western society where women are forced to navigate between competing discourses and expectations. Consequently, in order to understand the experience of mothering for women who attempt to resist the dominant discourse, it is necessary to take into account the challenges that societal structures and discourses place on them. Certainly resistance to the dominant discourse is necessarily limited by the social and structural supports that society provides to mothers.

Research has also identified paternal involvement and extended family support to be beneficial in reducing the burden and increasing the role and life satisfaction of women who are mothers (Amato & Booth, 1995; Baker, 2000; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Uttal, 1999). For example, in their exploration of the relationship between wives' reports of marital satisfaction and paternal involvement, Harris and Morgan found a high correlation between mothers'
satisfaction and the degree of childcare involvement on the part of fathers. Similarly, the women in the present study whose husbands were extensively involved in caring for their children, expressed feeling satisfied with their lives because they believed they had “the best of both worlds.” In other words, they were better able to balance their needs and those of their children. Having their partners actively involved in raising their children, allowed these women to reconcile some aspects of the competing mothering and individualistic discourses. Furthermore, this is consistent with the findings of Baker (2000) who examined the experience of feminist mothers and their grown daughters. Baker suggests that the feminist mothers in her study whose partners were significantly involved with childcare did not experience conflict between motherhood and their feminist ideologies. The findings of the present study again serve to reinforce (or draw attention to) the importance of spousal involvement in the process of parenting children and the benefits of being able to share responsibilities of childcare and childrearing on women’s efforts to resist the “selfless mother” dominant discourse.

Consistent with feminist research (Wright, 2000), the findings of this study suggest that formal education may help to promote and maintain resistance on the part of mothers. Most of the women in the study had some post secondary education and most of them mentioned access to information as enabling them to research possibilities and make alternative choices. In her article Educated mothers as a tool for change, Wright (2000) examined studies of women’s education and social conditions in 18 nations. She argued that women’s education fosters women’s equality. Wright (2000) suggested that women’s ability to access information, to analyze new information, and to argue their point of understanding promote critical thinking that leads to questioning the status quo (i.e. the dominant discourse). The findings of the present study reflect Wright’s conclusions in that the participants’ believed that their education was
helpful in their ability to access and critique various sources of information regarding alternate mothering practices.

Other factors that were also influential in the participants' efforts to resist the dominant discourse included their early mothering experiences, their observations of their own mothers, and their awareness of social structures. Feminists have explored and written extensively about the relationships between mothers and their daughters and the influence of mothers on their daughters (O'Reilly & Abbey, 2000). The mothers in the present study perceived their early life experiences to be significant influences on their mothering choices. The participants looked for ways in which they could mother more effectively by examining the impact that their own mothers had on them. This suggests that women who resist may seek answers to their mothering questions not only by questioning the status quo but also by exploring their own early experiences and how these impacted them, both positively and negatively.

In summary, the present study provides a portrait and interpretation of the multifaceted ways in which certain individuals in a specific role, that of mother, can engage in the activity of mothering. If I was to suggest that this study has uncovered the ideal way to mother, I would be perpetuating the very premise I am challenging: that there is one right way to mother. The purpose of the study was not to offer another grand narrative on the best way to mother. Rather, the findings of this study suggest that there are many possible ways to mother and that resisting dominant discourses is a complex process where women find themselves navigating among multiple and competing discourses. Furthermore, feminist theories of mothering have often portrayed mothers as victims of discourses, unable to be active agents in their own lives (Garey, 1995; Hays, 1996; Rich, 1986). Others like Stoppard (2000) and Mauthner (1999) have argued that women's experiences of depression are tied to their efforts and perceived failure at reaching
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the ideal of the perfect mother. Consistent with Mauthner who suggests that women can resist depression by modifying their picture of the perfect mother into one that is more realistic, the present study suggests that within the structural limits of their lives, mothers can be agents in their own lives by questioning societal definitions of mothering and choosing to mother differently. Thus, women can exercise their power by using strategies (e.g., ideological work, questioning the status quo, and taking care of their needs) that help them claim their “cognitive competence and authority” (Code, 1991, p. 218). In other words, the present study suggests that mothers can exercise agency and power by not only questioning the status quo but also by engaging in practices that are more aligned with their values despite societal pressures to conform to the dominant discourse.

Conclusions: Discursive Niche

The current sociocultural context influenced the mothering experiences for the participants in the study. In order to enhance knowledge of the discursive niches within which the participants’ experiences occurred, I identified discourses that appeared to influence the participants’ experiences of mothering, and subject positions that the participants occupied within their lives. The findings suggest that the process of resistance is complex and entails drawing on a variety of discourses and subject positions. For the women, resistance to the dominant discourse involved drawing on discourses and positions that were alternative to the dominant discourse on mothering but that were still within the larger Western dominant discourse of individualism and self-actualization (Cushman, 1995; Kim et al., 1994). According to Kim, individualism is present in societies where the ties between individuals are loose and everyone is expected to be responsible for him or herself and his or her immediate family (Kim et al., 1994). Individualistic societies are based on cultures of separateness and self-actualization
The larger dominant discourse of the past century has promoted an isolated, self-contained individual. During this period, there has been a decline in the proximity of extended families, so that the individual has become responsible for his/her own salvation through a search for self-actualization and growth (Cushman, 1995).

The findings of the present study suggest that the participants were still limited by this larger individualistic dominant discourse. They drew on discourses such as feminism, individualism, achievement, collectivity, science/expert, attachment, and alternative medicine, which were alternative to the dominant discourse on mothering. A close examination of these discourses reveals not only that they often contradict each other, but that they also form part of a larger North American ideology that communicates that it is a person’s right to be independent, to make their own choices, and to achieve their maximum potential while being responsible for him or herself (Kim et al., 1994). Although these alternative discourses enabled the participants to challenge the expectation that they should always sacrifice, be ever present, and are the only influence in their children’s lives, these discourses still existed under the influence of the larger Western dominant discourse.

To illustrate the complexity of the discursive niche, I will discuss the discourses of feminism and collectivity. First, the feminist discourse evolves from aspects of the larger individualistic dominant discourse that it critiques (Cushman, 1995). Feminism has blamed individualistic structures for the isolation of women into the private sphere while encouraging women to become more collective (Rich, 1986). At the same time, it has drawn from individualistic discourses to promote the rights of women to make their own choices (e.g., right to choose abortion). Thus, while calling for more collectivity among women, feminist discourse has employed the opposing larger individualistic dominant discourse to point to the rights of
individual women. Similarly, in choosing a feminist individual rights discourse, the participants positioned themselves in opposition to the selfless mother discourse but were in essence drawing on yet another discourse that promoted a certain set of expectations.

Collectivist discourse places more emphasis on the goals and welfare of the group and promotes collective decision-making (Myers, 2000). Many of the participants identified collectivity as a possible answer to their isolation and intensive mothering practices. At the same time, they believed in their right to make their own decisions and were unwilling to involve paid caregivers in caring for their children because they perceived them as not being emotionally invested in their children, and therefore, not part of a trustworthy community. The participants in this study appeared to be largely influenced by the individualistic discourse so that their adherence to collective ideologies was limited to what they found reasonable in so far as their individualistic beliefs were concerned and is so far as these were consistent with the “good mother” discourse (i.e., a good mother doesn’t leave her children to be cared for by unrelated, paid caregivers).

In summary, resistance is a complex process that involves the interplay of various discourses, which often pertain to a larger social discourse. The findings of the present study suggest that resistant mothers may be limited by larger social discourses. They may draw on discourses that allow them to construct alternative views and practices, but may be limited as to how much they can deviate from the dominant discourse on mothering given the limitations of serving two competing and contradictory discourses.

Limitations of the Study

Before discussing the implications of this study, it seems important to first address the limitations. The findings of social research are always bound by certain limitations, and this
study is no exception. First, the present research focused on the content of interviews that lasted anywhere between 1 and 2 hours. Therefore, the data available from these interviews were limited and selective. I also cannot claim that the findings contained herein provide the full stories of the participants’ lives. The findings open a window to what was most salient to the participants at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, the strength of this type of inquiry is that it can provide rich and detailed insights of specific processes (Madill, 1993) that can guide future research and inform clinical practice.

The generalizability of the findings is limited. The women in the study may represent a number of other mothers who resist the dominant discourse on mothering but not all such individuals are represented in this study. For instance, the sample included women who were White, were in heterosexual relationships, and who were relatively well educated, and economically secure. Clearly mothering experiences may differ for women of colour, those who are economically disadvantaged, and lesbian women who are co-parenting with their partners. Nevertheless, the present research was an initial step in understanding how women who resist the dominant discourse experience mothering and the contextual factors that they perceived to facilitate or impeded their ability to resist.

Qualitative research is perspectival. In other words, different investigators may have different interpretations and identify different contextual factors that may account for them. Hermeneutic research theory eschews the view that there is only one “truth” or “right” interpretation of any given text. On the contrary, different interpretations and understandings are useful in the process of textual hermeneutic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is not to suggest that any theory or interpretation is acceptable. There must be some degree of coherence between texts and their interpretation, which is supported by the shared meanings of understanding and
practice within a community of participants and investigators. There must be efforts made to validate the interpretations of the data by involving other interpreters. In order to validate the findings of this study, I ensured that the participants reviewed my interpretations of their interviews and I asked a fellow graduate student to review a randomly selected set of analyses of five interviews.

Finally, the findings obtained are bound by the social context in which the participants and I live. It is possible that other researchers from different ethnic backgrounds or who differ from me in age or socio-economic background may have pursued different questions and arrived at different interpretations. Hermeneutic research is not intended to generalize results to other social contexts or historical periods. The present study is bound by the social and cultural context within which the participants and I are embedded. With these limitations in mind, I turn now to a discussion of the implications of the study from the standpoint of research, practice and theory.

Implications for Further Research

The sample of the study included White women. Most of them had some post-secondary education, 13 were partnered, 2 were single, and one was gay but had only recently “come out.” Future research could explore resistance on the part of mothers who have not had access to post-secondary education, who are sole support mothers, and women of different sexual orientations or ethnic backgrounds. It is possible that the types of social and structural supports that these different women have as well as the values and expectations they hold vary and differ from those of the women who participated in the present study. Further research could examine how a lack or abundance of social and structural supports may impact the ability to resist for some of these women. Finally, although the present sample included 5 mothers whose annual family income
was within the range that is considered Statistics Canada (2000) to be low, there is not enough data to indicate how socio-economic status may impact a woman’s ability to resist the “selfless mother” discourse. Further research could explore the role of socio-economic status in women’s resistance. The present study suggests social supports (e.g., spouses, friends, and family) appear to be a very significant factor supporting a mother’s ability to resist. However, more research is needed that may support or expand on this finding.

The sample of the present study included 15 women who self-identified as resisting the dominant discourse on mothering. Given that the ideal set forth by the dominant discourse is difficult if not impossible to achieve, it is possible that mothers in general engage in resistance. To further understand the experience of resistance by mothers, future research is necessary to explore whether all mothers resist the dominant discourse to different degrees and how they may differ from those who self-identify as resistant. Future research can also explore whether this resistance is a conscious choice or whether it is manifested in practices.

All the women in the study reside in an urban area. If context affects experience, as the methodology for the present study posits, future research could explore the experience of mothers who resist in other social contexts such as rural or remote areas. This type of inquiry would contribute to our knowledge of how different contexts and communities may impact a mother’s resistance and whether different social structures are more or less conducive to this process.

The findings suggest that resistance may lead mothers to experience some challenges. Further research could also examine possible factors that could minimize the negative impact of resistance on mothers. In other words, are there ways in which women who resist can avoid feeling isolated or silenced? Are there some ways in which resistance may involve a reduced
degree of juggling and balancing? Finally, are there some strategies that can facilitate the process of ideological work for women? In addition, research that focuses on an exploration of the social changes that may need to occur in order for women to mother in ways that deviate from the oppression of the dominant discourse may also be useful.

Finally, the present study has implications for our understanding of the process of resistance. There appears to be little previous research that has explored the experience of resistance not only for mothers but for other groups as well. This process appears to be one that involves critiquing dominant and alternative discourses, choosing among the various alternative discourses, and integrating these with personal past and present experiences to develop a certain set of beliefs and practices. Further research is necessary to examine this process not only with mothers but also with other populations in order to define how resistance is experienced and how it can be employed as a tool of empowerment among oppressed or marginalized groups.

Implications for Clinical Practice

The findings are necessarily limited by the sample size and characteristics, the methodology, and my abilities as the researcher to interpret the data and identify and represent the salient findings. These limitations necessarily circumscribe the scope of any of the implications resulting from the present study. With this in mind, the findings of this study provide tentative directions for clinical practice and theory.

One finding of particular import is the fact that perceived resistance appeared to be as important as actual resistance in helping these mothers to experience a sense of empowerment. Even when their resistance did not translate into alternative mothering practices, due often to the structural and pragmatic realities of their lives, it was empowering for these women to go against the mainstream thereby positioning themselves as agents rather than victims of society’s dictates.
By locating the challenges they encountered outside of themselves and positioning themselves in ways that opposed the dominant discourse, they experienced themselves as resistant and empowered. This finding supports the underlying philosophy of most feminist therapies, the main goal of which is to empower women (Chaplin, 1988; Dutton-Douglas & Walker, E.A., 1988; Laidlaw & Malmo, 1990; Mirking, 1994; Weingarten, 1995; Worrel & Remer, 1992). Consistent with theories of feminist therapy (e.g., Weingarten, 1995; Worrel & Remer, 1992), this finding suggests that clinicians should assist their clients to become aware of the societal discourses that impact their lives, to identify dysfunctional environmental factors, and to position themselves in ways that oppose the dominant discourse in order to help them feel more empowered and agentic in their own lives and to find more satisfying and less guilt-inducing ways of mothering. Basic feminist consciousness-raising may also be useful in helping clients who mother to challenge the dominant ‘selfless mother’ discourse, thereby reducing the feelings of inadequacy and guilt that appear to plague many women who find that they can not live up to these impossible and unrealistic standards (Seagram & Daniluk, 2001).

Another finding of the present study that has potential practice implications is that for the women in this study resistance involved navigating between competing, paradoxical discourses, most specifically the ‘selfless mother’ discourse versus the individual rights discourse. Thus, clinicians can expect that their clients may encounter certain contradictions and inconsistencies in their endeavours to resist. Feminist therapy suggests that the main source of a client’s distress is not personal but rather social and political (Chaplin, 1988; Laidlaw & Malmo, 1990; Worrel & Remer, 1992). A clinician can assist a client who is struggling to reconcile the tension among competing and contradictory discourses by pointing out that this struggle may not be related to intrapsychic deficiencies but to the impact of the contradictory nature of these discourses.
Mothers' Resistance (Worrel & Remer, 1992). The challenge, then, may be to assist clients to reconcile these in a manner that may be helpful to their sense of agency. For example, a mother who has become isolated or silenced may be encouraged to see that these are strategies for coping with an unhealthy environment. If a client recognizes that there is nothing wrong with her and that her feelings and reactions are related to social oppression, she may then be empowered to make changes in herself and in her environment by resisting the dominant discourse on mothering.

The findings of the present study also suggest that certain personal and discursive niches supported these mothers in their efforts to resist the 'selfless mother' discourse and mother in ways that were responsive to their individual needs as well as the needs of their children. Support and collaboration on the part of partners, extended family, and friends, as well as formal education, access to financial resources, flexible employment, and access to services were all part of the niche identified by the participants as helpful to their resistance of the dominant discourse. Clearly, some mothers may not have access to these types of supports. Consistent with feminist approaches to therapy (Chaplin, 1988; Dutton-Douglas & Walker, 1988; Laidlaw & Malmo, 1990; Mirkin, 1994; Worrel & Remel, 1992), clinicians can encourage clients who do not have access to social supports to find concrete ways in which their resistance may be manifested. For example, some of the women in the study engaged in activism – working to challenge the dominant discourse even though the circumstances of their lives did not afford them the opportunity to share mothering responsibilities with significant others or mother less intensively than they would have preferred and believed was desirable for themselves and their children. The women in the study who elected to engage in social action felt that this was an important aspect of their resistance because it allowed them to step outside of the domestic boundary and to exercise their rights to be heard. By removing themselves from the private
sphere into the public realm, these women felt a sense of empowerment. These findings suggest that clinicians can encourage clients to step into the public sphere not only to become empowered but also to possibly develop a network of supportive others (Dutton-Douglas & Walker, 1988; Worrel & Remel, 1992). Furthermore, these findings may encourage clinicians to also become active in the public sphere by advocating for resources that would allow mothers to feel more supported and empowered.

Conclusion

In spite of the potential limitations and pitfalls of the study, I believe that the study represents a valid portrayal of the experience and meaning of mothering for the women in this study, all of whom were actively resisting the dominant discourse on mothering. Furthermore, I maintain that the findings open a window to our understanding of possible personal and contextual factors that support the process of resistance for these women.

The present study contributes to the larger body of literature on the topic of mothering by suggesting that within the structural and contextual limits of their lives, mothers can be active agents in creating and living by more empowering and less restrictive mothering discourses and practices. Consistent with feminist theories, the findings of the present study reveal the possibility that mothers can challenge societal expectations and experience a sense of empowerment from doing so.
References


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APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY
Telephone Screening form

• Please note that any information in brackets will not be read to the participants.

• I am conducting a study that is exploring the experiences of mothers who are mothering in ways that are different from how mothers are commonly expected to feel and behave towards their children.

1. Can you briefly tell me what makes you think that you are mothering differently? [I am looking for information that illustrates that they are resisting the dominant discourse]

• [The discourse on mothering promotes a series of myths: mothers should sacrifice their needs, their needs must come last, mothers are to blame for any problems in their children, mothers are supposed to be ever present, mothers should be responsible for everything that relates to their children, mothers should not get upset at their children, and mothers should stimulate their children all the time. This discourse is related to myths in the child discourse that suggest that children are fragile and that they are always innocent, pure and unspoiled; also that children’s self-esteem is directly connected to how they are mothered.]

• [If the caller reveals that she is mothering differently from any of these myths or from some myths that are not in the literature but that appear to be mainstream (I will assess this from my knowledge of the literature), she will qualify for the study.]

2. Do you have a child living with you under 13?

• [If their children are under 13, they qualify to participate and will go on to the next question].

• [If their children are over 13, I will then say:]
• Thank you very much for your interest in our study, at this point, we are looking for mothers of children under 13, if we decide to broaden the study to include mothers of older children, is it ok for me to contact you? [If she says ‘yes’: ] Can I have your phone number? Thank you very much.

3. Where were you born?

• [If participant is Canadian born or from Britain, Australia, Latin America, or Spain, she will qualify to participate, and I will then go to the next question]

• [If participant is from another country, I will ask:] How long have you been in Canada?

• What are the common ways that you think mothers are expected to feel and behave towards parenting (or towards their children)?

• Would you say that these are the expectations placed on you and that you are doing some of them differently? Can you give me an example?

• [I am looking for women who have been exposed to the dominant discourse and who are actively resisting it. I will not include women who have had limited exposure to the discourse. So that even if their mothering practices are different from those promoted by the discourse, if these practices are influenced by their cultural backgrounds and upbringing rather than by a process of resistance, they do not qualify.]

• [If a caller discloses practices that are abusive toward their children as a way of resistance, she will not qualify].

• [If some of the expectations that she describes match some of the myths contained in the dominant discourse, the participant then qualifies. If not, she does not qualify]
• [If she does not qualify I will say: Thank you very much for your interest, but we are looking for women who have been exposed to the mainstream expectations in Western Society and who are mothering in some ways that are different from these].

• I will include all women who are mothering except:

  □ Women who are pregnant with their first child [given that they have not had the experience of mothering yet].

  [There may be other mothers who are not listed here, but who I may not include because I do not have enough knowledge of their context or experience in order to understand their situation or story so that I may misrepresent their experiences in the analysis.]

[In order to gather some initial demographic information that will aid me in seeking diversity I will ask:]

  • Are you in a relationship?
  • Is it a live in relationship?
  • Is your partner a man or a woman?
  • Where did you hear about the study? [This may aid me in finding out if they are possibly from a low socioeconomic background]

[I may not accept a caller if at that time the sample is saturated with women with her same background. In other words, if I have not reached some diversity in the sample I will say:]

  • Thank you very much for your interest, at this time, I have the number of women with your background that I need for the study. If I decide to broaden the study to include more women with your background, would it be ok for me to call you? [If participant says ‘yes’, I will say:]

  • Thank you very much, can I have your name and phone number?

[If participant says ‘no’, I will say:]

  • Thank you very much for your interest and for calling.

[For those who do qualify, I will say:]
You do qualify to participate in the study, your participation includes two 1 ½ - 2 hour confidential interviews that we can do at your home or at an Office at UBC.

- Would you like to participate? [If she says yes:]
- Thank you very much, can I have your name and phone number?
- Can we arrange for a time to meet?
- Would you prefer that we meet at your home, or at UBC? [If she says her home:]
- Can I have your address?
- [If she says, UBC, I will give her directions to the UBC Counselling Psychology office and tell her that I will be paying for her parking costs. I will also offer to mail or fax directions to the UBC campus, the parking lot, and the building where we will be meeting].
- Do you have any questions? If you need to contact me, you have my number, and don’t hesitate to call if any questions come up.
- Thank you, and I am looking forward to meeting with you.
- [If she says no:]
- Thank you very much for calling.
- [I will keep a detailed record of those women who contacted me and who did not qualify for the study].
Note:
Dr. Judith Daniluk, Dr. Bonnie Long, and Dr. Jack Martin will also have access to the interview data.

Consent:
I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that it is possible that my participation may have an emotional impact on me by telling my story.
I have received a copy of this form for my records.
I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant  Date

Signature of Witness  Date
Appendix D

Orienting Statement

[I will greet the participants, and introduce myself:]

I am Erika Horwitz who spoke to you on the phone. I’ll start by telling you a bit about myself. I am a mother of two girls who are 16 and 12 years old. I am doing this study as part of my doctoral program in Counselling Psychology at UBC. [I will emphasize my role of mother or student differently with the different participants to establish rapport].

We will be meeting for approximately 1-½ to 2 hours today.

[I will generally state the following to the participants at the beginning of the interview and modify it slightly based on their background.]

I am interested in learning about your experience as a mother who is going about mothering in some ways that are different from the mainstream expectations (or common myths) and beliefs about mothers. There is very little research in this area so that your story along with the story of the other participants may begin to fill a gap in our knowledge about how mothers can mother in ways that are different from social expectations. Before we begin, I want to discuss with you some details about the study that is described in this informed consent form. [At this point, read and answer any questions regarding the informed consent form, ask participant to sign it]. I will begin by asking you some broad questions about your experience of mothering. It is important that you understand that you are in no way obligated to answer any question or discuss anything that you do not want to. During the interview I may ask you for additional information or to clarify something that you have said so that I may understand your experience. Do you have any questions before I begin?

Interview Questions

[I will explain some of the common myths and invite the participant to add any others that she is aware of]. I thought we could start by briefly talking about those beliefs that say that
mothers should be perfect. Some of the common expectations on mothers include the belief that mothers are supposed to always be around their kids. In other words, mothers do not have the right to take care of their needs or pursue what is important to them if it means not spending time with their children. Also, mothers are often blamed for what goes wrong with children. They are expected to be fulfilled by their roles as mothers and not to need anything else. Finally, mothers are not supposed to “lose it” and are always supposed be calm and understanding toward their children.

Are there any others that you can think of?

- **Main guiding questions [these will not be asked in the same order; I will draw on these to elicit the participants’ stories]:**

1. We can continue anywhere you like. You might want to start from the beginning when you decided to have children and were pregnant, or you may want to talk more generally about your mothering experiences. Perhaps you have a recent example of a situation where you felt like you bumped up against one of those “perfect mother” expectations, and talk about what that was like for you and how you responded. It is up to you. You can begin wherever you wish.

2. Can you describe how you think you mother differently from the mainstream expectations (or common beliefs) of mothers?

3. What is it like for you to mother in this way?

4. What are your beliefs about children and how they should be mothered?

5. Why is it important to you to mother the way you do?

6. How do you think others view your performance as a mother?

7. How do you feel about yourself as a mother?
8. What expectations do you have of yourself as a mother?

9. Are there times you feel you don't live up to these expectations? If so, what impact does this have on you as a mother?

10. What do you find rewarding about mothering this way?

11. What do you find difficult about mothering this way?

12. What enables you to mother in this way? What supports or other things do you have in your life that allow you or help you to mother in this way? What pressures do you feel are placed on you to mother differently, or more traditionally?

13. What do you think your role as a mother should be?

14. How do you understand and experience your role in your child’s (children’s) life?

15. Have I missed anything that would help me understand your experience of mothering?

[I will ask the participant if the interview process upset her, and if it did, I will take some time to engage in a proper debriefing of her feelings if necessary].
Demographic Questionnaire
[To be filled by participants after the interview]

1. How many children do you have? __________
2. How old are they? __________
3. What is your age? __________
4. What is your marital status? Married _____ Single _____ Divorced _____
   Widowed _____ Separated _____ Common Law _____
   Other _____ (specify) ______________________
5. [If married or in common law relationship,] How long have you been married [or] in this relationship? __________
6. [If separated, divorced, or widowed], How long? __________
7. Are you employed? If so, what is your occupation, what are your hours of work? __________
8. What is your annual family income? Less than $15,000 _____
   $15,000 - 30,000 _____ $31,000 - 45,000 _____
   $46,000 - 60,000 _____ $61,000 - 75,000 _____
   Over $75,000 _______
APPENDIX E

Second Interview: Summary Statements

#4 Astrid

1. I don't agree with the belief that if you stay at home with your kids you are a doormat, or can't be a feminist.

2. The problem is not staying home but doing it on my own, without a supportive community.

3. In order to have community, I have to make an effort to create it for my kids and myself.

4. I am isolated because of the lack of community

5. Sometimes I feel great about my decision to stay home and others I feel I need to get out and do something (the latter is often short-lived).

6. The way society is set up it does not support mothers or children

7. It is often difficult to relate to other moms who have more traditional views.

8. I do think that kids need their mother first, you bear them

9. There is something very special about that, that needs to be honoured.

10. At the same time, others can also attach, kids need to have somebody on an ongoing basis, who is reliable

11. I think the best caregivers are those that you don't pay

12. Being a mother is something that grew on me.

13. Reading can help to cope.

14. Different children will demand different ways of interacting with them.

15. People expect you to do it different and this sometimes is a pressure.

16. Mothering can be a struggle sometimes because it is an intense experience.
17. What I do tends to not be seen as work.

18. Mothering is work.

19. Sometimes you feel like you don’t like your children.

20. The best way for me to deal with oppression is to jump into those areas that affect me and make my own choices.

21. Feminism should honour the need of all, and of children, especially.

22. Quality childcare options are needed.

23. Children need to be respected.

24. Children deserve to have their needs met.

25. I disagree with the belief that mothers are responsible for their children’s actions and personalities.

26. Choosing to stay home is not about money.

27. Mothering the way I do is very lonely.

28. As a mother, woman and citizen I contribute a lot, and my work is work even though it is unpaid.

29. The problem for stay at home moms is not that this causes boredom but that it is so isolating.

30. I make choices that are criticized by others, but that is the way that I think it’s best.

31. I am a social activist.

32. Children need a variety of role models.
APPENDIX F
Sample of Transcription

#5 Aibrean

1. I: Ok, so the first thing I thought we could start with was just clarifying a few of those beliefs,
2. That tell mothers, you know that they should be perfect and that mothering should be done a certain way,
3. And so on.
4. So some of the common expectations on mothers include:
5. The belief that mothers are supposed to always be around their kids,
6. And that doesn’t mean if you stay home or if you work,
7. If you need to do something for yourself or do anything,
8. You better sacrifice that, because the kids come first.
9. That you don’t have a right to take care of your needs or pursue what’s important to you,
10. If it means not spending time with your children.
11. Also that mothers are often blamed,
12. So that if your child misbehaves or there’s something wrong,
13. Then that must be something wrong the mother is doing, and it must be all your fault.
14. They are expected to be fulfilled by their roles as mothers,
15. So that’s all you should wish for in life,
16. So that once you are a mother, you shouldn’t hope for anything else.
17. That should be fulfilling,
18. And another one, is that mothers are not supposed to lose it or get angry at their children (participant laughs),
19. You are supposed to be always be calm, and if you do, then you’re harming them
20. So those are some of, and there’s I’m sure others,
21. Are there any others that you can think of,
22. That you’ve experienced as pressures on mothers....
23. R: Well, One of the things that I’ve always had, is the whole messiness factor.
24. The whole cleanliness thing, I think we talked about that a bit on the phone,
25. I grew up in a home, where my mom was,
26. She was a teacher and she had the summers off,
27. But she was, she bought into all that, and she still does.
28. She has all this mother guilt,
29. And she wonders why we are full of self entitlement, and spoiled
30. And she didn’t do anything else.
31. She cleaned from morning to night, worked, cooked and clean and mothered us.
32. Everything was spotless all the time.
33. And she wonders why we are full of self entitlement, and spoiled
34. And she didn’t do anything else.
35. So I fight the cleanliness thing because I have other things to do.
36. So I don’t (hmm, hmm).
39. I: Yeah, and I think that is actually true that if you are a mom and a "housewife"
40. That's part of the...
41. R: You are supposed to vacuum every day, and have a sparkling floor and the dishes are
    supposed to be done.
42. And the laundry is always supposed to be done,
43. And it is not impossible to...
44. I: You attend to other things so, if
45. R: Yeah, so that is one of my things.
46. I: Are there any others that you have experienced as pressures on you to do it a certain
    other way...
47. Or they might come later...
48. R: There are many things that are specific,
49. Specific to me, but I don’t know if they are general pressures.
50. (or to you, it doesn’t matter).
51. …I get a lot of pressure from my parents specifically,
52. To do certain things, make sure I,
53. They, I don’t know if they are perceived all toward mothering,
54. Or if it is religion.
55. You know, you need to bring your child to Sunday school, you need to bring your,
56. You know, otherwise they won’t be moral people.
57. You need to do certain things that pertain more to religion than mothering and such.
58. I think that sometimes, if you grow up in a religious household there is that expectation.
59. (my son is having some problems at school, so if the phone rings I need to answer it, he has
    ADD).
60. I: OK, so we can continue anywhere you’d like,
61. You might want to start from the beginning when you decided to get pregnant and have
    children,
62. Or you can talk more generally about your mothering experiences or
63. You can maybe, if that doesn’t, you can also think of a recent example of a situation where
    you felt that you bumped against one of those…and how you responded, it’s up to you.
64. R: Well, I’m good at chronological so I’ll just keep talking and talking,
65. And you can interject (OK,)
66. I started out parenting in a very wrong way according to society.
67. I was 19 and I had a one night stand with somebody,
68. Like so many people do, but I got pregnant.
69. And just where I was in life, I knew I couldn’t have an abortion,
70. I was depressed, and it wasn’t an option.
71. And I really wanted to be a mom, I always wanted to be a mom,
72. I was extremely confident in my ability to be a mom.
73. If I could get over the depression part.
74. Or I was going to give up the child for adoption,
75. Which I thought of for the whole of two weeks, and then stopped,
76. And I was going to be a mom.
77. I was 19 when he was born, and so right of the bat,
78. I was doing things differently.
79. “oh, my gosh, you are not going to have a dad”
80. how’s the child, you know, what are you going to tell him,
81. You can’t tell him the truth,
82. Why, can’t I tell my child the truth?
83. You can’t tell him that you had a one night stand with someone,
84. And I got this from friends, from his parents, not so much from my parents,
85. But from other people.
86. Ah, I grew up in a small rural, close minded community,
87. And the father was the father was from a different race,
88. He was from Mexico,
89. And it is a really icky place, where I used to live,
90. And that is why I don’t live there anymore, part of the reason.
91. Really closed minded, and people saying, ‘he’s going to look different!”
92. People were making rude and nasty comments before he was even born.
93. It was just icky.
94. So in that way, I started out diff.
95. But at 19, I wasn’t a full, I mean, I didn’t know a lot about myself at 19
96. And so I was, Andy and I have grown up together.
97. As a University student, I was told I couldn’t be a university student and have a child at the
same time,
98. Because there was not possible way I could possibly parent and go to school.
99. And actually that is the best situation I’ve ever been under,
100. Only next to being able to stay at home, which I like to do, now that I can do that.
101. I moved 3 and ½ hours away from my parents,
102. And Andy went to a family daycare,
103. And I never really got the, I got the “you’re supposed to be with your child, you can’t go to university”
104. But if I didn’t go to University, I would have had to work.
105. But nobody seem to think that that was a problem,
106. Like if you worked and put your child in daycare.
107. I did have enough people, once I got to University, who were really supportive,
108. “you’re a really good mom, and,”
109. I just parented the best way I know how.
110. I did however have the whole, I thought I had to do everything,
111. I thought the house had to be clean, I thought all the laundry had to be done,
112. I was really kind of stressing out at first.
113. Ah, I don’t really remember anything terribly specific with him.
114. Ah, I know that, when he was 3 ½ he started showing signs of attention deficit.
115. And just having the behaviour issues, he would throw extreme spassy temper tantrums.
116. And, one time we were at the library,
117. And he was, having a conniption fit, and I had to bring him to the bathroom,
118. There was nowhere else to take him, the exit was on the opposite side of the library.
119. He was screaming, “mommy, you are hurting me, no, no, you’re hurting me!”
120. And I wasn’t even touching him.
121. So I put him on the changing table and I stood back,
122. And I had mother after mother, coming in to check on me.
123. And obviously I don’t think that has to do with, you know, what did I do?
124. But obviously if your child is screaming, mommy, you’re hurting me,
125. Hopefully you would think that…but I was standing back with my arms to myself.
126. So that, I would make sure that other moms would see that I wasn’t hurting my child.
127. But I always got the look, and I always felt like [they thought], “what did you do to him
    at home to make him say those things?”
128. You know, I’ve never done anything.
129. I am not sure, so what experiences are you looking for?
130. (just keep talking).
131. With Andy, I breastfed Andy until he was 13 months
APPENDIX G
Request for Participant Feedback Regarding analysis

Mothering Study

To Participants

Please read and think about what the attached interpretations of your narrative suggest in terms of how well it describes your overall experience. Try to think of your experience and beliefs and compare these with my interpretation, with the purpose of determining how well the enclosed interpretation captures your overall experience as a mother.

You may comment on how accurately or inaccurately the interpretation describes your experience. Please be specific and write a few comments on each interpretation. If you agree and do not have much to add, just indicate your agreement.

I have provided you with the analysis which is a series of themes that I identified after carefully examining your story.

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this study. It has helped me enormously in my research endeavours. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call me at 464-5953 or email me.

Thank you,

Erika Horwitz

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS:

The central theme in the narrative account aimed at describing the main theme of your experience.
The subject positionings are employed as descriptions of how you may see yourself or your role in your present experience.
The secondary themes are themes that may not be as central as the main theme but that present themselves as important patterns of experience in the narrative account.
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_Mother's Resistance 220_
APPENDIX I

Modes of Resistance

1. Resistance by Making Myself Count.
   a. Resistance by meeting my needs and/or pursuing my interests.
   b. Deriving fulfillment not only from mothering but also from other things in my life.
   c. I don’t have to be around my children all the time.

2. Resistance by Involving Others.
   a. Partners as primary caregivers.
   b. Co-parents.
   c. Involving others/community.
   d. I should not have to do it all.

3. Resistance by Actively Questioning and/or Actively Voicing Views.
   a. Actively questions expectations.
   b. Voicing views/experience.

   a. Resistance to the mainstream medical model.
   b. Child focused and/or attachment parenting.

5. Resistance that Involves the Role of Mother.
   a. Not responsible for all of my children’s behaviours or how they turn out.
   b. I don’t have to feel loving toward my children all the time.
   c. My role is not to cook and/or clean.
   d. I cannot take credit or blame.
APPENDIX I (continued)

Modes of Resistance

The types of resistance that the participants’ reported were clustered into five categories:

a) Instances of resistance that involve ‘making myself count’;

b) Instances of resistance by involving others (sharing responsibility or wanting to share responsibility for caregiving, parenting, and influencing their children);

c) Instances of resistance by actively questioning and/or actively voicing views (e.g., the status quo, society, etc.) and often taking some action;

d) Instances of resistance to the mainstream medicine/individualistic approaches to child-rearing.

e) Instances of resistance that involve the role of mother.

The fact that some participants may have not mentioned certain types of resistance does not necessarily mean that they don’t resist in that way but that this type of resistance is not central to their experience. Quotes from the participants’ narratives will support the findings presented here.

Resistance by Making Myself Count

Meeting my needs and/or pursuing my interests is important. All the participants in this study expressed that it is important for them to meet their own needs or pursue their own interests. Their interests included athletics, graduate school, writing, taking time out, work, exercise, mundane activities, and so on. The degree to which they were able to meet their needs or pursue their interests varied. For example, Carla, Jane, Catherine, and Alexandra’s partners were the primary caregivers of their children, which freed them to pursue their careers and take time for other activities such as reading and exercise. Catherine said, “I think that in order to be
whole, you have to be healthy and happy and take care of yourself physically, and mentally, emotionally, before you can give to your spouse, and then as a couple you give to your children” (271-272). Others like Louise, Anna, Lilith, and Kate found ‘community’ in friends, family, daycare, and baby-sitting co-ops and this allowed them to pursue their careers or take some time for themselves. Some participants explained that they believed in meeting their needs and pursuing their interests but that they found it difficult because they lacked the social supports to do so. Astrid, for example, explained that she has a right to her interests but that she does not have any family near by and it is difficult to find someone to help her with her children. Finally Lisa expressed that she is interested in other endeavours including “challenging conversation” or art exhibits but that she is often unable to pursue those because society does not allow mothers to include their children in this type of activity. Whether they were able to fulfill their needs or not, all the participants expressed having a right to do so.

**Deriving fulfillment not only from mothering but also from other things in my life**

“Yeah, and I know I am not completely fulfilled by the mothering role.” (Jane, 85).

Eleven of the 15 participants expressed that even though mothering is important to them, they also need other experiences to feel fulfilled (Louise, Anna, Carla, Theo, Madelaine, Lilith, Jane, Catherine, Alexandra, Nancy, Lisa). For example, Catherine and Alexandra explained that there is no one thing in their lives that is fulfilling on its own, they need variety to feel satisfied. Catherine said, “I do not think that any one thing in life makes you whole” (261). Others found that their initial experiences as mothers were difficult, which led them to seek other activities to feel fulfilled. For example, Anna explained that motherhood, particularly in the early stages, did not allow her to feel competent because her baby was a very difficult infant who cried
constantly. For her, mothering during that period did not fulfill her needs so she sought involvement in her work to feel competent,

If I was going to love that baby, have any quality time with that baby, I have to get away from that baby. I have to meet my own need, and my own needs of being competent (136-140)

Finally, Lisa, in contrast to the rest of the participants, expressed that because she is “child focused” she has found fulfillment in being a mother but does not expect that this will be the case after her child is 5 and more independent. She expects to return to work at that time,

I mean I’m going to go back to work next year, but, I think I’ll really be able to focus on that more, because she’s going to be going to have her own space and her own time. But at the moment, when she’s more dependent on me...(452-455).

In conclusion, these women explicitly expressed that fulfillment for them derives from a variety of experiences, not just from mothering.

I don’t have to be around my children all the time Eight participants expressed that they did not believe they had to be around their children all the time, they did not see that as necessary for their children’s well-being or to be good mothers (Louise, Anna, Carla, Lilith, Jane, Catherine, Alexandra, Nancy). Carla, for example, said, “I don’t think you have to be with your child constantly for a strong bond to develop. I think as long as you’re there frequently and as long as you are loving and consistent...there is going to be a strong bond” (110-113). Jane stated, “I don’t think that a mother has to be around 100% of the time to be a good mother” (394). Alexandra and Catherine explained that they believe in being available for their daughters but not all the time. Alice, on the other hand, had chosen to be with her children all the time, she has remained at home and has chosen to homeschool. She explained that mothering took over and absorbed her, she realized this was becoming a problem for her so that she began to pursue her writing career in order to keep a balance.
Mothers’ Resistance

So I was focusing on mothering all the time, I couldn’t, like it was almost like I had chosen it as an escape from life...It’s like before I had my kids I was the Richard Stein, with the cigar in the mouth and the F word. And suddenly I was this ultra-domesticated woman...(340, 361-362)...I’ve got to find something to do or I am going to go out of my mind. So I, I went back to writing (314-315).

These women explained that motherhood cannot fulfill them. They found that they needed to pursue other interests in order to “be happy” and “feel whole.”

Resistance by Involving Others

Partners as primary caregivers. Four of the participants’ husbands were the primary caregivers of their children (Carla, Jane, Catherine, Alexandra). These women were pursuing careers and education while their husbands were at home taking care of their children. Jane and Carla’s husbands took parental leave when their children were born. Carla went back to work 2 weeks after the baby was born and Jane at 3 months. Alexandra and Catherine shared taking care of their infant daughters with their partners for the first few months and then chose to return to work while their husbands took care of their children. Three of these women all expressed that this arrangement freed them to pursue their careers and interests without feeling guilty for leaving their children behind.

Co-parents. In addition to the participants whose husbands were the primary caregivers of their children, Nancy and Lisa reported that their husbands were equal partners in parenting their children and also saw themselves as co-parents. These two women emphasized that they shared the care of their children with their husbands. Lisa recently separated from her husband but he continues to share equally in the care of their daughter. Madelaine also expressed that she believes that partnership and co-parenting is a desirable goal, but that because her husband was initially unable to participate equally due to illness and work difficulties, they developed “patterns of care” that placed her as the main caregiver (situational compliance). The result is
that her children now see her as their main source of guidance and support. Finally, Lilith stands out as unique in this category because she is and always has been a single mother, she does not have a partner with whom to share responsibility with. She has involved several trusted friends and daycare providers in helping her raise her children.

Involving others/community Most of the participants had either involved others in helping them with their children, or believed in involving others but were unable to do so (Louise, Anna, Carla, Astrid, Theo, Madelaine, Lilith, Jane, Catherine, Alexandra, Kate, Lisa). These women believed that having access to a supportive community when raising children is essential. Louise explained that because her partner travels “off and on” for 9 months of the year, she has had to seek a community for herself and her children, “I believe in community parenting!” (658). For example, she has participated in baby sitting co-ops, she asks family to help her, organizes pot-luck dinners, and participates in athletic activities with and without her daughters. Astrid, on the other hand, moved to the Vancouver area recently and feels quite isolated. Even though she has made efforts to find supports, she has found it very difficult to build a community for herself and her family.

It is important to note that most of the participants except Anna, Aibrean, Lilith, and Alexandra do not believe (or like) leaving their children in daycare centres. They did not want to pay for someone to care for their children, or believed that having adults who love and have an investment in the well being of their children is better for their children. These women emphasized that the way society is structured does not allow for a natural community experience that includes various loving adults collaborating in the upbringing of children. These women explained that this leads them to actively seek ways to create community for themselves and their children.
Kate emphasized how living within a community where the children can go out and play freely without needing parental supervision at all times is the ideal for her. She lived in co-operative housing in Vancouver,

"We lived in a co-op with enclosed courtyards. And it was really like the best possible set up for little kids. Because from a really early age, they would just go out the door. And, I kind of check in on them, or check up on them." Because they would just be off doing their own thing. And that was the norm, all of us did that. There were so many eyes on the courtyard, and the courtyard was enclosed that, it was fabulous. It was really a nice safe place." (82-91).

Kate explained that she experienced how community and support made her feel connected and supported. In addition to living in this setting for many years, she always felt comfortable leaving her children with baby sitters, "And from a very early age left Ian with baby sitters, and always thought that that was a very healthy thing" (46-47).

I should not have to do it all. Three participants expressed that they did not believe they should have to do it all (Astrid, Catherine, Madelaine). Astrid explained that she believed in being with her children and seeing them develop but that she does not believe that she should have to do it all by herself; she would prefer to be part of a supportive community where people would share in supporting each other. Catherine does not believe that she should have to do it all herself so she chose a partner who shares equally with her in running the household and taking care of their child. Finally, Madelaine explained that she would have liked her partner to be more involved not only with the children but with the running of the household. She believes that they developed strong patterns by which she does most of those tasks and that these patterns would now be difficult to change.

Resistance by Actively Questioning and/or Actively Voicing Views

Actively questions expectations. Six of the participants expressed that they actively engage in questioning the expectations that are placed on them by others and society (Astrid,
Aibrean, Alice, Madelaine, Lilith, Lisa). It is possible that most mothers in the study engage in some sort of questioning at one time or another, but these 6 women’s narratives reveal that questioning is central to how they experience mothering and resist the dominant discourse. Astrid found the experience of mothering so difficult at the beginning (her son would not stop crying) that she began searching for ways to make sense of her experience. She read feminist literature and began to question the social forces that affected her experience (e.g., the lack of community for mothers who choose to stay home, the views that mothers who stay home are “doormats” and sacrificial, and so on). She does not view herself as a “doormat” and is not willing “to compromise my right to have close and connected relationships with my children.”

Aibrean described herself as a “questioner” and Lilith as someone who has always “questioned the status quo.” Both these women described that they always asked questions about societal norms and expectations when they were young. They both stated that they have continued this practice with regards to mothering. Alice, Madelaine, and Lisa also appear to question how society tells them they should mother. For example, they questioned whether boys should not be raised as girls (Madelaine), or whether children do not belong at certain events (Lisa), or whether children should attend school because it is good for them (Alice). Finally, Louise, Astrid, Aibrean, Alice, and Madelaine stated that they question the value of materialism, which has led them to make efforts to raise their children in alternative ways. For example, Aibrean explained that she does not work because she believes in being home with her children, she would rather be home and have a limited amount of money, than to go to work just to buy her children ‘things’ at the expense of being around them. All these mothers explained that questioning often leads to choices that are not ‘mainstream.’
Voicing views/experience. Eight of the participants stated that they voice their views or experience formally or informally. Astrid, Theo, Madelaine, Lilith, and Jane consider themselves activists for women and mothers. Astrid participates in groups for parents (parenting and La Leche League) where she voices her views about patriarchy and its impact on mothers, children, and families. Theo is a doula who believes in telling new or expecting parents about the difficulties of caring for an infant. Madelaine has been involved in an organization called Mothers Are Women where she has done research and advocacy in support of the view that mothers' work is work. Lilith attends demonstrations and writes to politicians to protest the treatment of single mothers in British Columbia. Jane is actively involved in supporting mothers who want to engage in extended breastfeeding.

Aibrean, Nancy, Kate, Theo, and Lilith all believe that mothers should be free to express the difficulties of being a mother. Nancy explained that sometimes she felt like she was going crazy and she hated her child. Being able to voice this to her friends was very helpful in keeping her sanity. Kate, Aibrean and Lilith told similar stories. They felt relieved when they shared their frustrations with others.

Resisting by Questioning Mainstream Medical/Individualistic Approaches to Child-Rearing

Resistance to the mainstream medical model. Nine of the participants reported that some of their practices were not in agreement with the mainstream medical model on birthing, breastfeeding, and vaccinations (Astrid, Aibrean, Theo, Alice, Madelaine, Lilith, Jane, Nancy, Kate). These 9 women chose to practice extended breastfeeding, which means that they breastfed their children anywhere between 1 1/2 to 4 years. For example, Astrid explained that breastfeeding enhances the bond between mother and child. Jane, who is an activist for extended
Mothers’ Resistance

breastfeeding said, “Actually the research shows that breastfeeding 2 years and beyond is a good thing for the child and for the mom, health for bonding, and a number of other reasons” (104).

Aibrean, Theo, and Alice all chose to have home births. They explained that there are many women who do this but it is still uncommon. Aibrean said it was the best choice she could have made, “I think it’s the very best choice women can make, I think if they knew more,” (443). They found that many people including their families and friends were opposed to or critical of this choice. Theo explained that her mother-in-law is a nurse and she was very vocal against her having her baby at home. All 3 women explained that they researched the topic in depth and felt very confident that their decision was the right one for them and that home births are indeed safe.

Finally, Alice, Madelaine, and Lilith explained that they chose not to vaccinate their children. They did extensive reading that led them to make this choice. Alice explained that the decision was not easy but that after doing some research, she decided that this was the best thing for her children. These 3 women explained that they have experience criticism for making this choice. Alice said, “As if I had not carefully decided, as if I had not really gone through, you know, difficulty as to what to do with them” (153).

**Child focused and/or attachment parenting**. Six mothers in the study indicated that they practice (d) parenting that is child focused (Astrid and Lisa) and/or that involves some aspects of ‘attachment parenting’ (Astrid, Madelaine, Nancy, Theo, Aibrean). Lisa, for example, explained that she believes that mothers and fathers should focus their attention on the children for the first 5 years of life. Astrid wants to be around her children a significant amount of time because this is important for their development and because she wants to be there “to see them grow.” Madelaine and Astrid mentioned Dr. Sears’ “Attachment Parenting” (Sears & Sears, 2001) as the model for raising their children and for keeping them as close as possible to them while they are
very young. All 6 women chose to have their children sleep with them for the first few years of their lives. Nancy explained that she needed them to be in her bed because she found this to be less disruptive to her sleep when the children needed to breastfeed or when they needed support with bad dreams or illness.

Resistance that Involves the Role of Mother.

Not responsible for all of my children's behaviours or how they turn out. All the participants stated that they do not feel responsible for how their children turn out. They acknowledged that they are one of many factors that influence their children's development. Lilith, for example, said: “And, cause like some studies are saying, the parents are actually like 13% of control over the future of the kids. I mean, that was the lowest number I saw, but that was the one I liked the best (laughs). I only have 13% of control” (432). She explained that although she believes that there are other influences that impact children’s development, she nevertheless makes efforts to teach her daughters to act with respect and to be well behaved. The other participants shared similar stories, that biology is a strong influence. For instance, Aibrean stated that her son has been diagnosed with ADHD and that she does not feel responsible for that. Jane said, “nature is so much ingrained, they will develop the way they are going to develop.” Carla stated that “genetics are the canvas. The canvas can’t be changed” but that “How you are made to feel about yourself when you're a baby and a toddler by adults around you” is also an influence. Catherine said “genetics, nurture, love, environment” are all influences on who children are and who they become. Alexandra said, “it’s a soup of factors.” Kate said she did not only not take all the blame, but she emphasized that she could not take the credit either, “I feel like I can’t take the credit for how they turn out” (542).
Finally, Theo and Lisa stated that although they are not the only influences on their children, they see themselves as very influential. Theo said, “the mother is a huge factor” in a child’s life. Lisa said, “I take credit.” These two participants appeared to view themselves as more influential than did the rest.

I don’t have to feel loving toward my children all the time. A few participants expressed that they did not feel loving towards their children all the time (Anna, Astrid, Aibrean, Theo, Nancy). Aibrean explained that when her first son was small she shared her frustrations with other mothers at a parent/baby group:

It’s kind of like a play group but much more organized. And, it was one of those groups, then I looked at everybody, I looked at the parents, and instructors, and I said, “you know, I don’t like to be a mom all the time...The myth that mothers are all wonderful and all loving, I mean I think it is possible to love your child completely. It’s completely possible to love your child unconditionally and to be loving, and not necessarily act in a loving way all the time, you know what I mean? (533-537).

Anna, Nancy, Astrid, and Theo found that children can be very difficult to care for at times and they acknowledged that they do not always feel or have felt loving towards their children. Theo has chosen to speak up about the difficulties and pain of taking care of an infant, “I’m pretty forthright that there was a lot of times when I didn’t really like her” (432).

My role is not to cook and/or clean. Four of the participants explained that they did not view their role as that of a cook and/or cleaning person (Aibrean, Alice, Lilith, Lisa, Catherine). Aibrean and Alice described how their mothers had focused too much of their energies on having perfectly clean homes and cooking fancy meals. They did not want to spend their time focused on these endeavours. Alice explained that she makes sure that she has food that her children can prepare on their own or makes nutritious meals that may include sandwiches and raw vegetables, “So a lot of times, we’ll have, you know, raw cut up vegetables, and toast and maybe some tofu,
for supper….Because I’m sorry, he’s here all day, he eats 8 times a day, I can’t make 8 meals a day. So I see my job for my 7-year-old is that there are snacks that he can help himself to.” Lilith and Lisa were not interested in cleaning and cooking, they did not see that as their contribution. Although Lisa explained that her parents were gourmet cooks and she wishes she could cook that way for her daughter, she does not like or is interested in it.

**I cannot take credit or blame.** Kate’s narrative yielded some instances of resistance that are unique to her. This may not mean that she is the only one who resists in this way only that these were central in her narrative but not in the others’. Kate stated that she does not believe in sheltering her children from the outside world, she hopes that children could play outside without needing adult supervision. She does not believe in catering to her kids, her kids participate in the running of the home as equal participants not as helpers. She explained that she was influenced by her children’s Montessori school in this instance. They teach the children to be participants rather than helpers. Finally, Kate’s style of mothering is “to go with the flow,” she considers herself a ‘slack parent’, “I’m very relaxed about lot of things that other parents…get very stressed about…I’m a very slack parent.” (456, 460).

**Conclusion**

As the previous discussion illustrates, the participants resisted several aspects of the dominant discourse. Further analysis revealed that resistance is not a simple process but one of a dialectic moving back and forth within the demands of various discourses. This dialectic movement is associated with certain experiences. The themes that relate to these experiences are discussed below.