RECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD: IDENTITY SALIENCE IN MOTHERS OF ADULT SEXUAL MINORITY CHILDREN

by

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(Under the Direction of JUANITA JOHNSON-BAILEY)

ABSRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. Research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

Maternal narratives were collected from nine mothers ranging in age from 45 to 65 using open-end interviews. Analysis of these narratives revealed three major findings. First, the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child produced cognitive dissonance (i.e. psychological disequilibrium) in mothers because homosexuality was considered contrary to the normative gender and sexual ideology learned during their own growth and development. Secondly, in response to this intrapsychic disorder, mothers engaged in introspection, reevaluated their maternal paradigms, and shifted their maternal frame of reference to include sexual diversity so

as to support their child's new identity and the various needs associated with that identity. Lastly, mothers evaluated each social context and selectively disclosed information regarding their children's sexual orientation in order to manage the social perception of both their child's sexual identity as well as their maternal identity. The amount and type of information socially disclosed depended upon three factors: 1) the nature and of the social relationship between a mother and those she disclosed to, 2) a mother's preconception of how the information would be socially perceived and 3) the underlying social motives of disclosure.

Two conclusions were drawn from this study: 1) The sexual minority disclosure of a child produces in mothers a sense of disequilibrium which called into question their efficacy as mother, and 2) mothers who experience an adult child's sexual minority disclosure reconstruct a salient personal and social maternal identity by reexamining the sociocognitive orientations that shape and influence their maternal perspective as well as engaging in the social process of impression management.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, Gay and Lesbian, Heteronormativity, Identity Development, Maternal Narratives, Motherhood, Narrative Inquiry, Transformative learning

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all those who recognize and embrace their difference and to those whom continuously struggle to shift the center so that no one group of people have power.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although discourse on adult development regards motherhood as one factor that largely influences the formulation of an adult identity (Azar, 2002; Demick, 2002; Hooker, Fiese, Jenkins, & Morfei, 1996; Leadbeater & Way, 2001; Palkovitz, 1996), more emphasis is placed on cognitive development than on the multiple socio-cultural dimensions undergirding those intrapsychic processes. Maternal identity development has been theorized from both a psychodynamic and psychosocial perspective resulting in various generalized assumptions that tie maternal identity development to progressive age related stages (Erikson, 1950, 1968), to progressive phase related psychic reorganization (Stern, 1995), to the internalization of a feminine identity (Dinnerstein, 1976; Chodorow, 1978; Josselson, 1987; Stoller, 1976; Ruddick, 1980), to the internalization of an idealized maternal identity (Barber, 1975; Block, 1990; Breen, 1975), and to the attachment to and rearing of children (Ribbens, 1994; Ruddick, 1980; Solomon & George, 1996, 2000). A common theme to all of these assumptions is that the conceptualization of a maternal identity is a universal human process rather than the result of a set of uniquely subjective experiences influenced by diverse socio-cultural factors. Furthermore, despite a current trend focusing on maternal subjectivity and its relationship to identity development (Baraitser, 2006, 2008; Holloway, 2001, 2006), there is a continued lack of consideration for the myriad of historical, contextual, and social forces that underpin the developmental process - thus, a mother's subjectivity and subject position are generalizable at best.

Psychodynamic and psychosocial development models are predicated upon an individualistic perspective that conceptualizes a unitary "self," one that is coherent, authentic, independent, highly rational, and, although situated in society, is considered separate from society and capable of transcending particular social constraints (Clark & Dirkx, 2001; Tennant, 2000). Theorization from this perspective portrays maternal identity development as a normative process producing a homogenized, immutable, and essentialized identity, i.e., the existence of a singular maternal construct. However, such a perspective does not take into consideration the possession of multiple social identities, the various discourses that shape each identity, and how intersectionality of identities relative to a maternal identity is operationalized in society and possibly lead to social processes such as differentiation and marginalization (Anthias, 1999). To better understand the complexity of identity development, scholars suggest a shift in focus from the conceptualization of an autonomous unitary self toward a conceptualization of self that is dialogic (Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992), relational (Tennant, 2000), and intersectional (Wallace, 2003). Self from this perspective is considered socially constituted, occupies multiple social positions, each with multiple meanings and, is continually compared to an internalized ideal. Therefore, maternal identity development from this non-unitary perspective is a process of interpreting various subjective maternal experiences (i.e., one's maternal reality) using multiple sociocultural lenses as well as comparing these experiences to an internalized maternal ideal.

An inherent problem of a universal singular maternal construct, as suggested by both psychodynamic and psychosocial theories and models, is the privileging of individuals who's lived experiences only directly reflects the assumptions of those theories and models. Those mothers who closely represent the construct of mother, expressed by the either perspective, may

perceive themselves as salient, whereas those who do not fit the construct may perceive themselves as being marginal. Furthermore, due to the socially constructed and socially evaluative nature of the maternal identity, I contend that a continuum regarding attributes and expectations of motherhood exists and that the legitimacy and efficacy of one's maternal identity is based on their perception of where they are located within this continuum. Conceptually, at one end of the continuum lies the socially idealized or "good" mother and at the other end lies the ineffectual or "bad" mother (Caplan, 2000; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Each new maternal experience thus promotes introspection and interpretive reevaluation which results in the manifestation of various emotions. Maternal identity development then becomes a function of how maternally archetypical an individual perceives themselves to be relative to their subjective maternal experiences. In essence, adult development is not prescriptively linear as suggested by psychosocial and psychodynamic theory; rather, the developmental process, as suggested by social identity and transformational theory, is a perceptually comparative process based on subjective experiences that are shaped by specific contextual and socio-relational conditions. Therefore to aid in the adult development of a maternal identity for a diverse group of mothers, each with unique maternal experiences, an adoption of a more inclusive and contextualized perspective is necessary.

Statement of the Problem

Within the context of North American society, parenthood is based on heteronormative assumptions (i.e., sociocultural assumptions, expectations, behaviors and practices that privilege heterosexual individuals) with parental roles inextricably linked to socially constructed notions of gender and sexuality (Arendell, 2000; Hays, 1996; Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1992). Any experience that undermines or subverts these roles may lead to a decrease in the perceived salience of these roles in the larger social context. Changes in parental salience have been documented in adult

children who disclose their sexual minority status (i.e., come out) (Aresto & Weisman, 2001; Conley, 2007; Fields, 2001; Streipe & Tolman, 2003; Terry, 1998; Williamson, 1998). In these cases a direct conflict emerges between the normative ideology associated with gender and sexuality accepted by parents and the sexual minority status (i.e., self-identifying as non-heterosexual) of their children. As a result of the disclosure, parents question their child's sexual identity and, in many cases, question their own assumptions regarding parenting (Erhrensaft, 2007; Saltzburg, 2004; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Furthermore, researchers suggest that when children disclose their sexual identity, a similar process reciprocates in parents, with guilt, self-blame, and fear of identity stigmatization as common parental reactions (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Boxer & Herdt, 1991; Conley, 2007; Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996; De Vine, 1984; Fields, 2001; Herdt & Koff, 2000; Matthews & Lease, 2000). However, although researchers recognize that each parent occupies different "sociostructural niches" (Green, 2000) or social roles and, in general, may react to a child's disclosure relative to their specific role (Green, 2000; Holtzen & Agriesti, 1990), studies exploring the impact of child's disclosure on parental identity and salience of either mothers or fathers is undocumented. Therefore, taking into consideration the concept of heteronormative parenting whereby mothers engage in exclusive parenting and are socially evaluated based on their ability to instill sociocultural normative ideology in children (DiQuinzo, 1999; Hays, 1996; Marshall, 1991; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Schwartz, 1994), this study will focus on identity development and salience in mothers who experience a sexual minority disclosure of an adult child.

Some theorists contend that motherhood is a socially constructed identity shaped by institutionalized practices (Urwin, 1985) that provide mothers with a frame of references that is a "traditionally mimetic gender/sexed model of heterosexuality" (Schwartz, 1994) and that

mothers engage in "intensive mothering" (Hayes, 1996), or altruistic care of children. In addition, Woollett and Marshal (2001) note that "motherhood and the production of children who are competent, well-adjusted, and effective citizens are publically valued and give a women a sense of being effective, powerful, and in control" (p. 173). This sociocultural mandate not only represents a divisional difference between mothers and fathers (i.e., different parent/child dynamics) but also is one of many sociological forces undergirding the development of a maternal identity. Although mothers are expected to support self-growth (i.e., individuality) in their children, they are also compelled to support social conformity (DiQuinzo, 1999; Hays, 1996; Marshall, 1991; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Schwartz, 1994). If a child does not display culturally bound and reproduced normative behaviors, then the child's deviant behaviors are correlated to ineffectiveness regarding maternal care and both the child and the mother are socially evaluated accordingly (de Lustgarten, 2006; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). In essence, a paradox exists between supporting and nurturing a child's individual fluid sexual expression, and reproducing compulsory heteronormative sexuality (Ehrensaft, 2007).

At the epicenter of identity development for both the child and the mother is the dichotomous relationship between individuality and conformity and how each identity is operationalized socially. Incongruence, whether it is sexuality or maternal narcissism (i.e., maternal expectations), results in an internal cognitive conflict and external social conflict, both leading to the development of a stigmatized identity. However, although there are models and theories that examine both the psychological and social dimensions of sexual identity stigmatization as well as offer steps toward positive sexual minority identity development (Cox and Gallois, 1996; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004), none exist that

problematize maternal identity stigmatization as well as provide suggestions for reconstructing a personally salient maternal identity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. Research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

Significance of the Study

Adult education discourse centering on women's identity development suggests a shift in focus away from psychological and socio-relational perspectives toward a constructivist perspective due to the essentialist assumptions of the former and the diverse and inclusive nature of the latter (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Hayes, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Ross-Gordon, 1999). In addition, a plethora of literature suggests that using an essentialist lens regarding maternal identity development leads to the mythologization of motherhood (i.e., the untenable idealization of motherhood) and the pathologization of many mothers (Arendell, 2000; Caplan, 2001; de Lustgarten, 2006; Marshall, 1991; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Taking into consideration that women are a compilation of multiple sociocultural identities, each with a unique set of assumptions and each operationalized differently, motherhood is not a universal human experience nor can it be characterized as such. Therefore, to attend to the individual needs of mothers who face a normative and potentially hegemonic motherhood

(Arendell, 1999), a pedagogical approach that acknowledges the plurality of perspectives and the subjective nature of motherhood, yet nurtures positive individual change, should be created and adopted.

The sexual minority status disclosure of a child to a heterosexual mother represents a maternal experience that contextualizes maternal identity development and helps identify various personal and societal forces that shape development. The conflict between the normative assumptions of gender and sexuality that is modeled and instilled by a mother and the sexual minority status of the child serves as the impetus for maternal introspection regarding maternal identity salience. If a child exhibits acceptable social behavior and expectations, then the child is a source of narcissistic pride and, conversely, if a child possesses or displays socially deviant behavior, then the child is a source of narcissistic injury (Saltzburg, 2004). Furthermore, Diane Ehrensaft (2007), in *Rasing Girlyboys: A Parents Perspective*, argues that an intrapsychic negotiation occurs in parents whereby a parent chooses either altruistic (facilitative) parenting, which supports individual growth and alternative or fluid expression of gender and sexuality, or culturally sycophantic (obstructive) parenting which supports social conformity and aspersion toward variances in gender and sexuality. Ehrensaft suggests that many parents choose obstructive parenting because fostering protogay development rather than heteronormativity would socioculturally lead to the pathologization of both children and parents which, in turn, would psychologically manifest as a stigmatized identity in both cases.

Stigmatization development in parents of children who possess physical and psychological disabilities is well documented (Baxter, 1989; Birenbaum, 1992; Gray, 2002; Green, 2003; Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh, & Straight, 2005; Norvilitis, Scime, & Lee, 2002). Scholars contend that parents develop what Goffman (1963) termed “courtesy stigma” (p. 30) – a

stigma produced by association with a stigmatized individual. Social scrutiny (e.g., stares from public) as a result of a peculiar behavior expressed by a child is internalized by parents and manifests as inadequacy and a sense of disconnect or social isolation. However, Francis (2008) argues that this term is not a sufficient descriptor for parents because it can be applied to anyone associated with the child and it does not account for any social scrutiny that specifically targets the parents as the source of deviance seen in a child. Furthermore, Francis (2008) coins the term "bad parenting" stigma to represent the accusation or blame internalized by parents and notes that "the bad parent label is more often associated with mothers than with fathers" (p. 11). Therefore, the untoward behavior of a child is a source of maternal pathologization and has a large impact on maternal identity development.

Although courtesy and parental stigma resulting from sexual minority disclosure has been noted in research (Fields, 2001; Saltzburg, 2007), the sources and impact of stigma on maternal identity development have largely gone unexplored. This study provided mothers opportunities to examine and problematize their assumptions and meanings regarding aspects of gender, gender role, and sexuality and provided opportunities to reconceptualize and reconstruct a new maternal identity. Data collected from this study supports the notions that adult identity development is not a prescriptively linear process as previously theorized and that it advances or contributes to theories such as Social Identity Theory and Transformational Learning Theory that posit adult identity as a fluid and dynamic construct and its development as being highly subjective and contextualized. Furthermore, information gleaned from this study provides information to all mothers who will not only face the reality of having a sexual minority child, but also face the potential marginalization and social isolation associated with being a parent of this child. Lastly, this study adds to the body of knowledge in adult education that explores the

impact of internalized oppression on identity development of women (e.g., Brooks & Edwards, 1997; Rosenwasser, 2002) so as to create a more diverse and comprehensive pedagogy that facilitates both healing and personal change.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on maternal identity. Two questions that guided this study are: (1) How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity? (2) How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

To help inform this study regarding how mothers construct, deconstruct and reconstruct a social role identity, the following two major themes in literature were explored: motherhood as a social construct and theorization of maternal identity development. The first of the two themes, motherhood as a social construct, is a sociohistorical and philosophical analysis of two major discourses that problematized the nature and role of normative motherhood. The second theme, theorization of maternal identity development, is a synthesis of various developmental models and how each theorizes the development of a gendered adult social role identity (i.e., mother). The exploration of the literature provides the various discourses and perspectives concerning how mothers formulate a maternal identity as well as factors influencing that development.

Motherhood as a Social Construction

> Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"…it is situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production (West & Zimerman, 1987, p. 126)

Several scholars contend that through social interaction, not biological determinism, the concepts of gender and gendered relations are constructed (Bem, 1979; Bohan, 1993; Butler, 1990, 1993; Lucal, 1999; Seidler, 1989; West & Zimerman, 1987). Because gender identity is developed through the process of socialization, children at an early age learn that girls become mothers and boys become fathers and that each parent has a gender specific role (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Gendered parenting, feminist scholars argue, is divisive, produces asymmetrical gender relations, and leads to gender oppression (Arendell, 2000; Bronstein, 2001; de Lustgarten, 2006; Hays, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Rothman, 1994; Ruddick, 1994). At the center of this argument is symbolic nature of what a mother is and what a mother does. In this section of the literature review, I will discuss the sociohistorical evolution of both feminist constructionist and psychoanalytic feminist discourses; describe how each conceptualizes the role of motherhood in society and its effect on women's lives; and lastly, discuss the notion that contemporary theorization of motherhood must include maternal subjectivity, i.e., consider the multiple biographical and contextual factors that influence and shape a woman's maternal reality in order to uncover various hegemonic forces that may marginalize mothers.

Feminism and the Social Construction of Motherhood

What is motherhood and what role does it play in society? This overarching question became the center of debate in early feminist discourse. Betty Friedan (1963), in *The Feminine Mystique*, sparked an argument concerning the nature of mothering and the function of motherhood in society. Based on her research in the 1950s consisting of White, middle-class, college educated, married, heterosexual women, Friedan suggested that the idealization of and passive conformity to traditional female roles, which she refers to as the "Feminine Mystique," inhibits autonomous development and produces a sense of unhappiness in women. Stating that a

"woman cannot find her identity through others – her husband, her children [and] cannot find it in the dull routine of housework" (Friedan, 1963, p. 324), Friedan considered motherhood developmentally repressive and by engaging in mothering a woman would perpetuate asymmetrical gender relations (i.e., patriarchy) and, thus, her own oppression. Lastly, It is implied in her book that to overcome the incompatibility of motherhood with autonomous development, women must use their "full capacities" (Friedan, 1963, p. 324) in more challenging endeavors.

The radical concept of abandoning the traditional gender role of motherhood was shared by other feminist scholars. Shulamith Firestone (1970), for example, in the *Dialectic of Sex*, suggested that biological motherhood, which she defined as childbearing and childrearing, is at the heart of gender oppression. She contends, like Friedan, that mothering limits a woman's ability to pursue other endeavors which, in turn, inhibits a women's autonomous development. Firestone expresses that to break free from the tyranny of reproductive biology women must forgo becoming mothers and take control of reproductive technology. However, in her book she never offers suggestions on how women are to accomplish this goal. Lastly, Jeffner Allen (1983), in *Motherhood: the Annihilation of Women*, shares the sentiments of Friedan and Firestone that women who become mothers and engage in mothering support gender oppression. Allen contends that women must first dismantle patriarchy before bringing boys and girls into the world of male domination.

Problematic with Friedan, Firestone and Allen's radical suggestion of abandoning conventional motherhood is that it is predicated on an individualistic perspective which places emphasis on rational autonomy. It is assumed that all mothers have the resources and power to abdicate their position as mother and that resigning from motherhood would cause significant

changes in social structures and lead to gender equality. However, scholars argue that renouncing motherhood as suggested by radical feminism diminishes the embodiment of being a mother (DiQuinzio, 1999), renders the mother-child relationship as insignificant (Adams, 1995; DiQuinzio, 1993; Umansky, 1996), and may actually marginalize women – e.g., "replacing the women and mothers who traditionally do this work in their own families for no direct remuneration with paid works, most likely poor women, subjects these paid workers to a version of the feminine mystique" (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 65).

In light of Betty Friedan's suggestion of abandoning motherhood, many feminist scholars in the 1970s began to question and examine how motherhood is created and culturally imposed on women. Shirley Radl (1973), in *Mother's Day is Over*, suggests the cultural claim that women universally desire to be mothers is illusionary. In her research, Radl purports that the experience of giving birth and the raising of children in isolation produced feelings of regret and oppression in many mothers. Jessie Barnard (1975), in *The Future of Motherhood*, used cross-cultural studies to report that mothers who raised children in isolation had a lower tendency to express warmth and caring toward children and a higher tendency to inflict pain on children. In addition, Barnard's study revealed that regardless of class women expressed that "although they love their children, they hate motherhood" (p.14). Angela McBride (1973), in *Growth and Development of Mothers*, argued that it is the cultural constructions of motherhood that is problematic, not the relationships women have with their husbands and children. Coining the term "Motherhood Mystique," McBride contends that culture places heavy emphasis on altruistic mothering and child development whereas there is little or no consideration for maternal growth and support. This is evident in Lazarre's (1976) book, *The Mother Knot*, in which she describes the feelings of connectedness yet separateness in trying to balance maternal care with personal development and

the feelings of depression and anger in comparing an internalized ideal to her maternal reality. Lastly, Adrienne Rich (1976), in *Of Woman Born*, reflected on her ambivalence of raising her sons and suggested that the medicalization of birth and childrearing as well as the pathologization of the mother-child relationship is the cause of ambivalence and hinders a women's self-actualization.

Concurrent with feminist research and personal observations from feminist mothers, sociologists investigated the social and cultural forces which propel women into motherhood. After reviewing contemporary literature, Nancy Russo (1976) expressed that culture valorizes motherhood and associates women as those who exclusively engage in childrearing. Russo refers to the pervasiveness of this assumption as the "Motherhood Mandate." Ann Oakley (1974), in *The Sociology of Housework*, examined the limitations and oppression associated with being a housewife and mother. Oakley suggested that there are two myths prevalent in society regarding a women's role – only women are housewives and only women rear children. Although these are considered myths, like Russo, Oakley contends that there are powerful cultural forces acting in society that help maintain the veracity and value of these concepts. Furthermore, she subdivides the myth of motherhood into three separate types of motherhood myths: "that all women need to be mothers, that all mothers need their children and that all children need their mothers" (Oakley, 1974, p. 186). Oakley demystifies these myths by pointing out that not all women choose to become mothers, not all women choose to have multiple children (i.e., deemphasizing the need for children), and not all children are raised or receive full care from a biological mother. Therefore, she disproved that motherhood is an intrinsic or core identity of women and that mothering is an innate behavior.

Taking into consideration "Motherhood Mystique,""Motherhood Mandate," and the "Myths of motherhood", what is clear in early feminist constructionist discourse is that social factors or forces primarily shape motherhood and are to blame for asymmetrical gender relations. However, cotemporaneous with early feminist constructionist discourse, psychoanalytic feminists asserted that the act of mothering, not social phenomena, is the principle factor undergirding gender oppression. Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, and Nancy Chodorow (1978), in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, for example, contend that gendered relations are formed through maternal care; that mothers exclusively raise children; that women who engage in mothering perpetuate asymmetrical gender relations; and that to eliminate asymmetries, men must engage in shared parenting. Therefore, psychoanalytic feminists argued that mothers are to blame for gender asymmetries because it is believed that the maternal bond nurtures gender identity development which, in turn, reinforces gender difference. Many of the psychoanalytic assumptions, however, are questionable because they tend decontextualize maternal experiences and universalize both the feminine nature of women and the experience of a mother-child relationship (Bart, 1984; Lorber in Lorber et. Al., 1981; Rossi in Lorber in Lorber et. Al., 1981). (Note: for a more detailed analysis of how motherhood is theorized in psychoanalytic feminist discourse please see the next section of the literature review).

Feminist research became increasingly concerned with the issue of giving women a voice (Duelli Klein, 1983; Finch, 1984; Gilligan, 1982; Harding 1987; Oakley, 1981) and, more specifically, giving mothers a voice (Glendinning, 1983; Graham & McKee, 1980; Graham & Oakley, 1981; Graham, 1984). Scholars argued that the traditional interview used in sociological research was considered oppressive because it creates a hierarchical relationship between a researcher and participants and that the information gleaned did not accurately reflect the lived

experiences of women (Duelli Klein, 1983; Oakley, 1981). With the advent of more subjective research methods (e.g., unstructured interviews and narrative) and an increase in women in entering academia, research and literature concerning motherhood and mothering proliferated (Caplan, 2001; Umansky, 1996). The rhetoric of motherhood in feminist discourse shifted from mother as object (i.e., mother as biological and a universal, essentialized identity) toward mother as subject (i.e., what it means to be mother; the existence of various maternal social realities; and the legitimization of a maternal perspective). Researchers began to interrogate the myriad of discourses that constructed an ideal mother as well as the contradictions that exist between trying to achieve the ideal versus the various social realities of motherhood that women experienced (Bart, 1984; Boulten, 1983; Cowan, 1983; Craig, 2007; Dally, 1982; Ehrenreich & English, 1979; Housman, 1982; Kitzinger, 1978; March & Miall, 2006; Riley, 1983; Silva, 1996).

In addition to an increase in maternal subjectivity in research and literature, motherhood in feminist discourse of the 1980s shifted from being demonized for being the root and reproducer of gender oppression to being extolled for representing notions of femininity and womanhood (Sigerman, 2003; Snitow, 1992). This is evident in Betty Friedan's second book, *The Second Stage* (1981), in which she retracts or recants her antifamily philosophy and supports the issues surrounding the growth and development of mothers as well as the care of children. This shift in theorizing motherhood is believed to be caused by an infusion of a pronatalist perspective within feminist discourse (Gimenez, 1980). The principle tenet of pronatalism is that there are societal norms that motivate individuals to value, desire, and preserve children (Peck & Senderowitz, 1974). Feminist scholars such as Sarah Ruddick (1980, 1983), Carol Gilligan (1982), and Nel Noddings (1984), for example, contend that women possess a maternal drive to care and preserve children and forms the basis of moral development in women. However, both

social valorization of mothering and feminine morality development were contested in feminist discourse. It is argued that there is an underlying assumption that motherhood is inextricable linked to womanhood, and that to be an adult woman one must support and engage in the birth and rearing of children (Fawcett, 1988; Lewis, 1986; Veevers, 1980). Furthermore, the concept of reproductive and maternal normativity reifies the notion of a childless woman, whether by choice or by circumstance, as being taboo (Lewis, 1986; Snitow, 1992) and the notion that a woman engaging in anti-natalist activity such as birth control and abortion as verboten (Purdy, 1996) – both points considered factors largely limiting the rights of many women. Lastly, the notion that all women are maternally intuitive and engage in "maternal thinking" (as suggested by Ruddick) is as essentialist as other moral theories and, thus, reifies feminine and masculine stereotypes (Bartky, 1990; Tronto, 1993).

Although early feminist research and literature regarding motherhood helped build an argument against the marginalization of women, theorization from this body of work was considered myopic because it was developed from the experiences of a small subset of mothers (i.e., White, middle-class, educated, heterosexual, married women), thus creating a one-dimensional construction of motherhood (Collins, 1994; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Snitow, 1992; Tronto, 1993). Scholars began to question the role of motherhood in feminist discourse – "Do we want this presently capacious identity, mother, to expand or to contract? How special do we want mothering to be? In other words, what does feminism gain by the privileging of motherhood?" (Snitow, 1992, p. 42). Questions such as these arose as a result of an infusion of postmodern and post-structural thought into feminist theory (e.g., Flax, 1987; Gavey, 1990; Lather, 1988; Nicholson, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Postmodern feminists argued that the narrow spectrum of women used in research as well as the lack of attention to specific sociohistorical

and sociopolitical contexts created a totalizing discourse because it was presumed that there are behaviors, characteristics, and experiences shared by all women. Furthermore, essential motherhood was considered problematic by postmodern feminists because it does not account for the multiple subject positions women hold and the multiple discourses that shape those positions:

> In order to understand why women so willingly take on the role of wife and mother, we need a theory of the relationship between subjectivity and meaning, meaning and social value, the range of possible *normal* subject positions open to women, and the power and powerlessness invested in them (Weedon, 1987, pp. 18-19, italics in original).

Lastly, it is argued that by adopting a universalizing approach to motherhood, early feminist theory minimized, masked, or obscured any differences among women and, therefore, privileged the experiences and interests of a few at the expense of others (DiQuizio, 1999; Fox, 1998; Graham, 1993; McMahon, 1995; Morris, 1993; Tronto, 1993). To avoid the marginalization of mothers and support inclusivity, scholars suggest a more multidimensional approach to theorizing motherhood:

> Just as varying placement of systems of privilege, whether race, class, sexuality, or age generates divergent experiences with motherhood, examining motherhood and mother-as-subject from multiple perspectives should uncover rich textures of difference. Shifting the center to accommodate this diversity promises to recontextualize motherhood and point us toward feminist theorizing that embraces differences as an essential part of commonality (Collins, 1994, p. 73).

In summary, the goal of early social constructionist feminist theory was to enable women to achieve autonomous development and be free from the oppression of gender asymmetries (i.e.,

patriarchy). Motherhood was described as a universal, transhistorical construct and theorized as the source and reproducer of gender oppression. However, this type of theorization is problematic because it was developed from the experiences of a small privileged group of individuals (e.g., White, married, educated, heterosexual, women); it is a unitary perspective that assumes autonomous development is possible (i.e., one can transcend social constraints); it presupposes that only one system of oppression exists (e.g., patriarchy or male domination); and, lastly, it suggests that identities (e.g., "mother") are discrete, homogenous, immutable, and essential. Postmodern feminist scholars, on the other hand, argued that women are shaped by the various subject positions they hold and the multiple discourses defining each position and criticized early feminist theory because it could not serve the interests of all women. In essence, essential motherhood at once both reifies normative motherhood ideology and prescriptive practices as well as marginalizes those who do not or cannot conform to such standards. Therefore, by adopting a non-unitarian postmodern perspective, one may explore the multidimensionality of motherhood and help serve the interests of a diverse set of mothers.

Feminism and the Psychological Construction of Motherhood

Unlike early feminist social constructionist emphasis on the role of motherhood and its relation to patriarchy, early psychoanalytic feminist discourse focused on the nature and practice of mothering. Gender oppression from a psychoanalytic perspective is not the result of sociohistorical phenomenon; rather, it is the direct result of an exclusive interpersonal relationship between a mother and child that establishes and perpetuates gender differences. In response to Freudian psychosexual perspective stressing the importance of the mother-child relation in gender differentiation, American psychoanalytic feminists, Dinnerstein (1976) and Chodorow (1978) problematized the act of mothering and how it is tied to notions of femininity

and patriarchy. Critical of Freud's Oedipal complex, Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), in *The mermaid and the Minotaur*, focused on the symbolic nature of the mother-child dyad and its role in culture. Similar to Freud's concept of mother as an infant's object of desire, Dinnerstein suggested the idea of "maternal eroticism." She believes that maternal care produces erotic feelings and desires in infants toward a mother; thus, creating the first attachment to women for both boys and girls. Furthermore, to recapture or relive erotic feelings, boys will seek gratification with women whereas girls yearn to become a mother. Therefore, Dinnerstein (1976) contends that female maternal eroticism results in a "monopoly of child care" (p.33) which perpetuates a sex-gender system and to change asymmetrical gender relations, emphasis must be placed on shared parenting.

Rather than focusing on Oedipal mother-infant relations, Nancy Chodorow (1978) concentrated on pre-Oedipal relations and how it affects gender differentiation. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Chodorow (1978) suggests that differences in object-relational (i.e., mother-child) experiences exist between infant boys and girls. Although infant boys are sexually attracted to their mother in the pre-oedipal stage, a growing awareness of mother as "other" and an object of the father forces boys to separate themselves from their mothers and gain autonomy. On the other hand, Infant girls, due to narcissistic identification and gender congruity, have trouble separating themselves from their mothers. The resulting mother-daughter relation is, then, referred to by Chodorow as a "feminine Oedipus complex." However, separation of infant girls from their mothers inevitably occurs because infant girls desire what the father symbolizes – power and authority. Lastly like Dinnerstein, Chodorow concludes that patriarchy is recreated through exclusivity of maternal

propriety and that to eliminate asymmetrical gender relations couples must engage in shared parenting.

Although Dorothy Dinnerstein's work was influential in feminist discourse, Nancy Chodorow's theory resonated with many feminist scholars because of its recognition that sociostructural factors may have an impact on gender identity development and gender differences. Chodorow (1978) posited that "all people have the relational basis for parenting if they themselves are parented" (p. 88) yet questioned the existence of segregated and isolative parenting. In her theory, she asserts that gender congruence and a mother's narcissistic identification with a daughter produces a longer and deeper social relational experience. It is this experience of differential mothering that, according to Chodorow, produces a female psyche or feminine identity. In essence, Chodorow conflates a relational capacity with gender and gender role and suggests that this relational capacity is ingrained in the female psyche: "Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure" (p. 39). However, scholars argue that Chodorow's assertion is highly problematic because it does not address the impact of variances in family structure nor does it address the psychosocial phenomenon that establishes the motivation (i.e., "gratification") to nurture and care (Bart, 1984; Gottleibe, 1984; Lorber, 1981; Max, 1989; Rossi, 1981).

The underlying assumption of Chodorow's theory is that psychic development is highly influenced and shaped by parental behavior. Chodorow presupposes that exclusive maternal parenting produces a female psyche that will reproduce such a parental behavior. Considering this to be true, she suggests that shared parenting will produce various psychic patterns which would disrupt the reproduction of stereotypical gender difference. However, this suggestion is

problematic because it assumes a normative nuclear family structure with two heterosexual parents; that there are essential or universal parenting skills and behaviors (i.e., good parenting or good mothering) and that they can be applied to all children; that everyone possesses a "relational basis for parenting"; that psyche development is a universal process in infants; and that all fathers will nurture and care for children in similar fashion as mothers (Al-hibri, 1981; Ehrensaft, 1991; Eisenstein, 1983; Johnson, 1988; Riley, 1983; Young, 1981).

Although Chodorow recognizes that gender differences occur as a result of psyche development, her theory is void of any recognition that sociocultural factors may have an impact on psyche development. In other words, Chodorow's theory, specifically, and object-relations theory, in general, was criticized for suggesting that the social-relations between a mother and child is a universal process and that women engaging in mothering and psychic development in infants occurs independent of sociohistorical influences (Adams, 1983; Bart, 1984; Doane, 1992; Gottleibe, 1984; Lorber, 1981; Max, 1999; Rossi, 1981). Furthermore, the validity of Chodorow's suggestion that object-relations (i.e., motherhood) is *the* source of gender oppression is questionable because of the lack of attention paid to both variances in parental behavior as well as the sociocultural forces driving that behavior. Nancy Wood (1983), in response to Chodorow's theory, questioned the role of psychoanalytic theory in feminism by stating: "The question of interest to a feminist analytics of mothering, then, is whether the social and psychic mother ever coincide" (p. 18). In other words, the early psychoanalytic perspective did not taken into consideration any differences between the psychic perceptions of motherhood and lived maternal realities.

Unlike Dinnerstein and Chodorow, contemporary psychoanalytic feminists began to question how gender is socially constituted and, therefore, interrogated sociostructural

determinants that may influence gender identity development. Jessica Benjamin (1988), in *Bonds of Love*, suggests that psychoanalysts move away from a "solipsistic omnipotence of the single psyche" (p. 46) and to consider the notion that psychic development may be influenced by social or material factors. Borrowing from Stern's (1985) notion that an infant's attachment to and separation from a parent occurs as a result of a socio-relational interaction between parent and child, Benjamin proposes the concept of intersubjectivity. Through a process of what she terms "identificatory love" (p. 132), infants engage in an interpersonal relationship with parents and formulate a sense of separateness (i.e., self) yet maintain a sense of connectedness to others. However, it is through this intersubjective process, Benjamin contends, that gender asymmetries are established and perpetuated. Socioculturally, gender ideology is believed to portray women as empathic and nurturing, yet devalued and dependent upon men and to depict men as valued and autonomous. Therefore, Benjamin suggests that a boy will identify with his father and his "imperial phallus" (p. 130) and gain autonomy by separating from their mother. Girls, on the other hand, separate from mothers because girls desire to seek out an empathic relationship with an "exciting father" (p. 131); a relationship which invariably is denied by the father and, thus, perpetuates male dominance and gender-specific roles. In essence, Benjamin purports that gender identity is a function of connecting with either expressions of masculinity or expressions of femininity and that to decrease or eliminate gender oppression, parents should express gender more fluidly.

Central to Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity is the notion that socio-relational interaction between a mother and child shapes psyche development. However, mother is no longer considered an "object" or a passive conduit for infant development. Rather, she is a subject whose development is also affected by the parent-child interaction. Thus, maternal

identity development in mothers occurs contemporaneously with gender identity development in infants. In addition, becoming a mother is regarded as a transformative process; one in which causes a reorganization of the feminine psyche and produces what Stern (1995) refers to as a "new and unique psychic organization…the *motherhood constellation*" (p. 171, italics in original). Stern (1995) suggests that there are four interdependent themes concerning psychic reorganization in new mothers: life-growth (keeping the baby alive), primary relatedness (questioning intimacy and bonding), supporting matrix (creating stability), and identity reorganization (identity transformation). Similar to Erickson's (1963, 1980) notion of "crisis in identity," Stern (1995) contends that having a child disrupts a woman's self- concept, causes a sense of disequilibrium, and promotes her to "transform and reorganize her self-identity" (p. 180).

Although the work of Benjamin (1988) and Stern (1985, 1995) introduced into psychoanalytic discourse the notions of maternal subjectivity and maternal identity development, their theories were predicated on universalistic assumptions concerning femininity and autonomy (Brennan, 1992; Tronto, 1993). Mothers are portrayed as possessing a female psyche, one in which equates femininity with the possession of characteristics such as empathy, nurturance, and care as well as the prescriptive displays of these traits. In other words, to be female, one must be feminine and embody empathy and care, and to be mother, one must be feminine and engage in mothering. However, in response to the psychoanalytic perspective's essentiality of gender identity, Judith Butler (1990), in *Gender Trouble,* questioned the biologically deterministic view of gender and developed a theory of subjectivity. Using psychic constellations (e.g., love and loss) that undergird object-relation's processes of identification and attachment/separation, Butler argues that gender identification is the result of mimetic expressions of masculinity and

femininity in the larger social context. According to Butler, gender identity is a social construct – it is through social relations and what she terms "gender performativity" (Butler, 1990, p. 171) that specific ideologies and behaviors are established and associated with gender identity. Furthermore, gender is considered to be socially interpellated (i.e., called out or hailed) and initiates a process in which an individual must recognize and respond to those ideologies associated with gender identity. The end result of this self-identification process is an individual's acknowledgement of their subjectivity. Therefore, maternal identity development from Butler's perspective is not based solely on mother-child interpersonal dynamics as suggested by object-relation theorists; rather, it is based on normative gender framing and the performance of idealized cultural representations of femininity and motherhood.

Judith Butler's use of psychoanalytic principles to interrogate the assumed 'naturalness' of femininity had influenced object-relation theorists to rethink the socio-relational nature of identity development. Psychoanalytic feminist scholars suggested that psyche development move beyond the mother-child intersubjective process and include the relationship between social ideology and subjectivity:

> …social or material realities do not simply hop across to the psyche, nor does the psyche merely reflect the reality in which it lives. The psyche is structured according to certain processes which are essential to securing an identity capable of *being socialized*. That entity is not pre-given, but constructed. (Brennan, 1992, p. 69, italics in original)

Development of a maternal identity, thus, is dependent not only on the internalization of maternal experiences but also on normative ideology underpinning gender and gender role as well as how both identities are socially operationalized. Therefore, I argue, salience of a maternal

identity is dependent upon the extent of a woman recognizing, accepting and embodying culturally normative mothering.

Evidence for object-relations shift away from an essentialist perspective toward a more postmodern perspective regarding women and mothers can be found in contemporary discourse. Benjamin (2004), for example, reflecting on her previous work, contends that "femininity is not a preexisting "thing"… rather it is constructed" (p. 45) and that psychoanalytic discourse should include a "theory that values both the contribution of maternal holding and the mother's independent subjectivity" (p. 53). In addition to Benjamin's (2004) recognition of identity as constructed and fluid, Baraitser (2006, 2008) and Curk (2008) suggest that previous psychoanalytic feminist theory's emphasis on mother-infant intersubjectivity and its relation to autonomy is problematic. Autonomy, as defined by psychoanalytic feminist theorists such as Dinnerstein (1976), Chodorow (1978), and Benjamin (1988) assumes a unitary self, one affected by an "other" (i.e., infant) but largely unaffected by sociocultural dimensions. Although object relation theorists had recognized that that identity development occurs in relation to an "other," missing from discourse and theory was the concept of maternal identity development and how it is impacted through a relationship with an "other" or "others" beyond the mother-infant dyad.

The focus of early psychoanalytic feminism was placed on how exclusive parenting (i.e., mothering) leads to gender oppression and that by changing parental obligations, women would gain autonomy such as that afforded to men. However, I argue that the self is relational and, is situationally embedded within multiple social relationships and multiple subjectivities; thus, for women, in general, and mothers more specifically, obtaining rational autonomy is untenable. Baraitser (2006), for example, introduces the concept of a non-unitary self into psychoanalytic feminist discourse by stating:

> The unitary "I" was always a fiction anyway…Rather than a discrete substance as such, the psychoanalytic subject is understood to be under constant maintenance because of these inherent threats to its real or imagined stability, a shifting process of negotiation between material conditions and unconscious desire (p. 219).

In addition, Curk (2008) contends that the self is relational, socio-historically embedded and that identity is "co-constructed" and "…created and continuously formed through a medley of discourses" (p. 64). Therefore, I assert that the identity "mother" is constantly in a state of flux and that through a myriad of maternal experiences associated with both child and other social relations, mothers deconstruct and reconstruct their maternal identity.

In summary, the primary objective of early psychoanalytic feminist theory was to problematize the nature and practice of mothering and its relation to gender oppression. Early theorists such as Chodorow, Dinnerstein, and Benjamin asserted that parental care fosters gender identity development and that exclusive parenting by mothers perpetuates asymmetrical gender relations. However, their theories are problematic due to both a biologically deterministic view of femininity and mothering and a decontextualized perspective concerning autonomy and the sociocultural situatedness of gender roles. Furthermore, contemporary psychoanalytic feminists, such as Baraitser and Curk, are beginning to question the socio-relational nature of identity development as purported by early discourse and suggesting that identity is a social construct, one that is fluid and mutable, influenced by multiple discourses, and constantly being formulated and reformulated. Therefore, to attend to the needs of a diverse set of mothers, each possessing unique maternal experiences, one should adopt a non-unitarian postmodern perspective.

Theorization of Maternal Identity Development

Homeostasis is a general physiological term to describe the ability to maintain a sense of equilibrium even in the face of constant change. Human development is not a dissimilar process

and can be characterized as a state of dynamic equilibrium. Although our sense of "self" or idiosyncratic (personal) identity is considered relatively stable, its strength or salience is greatly influenced by the development of various interpersonal (social) identities, each of which are shaped by a myriad of social interactions and relationships. In this section of the review and using maternal identity development as the framework for discussion, I will examine the origins of traditional psychodynamic and psychosocial based developmental models (e.g., Erikson, Levinson, and Kohlberg, etc…), compare these developmental models to alternative models (e.g., Peck, Gilligan, Josselson, etc…), and lastly discuss the need for a multidimensional approach to theorizing maternal identity development.

Psychodynamic and Psychosocial Theories of Identity Development

One of the most widely cited developmental theories in adult education is Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development. Erikson, educated and trained as a psychoanalyst, was influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud. Human development, according to Freud, is based on five stages of psychosexual development (oral, anal, phallic, Oedipal, and genital); all of which progress in a linear fashion, occur within the first five years of life, and are related to the fixation on specific objects which serve as a source of pleasure. Freud believed that the unconscious desire toward an object directly shaped personal identity and largely influenced behavior. For example, in the Oedipal stage, Freud believed that a mother serves as the initial love object of children and that the relationship between mother and child would determine the distinction between sexes. Boys, he believed, upon seeing a genital difference in comparison to mother, developed castration anxiety and would try to emulate the father (i.e., acquire a woman, wife, and mother of his children). Girls, on the other hand, upon seeing a genital similarity, developed penis envy and would shift desires toward father and harbor jealousy toward mother. Thus,

maternal relationship, Freud contended, ultimately leads to gender differences awareness and helps formulate the basis of heterosexual behavior.

Although Freud's theory offers a framework for understanding idiosyncratic development, post-Freudian psychoanalysts (i.e., Neo-Freudians) questioned two major aspects of his psychosexual model: the role of a parent in object-relations and the role of social interaction on and the duration of development. Object-relations theorists, such as Melanie Klein, Margaret Mahler, John Bowlby and Donald Winnicott, using phase or stage models similar to Freud's, differed from Freud's Oedipal complex and focused on pre-Oedipal issues. They contend that gender identity and behavior does not arise from sexual desire for an object; rather, it develops as a result of a desire for an interpersonal relationship with an object. Furthermore, because mother is considered to be the primary care giver, object-relations theorists suggest that the type and extent of mother/child relationship will have a large influence on idiosyncratic development. Maternal behavior is characterized as either "good" or "bad" (e.g., Winnicott's theory of the "good enough mother") and is believed to be the underlying motivation or inhibition of development. However, some object-relations theorists questioned the nature and exclusivity of the mother/child interpersonal relationship. Klein suggested that there are limitations on maternal altruism and that mothers cannot be selfless to the point of detriment to a child (i.e., mothers are not the blame for all psychological and social problems or issues of their children). In addition, feminist object-relations theorists Dinnerstein (1976) and Chodorow (1978, 1982) suggested that although women are biologically predisposed to nurturing and care, exclusive maternal care is conflated with asymmetrical gender relations and proposed the notion of shared or equal parenting to combat against perpetuating patriarchy.

Development according to Freudian and object-relations theory is highly problematic and raises several questions: Is mothering instinctual and innate in all women (i.e., is maternal behavior universal in all women)? Is the role and practice of mothering biologically determined or an artifact of dominant sociocultural ideology? Do all infants respond similarly to maternal care? Does idiosyncratic development only occur in the first few years of life or does it continue throughout one's lifetime? Birns & Ben-Ner (1988) suggest that research regarding Freudian and Object-relations theory is scant at best, contains middle class participants only, and does not consider other factors that may be involved in infant development such as temperament of the child, a father's influence in socialization of the child, and socioeconomic and sociocultural influences. However, over twenty years after their observations and suggestions and although evidence of ambivalence or negative feelings toward childrearing (Elvin-Nowak, 1999; Hock, Schirtzinger, & Lutz, 1992; Nicolson, 1998; Oberman & Josselson, 1996) and differences in psychological pathology among mothers exists (Burman, 1994; Ong, 1985; Woollett & Phoenix, 1996), research concerning idiosyncratic development still universalizes maternal behavior as a "natural," mutual, and pleasurable experience (Block, 1990; Burman, 1994; Oberman & Josselson, 1997; Solomon & George, 1996; Stern, 1995; Woollett & Phoenix, 1991) and is the primary factor undergirding idiosyncratic development. Therefore, object-relations theory's biological determinism and prescriptive maternal expectations and behavior supports the notion that motherhood is socially constructed and that theorization concerning maternal identity needs to be more comprehensive.

Breaking away from Freud's psychosexual and object-relations' interpersonal development, yet maintaining the linear stage progression exemplified in both, the Neo-Freudian Erik Erickson (1963, 1968) suggested that idiosyncratic development is not limited to

intrapsychic processes only nor does it necessarily fully develop in early childhood; rather, it is internal process affected by external sociocultural changes and occurs over a lifetime. Erikson (1963) proposed a model containing eight stages of development, each focusing on a specific psychosocial crisis: Infancy (Trust vs. Mistrust), Early Childhood (Autonomy vs. Shame), Preschooler (Initiative vs. Guilt), School Age (Industry vs. Inferiority), Adolescence (Identity vs. Role Confusion), Young Adulthood (Solidarity vs. Isolation), Middle Adulthood (Generativity vs. Stagnation), and Late Adulthood (Integrity vs. Despair). Motherhood would, according to his model, fall into middle adulthood because it is the stage associated with "…establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1963, p. 267). In addition, like Freud and Object-relations theorists, Erikson (1968) held a biologically deterministic view that "…anatomy is destiny" (p. 285) and that universally, men and women differed in reproductive function – thus, in order to be psychologically "healthy," one should engage in gender appropriate behavior. He further suggested that women (i.e., mothers) have "a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (Erikson, 1968, p. 266). In essence, because adulthood is associated with the concern for the next generation and is socially valued, being mother and engaging in mothering produces a sense of generativity. However, although Erikson (1950) suggested the existence of unduly pathologization of mothers, i.e., "blame attached to mothers in this country…has in itself a specific moralistic punitiveness" (p. 289), he was not troubled to the point of problematizing the factors that cause the pathology.

Erik Erikson provided Adult Education scholars with one of the first models that supported the notion of life-long learning and development. However, as with Freud and Object-relation theorists, his psychosocial model was based on observations of a small homogenous set of participants (i.e., males) which yielded a myopic perspective of adult development based on

socially constructed and culturally transmitted normative assumptions and expectations that are linked to sex-segregated gender roles. Erikson considered the process of adult development to be a linear and universal process that can be generally applied to all adults in all contexts.

Erikson and other life-span or life-course development theorist's concept of universal and linear adult development was first critically and comprehensively examined by the adult education scholars Caffarella and Olson (1993). The purpose of their study was to explore the applicability of various adult developmental models to the psychosocial development of women. In their study, they examined conceptual papers and empirical studies and compared traditional development models to alternative models. The theories proposed by Erickson (1963), Kohlberg (1973), and Levinson et. Al. (1978), were identified as traditional developmental models because they were considered to be the most widely used models in adult education to describe adult development. All three models suggest the following: (a) human development is a universal process for all adults, (b) development occurs sequentially in stages and phases, and (c) the primary goal is to develop autonomy or separateness. However, as Caffarella and Olson (1993) point out, these models were developed using male participants, written by male researchers and, thus, are male-centered (i.e., androcentric) models. In contrast to traditional models, alternative models are defined as those that do not incorporate women into the paradigms of traditional models. Rather, alternative models were constructed to "identify the unique patterns of psychosocial development in women" (Caffarella & Olson, 1993, p.135).

In the first of two parts of Caffarella and Olsen's literature review, female-centered (i.e., gynocentric) conceptual papers and cross-validation studies subscribing to the paradigms of traditional development models were compared to the original androcentric conceptual and empirical studies. Two observations emerged from this comparison: some aspects of the

stage/phase androcentric models are applicable to the development of women and the importance of having relationships and connectedness with others appeared to be unique to a woman's development and opposed the traditional model's paradigm of separateness and autonomy. Socio-historically, feminist scholars such as Bardwick (1978, 1980), Chodorow (1978, 1987), Gilligan (1982), Miller (1986), and Peck (1986) were cognizant of this aspect of women's development and responded to the limited and conflicting paradigms of traditional models by developing conceptual models and conducting empirical studies that emphasized the affiliative or relational nature of women. Caffarella and Olson (1993) categorized these studies as alternative models and provided a summary of four assumptions of the psychosocial development of women that resulted from these alternative models: (1) interpersonal relationships are of central importance in a woman's self-concept; (2) roles such as spouse, mother, and worker and the dynamics of these roles have specific importance; (3) a diverse and non linear set of expectations and development containing role discontinuities are the norm; and (4) there is a diversity of experience about the various developmental issues and patterns.

The assumptions from the alternative models suggest that the paradigms of traditional adult development models do not directly reflect the psychosocial development of women and the linear sequential pattern of traditional models seem to be antithetical to the diversity of issues and patterns as well as role discontinuities that characterize women's development. However, Caffarella and Olsen (1993) keenly noted that although alternative models provide a developmental framework more reflective of women, alternative models (like traditional models) are informed by empirical studies plagued by design and methodological issues. The majority of cross-validation studies of alternative models included participants who were middle-class, middle-aged, Caucasian women; lacked a longitudinal scope; and used a limited theoretical

perspective that resulted in a depiction of women without context. Missing from these studies were the voices of women of various ages and from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, although the voices of women were heard and the relationships were of central importance, the nature of social relations and the power dynamics associated with social difference and how each shaped their lives and influenced their adult development were absent from these studies. Therefore, alternative models could provide only limited insight to a narrow spectrum of women located in a specific time period.

Caffarella and Olson's study raises fundamental questions regarding identity development: Are there universal truths regarding human nature (i.e., is it biologically predetermined)? Do essential identities exist or are identities the product of social interaction (i.e., socially constructed)? Is there a model that encapsulates all aspects of human development (e.g., both idiosyncratic and interpersonal identity development)? Many of the psychological models fall short of being able to be universally applied for several reasons: (1) not all humans share the same genetic potential (e.g., gender isn't a binary as previously assumed and not all women are capable of reproduction), (2) not all identities are biologically determined (e.g., giving birth and engaging in the practice of mothering are not necessarily mutually inclusive), (3) not all humans share the same temperament associated with specific identities (e.g., not all mothers are selfless nurturers), (4) development isn't necessarily predictable, linear, and stable (e.g., maternal identity development as a result of giving birth to a child after the loss of another), and (5) development occurs within a social milieu and, thus, psychological models do not account for social phenomenon such as social differentiation or social stratification. Therefore, to attend to diversity among mothers and support the notion that maternal identity development is a personally unique and subjective process, I suggest that research concerning

adult identity development should consider three factors: contextuality, intersectionality, and fluidity.

Identity is continually constructed and reconstructed through social interaction and is influenced by a complex multidimensional framework. Cultural and historical contexts, for example, have a marked impact on maternal identity development. Assumptions and expectations regarding motherhood are learned through the process of socialization, social institutions (e.g., school) and organizations (e.g., girl scouts), and through personal experience. How a woman perceives motherhood and her position as mother in society are based upon her views concerning many sociocultural factors and issues such as marital status, employment status, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, reproductive rights, sexuality, etc…, (Arendell, 2000; Collins, 1994; DiQuinzio, 1999; Eichler, 1997; Guerrina, 2001; Hays, 1996; Katz-Rothman, 2000; Johnston & Swanson, 2003, 2006; Malacrida, 2009; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Furthermore, intersectionality of biographies, like contextuality, has a large impact on the development of a maternal identity. Mothers are a compilation of many interpersonal (social) identities, each with a unique set of sociocultural assumptions and expectations and each vary in social value. The salience of a maternal identity, I contend, is greatly impacted by the possession other social identities – e.g., a single, unemployed, lesbian mother may view herself quite differently in comparison to a married, employed, heterosexual mother. In essence, each mother occupies multiple social locations and experiences different social realities. Lastly, fluidity of identity influences the development of a maternal identity. Because identity is constructed through social relations, it is not a fixed construction defined by distinct or essential qualities; rather, identity is dynamic and mutable with multiple and shifting meanings. Therefore, through

social interaction in various contexts, the construct of mother and the ideology undergirding motherhood is continually negotiated.

In summary, socio-historically and maternally speaking, developmental models have evolved from focusing only on intrapsychic processes, whereby development is solely based on interpreting maternal interaction (i.e., bonding or attachment), to psychosocial processing by which successfully taking on a social role such as mother leads to "healthy" development. In both perspectives, assumptions and behavior are considered biologically determined and universal thereby becoming prescriptive to all mothers and creates an essentialized motherhood. However, I argue, this view is myopic at best and objectifies women, reifies gender role differences, and places mothers in a static category rather than acknowledge that they exist in multiple social locations and experience multiple social realities. Furthermore, those mothers who are not centrally located within the boundaries of this socially constructed and fixed category will experience the divisive processes of social differentiation and marginalization. Therefore, I contend that developmental models and research concerning identity development must take into consideration the particulars of social relations such as contextuality, identity fluidity, and multiplicity of biographies and how each impact both idiosyncratic and interpersonal development.

A Multidimensional Approach to Theorizing Maternal Identity Development

> For a theoretical perspective to be politically useful…, it should be able to recognise the importance of the subjective in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality… this involves understanding how particular social structures and processes create the conditions of existence which are at one and the same time both material and discursive (Weedon 1987: 20).

In the previous sections of this literature review, I discussed that early discourse concerning a maternal identity, whether from a sociological or psychological perspective, was a totalizing discourse – one in which mother is thought of as being a universal and transhistorical construct. Moreover, tied to the notion of a maternal construct were implicit and essentializing assumptions regarding motherhood and mothering. However, I argue, absent from this perspective are all those mothers who, because of their diverse biographies and subjectivities, do not or cannot conform to this normative maternal identity and are relegated to a hegemonic motherhood (Arendell, 1999). Therefore, I contend that researchers must adopt, not a unitarian and universalistic view, but a comparativist perspective which takes into consideration the multidimensional nature of being a women, a mother.

Central to this study is the exploration of how a woman not only formulates a maternal identity but also maintains a salient one relative to diverse maternal experiences and subjectivities. At the onset of and, continuing throughout motherhood, a myriad of changes occur in a mother's life, both psychologically and socially. Such experiences promote introspection regarding the nature and meaning of motherhood and how it is socially constituted. Therefore, to attend to the constructive, deconstructive, and reconstructive processes of identity development as well as the dynamic changes that occur prior to and during motherhood, two theories have been chosen to inform this study: social identity theory and transformational learning theory.

Social Identity Theory

The non-unitarian notions of "self in society" and social relations driving identity development are fundamental concepts of social identity theory. Social Identity theorists contend that individuals are a compilation of both social and personal identities and that the characteristics of a particular group into which one is socially placed or to which they perceive

they belong, provide the basis of one's social identity whereas a particular idiosyncratic attribute (i.e., personality) that one possesses is associated with a personal identity. In addition, a major assumption of social identity theory is that personal identity has little influence on group dynamics, whereas social identity has a marked effect on the development of personal identities (Hogg, 2006). For example, if nurturing and caring are considered behaviors associated with mothering, then, those mothers who do not personally possess these traits must learn to develop and incorporate them in order to increase their social identity salience.

Social identity theorists suggest that phenomena such as normativity and discrimination can be explained by exploring and analyzing the subjective process of social categorization (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Hogg 2006; Hornsey, 2008). Each social category or group is cognitively represented as a prototype which is defined as a collection of connected beliefs and assumptions to denote similarities within the group while simultaneously distinguishing the group from others. Prototypes serve as references to determine the relatedness of an individual to a particular group or category. Furthermore, people are considered to be prototypically compared or perceptually "depersonalized" (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). If an individual perceives that he or she personifies a certain prototype, then he or she self-identifies as part of the "in-group." Conversely, if an individual does not perceive that he or she personifies the prototype, he or she self-identifies as part of the "out-group." In essence, the mechanism of depersonalization is the driving force of self-categorization.

Although self-perception of social identity is based on prototypicality, categorization must be psychologically salient and contextually relevant. Social Identity theorists express that salience is a function of categorization accessibility and fit. Categorization accessibility is based on value or frequency (i.e., considered chronically accessible), or it is contextually dependent

(i.e., situationally accessible). Categorization fit refers to how well or appropriate a categorization is for a specific context. It is believed that people will cognitively scan through a repertoire of accessible categories until an optimal fit is retrieved, thus salience is achieved. However, social identity theorists contend that this process is not automatic and, that because the process is both cognitive-perceptual and social, there are motivational influences to maintain in-group fitness (Hornsey, 2008; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Hogg 2006). Positive distinctiveness and uncertainty reduction illustrate two motivational forces that influence social identity salience. Positive distinctiveness, also known as ethnocentrism, refers to group behavior that promotes (and accentuates) positive intergroup distinctiveness (i.e., "we" are better than "them"), which supports social valence and creates entitativity, a group's perception of their unity and coherence. Uncertainty reduction is the process of clarifying one's place or position in the world and the other's place and position by associating oneself with a particular group's prototype; the association clarifies who one is and how to behave as well as who others are and how they might behave. Thus, the process of social categorization reduces uncertainty because it provides the prototype which fosters distinctiveness.

Maternal identity development and maternal subjectivity, from the perspective of social identity theory, is the product of both cognitive and social processes rather than solely a psychological process as suggested by psychodynamic and psychosocial theories and models. Through various social experiences prior to and during motherhood, a woman develops a cognitive representation of a maternal identity – a "mother" prototype. This archetype is a compilation of learned assumptions, both implicit and explicit, and serves as the frame of reference during the process of prototypical comparison or depersonalization. In essence, motherhood ideology is learned through various social relations (e.g., family observation,

schooling, media, etc…) and forms the basis of how a woman self-identifies as a mother as well as how others socially view or categorize her as a mother. Furthermore, maternal assumptions, according to social identity theory, have perceived social value and for a maternal identity to be considered salient, one must be able to embody the ideology such as performing maternal behaviors considered appropriate for a specific social context. Therefore, assimilation and conformity to the maternal prototype (i.e., normative mothering) drives the process of self and social categorization. However, because identity development is an internalization of subjective experience which is framed within the context of social relations, any experience that is inimical to the assumptions of the prototype may, depending upon one's personal identity, manifest as identity ambiguity, conflict, or crisis, and, in some cases, cause the development of a stigmatized or de-legitimized identity (Cox and Gallois, 1996; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004) as well as lead to social marginalization.

Transformational Learning Theory

Although social identity theory suggests that the socio-cognitive processes of positive distinctiveness and uncertainty reduction are motivational forces that influence self categorization, missing from social identity discourse is a clear description of the mechanisms at play regarding how those forces influence identity development and salience. According to social identity theory, positive distinctiveness is the social process of developing ideology that promotes social valence and entitativity; it is the social construction of those ideas, characteristics, and behaviors that are associated with a specific identity. Uncertainty reduction is the cognitive process of associating oneself with a particular prototype so as to clarify who one is and how to appropriately behave. Therefore, if an individual recognizes, supports, and personifies the prototype as well as engages in contextually appropriate behavior, then identity

salience is achieved. However, I argue that there is a continuum regarding the perception of salience and, because social identity theory is prescriptively described in absolute as well as dichotomous terms (e.g., aprototpyical/prototypical and in-group/out-group), little consideration is given to variances in salience relative to the process of self-categorization and how these variances relate to the phenomena of internalized oppression and social marginalization. This raises the question – taking into consideration individuals whose prototypicality ranges from the mildly incongruent to the antithetical and who may face being depersonalized as marginal or deviant, how do they, if at all, resolve prototypical conflicts and identity uncertainty? The answer, I contend, lies within the mechanism or process of introspection and reflection whereby an individual makes sense of their experiences as well as their subjectivity by deconstructing the assumptions undergirding normative ideology relative to their social reality. In essence, one engages in transformational learning as a way to make meaning of one's identity and social position.

Jack Mezirow (1978) introduced into adult education discourse the notion that the interpretation of lived experience (i.e., meaning-making) is central to adult learning. According to Mezirow (1996, 2000), much of the knowledge acquired during childhood and adolescence is unintentionally and uncritically assimilated, represents cultural paradigms, and forms our adult frame of reference. In addition, he suggests that one's frame of reference, or "meaning perspective" (Mezirow, p. 16), is subdivided into two sociocognitive dimensions: habits of mind and points of view. The various orientations such as philosophical, moral, and psychological as well as their associated assumptions are referred to as habits of mind and help guide the process of interpreting the meaning of experience. Points of view, also known as "meaning schemes," are "sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments – that tacitly

direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). In essence, habits of mind help define who we are, points of view help determine what we value, and collectively both help frame how we view the world. However, Mezirow (2000) argues that because knowledge is dynamic, mutable and embedded in specific sociocultural and historical contexts, adults are considered to be instinctively driven to continuously "negotiate contested meanings" (p.3). Therefore, various experiences that create a problematic frame of reference promote transformational learning – a critical reflection of uncritically assimilated knowledge that leads to the transformation of our frames of reference and "to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true and justified to guide action" (Mezirow, p. 8).

Despite the fact that Mezirow (2000) prescriptively suggests that there are ten universal steps or phases to transformational learning, central to his theory is the concept that personal transformation is initiated by a "disorienting dilemma" (p. 22) and followed by "subjective reframing" (p. 23), or a critical analysis of the validity and veracity of our socioculturally embedded assumptions relative to specific personal experiences. From Mezirow's perspective, many women who transition into motherhood or encounter circumstances contrary to their maternal assumptions may undergo a transformational experience. Erikson (1963) and Stern (1995), for example, contend that becoming a mother may produce feelings of uncertainty, ambiguity, and disorganization and that these experiences create a "crisis of identity" (Erikson, 1963) which compels a mother to "transform and reorganize her self-identity" (Stern, 1995, p. 180). Furthermore, Colarusso and Nemiroff (1981) suggest that experiences during adulthood that are contrary or disappointing produce narcissistic injury and promote an assessment of the

limitations associated with a specific adult identity or role. Therefore, narcissistic injury during motherhood, due to differences between a perceptually idealized maternal identity and a socially realized identity, incites the process of assessing those factors that produce narcissistic vulnerability and incertitude.

Unlike Colarusso and Nemiroff's suggestion of analyzing limitations and "accept what is real in both the external and inner world, regardless of the narcissistic injury involved" (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981, p. 86), Mezirow (1978, 2000) contends that people should engage in what he terms "subjective reframing" which is the process of "restructuring one's conception of reality and one's place in it…[which]…involves a redefinition of problems and the need for action and new criteria for assigning values and making judgments" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105). In essence, an individual undergoes a critical assessment of knowledge that was uncritically assimilated and, prior to a particular experience, unchallenged. Furthermore, the deconstruction of assumptions related to a particular experience enables individuals to posit the meanings underpinning those assumptions; to conceptualize how these assumptions are socially operationalized; and to reformulate new assumptions that will decrease uncertainty while simultaneously increasing personal salience or self-efficacy. Therefore, in terms of interpreting maternal experiences that produce ambiguity or uncertainty, subjective reframing provides mothers the ability to critical reflect on the assumptions of motherhood as well as construct new and alternative ways of perceiving a salient and meaningful maternal identity.

In summary, psychosocial and psychodynamic perspectives theorize the identity of mother as a universal, acontextual, and transhistorical construct. Assumptions from such theorization are usually implicit in nature and create an essentialized maternal identity. Therefore, theorization must move away from the production of a normative maternal identity to

one that is more inclusive and accounts for the multidimensional nature of being a mother. Both Social Identity Theory and Transformational Learning Theory enable a researcher to examine how assumptions are socially constructed, the myriad of meanings undergirding those assumptions, the various social motivations that compel individuals to assimilate and conform to those assumptions, and lastly, how individuals, in light of experiences that are contrary to the normative assumptions, may analyze and resist universalistic and hegemonic assumptions so that they increase their awareness of their subjectivity and recreate a new individualistic and salient maternal identity.

Chapter Summary

The rhetoric of motherhood in both early social constructionist and psychoanalytic feminist discourses focused on the nature of motherhood and its role in relation to gender oppression. As a result of empirical data that was based on a small homogenized set of mothers, early discourse characterized "mother" as a universal and essentialized identity and portrayed her as engaging in prescriptive gendered parental practices (i.e., exclusive mothering). Furthermore, early discourse assumed that rational autonomy was possible either by abdicating the role of mother or by changing the exclusivity of parenting. Therefore, early motherhood rhetoric obscured any differences among mothers as well as placed emphasis on patriarchy as the source of oppression instead of taking into account the existence of multiple sociostructural levels of gender oppression. However, with the infusion of a postmodern perspective into feminist discourse, scholars argued that motherhood is multidimensional whereby mothers hold multiple subject positions, each shaped by multiple discourses, and that by maintaining an essentialized motherhood perspective, the reification of normative mothering will continue as well as the marginalization of many mothers.

Cotemporaneous with early feminist discourse and in a similar fashion, early adult development models and theories hypostatized “mother” as a universal and transhistorical construct. Absent from theorization was the consideration of how contextuality, biographical intersectionality, and identity fluidity shapes the process of identity development. Therefore, theories that not only problematize socioculturally embedded assumptions regarding identity but also examine subjectivity in relationship to those assumptions are needed and necessary in order to account for the occurrence of social phenomenon such as marginalization which, in turn, affects the salience of an identity. A marriage between Social Identity Theory and Transformational Learning Theory, I contend, will enable mothers who experience circumstances that are inimical to normative motherhood assumptions to examine the socially constructed nature of and the multiple meanings underpinning those assumptions.

CHATPER III

METHODS

Discussed in this third chapter are the elements that provided the lens and framework for the process of exploring adult identity development in women, more specifically mothers. Included in this chapter are descriptions regarding the design of the study, theoretical considerations, data collection, validity and reliability, and bias and positional reflexivity. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. Research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

Design of the Study

> Motherhood narratives are especially potent cultural forms, and only a few dominate the landscape. In the most popular account, every woman is a potential mother waiting to fill this role. How we become mothers and "do" mothering is culturally prescribed, although motherhood and mothering are written as "natural phenomenon"; anything "different" is "unnatural" (Romero & Stewart, 1995, p. xvi-xv)

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), qualitative research is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world [and] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible" (p. 3). Qualitative research is set apart from quantitative research in that it involves a naturalistic approach (i.e., data is collected in the field in natural settings), views

social phenomenon holistically (i.e., adopts a broad approach to analysis), entails obtaining and using rich descriptions of the social world, is emergent and employs an inductive strategy, is committed to an emic perspective, and considers researchers as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). In addition to these distinctive differences, much of *contemporary* qualitative research is from a constructivist perspective that assumes a relativist ontology in which multiple realities exist and assumes a subjectivist epistemology in which knowledge is thought of as being co-created or co-constructed (Crotty, 2003; Elliot, 2005; Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

Taking into consideration that "self" is socially constituted and defined by normative ideology and that adult development is a multidimensional process affected by factors such as context, history, and socio-relational conditions, I believe that motherhood is socially constructed and its meaning is highly subjective. Therefore, I take constructivist standpoint regarding maternal identity development and, as a result, I seek to employ a research method that will help depict and interpret the complex process of human meaning-making among mothers who experience the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child. One qualitative method in particular that supports my constructivist standpoint regarding adult identity development is narrative inquiry.

Synonymous with story, narrative is a "perspectival construction" (Kramp, 2004); it is a personal account of specific events and life experiences from a particular point of view and organized in such a way as to express meaning in one's life (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995). Furthermore, Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that a narrative is a "meaning structure" (p. 13) which is very analogous to Mezirow's "meaning perspective" (p. 101) and, represents our beliefs and assumptions undergirding the interpretation

of experiences and the creation of meaning in our lives. Essentially, a narrative has temporal and contextual dimensionality, i.e., a series of events occurring within a social milieu, but also has introspective and transformative dimensionality, i.e., reflection of events that may lead to a change in one's point of view (Bailey & Jackson, 2003; Chase, 2005; Elliot, 2005; Rossiter, 1999). The utility of narrative lies in the fact that it "gives preeminence to displaying data in its original state" (Johnson-Bailey, p. 124, 2004), it "privileges the storyteller" (Kramp, p.111, 2004) and, in terms of power dynamics (e.g., gender incongruence between researcher and participants), it is considered a method appropriately suited to give women voice (Bloom, 1998; Cotterill & Letherby, 1993; Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

In regards to conducting narrative inquiry, literature offers two distinct approaches. The first approach is a purist form which is used by narrativists like Kathleen Casey (1993) in *I Answer with My Life*, and involves sitting for hours with a participant while they expound in response to one question. For example, Casey asked female teachers, "Tell me the story of your teaching career?" The second approach is a modified form which is used by narrativists like Patricia Bell-Scott (1998) in *Flat-Footed Truths: Telling Black Women's Lives*, and entails asking a few well-crafted open-ended questions. Bell-Scott, for example, asked questions that guided women through pivotal moments in the specific stories of their process of representation and recording of their community of Black women. Therefore, in an effort to better understand the complexity concerning the deconstructive and reconstructive process of maternal identity development, narratives from mothers who have experienced the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child were collected using in-depth interviews comprised of open-ended questions such as How did you develop a conception of motherhood prior to becoming a mother? How has this conception changed over time? How has your child's sexual minority disclosure i.e., "coming

out" impacted your maternal identity or your role as a mother? (For a full list of questions see Appendix B). The purpose of this research was to find among their stories a master script, i.e., a maternal narrative, of how, in light of an experience that is contrary to cultural prescriptions and normative motherhood ideology, they reformulate a maternal identity.

Sample Selection

The sampling approach employed in this study would be characterized as deliberative or non-random. Creswell (2007) describes deliberative (i.e., purposeful) sampling as a process in which the researcher "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Furthermore, criterion-based sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, was used to select participants because individuals that are chosen using study-specific criteria will "represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). Taking into consideration that the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity, three criteria were used in the selection of participants. First, nine mothers of an adult sexual minority child were interviewed. Patton (2002) offers two explanations for using small, even single digit, samples in qualitative research: (1) qualitative research places emphasis on depth, not breadth, of experience and information – thus researchers focus on the information richness of participants selected and (2) qualitative research (i.e., fieldwork) is emergent and enables more participants to be added if necessary. Secondly, the ages of mothers selected ranged between 45 and 65 years of age. This range, in general, corresponds to the ages in which a mother would have an adult child, would have experienced the disclosure of the child's sexual minority status, and would have time to process the experience (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). The third and final selection criteria was the possession of unique maternal subjectivities which is best represented

through selecting mothers who have varied biographical attributes (e.g., race, marital status, education, and social class).

In terms of collecting samples, mothers were solicited by contacting sexual minority related organizations such as PFLAG (i.e., Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays), Youth Pride, and collegiate Gay and Lesbian Student Unions whose mission is to help raise awareness of issues related to sexual minorities. Initial contact with these organizations lead to snowball sampling in which the first few participants recruited for the study made use of their social network and helped refer other mothers who could potentially participate in the study. As a result, the study has a diverse group of mothers whose experiences aided in the interrogation of normative motherhood as well as the examination of maternal identity development.

Data Collection

Gubrium and Holstein (1997), in *The New Language of Qualitative Method*, identify two approaches to qualitative interviewing: the naturalistic approach that focuses on the *what* and *how* questions concerning social life and the constructivist approach that focuses not only on the *what* and *how* questions but also address the *why* questions concerning social life. Comparatively, although both are concerned with a participant's lived experience, naturalists assume that there is an observable and describable unified external reality whereas constructivists assume that "the social world is constantly "in the making" and therefore the emphasis is on understanding the *production* of that social world" (Elliot, 2005, p. 18, italics in original). Constructivists, therefore, view an interview as both a site of data production as well as a means of exploring and "identifying meaning making *practices* and on understanding the ways in which people participate in the construction of their lives" (Elliot, 2005, p. 19, italics in original).

Narrative interviewing uses a constructivist approach in which a narrator, through a few sequential probing questions, recounts specific experiences or events. It is through this retrospective interpretation of their life story and the examination of the multiple and shifting constructions of self that a participant will make meaning of those experiences and uncover their subjectivity relative to the social world in which they are engaged in. Therefore, in order to characterize maternal identity development in mothers who experience the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child, narrative interviews employing sequentially open-ended questions (see Appendix B) were used as the primary means of data collection in this study. These interviews provided motherhood narratives that not only depict the complex socio-perceptual process of adult social role identity development but also addressed the specific process of reformulating a maternal identity in light of experiences that are inimical to a universal or essential motherhood.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data in most qualitative research begins with the organization of data into analyzable units and then placing them into categories or themes. A researcher engages in a process of "coding" the data to generate interpretive insight regarding the research questions as well as generate theory. In narrative analysis, on the other hand, researchers do not truncate or "fracture" (Strauss, 1987, p.29) data into categories. Rather, a researcher will employ what Maxwell (2005) refers to as a connecting strategy:

> Instead of fracturing the initial text into discrete segments and re-sorting it into categories, connecting analysis attempts to understand the data (usually, but not necessarily, an interview transcript or other textual material) in context, using various methods to identify relationships among the different elements of the text. (p. 98)

When a researcher analyzes narratives, he or she will look for patterns and narrative threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 200) that will "*connect* statements and events within a context into a coherent whole" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 98, italics in original). In essence, a researcher is not reading text for categorical themes; rather, text is being read to develop "voice" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Reissman (1993). Therefore, in this study of mothers who experience the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child, I collected narratives and employed the method of "connecting analysis" to construct a collective motherhood narrative. This collective narrative depicts the process of maternal identity development as well as represents a counter-narrative that responds to normative cultural mandates.

Validity

Research validity, according to Elliot (2005), refers to "the ability of research to reflect an external reality" (p. 22). However, many scholars are divided regarding how "reality" should be depicted. Quantitative researchers, on the one hand, are emphatic concerning the use of measurement whereas qualitative researchers, on the other, are holdfast regarding the use of rich descriptions. Taking into considering the dynamic and subjective nature of adult development, a qualitative approach towards the examination and characterization of adult identity development is, in my opinion, more appropriate. Using the qualitative method of narrative as an example, Pavlenko (2002) describes the multidimensionality of qualitative research by stating that narratives are

> …discursive constructions rather than factual statements. Such an approach will allow us to uncover multiple sociocultural, sociohistorical, and rhetorical influences that shape narrative construction and thus to understand better how stories are being told, why they are being told in a particular way, and whose stories remain untold. (p. 217)

However, as described earlier, quantitative researchers are polarized about the representation of social life. Naturalists use narratives to depict a single unified reality whereas constructivists use narratives to portray an individual, subjective reality. Therefore, the type of research and research approach chosen by a researcher is dependent upon their ontological and epistemological standpoint.

This qualitative study employed the use of narrative to depict personal transformation in mothers and the reformulation of their maternal identity. Furthermore, in light of my research assumption regarding the subjective nature of motherhood, I had to address the question – *what is the criterion for validity in constructivist-narrative inquiry*? Several scholars have proposed validity criterion for narrative studies. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) contend that "each inquirer must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work" (p.7) and suggest "apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability as possible criteria" (p.7). They purport that the body of work produced from a narrative inquiry should be relatable and believable to a reader – "A plausible account is one that tends to ring true. It is an account of which one might say, 'I can see that happening'" (1990, p. 8, italics in original). Building on Connelly and Clandinin's work, Reissman (1993) suggests four criteria for narrative inquiry validity: *Persuasiveness* (width and plausibility), *Correspondence* (data verification/consensual validation), *Coherence* (creating unified perspective), and *Pragmatic Use* (future research/applicability). Reissman places emphasis on credible connection with theory, congruence in communication with participants, the structure and content of narratives, and the usefulness of the study. Lastly, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) also propose four criteria for narrative inquiry validity: *Width* (extensiveness of evidence), *Coherence* (logical integration of interpretations), *Insightfulness* (clear presentation of narrative and narrative

analysis) and *Parsimony* (provide insight with small number of individuals, perspectives). In sum, validity regarding narrative inquiry resides in all aspects of the research process as well as the resulting body of work.

To construct a plausible or verisimilar explanation of the reformulation of a maternal identity by mothers who experience the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child, I integrated Reissman's model for narrative validity with that of Lieblich et. al. This study will had three basic elements of validity: "comprehensiveness" through compendious data collection and documentation, "congruence" through consensual data confirmation, and "coherence" through inductive and reasonable compilation of interpretations. Furthermore, I also consulted with research exemplars such as Romero & Stewart (1995) and Austin & Carpenter (2008) which used motherhood narratives to support the notion that normative motherhood both privileges and marginalizes mothers. Research exemplars not only serve as models concerning the elements of research validity (Mishler, 1990), but they also support Reissman's concept of *Pragmatic Use* or the need of future research to expound upon current discourse.

Reliability

In addition to validity, a qualitative researcher must consider the reliability of the body work they produce. Reliability is equated with a study's "dependability" and "consistency" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and may also be defined as the "stability of research findings" (Elliot, 2005, p. 22). In order to achieve dependability, I employed the following three verification strategies: 1) triangulation, to confirm the interpretation of the emergent data, 2) member checks, to ensure plausible representation of narratives, and 3) peer-examination from committee members, to offer more than one investigative lens.

Bias and Reflexivity

Central to my research is the notion that "power is everywhere" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93) and that power is not a tangible object; rather, it is the result of some sort of relational dynamic. It is through the process of social interaction that we construct identities and associate with them very specific beliefs and values. These dominant ideologies are culturally transmitted and if an individual conforms to the prescriptive norms of a social identity they are privileged, whereas those who do not or cannot conform are marginalized. Considering this assumption to be true I, as researcher, was conscious of the various socio-relational power differentials that existed throughout the entire research process as well as the repercussions of my thoughts and actions. In essence, to prevent breaking the cardinal rule of research, *primum non nocere* (i.e., first do no harm), I continually engaged in the process of reflexivity.

Before gaining entrance into a "woman's domain" or the "female space," a male researcher should analyze their positionality and agency as well as anticipate a participant's perceptions of gender and gender-role relationships. Reflexivity in qualitative research has been described as the act of turning "the researcher's gaze upon oneself for the purpose of separation and differentiation" (Hawes, 1998). Thus, reflection serves as a tool for researchers to examine how their involvement in the research process informs and affects their analysis. Furthermore, it has been suggested that researchers should engage in "positional reflexivity" (MacBeth, 2001) which is described as the identification of an "analysts' (uncertain) position and positioning in the world he or she studies" (p. 38) and is "expressed with a vigilance for unseen, privileged, or, worse, exploitative relationships between analyst and the world" (p. 38). Positional reflexivity, therefore, enables researchers to become more conscious of their power and position, which has a large impact on the analysis and agency of the research.

Although I am not a parent, nor one who has had an experience that has negatively affected the social salience of their parental identity, I have had experiences that have caused a decrease in the salience of one of my social identities. Moreover, those experiences have both fueled my interest regarding the nexus between hegemony and subjectivity and how this relationship has an impact on adult identity development as well as has increased my awareness and sensitivity toward others who have had similar experiences. Therefore, in my pursuit of characterizing maternal identity development, I made every effort during the entire research process to be sensitive to the issues and needs of the participating mothers as well as be very conscious of my position and participation.

By engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process I was be able to continually identify potential bias. As a result, I was aware of potential inherent issues regarding my interaction with mothers and the collection and analysis of motherhood narratives. Gender dynamic s and interview site adoption, for example, posed potential problems in this study. Herod (1993), in *Gender issues in the use of interviewing as a research method*, suggested that regardless of gender congruence or incongruence, gender dynamics "…shape the social interactions between researcher and interviewee… [and] underpin the very context within which the interview itself takes place" (p. 306). Herod believed that gender socialization within the larger social context directly influences gender relationships in the research context. Williams and Heikes (1993) supported Herod's conviction in their study concerning the importance of a researcher's gender in the in-depth Interview. Williams and Heikes discovered that an interviewer's gender was used as a gauge by interviewees to develop what they believed to be gender appropriate responses to interviewers' questions, thus producing a "socially desirable effect." Williams and Heikes, thus suggested that interviewers should become sensitized to an

interviewee's gender socialization to avoid influencing the participant's response and achieve "reliable results." The notion of gender socialization and gender dynamics as factors influencing the research process is well documented in many studies (Arendell, 1997; Broom et al., 2008; Cosset, 1992; Devault, 1990; Giovannini, 1986; Hertz, 1995; Kosygina, 2005; Oakley, 1981; Ortiz, 2005; Trevino, 1992). Therefore, I felt it necessary that during the interview process, or what Denzin (2001) refers to as the "social performance," I had to be sensitive to and keenly aware of each participants expression of gender as well as express empathy regarding their maternal subjectivity.

In addition to gender expression sensitivity, the site location of the interview is also an important factor to consider. Scholars suggest that gender dynamics of an interview is highly influenced by the physical location (Hand & Lewis, 2002; Lohan, 2000), noting issues of safety (Trevino, 1992) as well as comfort (Crosset, 1992). Furthermore, Broom, Hand, & Tovey (2008), in *The role of gender, environment and individual biography in shaping the qualitative interview data*, suggest that a physical context may be perceived as gendered (i.e., a feminine or masculine context) and that a researcher should consider an appropriate gendered context when interviewing. Therefore, in terms of this study, I felt it necessary to empower mothers in choosing the site or physical location that best fits their safety as comfort as well as have the ability to have voice (i.e., construct their narrative) and interrogate their assumptions.

Chapter Summary

Several elements have been presented in this chapter to provide a description of the lens and framework which was used for the examination of maternal identity development. Narrative interviewing provided a means for mothers to interrogate normative cultural narratives and reconstruct a salient maternal identity whereas, narrative analysis of those interviews provide insight regarding the multidimensionality of adult identity development.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

Presented in this chapter are the profiles of mothers who participated in this study. Each profile consists of information collected from two sources: a survey (Appendix C) consisting of questions constructed to collect demographic information and an interview consisting of open-ended questions constructed to collect biographical information (Appendix B). All participants completed a survey prior to being interviewed and a summary of demographic information is provided in Table 4.1. In addition to surveys, each mother participated in an interview which varied in length ranging from an hour to an hour and fifty minutes. All interviews were transcribed as well as member checked by participants for accuracy.

Tracy

Tracy has one biological son yet serves as a mother-figure to two step-daughters. She was raised and currently lives in a southern U.S. state. Although brought up Baptist, Tracy has been

Table 4.1

Demographic Profiles

Participant Name	Current Age	Race	Current Marital Status	Age at Birth of First Child	Gender and Current Age Of Children	Gender and Current Age of Sexual Minority Children	Age of Child At Sexual Minority Disclosure	Years Since Disclosure
Tracy	50	White	M	29	Male 21 Female 31 (Step) Female 35 (Step)	Male 21	20	1
Kristin	65	White	M	27	Male 37 Female 32	Male 37	16	11
Stephanie	63	White	M	24	Female 38 Female 35 Male 32 Male 24	Male 32	19	13
Kathy	65	White	M	26	Male 37 Male 35	Male 37	21	16
Zoey	51	White	M	28	Female 23 (Identical Twins) F 31 (Step)	Female 23 (One Twin)	19	4
Patrice	45	White	M	19	Male 26 Female 23	Male 26	22	4
Victoria	57	White	M	27	Male 30 Male 28 Male 25	Male 25	14.5	10.5
Nina	57	White	M	26	Female 31 (Identical Twins), Male 27 Female 25	Female 31 (One Twin)	14	17
Sally	50	White	M	20	Male 30 Male 28 Male 28 (Step)	Male 28	14	14

an active member in the United Method Church for several years. Furthermore, she was raised in a small traditional family whereby her mother was the exclusive caregiver. In terms of motherhood, Tracy expressed that she never had a strong urge to become a mother until her husband suggested it and describes the experience as

> …the hardest thing I had ever attempted… I mean when I think about jobs or other stuff I mean just being a parent was demanding being a mother was demanding and you were pushed beyond your limits of patience and exhaustion and so many things so many times so it was the hardest… it was really the hardest profession I've had… most rewarding too…

Tracy worked part-time for a large university while raising her son and noted that becoming a mother signifies becoming an adult – "I guess you know you get treated more as an adult because you have to be an adult… you have a child you are not afforded the luxury of being selfish and doing what you want any more." She also defined this adult role as one in which a mother engages in "…the care and nurturing of a human being to be what they were created to be." Of all the participants, Tracy's son's sexual minority disclosure was the most recent and she expressed that it caused her to rethink her parental assumptions and expectations. In addition, her experience caused her to have more compassion as well as prompted her to be active in an organizations and activities that support sexual minorities. Lastly, when asked at the end of the interview to define motherhood for the last time, she responded "…motherhood is adapting to your role as your child matures."

Kristin

Retired medical doctor and mother of two children (one son and one daughter), Kristin lives in a city of a Midwestern state that she describes as a "bubble of social justice and liberalism." She was raised Catholic but left the church at twenty. In regards to being a mother,

Kristin initially described motherhood in a succinct and manner-of fact tone exclaiming "…um in addition to the obvious biological it's caring for, loving, nurturing watching over and doing this until one dies." In addition, she expressed that she wasn't interested in becoming a mother until after she got married and upon becoming a mother for the first time the experience was not considered pleasant or personally fulfilling:

> …ah (laughing) if I am going to be truthful here it was ah frustrating overwhelming ah a lot of anger a lot of depression ah or burdened… jealous of my husband who got to go back to work and I had to stay home… hassled ah I remember a lot more negative than the positive…

Midway into the interview when asked about first becoming a mother and what she learned about herself, she replied "…ah I might not have been cut out to be a mom…" However, her concept of being a mother changed with her second child:

> …oh I was just more comfortable and yeah it was the second mother thing I knew what was up and had been married a little longer and had a bigger circle of friends and acquaintances it was just easier I guess the second baby is always easier but the second C-section was a planned C-section and there wasn't all this hassle and misery and I didn't… I got pretty depressed after the first pregnancy but didn't after the second pregnancy so it was just a whole different experience all the way um also I was anxious to get back to work so (laughing) very anxious…

Although Kristin's gave the impression that motherhood was difficult, her son's disclosure has had a large impact on her both as a mother and an individual:

> …not because of him being gay I think just the maturity in general…I am better to my daughter now and better to him ah I am a nicer person now than I was 20

> years ago to everyone including my husband um that partially it's because hmm… (pausing) I don't know if that's true… I am thinking partially because he did come out and it did make me aware of all the possibilities in the world…

At the end of the interview, the question of "what is motherhood" was asked again and she gave a more in-depth description; yet, there was still a hint of the role as being perfunctory in nature:

> …ah probably pretty much like I at the beginning… it's biological of course and taking care of nurturing loving watching a kid grow charting his process ah nudging him in what you think is the correct directions on everything from algebra to sociology to life in general… what car to buy (laughing) just kind of nurturing loving guidance counselor I guess….

Lastly, although her son's sexual minority disclosure initially caused turmoil in Kristin's life, her later acceptance of her son promoted her to become active in organizations and activities that support sexual minorities and sexual minority issues.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a mother of four children, two sons and two daughters and was raised and currently lives in the southern United States. She has been active member of the Baptist church for many years. Stephanie was a stay-at-home mom for the first two children and then worked in education in various capacities. In the beginning of the interview she defined motherhood by exclaiming "…motherhood is losing yourself in another human being…" and went on further

> …when my first child was born caring for her and the subsequent children I had no idea I could get outside myself to love somebody as much as I did my child…. I had no idea… and it just comes nothing prepares you for it… you know the sleepless nights the you know I can't go because my child is sick the

> disappointments it's all worth it… I ah mean it's just the most wonderful thing…it really is…

Stephanie described herself as a voracious reader and read as much as she could on child development and parenting especially from a Christian perspective. Reflecting on her son's sexual minority disclosure, she believes there is distinct difference between mothers and fathers concerning parenting:

> …has this changed my views of motherhood?... not really because just I always thought that mothers you know would always love their children no matter what and that's born itself out… you know mothers… their love is unconditional… whereas father have a lot… a little more at stake especially with the sons I think especially with their sons...

Furthermore, in terms of her son's disclosure, she believes that homosexuality is a choice not an inherent trait. Although Stephanie accepts her son's orientation, she has trepidation regarding his social life and relationships and describes this aspect of his life as "unexplored territory." Lastly, at the end of the interview, Stephanie defined motherhood for the last time – "…motherhood is still loving your children no matter what and growing outside yourself… (softly) growing outside yourself…"

Kathy

Retired mother of two sons, Kathy was raised and lives in the Midwest. Although raised a Protestant in the United Church of Christ, she has been an active member in the Presbyterian church for the last thirty years. In terms of motherhood, Kathy worked part-time teaching piano and giving voice lessons but expressed that there was never doubt in her mind in terms of being a full time mother. When prompted to answer the question of "what is motherhood," she briefly said "… I would say that motherhood is love and nurturing…" She observed her mother, sisters,

and sister-in-laws to build her concept of motherhood, but described that her mother served as the most influential person in shaping her perspective. Although she became an aunt young and helped raise all 10 nieces and nephews, upon becoming a mother for the first time Kathy felt challenged and ineffectual – "…there were times I felt fairly overcome or inadequate you know to be the best that I could be for that child…" When asked a second time, "what is motherhood," her reply was "…being a mother meant you know fulfilling that I thought was put on Earth to do." Kathy believed her role in life as a mother was one of support and nurturance yet when reflecting on her son's sexual minority disclosure there was a new added component to her role as mother – an advocate for justice and social change:

> …I might have learned that I had more stamina and starch (laughing) than I thought… I might have I guess… I didn't… would not have seen myself as an activist out there leading a gay pride parade but in this case it's what I do…

Kathy passionately described how she strives to have laws changed that would support her son as well as educate people about sexual diversity and sexual minority issues. When asked about where she gets this confidence (i.e., starch) from she replies, "…um not wanting your kid to be hurt and treated unfairly." At the end of our interview together Kathy described motherhood one last time – "… well motherhood is still caring about someone more than you could ever quantify and all that love."

Zoey

Mother of identical twin daughters and a step-daughter, Zoey lives in the southern U.S. but comes from a "mid-west family." Growing up she was surrounded by many women in her family (e.g., mother and aunts), each with different views on mothering, yet all of them served as role models for motherhood. Zoey talked about delaying motherhood although many encourage becoming a mother earlier:

> I didn't really want to be tied down let's say with being a mother… I was not interested… when all of my friends were in high school and they were all talking about getting married and everything that was the last thing I was interested in doing… I was interested in being in the world and doing things… you know I wanted to get a job and live on my own and experience some life and to me being a mother meant that was going to stop (laughing)… you know I was gonna have to commit you know to taking care of someone else and I wasn't ready to take care of anybody else… I was busy just I wanted to deal with me… I didn't want to have to be responsible for anybody else for a while so I always said that I would be 25 before I get married and 30 when I had kids and I was 26 and 28…

Zoey raised three daughters while working full time and motherhood to her was providing a safe environment as well as loving and nurturing children to be able to live in the "real world." Thrilled to have twins, she recalled that how she "dealt" with people changed when she became a mother because she had to consider two other people (her children) when making decisions in her life. Zoey was amazed by differences in children such as the difference between her twin daughters:

> …having twins has been a unique experience because I can see my daughters are nothing alike and they were raised pretty much the same but they are two totally different people and it's because who you are as a person your tendencies for certain types of behavior are I think already in you when you are born but how those things develop is where the nurture starts and where the nurture fits in…

Lastly, Zoey expressed that her daughter's sexual minority disclosure and working through it had helped to increase communication between them.

Patrice

Mother of two children, one daughter and one son, Patrice was raised and currently lives in the southern United States. Of all the participants, she started to have children the earliest – having a son at nineteen. Patrice worked fulltime as machine operator and later as a lab tech while raising her children. When asked to describe or define motherhood, she replied "… in short, motherhood is being there for your kids." In addition, she stated that her grandmother not mother was the greatest influence in formulating her concept of motherhood – "ah she was patient um she taught me things um she listened to me… I mattered." Patrice went on further to express that her grandmother was the "quintessential stay at home mom June Cleaver." However, over time and as a result of her experiences and circumstances, her perspective changed:

> …I hovered a lot over my son and ah I can't say that I was he June Cleaver although I imagined that I should be… I wasn't um… I had to work… it changed from what I saw I realized that the ideal was not necessarily the normal…

Patrice Expressed that society projects an ideal and that women should strive for it but as she raised her two children she realized that society's ideal was unreal.

In terms of her son's sexual minority disclosure, she not only accepted her son's sexual orientation but also realized through interacting with him and other sexual minorities that gays and lesbians are "just normal everyday human beings." As a result of her participating with her son in events and activities such as PFLAG (i.e., Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and gay pride as well as the positive recognition she got for her participation, she stated that she felt as though she was "envisioned as a good mom." In essence, her acceptance of sexual minorities has reciprocated a sense of acceptance of her as a "good" mother by sexual minorities.

Lastly, Patrice describes her relationship with her son had deepened – "he and I are great friends… and I think he and I are better friends now than when he was a teenager."

Victoria

Victoria is a mother of three sons, was raised and lives in the southern United States, and is a long standing member of the Presbyterian Church. She balanced raising children and having a career in law. Although being an attorney and a court judge is an extension of who she is, Victoria describes motherhood as a more important identity: "…it was always important to me to be a good mother… always… I consider it my highest calling." When prompted to define motherhood she stated that motherhood is "the nurturing and care and upbringing of children to become productive adults." Upon becoming a mother she experienced a significant change: "… all of sudden I was completely identified with the animal kingdom and mothers of the animal kingdom I understood that completely um maternal protective drive." Furthermore, Victoria expressed how proud she was of her position as mother and boasted "…I was the standard by which people judged whether their kids could do things." When questioned about whether or not her perception of being mother change after her son's disclosure, Victoria confidently and emphatically exclaimed "I mean my role as mother is to affirm my children and so to that extent it's unchanged." Lastly, she felt it necessary to convey her compassion for other adults and families struggling with a similar experience – "…it breaks my heart for other now who struggle and who don't have people who love them or won't accept them cause I know it happens all the time…"

Nina

Nina is the mother of four children, three daughters (two identical) and one son. She was raised in the northeast U.S. but lives and resides in the south. Nina does not subscribe to any one religion and periodically participates in various churches. In terms of motherhood, she was a

stay-at-home mom for the first five years as a mother then worked part-time and full-time as well as attended college while raising her children. When asked in the interview to define motherhood Nina gave a very lengthy and personal description containing a myriad of childhood experiences as well as a number of people who touched her life. Furthermore, she expressed that many women served as models of motherhood and they were very diverse in their experiences and knowledge. When recalling about being a mother in the early years she redefined motherhood as "tiring." However, she emphatically expressed that raising children was a community effort not an individual or family effort. This sense of community effort helped her process her daughter's sexual orientation. Nina discussed that sexuality like politics and religion may affect your life but they were not talked about or argued about because they were insignificant as compared to the needs of the entire community.

Like Zoey, Nina observed and was amazed by both similarities and differences between her twin daughters:

> …it is so fantastic for one thing I have a set of twins and one is heterosexual and one is gay and so it's just when I look at them I go these are identical twins identical babies same egg mirror image left hand right hand and they have they're so different and I love they're so alike in so many ways and so close they talk to each other constantly they make fun of each other you know whatever very different in a lot of way and very attached to each other yet they have this difference that is so wonderful and they seem to be very happy with it you know they seem to be very comfortable with it themselves there's issue that come up…

Lastly, Nina expresses that she has sympathy for the adult children going disclosing their sexuality as well as the families that are processing the experience and feels blessed by her upbringing, education, and diverse experiences with sexual minorities.

Sally

Sally is the mother of two sons and a step-son and was raised and Lives in the southern United States. She was highly involved in the Baptist church growing up but no longer an active member. While raising her children, she worked as a factory worker and later as a secretary. In her interview, when prompted to describe motherhood she replied

> …ah (laughing) CHALLENGING (laughing) ah challenging… its having children watching the children grow… you think it's only going to be part of life but it becomes a major part of your life… I would say I'm a mother I'm a wife I'm a social worker in that order (laughing)…

Sally expressed that she learned about raising children and "the good things" from her mother, yet she was adamant that her perspective was skewed because her mother was an alcoholic. When asked a second time to define motherhood she replied, "ah being a mother meant ah taking care of your kids ah putting your kids before yourself um creating an environment where your kids feel safe." Sally attributes raising children and going back to school as the main factors that had changed her perceptions of right and wrong as well as broadened her perspective on life. She expressed that she would "still be in that little box that said this is how you have to do things." Lastly, when asked what she learned from her son's disclosure she replied "to be more accepting of how people are because everybody is different."

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide demographic and biographic information to characterize mothers who participated in this study. In addition, narrative was extracted from

interviews and used so as to “give voice” to mothers and to more accurately reflect their thoughts and feelings. Collectively, the information provided supports the notion that motherhood is a very subjective experience, yet, fundamentally, there are assumptions and beliefs commonly shared among mothers.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

Presented in this chapter are the findings of this study as well as an exploration of the common themes and subthemes extrapolated from the data collected. The chapter is organized into three sections beginning with an outline of three emergent themes which include "*Challenging the Meaning of Motherhood*," "*Examining Cultural Gauges of Motherhood*," and "*Motherhood and Managing Social Relationships*" followed by a detailed description of each theme, and ending with a summary of the major points discussed.

Themes Derived from Maternal the Narratives

I. Challenging the Meaning of Motherhood
   - A. Experiencing Disequilibrium – What Happened and What Did I do?
   - B. Facing the Unknown and Confronting the Fear – Will They Be Alright and How Can I Make Things Better?
   - C. Moving Forward – Where Do I Go From Here?

II. Examining Cultural Gauges of Motherhood

A. Mothering and Heteronormativity

B. Mothering and Religious Doctrine

III. Motherhood and Managing Relationships

Challenging the Meaning of Motherhood

An analysis of the participating mother's interviews suggests that the nurturance and care of children not only defines the role of mother but also promotes a sense of purpose and meaning as a parent. All nine mothers in this study expressed that motherhood is a continual state of being concerned for the overall welfare of their children and that maternal efficacy is based on their ability to respond to their children's needs, or as Patrice puts it, "motherhood is being there for your kids." Therefore, taking into consideration that the maternal frame of reference of mothers in this study was based on a mimetic gendered model of heterosexuality, the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child challenged their maternal role and salience as well as called into question their perspective regarding the meaning motherhood. This experience not only triggered a sense of internal disequilibrium which emotionally manifested as fear and uncertainty but also prompted introspection and reflection which helped propel mothers forward to reevaluate their maternal assumptions as well as develop and new maternal perspective.

Experiencing Disequilibrium

All nine mothers who participated in this study shared their account of their adult child's sexual minority disclosure. Two reactions, shock and blame, were uncovered in the maternal narratives and represent an intrapsychic disequilibrium that the mothers experienced. Patrice, Kathy, Stephanie, Kristin, and Sally expressed that their child's disclosure was unexpected

whereas the remainder of the mothers felt either a sense of culpability and responsibility or a combination of unexpectedness and guilt.

Stephanie, mother of four, an educator, stay-at-home mother for her first two children (two daughters), career mother for her third and fourth children (two sons), who prided herself on unconditionally loving her children and raising them from a Christian perspective, stated that her son's sexual minority disclosure surprised her and called into question her perspective concerning the inherent nature of human sexuality:

> …wow it was quite a deal… he left a note on my bedside one morning and he was gone I guess he went to work and I woke up and read that note and ah my fourth child had a ball game that morning… it was a Saturday had a ball game and I was a zombie you know just I remember it was like I frozen… and I was like that for I guess about a week…. it was just I had never know anybody (pause)… had never (pause)… no one in our family that I knew of ah you know… I had been brought up and provided a Christian environment and um I believe that it was wrong you know that it was an aberration and to this day I still don't believe that you are born this way… I believe somewhere along the maturation process something gets stuck I mean that's just what I believe…

Kristin, a medical doctor, mother of two (a son and a daughter), who questioned her abilities as a mother and raised children from an agnostic perspective, underwent a process of withdrawal but described it as being both personal and social:

> …I remember going to one party that was probably a week or two after he came out and I just remember this specific party because everyone was drinking wine and I just didn't feel like joining in and didn't tell anybody at that point…. ah it

> was in the middle of lent and my husband who gives up alcohol during lent had wine (laughing) course I don't give up anything so I had wine anyway but wasn't in the party mood um beyond that there was a St. Patrick's Day party a few weeks later or a week or two later it was in March and one of my friends… my son was sixteen when he came out… my friend said well is Greg dating yet? At which point I completely fell apart… ah crying at the… this giant party with people all around me so we ran off into another room… she was the first person I told outside of family so that was two weeks, 21 days into after he told us so at least for the first month or so there was feelings of sadness and um we didn't really tell anybody else after that for a long time…

In addition to causing withdrawal, the startling recognition of their child's sexual minority status produced in mothers a feeling of loss as well as an acknowledgement of the substantive change in their children's lives. Patrice, the youngest participant and mother of two (a son and a daughter), for example expressed that her son's sexuality may jeopardize her vision of being a grandmother: "…I grieved because I wouldn't have a grandbaby with his black eyes." Furthermore, Kathy, a music teacher and mother of two sons, was taken aback and disclosed that it would take time and effort in "getting used to him saying that he was gay." Lastly, although emotionally distraught, Sally, a social worker and mother of two sons and step-mother to another son, expressed that her emotions were tied to facing the fact that her son was gay: "it was an emotional day but necessary for me to begin confronting and accepting that my son was gay."

Although the remainder of the mothers in the study did share similar reactions to their child's sexual minority disclosure, two mothers questioned their role as mother and whether or not they influenced the change in their children. Victoria, a court judge, mother of three sons,

who emphatically expressed in her interview that being a mother was her highest calling, stated that her son's disclosure was not on her maternal radar and caused her to question whether she had any part in his development:

> …I was totally taken aback it was a total blindside…. and he looked so stricken, he looked petrified, which causes me to still tear up right now, again…. and part of that was really wondering if there because of the type of birth control I had used which was a spermicide I really wondered if because he was our third one we were going to have him a year later… I wondered if I had caused that and there and caused him pain not that I considered him perfect in any way but I was petrified… he clearly was not happy at the moment and I was very worried about suicide…very worried about it…. um and he didn't want us to talk to him about it…. so it wasn't like and so he didn't want us he did not and it was like and don't talk to me about it…. so um I was very worried… and, so, and I so of course then there was guilt wondering if there was something I had done that caused that…

Tracy, a nutritional specialist, mother to one son and two step-daughters, described that her son's disclosure, like Victoria, was unexpected and it raised questions regarding her knowledge of homosexuality, her role as mother and her part in her son's sexual orientation:

> …I just felt like a total failure… I guess I felt because being a heterosexual and being straight… (pause) being (pause again)… I keep trying to say the word straight because my son hates the word homosexual or heterosexual but I guess because it's… I didn't have that… I don't have close personal gay friends that doesn't mean I don't know them… ah have contact with them either in a professional or ah what extracurricular type environment but I guess I felt

> (pause)… I know nothing about the subject I felt like parents have the biggest influence over their children because we spend the most time with them… so I felt like I had done something wrong… I had been overly domineering or uh I felt like it was my fault…. because I didn't know anything really about being umm gay I didn't know that it was innate so I you know basically blamed myself…

In sum, the unexpected nature of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure caused a sense of internal disequilibrium in mothers. This cognitive disorientation resulted in personal and social withdrawal, elicited emotions such as loss and sadness, and in some instances, triggered a sense of guilt or blame for the change in their children's sexual behavior. All of these reactions indicate a realization in mothers that their child indeed is different and prompts them to confront the various meanings and implications associated with this change.

Facing the Unknown and Confronting the Fear

As stated in the beginning of this section of the chapter, maternal narratives suggest that nurturance and care of children not only defines the role of mother but also promotes a sense of purpose and meaning as a parent. Moreover, through the process of socialization mothers develop a sense of exigency to either take responsibility for their child's troubles and misfortunes or try to remedy them (Caplan, 2000, Hays, 1996; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Therefore, mothers are continuously confronted with issues related to the growth and development of their children as well as feel compelled to respond to these issues. In terms of this study, maternal narratives revealed that there were two periods in an adult child's life in which mothers in this study were confronted with the notion that their child may be "different." The first period occurred during early childhood and adolescence whereby mothers developed a maternal sense (i.e., maternal intuition or premonition) by observing non-heteronormative behaviors in their

children. Mothers throughout this period recognized behavioral variances in their children; yet, they did not obstruct the expression of these behaviors. The second period occurred in adulthood when an adult child disclosed their sexual minority status. A child's self-disclosure during this period concretized maternal intuition and early observations but promoted intrapsychic changes that to ultimately lead to the reevaluation of maternal assumptions and the reconstruction of a maternal identity. However, common to both periods and experiences, whether on a conscious or unconscious level, is both a mother's acknowledgment of difference in their child and a reaction toward that difference. Therefore, in this section of the chapter, both types of confrontation will be discussed to exemplify that each lead to changes in mothers – early encounters of difference leading to facilitative parenting which serves as the antecedent of acceptance and perspectival change and the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child which leads mothers to face new fears produced by the experience and to the reevaluate the meaning of motherhood and their role as mother.

Early Encounters – Facing Difference

Diane Ehrensaft (2007) suggests that when parents are faced with children who do not display normative gendered behavior they either choose to engage in either obstructive parenting (i.e., correcting the child's behavior) or facilitative parenting (i.e., supporting individuality). She further suggests that making the decision regarding which type of parenting to choose is an intrapsychic process influenced by the possible outcome of parental pathologization. Parents who chose obstructive parenting accept cultural gender norms, correct their children's behavior, and avoid pathologization. Conversely, according to Ehrensaft, facilitative parents undergo a paradigmatic shift and adopt a view that supports gender fluidity and the individual expression in children as well as resist the phenomenon of pathologization. In regards to this study, all nine

mothers reported that they did observe behavioral differences in their children and that they did not try to correct those behaviors.

Mothers in this study reported that they had some type of maternal sense, either maternal intuition or a maternal premonition. Kathy, for example, recognized behavior in her son that raised a cognitive flag but at the time did not follow through with interpreting the overall significance of the behavior:

> …When he was in the sixth grade I served as a parent chaperone to take a group of kids for I don't know some kind of academic… ah it was called future problem solving it was some kind of competition ok… so there was one teacher his gifted and talented teacher from our district and she asked me to be the parent chaperone so there were I think five or six kids two adults and we were in another state for this weekend and you know I was I was just kind of observing the kids as they interacted and they were doing this competition together and I remember saying to the teacher that do you have any knowledge about how you would tell if your kid is gay and she sort of looked at me like I had a square head or something (laughing) and she said oh my no I don't know anything about that and I said I just wondered… I said I think it is interesting to watch my son interact with these other kids and to tell you the truth I don't know I can't probably really verbalize what I was seeing (laughing) but I was seeing something that caused me to ask her that question….

Like Kathy, Nina and Stephanie observed non-normative behavior in their children but unlike Kathy they expressed that the behavior specifically deviated from gender norms:

> Nina… so there she is in junior high and you know she's ah maybe a bit more of a tomboy than her sister…
>
> Stephanie… I had a little premonition ah because Jake was always a little bit different… he was… he is very creative you know…

In addition to Kathy, Nina, and Stephanie, the remainder of mothers in the study reported observing non-normative behavior in their children. However, analysis of the maternal narratives uncovered that although all mothers observed variance in their child's behavior and did not obstruct and correct this behavior, more than half expressed that they avoided confronting the possibility that these behaviors may lead to or indicate homosexuality because the confrontation would cause measurable distress and discomfort. Sally, for example stated that "…although I had suspected that he was gay I never openly confronted the idea and I was scared." Furthermore, Tracy attributed her lack of knowledge and understanding concerning homosexuality as well as the totality of what it means for her son to be gay as factors driving her avoidance:

> …I can remember a specific time when he asked me about you know do you think homosexuality is wrong or whatever and you know my answers about that… well you know I think it's a choice and you know I look back on that and I think of some other things in his life and it was just something you didn't want to think about a child this young… you didn't want to think… I didn't want to think about it… it was too uncomfortable to think about that he could be gay… I just didn't even… I knew nothing about it either…

In sum, during the process of raising their children, mothers were confronted with the notion that their child may be developmentally different. Rather than correcting behavioral variance in their children, mothers shifted their maternal paradigms to include a more fluid

expression of gender so they could support their child's individuality. However, though a paradigmatic shift occurred in mothers, their concept of "mother" and the meaning of motherhood remained unchanged.

A Child's Sexual Minority Disclosure – Facing Fears

As a result of experiencing an adult child's sexual minority disclosure, mothers in this study were confronted with a new set of concerns for their children. In their narratives, mothers had expressed two categories of concerns regarding their child: fears developed from cultural knowledge focusing on issues prevalent with the sexual minority community such as the incidence of HIV, homophobia (e.g., gay-bashing), and denial of civil rights (e.g., marriage) and fears arising from either a lack of knowledge or lack of being exposed to sexual minority culture (e.g., meeting a son's boyfriend or same-sex parenting).

In terms of this study, Kathy best put into perspective the notion that mothers instinctively respond to changes in their child's life and feel a sense of responsibility:

> …the initial response was probably the strongest… feeling like I wasn't going to be able to make everything ok for him because society is going to judge and there are going to be things like a wedding and babies and I can't make that right for him… so my sense of like I want to be able I want to be able to make you know to do what I can to make him be a happy person and be as fulfilled as he can… I guess I just was you know I was feeling like ah I was worried for his happiness I was worried for his safety… those kind of feelings… I knew the way society set up the rules about this you know… I wasn't going to be able to ensure you know his civil rights or his ability to marry and his ability to see to… and even his safety… so you know that was ah you know to the extent that any parent thinks

> you can assist in these things it was kind of another level there ok I am not going to be able to do that… I can't by myself get these laws changed you know…

As Kathy suggests in her narrative, mothers are propelled to "another level" of mothering filled with new fears and concerns.

The most frequent fear expressed mothers in this study was the possibility that their children could be harmed because of their sexual orientation. Sally, for example, drew from a historical reference of gay-bashing to communicate her fear of her son being harmed:

> …I don't really think it changed my idea of being a mother I think it made me more fearful… when you are a mom there is always danger to your kids in the form of you know they could get in a car accident they could have normal accidents happen to them… things could happen to them that you always fear but when my son disclosed to me that he was gay my first thought at that time was not that I not that I was ashamed that he was gay or that I cared if anybody else knew that he was gay… I was afraid that he was going to get HIV and I was afraid of what other people would do to him because we lived in a small southern community where being gay was definitely not the cool thing to be… I always thought you know like a Matthew Sheppard thing I thought that's what going to happen and thank God it never has but you know that was my fear which made me even more fearful…

Whether concerned about civil rights, infectious disease, or physical harm, all mothers in this study expressed fear based on what they have learned and what is communicated within the larger social context. However, because of a lack of exposure to sexual minority culture, seven of the mothers in this study expressed that have had or continue to have a general fear regarding

circumstances or issues related to their child's sexuality that they know nothing about and that produce in them a sense of unexpectedness and unpreparedness. Tracy succinctly describes this sense of anxiety resulting from mothers entering into an unknown territory:

> …You know there's so much fear I think it's probably fear about wanting to think about your child that way… a lot of times you're afraid of things you know nothing about and so just finding out about it… just… but that's hard to do… that would be like I don't know thinking of a subject in your mind that you just can't stand and going and getting a book and reading about it… just something you just really don't do…

In sum, it is at the juncture of knowing the sexual minority status of a child that a mother must make a decision regarding how she will approach the newly uncovered identity of her child. In light of adopting a view of facilitative parenting and confronting fears associated with an adult child's sexual minority disclosure, mothers in this study accepted their children yet engaged in introspection to reevaluate the meaning of motherhood and their role as mother.

Moving Forward

After recognizing and confronting her child's sexual minority disclosure, a mother must make a decision concerning what is the best way to cope with the change as well as move forward. To help adjust to their child's sexual orientation and increase their awareness regarding this orientation, two thirds of the mothers actively sought out information on sexual minority culture and issues. Kathy, for example, expressed "Oh I read a lot… I probably checked out every book out of the Dirk County Library system that I could find." Patrice, like Kathy, stated "I did a lot of reading… I read everything I could get my hands on from PFLAG (i.e., Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and sites like that." Zoey, a mother of twin girls,

reported that she researched information on homosexuality in a similar fashion to finding information about having identical twins:

> …you start reading up and start researching… I am a big get on the internet and go to the library and read and look and check… I did the same thing when I was having twins… I just you know did research overload and ah I wanted to know what I was getting into (laughing)….

Lastly, some mothers actively obtained information as a process of coping with the change that followed the disclosure. Stephanie, for example, turned to a book as means of understanding and healing:

> … have you read Barbara Johnson? … a friend of mine gave that book to me when she knew I was going through this… it is a funny book but it is her story of having a son who she found out was gay and it is hilarious and I was able to read that and laugh so it… it taught me you know ah humor is a great healer you know (laughing) and ah tension buster et cetera…

In addition to researching and reading, mothers in the study sought social interaction as a means of coping with change and learning more about their children. Patrice, for instance, participated in organizations such as PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Gays and Lesbians) and events such as gay pride in order to better understand sexual minorities as well as find a new purpose in life:

> …going to the meetings… I have gone to PRIDE twice… loved it… and I've come to realize that the gay community is they are just everyday normal human beings who happen to be wired a little differently than I am… his coming out to

> me has opened my eyes to completely different set of people a different community and I feel like I can get involved in it…

Victoria, like Patrice, interacted with others as well as found a new purpose, i.e., reaching out to others:

> …I've had a very positive experience in that a mother who had a friend whose child came out and who was very traumatized by it and whose marriage was probably breaking up over it… it sent her to me to give her comfort and give her words you know cause she didn't have anybody to talk to that had been in a similar situation… that was a great gift…. It felt like a gift…

Whether it was engaging with literature, connecting with other mothers, or interacting with sexual minorities, mothers in this study learned a lot about sexual minority culture as well as issues related to sexual diversity. Using this new knowledge and comparing it to normative assumptions learned prior to their child's disclosure, mothers reassessed their frame of reference of what it means to parent not only a child but also parent one that is gay or lesbian. The fundamental role of mother as nurturer and monitor of the overall safety and welfare of their child did not change; rather, maternal expectations derived from a gendered model of heterosexuality are no longer projected onto their children and mothers act and react based on the unique needs of each child as well as inclusion of sexual minority ideology and issues. Tracy best expressed the narcissistic frame shift mothers had experienced:

> …it's caused me to appreciate my son for his uniqueness instead of for what I want him to be or what I assumed he would be um you know I can't… I have to parent him based on his unique needs instead of what I hoped he would be or hoped… it's just because that's who I am you know I am straight so it's hard for

> me to think... I can't have a gay mentality (laughing) because I am not gay… unfortunately most straights don't… I mean fortunately gay people do because they are forced to live in a straight world um so they probably do have… they probably can go you know probably can think both ways… I think they are probably much more tolerant of people with sexual orientations just because the hell they might have gone through…

Stephanie, like Tracy, accepted the fact that some of her maternal expectations for her son would not be fulfilled, yet, undergirding her acceptance is the knowledge that her son is happy:

> (Sighing)…. I learned that ah as much as I wanted to or to change him of whatever that I couldn't and that my desires for his life were not his and he did not turn out ah or did not do the things that maybe I had wanted him to but that was ok… he said mother I am happy… I am happy with where I am and what I am doing and that's all I wanted to hear you know… that's all I wanted to hear because he was happy and he didn't have to live up to my expectations…

Lastly, mothers in this study reported that experiencing their adult child's sexual minority disclosure has had a profound impact on their lives. Patrice, for example, in response to how her life has changed because of her son, expressed "I am grateful to him." Additionally, Kathy described that her son's disclosure has transformed how see views herself as a mother and how she views other people:

> …I am a better mother now and better mother to him… I am thinking partially because he did come out and it did make me aware of all of the other possibilities in the world… certainly because of his coming out I have learned more tolerance

and acceptance not just of gays but also of transgender um obesity ah anorexics oh crazy people… just kind of a tolerance…

In summary, through observation and social interaction women formulate what it means to be a mother and engage in mothering as well as learn what is considered socially appropriate behavior for children. Mothers will use this knowledge to develop their maternal intuition and monitor their children's growth and development. If a mother observes behavior in her child that is contrary to normative social behaviors, then a sense of disequilibrium will occur. The act of a child disclosing his or her sexual minority status, for example, produced a sense of disorder or disruption in the lives of several mothers in this study. They were faced with the challenge of recognizing and confronting their child's sexual orientation and were propelled forward to explore and examine their frame of reference regarding the meaning of motherhood and ideology centering on gender and sexuality.

Examining Cultural Gauges of Motherhood

A maternal perspective is based upon a collection of socio-culturally embedded assumptions and expectations that frame a mother's point of view and influences her beliefs and actions. Undergirding these maternal paradigms are sociocognitive orientations that are used to evaluate and make meaning from a myriad of motherhood experiences. In this study, two particular sociocognitive orientations, heterosexuality and religious doctrine, stood out as having a major impact on how a mother views the world as well as interprets the meaning of various maternal experiences. Prior to experiencing the sexual minority disclosure of a child, mothers uncritically assimilated the paradigms associated with each sociocognitive orientation. However, after their child's disclosure mothers engaged in introspection, critically reevaluated their maternal assumptions, and formulated new assumptions in order to resolve the disorientation and disorder produced from the disclosure.

Mothering and Heteronormativity

Two concepts were introduced in the last section of this chapter: norms centering on gender and sexuality and the social performance of those norms. During their own growth and development, mothers in this study learned various normative social behaviors, all of which were framed within a heterosexual perspective. Prior to their child's sexual minority disclosure, a mother's thoughts and actions were guided by a heteronormative frame of reference in that they perceived heterosexuality as being universal and that associated with this sexuality are idealized expressions of gender. Each recalled the knowledge they learned during childhood and adolescence and instilled in their children the expectation of engaging in gender appropriate behaviors and activities that would support and reproduce heterosexuality. In essence, if boys do male things and girls do female things, then such behavior validates the naturalness of heterosexuality.

This notion of normalized gender-based sexuality is evident in the interviews. Stephanie for instance, connected her son's sexuality with expressions of femininity:

> …Jake was not the stereotypical rough-and-tumble boy that many young boys are… he was not athletically inclined and I noticed a few effeminate tendencies early on… I realized that Jake was very gifted artistically and possessed a typical artistic temperament… later on I was to understand that many of these artistically gifted people like John also share his sexual orientation…

Unlike Stephanie, Tracy did not attribute expressions of femininity to her son's sexuality but worried that others would:

> …with my father he maybe thought we should oh be more rough-and- tumble with my son… you know he thought we were going to make him a sissy because we wouldn't let him have a gun or those kinds of things…

Nina not only observed that people are conscious of gender variances in children but also that deviance in boys is less acceptable than in girls:

> …I know that other women, other moms, other dads, struggled over it you know… it would have been tougher if I had been… if I ah you know… did I let them breast feed until he was five… if I didn't (laughing)…. Let him wear that tutu (laughing) you know… if I had taken all the pink dresses out of the dress up box (laughing) you know…. Or if the teacher at school hadn't you know allowed the boys to… the girls could dress up as fireman but you know but if those boys put on those evening gowns it was all over (laughing)…

Lastly, Victoria used gendered behavioral cues as a gauge to understand her children but learned that these cues are not always associated with the child's sexuality:

> … It was a blind-side coming from this child instead of the middle child for the stereotypical reasons I mentioned... The middle child was active in the theater… He had been making costumes and dressing up since he was a toddler... He would put on my mother's wigs and dresses and shoes when we visited at her house and was always acting out something.... He had stuffed animals and wrestling buddy dolls that he liked... So that would not have been such a surprise... David's disclosure was just not on the radar…

The accounts from the mothers above exemplify that there are indeed culturally prescribed gendered behaviors that these gendered behaviors are correlated with a heterosexual

orientation. Children learn heteronormative ideology through explicit and implicit parental expectations as well as observing and mimicking parental behavior. In order to perpetuate heteronormativity, parents must engage in monitoring and regulating their children's gender expression. Therefore, if a parent observes a child's behavior as departing from the gender norms, then that parent must make a decision either to accept this divergence and support gender and sexual fluidity or reject the deviance and enforce discipline or disconnect from the child. Although mothers in this study had a premonition or maternal intuition regarding their child's deviation from heteronormative behavior, this difference was not enough to promote a mother to either emphatically indoctrinate heterosexuality or completely sever ties. Stephanie, for example, continues to value heteronormativity, yet she holds higher her love for her child even though he does not conform to her expectations:

> …I did not act on this premonition because I was confident that I was giving Jake a solid, loving, caring base for the rest of his life regardless of what he chose to do with his life… At some point Jake was in charge of his life and there was little I could do to change him to my expectations… Until that time, I did all I knew to raise happy, healthy, well balanced children and I have not spent too much time with self-recriminations…

Central to what Stephanie refers to as a core "base" is the act of tolerance and the acceptance of difference. These fundamental human values supersede the surveillance and enforcement of normalized gender and sexuality. Furthermore, although Stephanie believes sexual orientation is a "choice" and can be nurtured like other behaviors, the remaining mothers believed that one's sexual orientation is due to nature and that basic core values such as compassion, love and

kindness are nurtured beliefs and behaviors. Zoey, for example, best expressed that parents are responsible for attitudinal behavior not sexual orientation as most people believe:

> I think we are responsible in some ways for our children's attitudes… having twins has been a unique experience because I can see… my daughters are nothing alike and they were raised pretty much the same but they are two totally different people and it's because who you are as a person your tendencies for certain types of behaviors are I think already in you when you are born but how those things develop is where the nurture starts and where the nurture really fits in… I mean you are who you are when you are born but how you end up is a mixture of all your experiences and all the people you are involved in… as a parent you can nurture certain attitudes where your children end up with better attitudes and maybe better thoughts you know as a parent I can emulate behavior that I would like my child to use as an adult and hopefully those things you can pass on you know like showing tolerance and kindness to people things like that you know you can teach that to you children like emulating that and nurturing those ideals in your child…

Lastly, there is evidence that mothers resisted heteronormativity by nurturing gender variance. Rather than obstructing or disciplining deviant gender expression, mothers fostered a wider array of behaviors and more idiosyncratic in nature:

> *Sally*…I think I was fairly open to whatever things my kids liked to do… for instance my son liked to play with dolls so I bought him a cabbage patch doll for Christmas one year and he liked to play with fisher price doll houses so I got him one even though my other son didn't ever want to play with anything like that…

> *Kathy*… I allowed him to play as his interests directed him… his grandparents gave him toys that were boy in nature tractors Tonka trucks etc… he didn't really ever choose to play with them, but he certainly didn't want anyone else to take them down without asking him, and they couldn't get them dirty… had I known earlier that he was gay, I still would have supported his interests as I did without knowing…

Fundamentally, the ideology undergirding gender and sexuality is learned both implicitly and explicitly through social interaction and, when uncritically challenged is normalized over time. Mothers use this learned normative knowledge to help guide their maternal behavior as well as instill in their children how to become models for future generations. The act of raising children, therefore, becomes the mechanism of perpetuating heteronormativity. However, in this study, when monitoring their child's development and observing deviance from norms, mothers did not hinder or obstruct their child's alternative expressions of gender and sexuality; rather, they resisted heteronormativity as a monolithic orientation and nurtured tolerance through the acceptance of their own children's gender variance.

Mothering and Religion

Religion may be defined as a set of communal beliefs that give spiritual meaning to an individual's life. These beliefs are usually considered a moral code of conduct regarding human behavior and are sometimes thought of as overlapping or interchangeable with secular philosophy. As a result, religion has a large cultural impact in prescribing who may have sexual relations (e.g., between a man and a woman) and when they may have sexual relations (e.g., after a sanctioned marriage) as well as regulating the act of sexual relations (e.g., restrictions concerning abortion and the use of contraceptives) and the outcomes of sexual relations (e.g.,

gendered expectations in terms of giving birth and raising children). Therefore, religion, by adding a moral imperative, not only affirms the secular belief of heterosexuality as being universal, but it also reifies the notion that there are normative expressions of gender and sexuality (Anderson, 1998; King, 1995). In this study, all nine mothers were raised in a household that engaged in an organized religion. Prior to their child's disclosure, four out of the nine participants left their religion due to philosophical differences. After their child' disclosure, one additional participant left her religion due to the church's view on homosexuality. Lastly, four participants remained active members of a religion prior to and after their child's disclosure; yet one changed religious affiliation after her child's disclosure because the new religious faith was more tolerant of homosexuality.

After experiencing a child's sexual minority disclosure a dilemma arises – in light of the moral and secular imperative of heterosexuality how does a mother reconcile her child's homosexuality? One participant, Kristin, reflected on the religious and secular connection and the difficulty faced by a mother of a sexual minority regarding maintaining relationships in both arenas:

> …I don't know what or which factor is bigger… I guess a religious is bigger but I think they go hand in hand… that would be hard to separate… I live in City X so we're not based on them too much here… so I really don't know I am sure it is both… but it may be easier to leave your social group than your ah family and religion… I don't know… if had any friends who were homophobic I would either ah consider them no longer a friend or work on trying to change them and see the light… I guess if I couldn't get them to understand that homophobia is a

> bad thing in life then I would drop this person as a friend… I wouldn't tolerate that…

As Kristin suggests, a mother of a sexual minority may have more control over her social relationships when religion is not a consideration. However, Kristin further suggests that if religion is factored in, then religious doctrine may not only dictate what viewpoint she must adopt but also define her social position:

> …I was on an airplane and a couple of years ago and I decided to make conversation with the lady beside me and found out she was on a journey to the holy land cause she was a fundamentalist from Florida and this was when prop 8 was in the news... so I said to her well you know prop8 is on the news what do you think about gays getting married and I just kind of left it an open ended question and she whispered to me... she made sure her husband on the other side was asleep and she whispered to me and she says I think they should be able to get married which just about floored me but she would never had voiced this out loud and I am sure if her kid came out she would you know just to keep peace in the family probably would have to reject them or ah see them on the fly or something…

In essence, religion serves as a mechanism to communicate the duties and expectations of women as well as evaluate individuals who do not meet those goals or expectations. In terms of motherhood, a mother's identity and role may be defined by her religious beliefs. If a mother experiences a maternal situation that is contrary to her religious beliefs, then she may feel compelled to react according to those beliefs although the action may produce an emotional conflict. For example, taking into consideration that love and compassion are foundational to

religious doctrine yet homosexuality is considered inimical, the experience of becoming a mother of a sexual minority child may produce both a social and psychological conflict. Socially, mothers are expected to instill heteronormativity in children and when this is not accomplished, mothers, like their children, are considered deviant and are evaluated as such. Psychologically, a sexual orientation other than heterosexual is thought to be antithetical to religious doctrine and moral values such as love and compassion may not apply toward individuals of that orientation. Therefore, in light of religious beliefs, mothers faced with sexual minority children may feel obligated in controlling and changing their children or even coerced into disassociating themselves from their children in order to maintain a salient maternal identity.

The notion of being socially monitored and evaluated as well as compelled to uphold religious doctrine and perpetuate heteronormativity is evident in this study. Half the mothers expressed a sense of being monitored. Nina, for example, discusses how a neighbor religious view compelled her to intervene with Nina's decision as a mother:

> …I got a call from a women in town (laughing) that lived up north it was so funny she goes I heard that you're going to let your children go to an all-women's college and I said yes they've only applied to women's colleges because they were in a class 32 boys and four girls and they really like guys and they really like girls but they are really tired going to a school with guys (laughing)…. I said yea they have applied to Wellsley and Smith and this school and that school and they've gotten into this school and that school and yah they can go wherever they want to go…. And the women said NO Anne has a problem (laughing)… and it's just going to make it stronger if she goes to (laughing louder)… and I was like I don't think Anne has a problem and I don't think whether she goes to one school

or another is going to… I said I think the ah if you look at all the statistics it's 7 percent across the board and first of all its not a problem and second of all its not going to be any different if she goes to a women's college…. No women's colleges there's all what comes out… send heterosexual girls in one end and out the other end you spit out a bunch of lesbians so I am just like oh my gosh its someone who you really thought was ok you know really had this fixation about…. Now she didn't mention it except for the one thing and she truly thought she was saving you know Anne and our family… I am wondering whether she… I think it part… might partially be she was from a very fundamentalist religious background and she didn't hadn't grown up in it but was… she had a big conversion… she saw the light.. she had her you know moment… whatever they call it… coming to Jesus or whatever so I think for her it was part of culture… part of the religion is to help other people be saved so she knew that she really couldn't talk about whether I was saved or not but she could help me out with the fact that did you know that you know women's colleges produce lesbians so you know if you don't want her to be a lesbian you probably shouldn't send her to be to a you know (laughing)... if you don't want either of your daughters to lesbians and you are sending both of them off to a women's college so you know you better… I really think she was trying to be helpful and it wasn't in a….. you know your daughter is filthy your daughter's doing the perversion it was more of a… it was more of a do you know I just want you to be aware that this is a fact that girls go in straight and come out as lesbians….

In addition to being monitored like Nina's experience of maternal intervention by a fundamentalist neighbor, half the mothers in this study experienced a sense of being evaluated by religious figures or members of a church. Patrice, for instance, was questioned by members of her church and made to feel like she was responsible for her son's sexuality:

> …when you say voice of society I'm going to go to the church where I was a former member… (in a stern voice) what did you do wrong to make him chose to do this… (hesitation)… you know he is going to go to hell how can you be supportive… (back to normal voice) I was approached by one of the deacons' wives… (in a changed voice) ok so he's gay what are you going to do about it?... (back to normal voice but angered tone) he's 22 years old what do you mean what am I going to do about it?... I think I was expected to ah request help from the church to pray for this boy and his wayward ways… I felt like I was judged simply for having a gay son… (in a changed voice) how dare I raise one… (back to normal voice) but I walked away from it… I have nothing to do with that group anymore and honestly I pretty much walked away from the church period… because I felt so uncomfortable there…

From the narrative above it is clear that to be a good mother, one must either be proactive and monitor their children for gender and sexual deviance or take action as soon as it becomes apparent. If a mother does not engage in this type of mothering, then a sense of conflict will arise and promote a mother to make a decision. All mothers in this study, in light of social and religious doctrine, decided to love their children and have compassion for sexual minorities. As a result, those who actively participated in a religion prior to their child's disclosure consciously reflected on the conflict and reevaluated the meaning of religion relative to their experience. One

mother, Patrice, decided to leave the church and organized religion due to philosophical differences related to gender and sexuality. The remainder of the mothers who decided to continue to participate in an organized religion either reconceived their spiritual beliefs or changed churches to match their concept of faith. Tracy for example, after reflecting on her son's homosexuality reassessed her religious beliefs:

> ...I think it has given me a different concept of Christianity as well that the way homosexuality is viewed in probably traditionally… it's just wrong it's so wrong how the church treats gays they don't treat anybody else that way, they don't say you have to get your act together in order before you know you can come to us and that's not what Jesus Christ is about so I guess it's just really… mean that's.. I think my spiritual walk has become deeper… I think it was turned on you know probably turned upside down almost um and that's a good thing, that's a positive thing and that has made me more compassionate… as my husband was saying last night I feel like my son telling us this has given us a ministry to other people that there's a lot of hurt to deal with and it's a lot of hurt for gay people if they happen to tell their parents and their parents reject them or it's a lot of anxiety their deciding whether to tell their parents and so I think I have a lot more compassion um for a group of people that I knew existed but for me was almost invisible you know I knew that they were there but I don't know I couldn't identify with them… didn't really want to take the time to… so I mean I… that's incredible that's huge you know a group a whole segment of the population that I was probably… I don't think I was vocal about opposition to them you know but then again I probably… I wasn't supportive at all….

In addition to Tracy, Kathy reassessed her faith and her relation to the church:

> ...I was raised in the Protestant faith in the United Church of Christ which is a very accepting religion umm lately the last… well lately as in the last 30 years I worked at a Presbyterian church and I have been a member of a Presbyterian church so the Presbyterians still don't have it figured out umm many of the Presbyterian congregations are very accepting welcoming and open and those are the only ones I will go attend or you know the one I worked in was like that too umm I have a step daughter whose family goes to a different flavor of Presbyterian church the Presbyterian America where homosexuality is considered to be needed to be fixed you know they can help you see your sinful ways and when we visit that family in Indiana I do not attend church with them… the grandchildren have asked why… I have told them… so yeah I guess I believe in the love of Jesus and his example of that umm if the institution of the church says anything different than that then I choose not to participate…

In view of secular and religious beliefs that mandate compulsory heterosexuality, the sexual minority disclosure of a child may manifest as an internalized conflict or struggle in mothers. Furthermore, Kristin describes the psychosocial force causing mothers to react to this conflict as a "burden" and suggests that if mothers "…can overcome the burden of a faith that tells them it's wrong and not only their faith but a husband a sister and the rest of the family…" they will, as she puts it, "see the light." This "light" is awareness or a new consciousness that they are able to reconstruct new maternal beliefs as well as reconceive a new maternal identity.

Motherhood and Managing Social Relationships

As discussed in the previous section, heteronormativity and religiosity have a large impact on shaping motherhood. Assumptions associated with each concept socially define not

only what a mother is but also what a mother does. However, how do mothers who are not considered prototypical navigate the waters of social surveillance and scrutiny in light of their new identity (i.e., being a mother of a gay and lesbian child)? Taking into consideration that mothers engage in social relationships ranging from the deeply personal (e.g., mothering their children) to the very public (e.g., working mothers), the operationalization of a maternal identity is highly dependent upon the dynamics of each unique social context. Examined in this last section are the ways in which mothers must maneuver through various social relationships relative to their shift away from a normative maternal archetype.

The concept of disequilibrium was introduced in the first section of this analysis and represented the psychological manifestation of conflict between the maternal assumptions learned during childhood and the maternal reality of experiencing a child's sexual minority disclosure. This notion of disequilibrium can also be applied to the dynamics of social interaction. If a mother performs her duties of instilling and nurturing normative gender and sexual behavior in her children, then her maternal identity is both personally and socially salient, i.e., she typifies the prototype of mother and is socially perceived as being acceptable. Conversely, if a mother does not conform to the expected standard, then a social conflict may arise and mechanisms such as judgment and marginalization ensue. Therefore, this sparks the question – what is involved in the socially evaluative process of determining whether or not a mother personifies or deviates from the maternal archetype? The answer to this question may be based upon the extent of and manner in which information is socially exchanged within a specific context.

Maternal identity salience is a function of not only how a mother perceives herself as being prototypical, but also her ability to manage the social perception of her being prototypical.

Socially appropriate gender and sexual behavior displayed by children, for example, is one of many perceptual markers that mothers use to indicate that they are indeed prototypical. If their children display normative behavior, then mothers are socially unencumbered by their children and may freely express information relative to their social role. However, if their children deviate from the norm, then mothers are encumbered by their children's status and must be selective regarding the dynamics of their maternal role or face the consequences of social surveillance such as criticism and judgment. The notion that women learn to use selective disclosure was evident in the narrative:

> …I think women are you know they're more social more intimate you know crave intimate relationships but I have learned over time that it's (hesitation)… you don't have disclose everything to have an intimate relationship with you know to be an intimate friend you know… I think it's…. because when I was younger I was a tell all…I realize it now some a little bit of ah umm your self-image your self-importance you feel better when you have a little bit of news you know to spread and that makes you feel important I realize that's not you know… my mother was always a trusting person and I see myself having evolved into her… the women in the neighborhood would come to her when they had problems and she would just listen and would not spread it… she was a very closed, very respectful person… I've been at my school long enough to where more than a few of my colleagues you know come to me to vent you know I just listen it doesn't go any further you know I was not that way (laughing) when I was younger that was one of the things you learned…

As previously discussed, upon confronting, acknowledging and accepting their child's sexual minority status, mothers in this study examined the assumptions underpinning a normative maternal frame of reference and constructed a new maternal framework that is more inclusive and tolerant of sexual diversity. This shift in in their maternal frame of reference was the impetus for reformulating a new and more personal salient maternal identity. However, though the acceptance of their children and the tolerance of sexual diversity afforded mothers a broader frame of reference regarding the unique needs of their children, this new perspective and identity came at a social cost. Taking into consideration the sexual minority status of their children and the social mechanism of surveillance, mothers could not freely communicate information relative to their social role; rather, they had to make decisions of when and what was appropriate to socially communicate. In essence, mothers in this study had to engage in impression or perceptual management (Goffman, 1959) in order to stave off social scrutiny.

The ability of mothers to selectively disclose information concerning their children enabled mothers to manage the social perception of both their children's identity as a sexual minority as well as their identity as mother of a sexual minority. In terms of this study, disclosure occurred at various social levels ranging from the nuclear family (e.g., husband and/or other children), to extended family (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc…), and to the public sector (e.g., friends and coworkers). The amount of information disclosed varied from none, to judicious/discriminative, to full disclosure depending upon the social context. Lastly, motives behind the various amounts of information disclosed include respecting privacy, managing family dynamics, and maintaining social recognition and credibility.

Fundamentally, given the nature of how sexual minorities are unfairly treated socially, mothers initially did not disclose their child's sexual orientation in order to respect their children's right to privacy as well as ensure their safety. Zoey illustrates this in her narrative:

> …I have been selective telling some people, mainly because I was trying to respect my daughter's privacy… she is pretty open about it though… if I meet someone like some of the parents kids, the girls she went to high school with, I don't discuss it…

In addition to respect and safety, mothers hesitated in revealing their child's status based on family dynamics and what the family's perception of the child would be. Patrice, for instance, based her decision to disclose information regarding her son based on the relationship with her husband:

> …I did hesitate because my husband at the time didn't know at the time he has some medical issues and we were afraid it would affect his health… ah so it was a good year before he knew during that time if someone were to ask me about my son he is doing fine he's going to college um he doesn't have much time for dating and I just let it go ah now that my husband knows (…confident tone..) I don't care who else knows…

Tracy has not disclosed her son's sexuality to her father based on a strained relationship with her father and to avert confrontation with him:

> …I likened it to you know he's out of the closet but I am going in…(laughing)… because a lot of that is umm I we still have not told our father… my parents my brother and my uh my I have ah ninety something um mother-in-law so my family… my husband's family other than his other than my step daughters

> nobody else in the family knows and I just view that as ah you know it's really not even though my son has said I don't care who knows um my father is so socially inappropriate in many ways anyway that I just don't want to tell him because for instance, he would make comments about you know when my son would be at the prom or had gone to the prom or something and would make comments about well you know the limo that the group rented or whatever we paid and he would make a comment like I hope he got laid you shelled out all that money…I'm like oh my God these totally inappropriate responses… I can even imagine what it is going to be like the… if he finds out you know he's gay… BUT I am not afraid of that it's nothing I am ashamed of it's nothing ashamed of for my son but I am not that close to my mother and father and older brother and I don't know I don't see the need for them to know really ah I am sure when he graduates from college and um when they start asking when's he getting married does he got any girlfriends… I am sure there will be a time to tell them ah but it's a personal it's a private things and I almost think that he wants if my son wants them to know then he should tell them… I mean I will happy (laugh) to deal with the fall out and support…

Lastly, Victoria expresses that she in order to maintain a relationship with her brother she has to limit what she discloses to him:

> …there's still a member of my family that I haven't told which is one of my brothers, who is a total right wing zealot and I went and he has I mean he can't be such an idiot that he doesn't know… maybe he doesn't I mean primarily because he's married to a woman now who is a Korean woman who will tell my son

> you're going to hell…. I mean she'll and then what I would say to my brother is I will cut you off and I will never speak to you again if you… but I don't want to do that…. I want to maintain a relationship with my brother which I will not because the animal mother in me will come out with all claws bared I mean and so because I don't want to do that, I am not going to verbalize that to him… I have verbalized it to his ex-wife you know and every other member of my family and everybody is fine but I haven't said it to my brother… he actually may be so oblivious…

Patrice, Tracy, and Victoria's narrative above exemplify the complexity involved in balancing the need to maintain family dynamics with the need to be supportive and respectful of their sexual minority child. Lastly, selective disclosure enabled mothers in the study to satisfy their own personal needs. Victoria, for example, did not fully disclose her identity as a mother of a sexual minority to maintain her need for social recognition and credibility:

> …I'm in an interesting position right at this moment because I'm about I'm a member of the Presbyterian Church USA I am I am going to be a delegate to the General Assembly in July…. I'm also gonna be a member of the uh, and this is a conservative region I mean and it's also and I'm gonna be a moderator of our presbytery in ah next year, 2011… I'm pretty confident that if a lot of those people knew that I was the mother of a gay child they would not have voted me to go… but you know, you don't go around you know saying you know I'm the mother of a gay child… it's not a hidden thing…. I'm you know they are not my personal friends, you know these folks are not my personal friends…. you know most people in my church would know that DO know that I mean most people

> that know me personally know that um but I also but I want my voice to be heard as I don't want them to say well I don't want them just to dismiss me as having already been heard, I don't want my voice NOT to be heard also because I'm the mother of a gay child…. I want them I want my voice to be heard because I have constructive things to say… I do have an insight here just like some people with other uh perspectives have this insight that they will bring…

In sum, the act of selective disclosure enables an individual to engage in identity management within various social contexts. Information can either support social salience or serve as the impetus for marginalization. In her interview, Tracy, states "I can always tell somebody but once I've told them I can never get that information back." This supports the notion that the nature of the information, the ways in which it is communicated, and how it will be perceived socially influences one's social status and efficacy. Therefore, mothers in this study selectively disclosed information regarding their child's sexual orientation in order to manage the social perception of both their child's identity and their identity as a mother of that child.

Chapter Summary

Presented in this chapter were three major themes extrapolated from interviews with mothers of children who have disclosed that they are a sexual minority. In the first theme, "*Challenging the Meaning of Motherhood*," the sexual minority disclosure by a child represented an experience that is inimical to the normative gender and sexual ideology mothers learned during their childhood and adolescence. The contradiction between a child's sexual orientation and a heterosexual maternal frame of reference created a sense of psychological disorder or disequilibrium in mothers. Subsequently, mothers expressed two types of fear undergirding their disorientation – one in the form of concern for their child's safety and welfare and another in terms of coping with the unknown (i.e., being a parent of and engaging in parenting of a sexual

minority). To help resolve these fears, mothers actively sought out information concerning sexual minority culture as well as issues related to sexual diversity.

The new knowledge and increased awareness gained by mothers produced the second extrapolated theme, "*Examining Cultural Gauges of Motherhood*." After experiencing their child's sexual minority disclosure, mothers scrutinized and reevaluated maternal paradigms as well as the socio-cognitive orientations that shaped these paradigms. What was uncovered is the notion that culture mandates heterosexuality and that the role of mother is to instill heteronormative ideology in their children as well as serve as a monitor for any deviant behavior. However, mothers in this study rejected the totality of heteronormativity and shifted their maternal frame of reference to include sexual diversity which lead to the acceptance of and support for their child's new identity and the needs associated with that identity.

Finally, resistance by mothers to culturally prescribed heteronormativity gave rise to the last theme extrapolated, "*Motherhood and Managing Social Relationships*." To stave off social scrutiny resulting from accepting and supporting their sexual minority child, mothers engaged in impression management (Goffman, 1959). Mothers selectively disclosed information regarding their children in order to manage the social perception of both their child's identity as a sexual minority as well as their identity as a mother of a sexual minority. This process of social communication and interaction limited the amount of judgment and marginalization that both mothers and their children would face.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on adult maternal identity. Research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity?
2. How does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure?

As a result of data collection and analysis, two major conclusions were drawn from this study: 1) The sexual minority disclosure of an adult child produces in mothers a sense of disequilibrium which called into question their efficacy as mother, and 2) mothers who experience an adult child's sexual minority disclosure reconstruct a salient personal and social maternal identity by reexamining the sociocognitive orientations that shape and influence their maternal perspective as well as engaging in the social process of perceptional control or impression management. In this six and final chapter, I will elaborate on these conclusions, discuss how this study impacts maternal identity discourse, and lastly present implications, further recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Conclusions and Discussions

Conclusion One

> Man [sic] seems to be born with a sense of social and psychological balance as acute as the sense of physical balance . . . difficulties spring not from the desire to reject such equilibrium, but from misguided movements aimed towards finding and maintaining it. (Perls, 1973, p. 27)

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of adult identity development in mothers who experience the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child. Motherhood narratives were collected through the use of open-ended interview questions and used to formulate conclusions to the two overarching research questions that guided this study. This first conclusion addresses and answers the first research question: how does an adult child's sexual minority disclosure impact the psychosocial salience of a maternal identity? A single conclusion was extrapolated from the maternal narratives: the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child produced in mothers a sense of psychological and sociological disequilibrium.

Mothers in this study disclosed that they developed their adult maternal identity based on a mimetic gendered model of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; DiQuinzo, 1999; Schwartz, 1994). This model presumes that normative ideology and behavior regarding gender and sexuality exists and that the role of mother is to oversee the reproduction of such normalized behaviors (DiQuinzo, 1999; Ehrensaft, 2007; Hays, 1996; Schwartz, 1994). Furthermore, there is an underlying assumption that if a mother ensures that a child displays culturally bound and reproduced normative behaviors, then socially she will be considered valuable and effectual (de Lustgarten, 2006; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Therefore, achieving social conformity produces a sense of social equilibrium which, in turn, leads to the internalization of this maternal legitimacy

or efficacy and the production of psychological equilibrium (Caplan, 2000; Woollett & Marshall, 2001).

Mothers in this study expressed that motherhood is gendered (i.e., it is a woman's role), that the meaning of motherhood is to nurture, care, and love their children, that their maternal expectations (i.e., maternal narcissism) were learned during their own growth and development and reflect a heteronormative perspective, and that they possessed a "maternal intuition" (i.e., a form of maternal surveillance) which gave them the ability to sense behavioral variances in their children. In essence, women in this study took on the role of mother and, using a heterosexual frame of reference, instilled in their children notions of what is considered socially appropriate gender and sexual behavior as well as monitored their children for variances in that behavior. However, contrary to the learned heteronormative perspective and the assumed maternal role of monitoring a child's behavior, mothers in this study did observe behavioral variances in their children yet did not act upon this maternal intuition. Mothers reported that encountering and facing the variance would either produce measurable distress and discomfort or produce feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness.

In the interim of recognizing their children's variance and the disclosure by their children, mothers underwent a process of "intrapsychic negotiation" (Ehrensaft, 2007) whereby they had to either choose altruistic (facilitative) parenting, which supports individual growth and alternative or fluid expression of gender and sexuality, or culturally sycophantic (obstructive) parenting which supports social conformity and aspersion toward variances in gender and sexuality. Although mothers observed gender and sexual variances in their children, none engaged in sycophantic (obstructive) mothering whereby they reprimanded or admonished their children's behavior or used corrective measures to ensure the indoctrination of heterosexuality.

Instead, mothers in this study let go or resisted this one socially mandated maternal expectation and, upon reflection, expressed that their actions were justified because their children received and reflect the fundamental attitudes and behaviors necessary to be productive adults. This "intrapsychic negotiation," developmentally speaking, served as the antecedent regarding the mechanism of deconstructing and reconstructing maternal assumptions.

As previously stated, maternal practices or experiences that reflect culturally projected heteronormative maternal narcissism create in mothers as a sense of social and psychological equilibrium whereas circumstances that are inimical or contrary result in disequilibrium. Prior to a child's disclosure, mothers in this study experienced a state of psychosocial equilibrium, i.e., socially they were recognized as exemplifying normative motherhood and, psychologically they internalized the social perception as achieving maternal efficacy. Upon their child's sexual minority disclosure, mothers in this study experienced an imbalance. The disclosure concretized maternal premonitions, represented narcissistic injury, and created cognitive dissonance, i.e., a confliction between the heteronormative maternal assumptions learned and the antithetical sexual orientation of their children. Mothers were faced with the dilemma of having to choose between holding steadfast to their maternal ideology which would lead to the castigation of or disconnection from their child or reframe their ideology to include their child but potentially lead to their own social marginalization. This decisional dilemma compelled mothers to make a choice and represents the point of psychosocial disequilibrium. Furthermore, the cognitive tension or disorder that occurred during this decisional process elicited emotions such as fear, grief, and vulnerability, all of which represent a loss of self as heteronormative mother, the transition into a new identity, self as mother of a sexual minority mother, and the possibility of facing social interpellation regarding this new identity. What emerges from this process is a an

adoption of a new maternal identity, one that is more congruent with the new assumptions formulated through the process of learning more about sexual diversity and sexual minority culture.

Conclusion Two

The second conclusion is in response to the research question: how does a mother learn to reconstruct and develop a new maternal identity after disclosure? A single conclusion addressing this second research question was extrapolated from the maternal narratives: mothers who experience an adult child's sexual minority disclosure reconstruct a salient personal and social maternal identity by reexamining the sociocognitive orientations that shape and influence their maternal perspective as well as engaging in the social process of perceptional control or impression management.

As discussed in the previous section, the cognitive dissonance that the mothers in this study experienced represented the point of psychosocial disequilibrium. In an attempt to resolve this cognitive tension or disorder, mothers underwent two processes: (1) the examination of the sociocognitive orientations that influence and shape their maternal perspective and, (2) the regulation of their social identity through perceptional control or impression management. In short, mothers engaged in introspection regarding their maternal assumptions while simultaneously trying to maintain a salient social perception of being able to fulfill their role.

Like all social identities, a maternal identity is socially-constructed and is cognitively represented as a prototype (Baraister, 2006, 2008; Benjamin, 2004; Curk, 2008). This archetype is defined by a set of normative assumptions and expectations that frame a mother's point of view and influences her beliefs and actions (Arendell, 2000; Collins, 1994; DiQuinzio, 1999; Eichler, 1997; Guerrina, 2001; Hays, 1996; Katz-Rothman, 2000; Johnston & Swanson, 2003,

2006; Malacrida, 2009; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Undergirding these maternal paradigms are sociocognitive orientations that are used to evaluate and make meaning from a myriad of motherhood experiences. In terms of this study, two sociocognitive orientations were found to have had a major impact on maternal identity and perspective development: heteronormativity and religious doctrine.

Heteronormativity, in general, is a frame of reference in which an individual perceives heterosexuality as being an essential and universal human characteristic and associated with this sexual orientation are socially idealized expressions of gender. Recalling the knowledge regarding normative gender and sexuality learned during their own growth and development, mothers instill in their children the expectation of displaying gender appropriate behaviors that would support and reproduce heterosexuality as well as monitor their children looking for any variances or divergence from the norms. However, mothers in this study did observe variances in their children yet did not consciously engage in corrective measures; rather, they either passively (i.e., taking no measure) or actively (i.e., encouraging exploration) supported gender and sexual fluidity in their children. This resistance to heteronormative maternal assumptions serves as a primordial indicator of cognitive restructuring.

In terms of maternal identity development, the act of an adult child disclosing their sexual minority status, not the gender-based variance observed earlier in childhood, that concretized in mothers the notion that their child's sexual identity is antithetical to their maternal assumptions. This experience created cognitive dissonance and initiated the process of introspection concerning their heteronormative maternal frame of reference. Although on the one hand raising heterosexual children would produce a sense of personal and social efficacy whereas on the other hand having sexual minority children would be considered an affront to their role, mothers in this

study chose to embrace their children and accept their children's sexual orientation. The maternal bond was very meaningful and far surpassed the social repercussions of resisting heteronormative maternal assumptions. As a result of this experience, mothers began to question their maternal beliefs and to learn more about sexual minority culture and issues. The new knowledge obtained caused shifts in their maternal expectations of raising children as well as changed how they viewed a subset of people in society.

In addition to heteronormativity, religious doctrine had a major impact in shaping the parental perspective of mothers in this study. Religion may be defined as a set of communal beliefs that give spiritual meaning to an individual's life. These beliefs are usually considered a moral code of conduct regarding human behavior and are sometimes thought of as being interchangeable with secular philosophy. Therefore, religion, by adding a moral imperative, not only affirms the secular belief of heterosexuality as being universal, but it also reifies the notion that there are normative expressions of gender and sexuality (Anderson, 1998; King, 1995).

All nine mothers in this study were raised in a household that engaged in an organized religion and expressed that religion, through beliefs, traditions, and practices, influenced their perception of motherhood (i.e., the expectations of being a mother and raising children). Religion conveyed to mothers that heterosexuality was monolithic, that any variance is considered antithetical and morally wrong, and that it was the duty of a mother to make sure that their children's actions and behaviors reflect heteronormativity. Moreover, mothers reported that they felt compelled to monitor their children yet simultaneously they themselves felt that they were being socially monitored and evaluated by individuals in the religious sector. Therefore, in light of religious doctrine and social surveillance, the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child produced cognitive tension – mothers felt a push-pull between upholding morality and

maintaining the maternal bond that was developed over time. What resulted from this moral dilemma was a maternal reevaluation concerning the meaning of religion relative to the experience of their child's disclosure. Mothers who were an active member just prior to the disclosure either left after their child's disclosure due to philosophical differences, remained in their church but chose to support their child, or switched churches that were more inclusive and would match their concept of faith.

Lastly, during the process of reflecting on their child's sexual minority disclosure and the assumptions undergirding the sociocognitive orientations that shape their maternal frame of reference, mothers engaged in the process of social identity management. Goffman (1959) suggests that individuals regulate or control information within a social context so as to influence the perception of their image or the image others and that this process of socio-perceptual control is driven by social dynamics (i.e., power and privilege).While resolving the cognitive dissonance brought on by a child's disclosure, mothers became acutely aware that their child's sexual orientation could cause social dissonance, i.e., a shift in the social perception of her being a prototypical mother. As a result, and, to avoid potential pathologization and stigma identity production, mothers selectively disclosed information concerning their children. The decision regarding the type and amount of information disclosed primarily depended upon three factors: (1) the nature of the social relationship between a mother and those who she disclosed to, (2) A mother's preconception of how the information would be perceived and (3) the underlying motive(s) of disclosure.

For example, one mother, Tracy, after reflecting on her relationship with her father, expressed that he was stereotypically masculine and an absentee father who is noted for making sexist comments and described him as "socially inappropriate." In her interview, Tracy stated

"with my father he maybe thought we should oh be more rough-and-tumble with my son… he thought we were going to make him a sissy." Therefore, taking into consideration that she does not share with her father the notion of normative gendered parental behavior and that she believes his comments regarding her parenting as being judgmental, Tracy perceives that if she discloses her son's sexual orientation it will have a dramatic negative impact not only on the father/daughter dynamic but also on the grandfather/grandson dynamic. To avert any conflict with her father and maintain the current perception of her status as mother and her son's status as sexually normative, Tracy chooses not disclose her son's sexual minority orientation to her father.

In sum, social role identity salience (efficacy) is a function of how an individual is socially perceived to personify an archetype. By managing identity information through regulating communication (i.e., selective disclosure) one can control, to an extent, the social perception of a social role identity. Lastly, in terms of this study, the act of selectively revealing information enabled mothers to manage the social perception of both their children's sexual identity and their identity as a mother.

Implications and Recommendations

Theoretical and practical implications for this study are drawn from a combination of the findings in this study, interpretations of the maternal narratives, and related literature regarding maternal identity development. In addition to the implications, this section will provide recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Implications

This study examined the process of maternal identity development in mothers who had experienced an adult child's sexual minority disclosure. The primary goal of this research was to support the postmodern notion that an adult social role identity is not an intrinsically human

static construct and its development not a transhistorical, prescriptively linear step-wise process; rather, it is a mutable social construct, shaped and influenced by a myriad of discourses and its development a very subjective and contextualized process. Two bodies of literature that helped provide the framework for this study include feminist theory and adult development theory.

Maternal Identity Development and Feminist Theory

Socio-historically speaking, there were two major feminist discourses that focused on theorizing motherhood and a maternal identity: social constructionist and psychoanalytic. The primary focus of early feminist social constructionist theory was to challenge the nature and the function of motherhood in society. Scholars theorized that motherhood served as the source and reproducer of gender oppression (Firestone, 1970; Friedan, 1963). However, this perspective assumed an existence of maternal qualities and behaviors shared by all women, i.e., a universal and an essential motherhood. Theorists later argued that this perspective was totalizing because it conflated femininity with mothering and did not account for the multiple subject positions women hold and the discourses that shape those positions (DiQuinzo, 1999; Fox, 1998; McMahon, 1995; Tronto, 1993). In essence, postmodern feminist scholars urged for the exploration of the various social forces undergirding the development of the maternal construct.

In contrast to feminist social constructionist scholars, early psychoanalytic feminists focused on the nature and practice of mothering. Scholars theorized that the reproduction of gender oppression was the direct result of an exclusive interpersonal relationship between a mother and child (Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976). This maternal bond was thought to be the root of feminine and masculine psychic development which produces various behaviors associated with gender difference. However, like early feminist social constructionists, early

psychoanalytic feminist theory was predicated on universalistic assumptions concerning femininity, mothering, and motherhood.

Later in psychoanalytic discourse, scholars questioned the socially embedded nature of gender and suggested to take into consideration differences between psychic perceptions of motherhood and lived maternal realities (Baraitser, 2006, 2008; Benjamin, 2004; Brennan, 1992). One scholar in particular, Judith Butler (1990), proposed a theory of subjectivity to explain the social construction and development of gender identity. Butler suggests that gender identification is the result of mimetic expressions of masculinity and femininity in the larger social context. According to Butler, gender identity is a social construct – it is through social interaction and what she terms "gender performativity" (Butler, 1990, p. 171) that specific ideologies and behaviors become associated with gender and are normalized over time. Furthermore, gender is considered to be socially interpellated (i.e., called out or hailed) and initiates a psychic process in which an individual must recognize and respond to those ideologies associated with gender identity. The end result of this self-identification process is an individual's acknowledgement of their subjectivity. Therefore, maternal identity development from Butler's perspective is not based solely on mother-child interpersonal dynamics; rather, it is based on normative gender framing and the performance of idealized cultural representations of femininity and motherhood.

Women in this study, through social interaction during their early growth and development, learned what a mother is and what a mother does and reported that they developed their adult maternal identity based on a mimetic gendered model of heterosexuality. Mothers accepted and uncritically challenged the heteronormative maternal ideology and practices learned and incorporated them into their maternal frame of reference. Furthermore, in terms of

maternal identity salience, to perceive and be perceived as a "good" mother, one must not only accept and "perform" socially appropriate gender and sexual behavior but also instill this ideology in their children. From Judith Butler's perspective, by accepting heteronormative maternal ideology and performing a gendered parental role, women in this study had self-identified as mothers and had recognized their maternal subjectivity. However, there is an underlying assumption that any variance in heteronormative maternal ideology will manifest as both cognitive and social dissonance, i.e., maternal identity salience will decrease both personally and socially. Missing from maternal discourse is the notion that although variances in maternal ideology (i.e., a maternal frame shift) may occur this change may have little effect on one's maternal subjectivity. The perceptual change that occurs in mothers and the change in the social perception of mothers are not mutually inclusive processes. Although acceptance of their adult children's sexual orientation is inimical to heteronormative maternal ideology and could lead to social scrutiny and marginalization, mothers in this study were able to manage their subjectivity by regulating the social perception of their role as mother.

Maternal Identity Development and Adult Development Theory

In regards to identity development in adult education discourse, early adult development models, whether based on male development (Erickson, 1963, 1968; Kohlberg, 1973; Levinson, 1978) or based on female development (Bardwick, 1980; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Peck, 1986), considered adult growth and development to be a linear and universal process for the purpose of achieving autonomy. Problematic with these models is that they are based on culturally transmitted normative and essentialized assumptions regarding gender and gender roles, are void of context (i.e., transhistorical), and do not consider the socially constructed nature of identity (Caffarella & Olson, 1993). Therefore, to attend to maternal

subjectivity and maternal identity development, two theories were consulted to inform this study: Social Identity theory and Transformational Learning Theory.

Social identity theorists suggest that identity development is a sociocognitive process in which a social category, composed of normative characteristics, is used to socially place an individual in as well as serves as a reference for an individual to self-identity with (Hornsey, 2008; Hogg, Terry, & White 1995, Hogg, 2006). A social category (e.g., mother) is cognitively represented as a prototype which is defined as a collection of connected beliefs and behaviors within a group while simultaneously distinguishing the group from others. According to social identity theory, an individual self-categorizes and is socially categorized based on the perceptual process of prototypical comparison, i.e., one's perception of and how socially one is perceived as personifying the prototype. Furthermore, identity salience is a function of categorization accessibility (i.e., situationally dependent) and fit (i.e., contextually dependent). Lastly, there are two motivational forces influence categorization and salience: positive distinctiveness and uncertainty reduction. Positive distinctiveness (ethnocentrism) refers to group behavior that positively distinguishes the group from other groups and supports social valence and creates entitativity. Uncertainty reduction is the process of clarifying ones place or position in the world by association oneself with a particular group's prototype.

Maternal identity development and maternal subjectivity, from the perspective of social identity theory, is the product of both cognitive and social processes rather than solely a psychological process as suggested by psychodynamic and psychosocial theories and models. Through various social experiences prior to and during motherhood, a woman develops a cognitive representation of a maternal identity – a "mother" prototype. This archetype is a compilation of learned assumptions, both implicit and explicit, and serves as the frame of

reference during the process of prototypical comparison. In essence, motherhood ideology is learned through various social relations (e.g., family observation, schooling, media, etc…) and forms the basis of how a woman self-identifies as a mother as well as how others socially view or categorize her as a mother. Furthermore, maternal assumptions, according to social identity theory, have perceived social value and for a maternal identity to be considered salient, one must be able to embody the ideology such as performing maternal behaviors considered appropriate for a specific social context. Therefore, assimilation and conformity to the maternal prototype (i.e., normative mothering) drives the process of self and social categorization.

Fundamentally, social identity theory does provide a basic framework for understanding the possible cognitive and social mechanisms of identity development. However, after collecting and analyzing maternal narratives, there are a few aspects of the theory that are either unclear or problematic. For example, the dynamics of prototype development are not well-defined; it is assumed that a prototype is composed of a specific quantifiable list of beliefs and behaviors that are universally known and widely accepted. When asked the questions "what is motherhood" and "what does it mean to be a mother," mothers in this study not only gave a variety of answers, they also changed their answer when referring to a different time and point during motherhood. Although there may be a commonly held belief that defines the maternal prototype, such as mothers are responsible for the welfare and care of children, there may be differences in how each mother interprets that belief. In essence, interpreting the social value and meaning of the prototype is highly subjective.

In addition to prototype development, the dynamics of self and social categorization are vague; it is assumed that all the social beliefs and behaviors defining a prototype will be uncritically accepted and personally incorporated in order to support entitativity and that

behaviors displayed and ideas communicated (i.e., group behavior) by an individual directly reflects an individual's perception and acceptance of the prototype. Although mothers in this study uncritically accepted heteronormative maternal assumptions and were cognizant of the social value of performing the maternal prototype, their maternal perspective changed after experiencing the sexual minority disclosure of an adult child. This experience produced a cognitive conflict in mothers which, after reflecting on the meaningful nature of the mother-child relationship, caused mothers to reframe how they interpreted maternal expectations. As a result of this maternal frame shift (i.e., perspective transformation), mothers began to evaluate each social context and communicate a maternal identity that they believed would be the best fit for that particular context. For example, if a mother perceives that their child's sexual orientation would not be socially accepted, then they may choose not disclose this information and give the social perception of being a normative mother. Conversely, if a mother perceives that their child's sexual orientation would be socially accepted, then they may choose to disclose this information and give the impression of being a non-normative mother. Therefore, personal salience for mothers in this study was resolved through introspection whereas social salience and maternal subjectivity was managed through contextual evaluation and selective communication.

Finally, although social identity theory provides a conceptual framework regarding identity development, missing in its discourse is the notion of change. Emphasis is placed on the formulation of a social identity rather than the motivational forces that may cause changes in prototype construction as well as changes in the personal and social process of categorization. Transformational learning theory, with its focus on perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1996, 2000), portrays development as a dynamic sociocognitive process. Central to this theory is the notion that specific experiences call into question the meaning and importance of our learned

assumptions and that these experiences serve as catalysts for critical reflection and cognitive change. Experiencing an adult child's sexual minority disclosure created cognitive dissonance in the mothers of this study because their child's sexuality was contrary to their heteronormative maternal frame of reference. This dissonance emotionally manifested as feelings of shame, guilt, and blame and promoted mothers to evaluate the meaning and importance of the mother/child relationship relative the social value of personifying the maternal archetype. Mothers responded to the cognitive conflict or by researching and expanding their knowledge of sexual diversity, connecting with other mothers whose children are also sexual minorities, and socially interacting within the sexual minority community. This response led mothers to embrace and accept their children and this act of accepting something that threatens their identity or way of knowing represents cognitive resilience (i.e., the ability to cope with or resolve disequilibrium) (Akhtar & Wren, 2008; Walsh, 2010) and a shift in their maternal frame of reference.

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical implications, there are practical considerations that are derived from this study of maternal identity development. Taking into account the socially embeddedness of motherhood, the social value of being a mother, and differences that may occur between a woman's maternal reality and her perception of normative motherhood, a methodological approach must be adopted to aid mothers in interrogating their meaning of motherhood as well as reconciling any differences between the social role expectations that are culturally projected and their subjective maternal experiences (May, 2004; Miller, 2005). Narratives used in this study, for example, helped mothers and the researcher examine the dynamic nature of social identity development and uncover psychosocial forces that influence and shape maternal identity development. However, mothers expressed that the process of

reflecting on their adult child's sexual minority disclosure produced very powerful emotions such as loss, fear, and vulnerability. Therefore, adult educators wishing to facilitate growth and development in mothers who experience a situation that is contrary to their role should consider the importance of affect relative to the nature and impact of the transformative learning process (Berger, 2004; Merriam, 2004, Taylor, 2001). In short, an educator should be aware that participants may not cope with or overcome cognitive dissonance (i.e., intern conflict) which is central to the transformative process whereas some, through time or multiple conflicting experiences, may develop cognitive resilience (Akhtar & Wren, 2008; Walsh, 2010).

In addition to psychical considerations, adult educators should keep in mind the social ramifications of nurturing individual identity development. Although current research suggests that perspective transformation can be a dialectical process between the personal and social (Scott, 2003), power differentials inherent within each sociocultural context usually shapes the dynamics of social interaction and influences the transformative process (Taylor, 2007). For example, mothers in this study expressed that they had to evaluate each social context to determine whether or not they would disclose their child's sexual minority status and, if so, to what extent. This decisional process was based on preconceptions of all the possible social outcomes that could happen (e.g., acceptance/denial, inclusion/exclusion, privilege/oppression, etc…) – a very similar process that occurred in their own children (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Conley, 2007, Fields, 2001; Matthews & Lease, 2000). Furthermore, mothers engaged in impression management (i.e., controlling social perception through communication), in order to regulate their own maternal subjectivity. Therefore, an adult educator should be cognizant of the fact that facilitating identity development could lead to individual and social perspectival changes and that these changes may have a negative impact on one's subjectivity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Narratives representing a mother's reflection on a child's sexual orientation relative to her learned heteronormative maternal assumptions aided in the exploration of psychosocial forces that undergird social role identity development and salience. Uncovered by this study is the notion that adult identity development is both a personal and social process. Mothers reexamined their maternal assumptions and sociocognitive orientations while simultaneously managing various social relationships.

As a result of this study of maternal identity development, I present three recommendations for future research. First, to affirm that social role identity development is both a personal and social process, it is recommended that a future study be conducted that explores a father's perspective in relation to an adult child's sexual minority disclosure. This study will provide further input concerning the sociohistorical and constructed nature of gendered social roles, support the idea that adult identity development can be shaped by transformative experiences, and verify the use of impression management as a means of regulating social role identity.

Secondly, another recommendation for future research is to investigate the impact of social context on the process of adult identity development. Mothers in this study were selective regarding the amount and type of information they disclosed as well as the person or group of people they disclosed to. A closer examination of the socio-relational dynamics related to a social role identity will help uncover possible socio-structural barriers that may hinder adult identity development and salience. Lastly, to better understand the perceptual process of adult identity construction and deconstruction, research that focuses on the relationship between cognitive dissonance and cognitive resilience will give more insight concerning and individual's

ability to handle transformative growth and development. Current research (Balk, 2008; Hardy, Concato, & Gill, 2004; Pat-Horenczyk & Brom, 2007) suggests that individuals who encounter a higher number of dissonance producing experiences increase cognitive resilience and are quicker to respond to transformative changes in their life. Assessing cognitive resilience in combination to socio-structural barriers will aid adult educators to more efficiently support adult growth and development to a specific group of adult learners.

Concluding Remarks

The sexual minority disclosure of an adult child to a mother helped contextualize the process of adult identity development and salience. The rich descriptions in the maternal narratives revealed that adult identity is not a fixed construct, that its development is indeed shaped and influenced by various historical, contextual, and social forces, and that these forces not only impact individual development but they may also affect one's subjectivity. Lastly, it is hoped that this body of work will serve as the impetus for continued research and program development that will help all mothers who struggle with the notion that their children are "different."

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study entitled Reconstructing motherhood: Identity salience in mothers of adult sexual minority children, which is being conducted by Thomas Harnden, Graduate Student, Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, 404-660-XXXX, tharnden@uga.edu, under the direction of Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Professor, Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, 706-542-XXXX. I understand that my participation is voluntary; I can refuse to participate or withdraw my consent at any time without any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to examine the impact of an adult child's sexual minority disclosure on a mother's perception of her maternal identity.
2. A sexual minority is defined as any individual who does not self-identify as being a heterosexual.
3. It is intended that the information gleaned from this study will be used to develop supportive programs and/or materials that will help inform and guide other mothers of adult sexual minority children.
4. Although I may not directly benefit from this research, I may benefit from the insight I may receive by reflecting on my experiences. Furthermore, I understand that the only foreseeable discomfort or stress that I may experience is mild anxiety resulting from the reflection on and the discussion of personal experiences associated with my child's sexual minority disclosure as well as experiences associated with being identified as a mother of a sexual minority. However, if I am bothered by any questions posed during the interview, I may choose to skip them.
5. The procedures are as follows
    a. I agree to participate in an interview that will be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me. Furthermore, additional follow-up contact and information collection may be requested and will be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
    b. The researcher will interview me about my experiences as a mother of an adult child who self-identifies as a sexual minority.
    c. I understand that interviews will be audio taped and may last between one and two hours.

   d. Transcriptions will be made from the audiotapes, leaving out any identifying information where possible. Furthermore, the tapes will be accessible to associated researchers only and will be destroyed at the completion of the study.
   e. The researcher will provide a draft copy of the findings to me for verification that my viewpoint has been correctly interpreted and that there are no gross errors of fact.
6. No risks are foreseen. The tapes will be transcribed by Mr. Harnden with all personally identifying information replaced by pseudonyms. The transcripts will be checked for accuracy by Mr. Harnden.
7. Any individually-identifiable information obtained in this study that can be connected with me will remain confidential, unless otherwise required by law. My name as a participant will be stored separately from the transcript of my interview; only my interviewer will know the transcript is mine.
8. The researchers will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached at the contact locations listed above.
9. I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.
10. PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM. KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO MR. HARNDEN.

_____	_____
Data Collector Name Date	Participant Name Date
_____	_____
Data Collector Signature Date	Participant Signature Date

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preconceptions of Mother, Mothering, and Motherhood

1. Looking back at childhood and early adulthood, what are the various ways in which you learned about being a mother or about mothering?
2. What are examples of the principles of motherhood that you learned before becoming a mother and what did they mean to you?
3. In terms of mother as a social role, what did "Mother" and "Motherhood" represent or mean to you prior to having a child? (i.e., being a mother meant_____)

Pre-disclosure Conceptions of Mother, Mothering, and Motherhood

1. Once you became a mother, did your conception of "Mother" or "Motherhood" change? If so, in what way(s)? (i.e., being a mother meant_____)
2. If there was such a thing as the "voice of society," what would this voice say about you being a mother?
3. Upon becoming a mother, were you perceived and treated differently in social environments? If so, in what ways?
4. Was there any sense of being judged while taking on the role of being a mother? If so, in what sense?

Post-disclosure Conceptions of Mother, Mothering, and Motherhood

1. After your child disclosed their sexual identity (i.e., coming out), how did this impact your conceptions of mother and motherhood? i.e., how did you see yourself as a mother? (i.e., being a mother of a gay or lesbian child means_____)
2. If there was such a thing as the "voice of society," what would this voice say about you being a mother of a gay or lesbian child?
3. After your child came out, can you recall any experiences that may have caused you to question your role as a mother and the meanings of motherhood?
4. Was there any sense of being judged while taking on the role of being a mother? If so, in what sense?

APPENDIX C

MOTHERHOOD BIOGRAPHY SURVEY

The information collected here is considered confidential. Furthermore, it will only be used for informational purposes to categorize data and will not be released in a manner in which the identity of the subject will be compromised. A sincere thanks for your time and consideration!

1. How old were you when you first became a mother? _____

2. What is your current age? _____

3. What was your marital status when you first became a mother?
□ Single □ Married □ Separated □ Divorced □ Widowed

4. What is your current marital status?
□ Single □ Married □ Separated □ Divorced □ Widowed

5. Is your mother alive? □ Yes □ No

6. How many brothers do you have? _____ How many sisters do you have? _____

7. While raising your children were you employed? □ Yes □ No

7a. If so, □ part-time □ full-time

7b. If so, please describe the type(s) of employment: (if necessary, please feel free to use the next page or back of this survey)

8. What is your current employment status? □ unemployed □ part-time □ full-time □ retired

8a. If employed, please describe the type(s) of employment: (if more room is necessary, please feel free to use the next page or back of this survey)

9. How many children do you currently have? □1 2 □3 □4 □5 □>5

10. Please list the ages and gender of each of your children:

11. Do you have any children that are deceased? □ Yes □ No

12. How many of your children have disclosed that they are a sexual minority? □ 1 2 3 4 5 >5

13. As accurate as possible, please list the age at which each child disclosed their sexual minority status:

14. Are you a grandmother? □ Yes □ No

14a. If so, how many grandchildren do you have? □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5 □ >5

15. If applicable, do you follow or belong to a specific type of organized faith or religion? □ Yes □ No

15a. If so, what is the name of this faith or religion? _____

15b. How long have you been member of this faith or religion?_____

15c. Are you an active member?

16. Please describe your highest educational level

□ No diploma □ High school diploma/GED □ Some College □ Post-graduate work

□ Associates Degree □ Bachelor's degree □ Graduate degree

Please feel free to use the space below for any question that you feel requires more description: