

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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This thesis investigates the reported communication experiences of married women transitioning to motherhood. The study involves a series of focus groups in which new mothers share their communicative experiences, explaining how they are navigating their new roles as mothers while also performing roles as wives, daughters, and workers. Informed primarily by relational dialectics and secondarily by literature on conversational argument and work-family research, the study produces four themes: 1) the women provided two strategies for dealing with problematic offers from others to “help”; 2) the women named their own perceptions of their role responsibilities as mothers as critical to their dialectical strain establishing boundaries; 3) the women perceived their husbands’ responses to fatherhood as affecting their own responses to and enactment of motherhood in conjunction with their other roles; and 4) the women reported as vital to their successful management of work and mother roles both verbal confirmation and messages endorsing their own abilities to capably engage both role responsibilities. Other minor themes also are discussed, followed by the implications for future research.

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Reported Communication Experiences of Married Women Transitioning to Motherhood:
A Case Study

by
Sarah Elizabeth Hanna

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Sarah Elizabeth Hanna, Author

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Reported Communication Experiences of Married Women Transitioning to Motherhood: A Case Study

1. Introduction

The transition to parenthood has been a widely discussed topic, consisting of many individual and relational adjustments (Belsky, 1982; McHale & Huston, 1985; Cowan & Cowan, 1992;). The communication styles married couples use affects how those couples engage and manage parenthood in conjunction with their other roles (Stamp, 1992; Golden, 2000; Shapiro & Gottman, 2005). For women specifically, the addition of the motherhood role can generate simultaneous, conflicting pulls, particularly as mothers adapt to the presence and constant needs of their newborns while balancing their existing roles as wives, daughters, and workers. As women navigate the transition to motherhood, they may wrestle with how to manage the variety of competing role responsibilities all vying for their focus, investment and energy. By engaging dialogue with her spouse, parents, friends and work associates, a woman responds to and manages her transition to motherhood through communication.

Because the addition of the mother role may lead women to reevaluate and modify how they engage all roles, their communicative responses may challenge the predictability of their former identities with the dynamic unpredictability confounded in their new roles as mothers. “While many changes occur during the transition to parenthood, perhaps the single biggest change is the actual addition of the parent role and the subsequent impact of that addition on other roles”(Stamp, 1994 p.89). As a new mother engages dialogue about how she wants to interact with each of her roles, she may refine and modify not only her own manifestation of her roles, but how she prefers significant others, such as spouses, parents, coworkers and friends, to react and respond

to her expectations as the mother.

Through my own experience managing the transition to motherhood, I discovered that I was not merely “adding” a mother role to my list of existing roles. Rather, the presence of motherhood meant a fundamental redefining and renegotiating of all roles. As I interacted with my husband, parents, colleagues, and friends, I began to develop a sense of how I wanted to be a wife, worker, and daughter and friend while also being a mother. The transition was simultaneously challenging, exciting, introspective, unpredictable, aggravating, humbling, and grounding. The dialogue I engaged with others, what I chose to verbalize and with whom (as well as what I kept private), how each issue was addressed and the meaning I associated with those interactions were central to my experience becoming a mother.

My own experience has driven my desire to research, study, and gain deeper insight as to how other women have navigated the transition to motherhood through discourse. While previous research has often focused on the dynamic between two roles, (mother and worker, wife and worker, wife and mother), and sometimes three roles, (wife, worker, and mother), I am interested in the interplay of these roles as well as that of daughter, with a pointed emphasis on rich, qualitative data centering on communication.

To enrich our understanding of women’s experiences engaging motherhood through discourse, I collected and analyzed new mothers’ reported interactions to gain insight into how they used communication to navigate their transitions to motherhood. I listened to the women’s talk and identified themes that emerged in their reported

communicative experiences. These themes offered rich insights into the specific ways these women have adapted and responded through discourse to the multiple role demands they defined and interpreted as central toward their abilities to capably engage motherhood along with their roles as spouses, workers and daughters. The elements the women identified as central to their transitions to motherhood included the women's identification and interpretation of problematic offers of help from others; the articulation of boundaries and expectations for managing motherhood which included how spousal responses to fatherhood affected the participants' navigation of motherhood; changes in their discursive patterns; and the communicative needs preferred by the women as they negotiated and effectively managed the interplay of their work and mother roles. The themes were examined primarily through relational dialectics and peripherally through conversational argument and work-family research.

To inform my understanding of the transition to motherhood, I will present in Chapter 2 a review of literature about Leslie Baxter's relational dialectics because Baxter's work directly addresses the contradictory communication inherent in women's multiple role development. In addition, I will present in that chapter truncated summaries of literature about argument in conversation and about managing work and motherhood as each of these topics may apply to interactions during this transition. In Chapter 3 I will present the methodology for this interpretive study. Chapters 4 and 5 will provide the results, the discussion, and the conclusion about women's communication experiences as the women transition to motherhood.

2. Literature Review

To enrich my understanding of communication experiences during the transition to motherhood, I have conducted a literature review of Leslie Baxter's work on relational dialectics, looking first at the fluctuating nature of dialogue, followed by a review of dialectical tensions. Subsequently, I will present a brief review of conversational argument literature which will provide characteristics of argument that occur naturally in dialogue. Finally, I will provide a truncated summary of literature pertaining to the interplay of work and motherhood roles.

2.1 Dialogue as Dialectical Flux

To understand the importance of communication dialogue in creating individual and relational identities and roles, I began by exploring Leslie's Baxter's research on dialectical flux, research grounded in the theory of dialogism developed by Russian cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin viewed selves and relationships as being constructed in the interactions among self and others (Baxter, 2004). Baxter contends that selves and relationships are fundamentally constituted in communication practices. The dialogue of utterances that occurs between and among people creates a complicated web of shared meanings. The development and understanding of "self" and "others" is manifested through a complex series of communication interactions that occur over the lifetime of relationships, never achieving an endpoint, but always existing in a state of fluctuation. Baxter grounds her theory in Bakhtin's perspective that social life is not a closed, univocal "monologue" in which only a single voice could be heard, rather social life is an open dialogue characterized by multivocality (Baxter, 2004) and the "indeterminacy inherent when those multiple voices come together" (Braithwaite &

Baxter, 2006, p.131) Engaging in dialogue means different, often opposing voices interpenetrate one another, some more dominant and others more marginalized (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006); these competing, interdependent poles constitute and change one another. To Bakhtin (1984a), the essence of dialogue can be found in its simultaneous fusion with, yet differentiation from, another (as cited in Baxter, 2004). Baxter (2004) argues that to engage dialogue, participants must blend their perspectives to some degree, while sustaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives.

Dialogue is made up of the interplay of contradictory forces: centripetal forces (such as unity, homogeneity, and centrality) and centrifugal forces (such as difference, dispersion, decentering) (Baxter, 2004). The centripetal-centrifugal tension reveals how communication involves values, orientations, perspectives, functions and/or ideas that are unified yet competing. To understand dialogue as constituted in contradiction, Baxter (2004) explores discursive opposites to gain insight as to how dialectical forces complete, enhance, and enable one another while simultaneously limiting or constraining one another. This ongoing flux of unity and opposition are jointly constructed for marital partners as they develop “we” identities and “I” identities. In this manner, dialectical flux is a discursive phenomenon (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

The development and management of parental role identity emerges through a dynamic interplay of dialogue. The role of mother is created and reflected through conversations and interactions that occur with the woman’s spouse, parents, and coworkers. The woman’s perspective on how her role as mother should be navigated does not exist as an objective reality “(just as the self does not exist as an object); rather,

roles are created through her interactions with others” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 as cited in Stamp, 1994, p.90). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) contend that relationship parties “expose each other to different perspectives, interests, and approaches, thereby helping one another’s selves to become” (as cited in Baxter, 2004, p5). A woman’s ongoing interactions with these individuals help her construct, maintain, and modify her new role as mother.

2.2 Relational Dialectics

One way to more fully understand the interplay of these roles for a woman transitioning to motherhood is to identify the opposing pulls she experiences with relationship parties during this period marked by significant role fluctuation. Opposing pulls can create conflicting desires and competing perspectives in the individual relationships new mothers have with significant others in their lives. The tensions created from these opposing yet interdependent needs and desires can be studied using dialectical theory (Baxter, 1988; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Conville, 1998; Rawlins, 1992). Dialectical theorists explore contradictions in personal relationships, contradictions which are defined as the dynamic interplay or tension between unified oppositions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In other words, dialectical theory focuses on factors, forces, and themes in relationships that are interconnected with one another while at the same time functioning to oppose one another. For women transitioning to motherhood, contradictory factors and themes can emerge in their relationships as they attempt to balance parental commitments and constraints with their other roles as spouse, worker and daughter. The contradictions function interdependently because a push in one

direction inevitably results in a pull away from the other direction.

Rather than viewing these contradictions as detrimental to relational life, dialectical theorists share the belief that contradictions are central to relationships. Neither pole of the opposition is seen as inherently positive or negative; they simply exist as essences of life (Montgomery, 1993). The interplay of competing voices can be an energizing source of vitality (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006.) The interplay of opposing poles is assumed to have potentially positive and negative qualities and ramifications for the relationship. “No theme or perspective is better or worse than its opposite; their interplay is what is important” (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006, p.131). A healthy relationship does not imply that the interplay of competing opposites have been resolved or extinguished; instead, both parties manage to satisfy both oppositional demands (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Women transitioning to motherhood will possibly deal with dialectical tensions in their relationships as they face competing pulls and tugs during the period of significant role change and negotiation inherent in their new-found mother identities. For example, a new mother may communicate needs for shared baby responsibility with her spouse, while also expressing preferences to handle baby care and baby-related decision-making independent of her spouse. Her desire for partnered-support and equality in child-rearing may be met with the contradictory desire to resist partnered-support to demonstrate her self-sufficient maternal capabilities. Relationship parties communicate these dialectical tensions both verbally and nonverbally; their everyday interactions create a management system they use to work out their individual and partnered needs with regard to these

tensions (Baxter, 2004). Those everyday conversations occurring between a woman and her husband, a woman and her mother or father, or among a woman and her work colleagues function to respond to and manage the dialectical forces which will be present, in varying capacities, throughout the lifetime of those relationships. New forms of oppositions are developed and experienced just as others are transformed, emphasizing the notion that “any current tension is situated along a historical chain of past and future tensions, which are linked by transformations” (Montgomery, 1993).

Through their research, dialectical theorists have identified three supra-dialectical contradictions that occur with regularity in dyadic relationships. These supra-dialectics encompass the tensions interacted within pairs and at the interface of pairs with a broader social system. The three most frequently experienced supra-dialectics are Integration/Separation, Stability/Change, and Expression/Privacy (Baxter, 1990). The supra-types are explored based on whether they are manifested internally within the dyad or externally between the dyad and the larger social system, or some combination thereof.

Baxter (1990) has identified three contradictions that operate as internal manifestations of the supra-dialectics: connection-autonomy which corresponds with Integration-Separation, openness-closedness which corresponds with Stability-Change, and novelty-predictability which corresponds with Expression-Privacy. Each internal set contains multiple dimensions of opposition.

Autonomy-connection refers to the tension between unity with another party and separation from that party. Relationships comprise a “both/and” quality of relating in which relationship parties experience both simultaneous needs for partner independence

and autonomy, *and* partner interdependence or connectedness (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). A new mother may struggle with the opposing pulls that stem from competing desires for paid-work and stay-at-home caregiver participation. Being a stay-at-home mother gives the woman more concentrated time to devote to baby care and traditionally feminine role responsibilities like cooking and house cleaning, which may increase her sense of connection to her baby, her husband and her motherhood role. However, that desire may be directly opposed by an equal desire for personal achievement in the workplace where she may develop work relationships that result in an increased sense of autonomy to her individual identity, an identity shaped *outside* her caregiver role. The presence of the autonomy-connection tension has potential to be a significant contradiction experienced by a woman navigating the addition of motherhood among her other roles.

To further the discussion of autonomy and connection, understanding the interpretative repertoires of “self” and “other” could be beneficial toward identifying how this particular dialectic may emerge for the participants. Annis Golden (2002) studied spousal collaboration on defining role identities and developing shared meanings, and she described relationship parties enacting a repertoire of “the self” and a repertoire “of other.” Golden described the dominant vocabulary in repertoires of the self as vocabulary of control rather than passion, autonomy rather than connectedness. The repertoire of “the other” was characterized by Golden as preferencing connectedness over autonomy and the dominant vocabulary privileges “the other” over “the self.” “Repertoires of ‘the other’ revolve around showing primary concern for an other (a child, a spouse, or family)

through love, protection, providing,” as well as self-denial, which means that when faced with competing interests between self and other, these conflicts are usually resolved in favor of “the other” (Golden, 2002, p128). The participants may report examples of autonomy and connection that incorporate their interpretative repertoires of “the self” and “the other.” Golden’s study revealed that how married couples understand their work and family arrangements, which is a function of the interpretive structures they employ in making sense of their lives, is of vital importance to their subjective emotional experience of these domains.

Another tension frequently experienced within personal relationships is the internal manifestation of openness-closedness which is of the Expression-Privacy supra-dialectic. Openness-closedness deals with the tension between sharing information with another party and keeping information from that party. The “both/and” quality of relating identified by Baxter is featured in openness-closedness as parties face conflicting needs to talk and not to talk (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Consider a woman adapting to her new role as mother who wants to reveal her frustrations about her baby’s poor sleep habits to her husband but also wants to conceal her feelings to increase her perceived capability as a “good mother” who can adapt to sleeplessness, a fundamental characteristic of traditional motherhood role responsibility. The woman may attempt to balance the opposing forces by being open about her frustrations if she perceives her husband’s response will be empathetic and supportive, and by being closed if she perceives his response will be directive and solution-oriented. In doing so, she may become resentful for not being able to unburden herself more freely, so she may begin to

disclose more, only to feel less capable in her mother role and unable to fully resolve her present behavior with her expectation of ideal motherhood behavior thereby elevating the dilemma to a new plane of dialectical experience. In this manner, dialectical dilemmas are constantly redefined.

The third most common internal contradiction is novelty-predictability, which is part of the Stability-Change supra-dialectic. Novelty-predictability refers to the tension between creating patterns and behaviors with another party that are comfortable and assumed while also wanting to change and recreate those patterns and behaviors into something new. Couples transitioning to parenthood are faced with significant change, in terms of their patterns, roles and communication behaviors. As they struggle to establish stability among all the change, a push-pull can develop between these unified opposites. A husband may communicate feelings of distress about the sudden and somewhat uncontrollable volume of change that has become central to their roles as parents. He may desire the stability of the patterns and behaviors related to their other identities, before they added the parental roles. The wife might experience the push-pull of novelty-predictability in similar and different ways. She might be comfortable with the significant role change on some levels, showing excitement about motherhood and embracing the change associated with management of her new role, while simultaneously expressing feelings of being overwhelmed by the lack of stability; thus, she may communicate desires for routine-- with the baby, with her husband, or with her job-- longing for a balance between the tensions. As the couple begins to manage their approaches and responses toward novelty-predictability as parents of a new baby other variables may

come into play. The couples' roles may continue to be adapted and redefined as the baby grows; thus, the dynamic between stability and change is altered once again.

Baxter also has identified three external contradictions of the supra-dialectics that occur between a relationship dyad and the larger social system in which the relationship resides. Inclusion-seclusion corresponds with Integration-Separation, revelation/concealment corresponds with Expression-Privacy, and conventionality/uniqueness corresponds with Stability-Change. Integration-Separation refers to the tension between a pair's involvement together with others and their isolation as a pair from others. New parents may want to integrate their family among their extended-families and establish a stronger connection of their mother and father roles in conjunction with their daughter and son roles, while also attempting to establish a boundary or separation from extended family to foster autonomy within their immediate family unit and to more clearly establish their roles as mother and father independent of the roles as daughter and son.

Revelation-concealment deals with the tension between sharing dyadic information with outside parties and keeping dyadic information private. Consider a woman who shares with her mother her decision to return to paid work shortly after her baby is born. The woman's mother may embrace or criticize her daughter's decision to keep working, or may have opinions about her number of work hours, acceptable childcare arrangements, etc. The woman must choose to what extent she wants to share personal decisions with her mother. If she reveals too much, she may risk competing opinion or disagreement from her mother, but she also may enjoy the benefit of fostering

a closer relationship through disclosure. If she conceals too much, she may feel disconnected from the intimacy she and her mother once shared but also experience the freedom to make decisions without disapproval.

Often determining when and how information will be revealed and concealed becomes a question of boundaries. Petronio (2002) describes managing communication boundaries by establishing and repeating patterns; thus, boundaries can come together and pull apart depending on the ebb and flow of the private and public information being maintained. The revelation-concealment tension can generate conversations with a woman's partner about how the couple makes decisions to share or withhold dyadic information from outside parties as well as generate conversations between her and third parties as means of managing the dialectics.

The third external contradiction, conventionality/uniqueness, refers to the tension between a couple conforming to social expectations and developing behavior unique or in contrast to those societal norms. A married couple transitioning to parenthood may have conflicting feelings between the traditional behaviors assigned to the roles of "mother" and "father" and more contemporary notions of parental role enactment. Lupton and Schmeid (2002) assert that gendered notions of "motherhood" and "fatherhood" are particularly important in influencing the discourse couples draw upon to make sense of their experiences of first-time parenthood. The results of their study revealed that many women reported struggling to come to terms with the contradiction between seeking to achieve the ideal of the "good mother" (as defined by more traditional gender roles) while also trying to maintain her individual self or "real me" (as defined by her personal

interests, work, and adult interaction). In addition, a woman who gravitates towards unconventional notions of “mother” and “father” roles may also be impacted by the views of her husband, who perhaps might support a non-traditional arrangement by accommodating his schedule for family life (decreasing hours, working from home) and/or by active participation in childcare responsibilities and housework. The couple’s chosen work-home arrangements and related role constructs may be directly opposed by feelings of inadequacy for not performing the roles typically assigned to them.

After reviewing the characteristics of the internal and external dialectical tensions and forecasting how the contradictions may operate in the study, understanding how researchers treat the location of the dialectic is beneficial toward conceptualizing how the tensions can be present in a relationship. The location of dialectical contradictions is disputed among researchers. Dindia (1998) argues that contradictory struggle can transcend particular relationships. She explains how some participants described an internal struggle occurring in themselves, as well as an external struggle occurring between people. “Human emotions tend to be present simultaneously at two levels: They are “out there” in relation to our goals, the environment, and other people, however they are also “in here” in response to the inner life of the self” (Wiley, 2003, p501). A husband and wife in conversation, for instance, continually and simultaneously act as individuals, as a couple, and as members of their community and their culture. Furthermore, any particular action or set of actions may simultaneously address different dialectical forces in these relational connections (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). I argue that these inputs from varying relationships and social contexts may affect the individual

process of relating between relationship partners. The individual is still not experiencing dialectical tensions as a contained sovereign self, but rather uses the information transmitted through interactions with multiple sources to form individual internal dialectics that will in turn become fused with the relationship dyad. “From a dialogical perspective, internal psychological thoughts and feelings are conceptualized as inner dialogues in which multiple discourses are at play” (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006, p.133) The development of an individual is not a static event but a process, yet an individual is capable of feeling tensions *as* an individual, while contradictions also exist within relationship parties.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) also discuss the notion of praxis when characterizing how the dialectics operate within relationships. Praxis focuses attention on the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives (p.14). People are actors in giving communicative life to the contradictions that comprise their social lives, but these contradictions in turn affect their subsequent communicative actions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). So as the women describe how they respond to and manage a dialectical dilemma, their decisions may impact subsequent interaction with their husbands, parents, or work associates, thus changing how the dialectic would be experienced in the future. While every interaction event is a unique moment, each is also informed by the historicity of prior interaction events and informs future events (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Dialectical theorists refer to the contradictions as inseparable; one contradiction cannot be considered in isolation of other contradictions with which it is integrally linked

(Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). As a result, all six tensions could potentially be named and applied to my research study, but only to the extent they are described by the participants. In addition, some dialectics may become more prominent than others. The tensions may appear in any number of ways: between the female participant and her husband, her parents or her work associates, as well as among the female participant, her husband, her parents or her work associates and the large social system in which the relationship resides.

As the women participating in the study discuss their communication experiences during the transition to motherhood, I will comb the transcriptions repeatedly and identify themes as they emerge from the data. Rather than framing the study and accompanying research questions around dialectical contradictions, my approach will be to structure the questions to elicit reported communication experiences that encompass the transition to motherhood among the interconnected roles of wife, daughter, and worker, and to identify how these experiences engage relational dialectics. I am interested in determining how dialectical tensions emerge naturally during the focus groups. In other words, I will not lead the discussion with the goal of centering on the dialectics, but will facilitate such discussion as it materializes through the participants' reported accounts. Relationship parties may gain perspective from one another by sharing their views and acknowledging the presence of contradictions in their relationship. The mothers in this study may report conversations that acknowledge the push-pull experienced as a result of multiple role management. Looking briefly at argument literature may help provide ancillary material to complement dialectical theory during the

analysis of some of the content of these conversations.

2.3 Argument in Conversation

Argument is a regulatory mechanism in conversation. The function of argument as a conversational mechanism is to manage instances where preferences for agreement have not, or might not, be otherwise achieved (Jacobs & Jackson, 1981). Argument functions to manage disagreement and its outcome. Examining how argument is described and engaged by the new mothers in my study will add value to understanding how these roles are articulated through dialogue.

As the women report their communication experiences navigating the transition to motherhood, some of the dialectic contradictions they describe may involve negotiating with significant others how the central roles of mother, wife, worker, and daughter will be enacted, managed, and modified. Through those conversations, each participant will likely negotiate and assert her point of view and in doing so, she will at times be formulating an argument through a series of speech acts. Exploring how the women describe using argument in conversation will provide an important dimension to understand how they have intersected argument within relational dialectics.

Conversational arguments operate as a dialectical exchange (Rips, 1998). “To say that argumentation is dialectical, then is to identify it as a human practice, an exchange between two or more individuals in which the process of interaction shapes the product” (Blair & Johnson, 1987, p.46). Walton (2007) advocates for dialogue-based approach to argument, seeing the process as a dynamic entity, moving through different stages towards a collective goal, based on collaborative conversational claims that govern how

moves are to be made during the process.

Like other conversations, informal arguments take place under implied agreement to cooperate in order to advance the discussion (Grice, 1989). A preference for agreement between participants' speech acts is an important feature of dialogue. Conversationalists try to produce assertions, evaluations, requests, or suggestions which can generate agreement (suppressing those that will not); they also attempt to supply agreeable responses to such speech acts, and they assume that disagreeable acts will not be issued without good reason for doing so (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980). In this way, individuals socially construct a shared meaning of how conversations are assumed to operate. The presumption to converse within an implicit agreement toward cooperation functions among the interpersonal relationships a woman may engage during the transition to motherhood as well.

Robert Trapp (1992) found two key characteristics of interpersonal argument: disagreeing and reason-giving. Disagreement in interpersonal argument results when participants construe their views of reality as if they were mutually incompatible and disagreement continues until participants interpret their views as compatible. Two people often engage open and sustained disagreement and in doing so, participants may make arguments in the course of having an argument. A prototypical case of this arrangement as it occurs in natural conversation is outlined by Jacobs & Jackson (1981): One person issues a speech act, which is then objected to, countered by, or rejected by the other person. Both people sustain the disagreement over a series of utterances which relate closely to issues involved in the original speech act. Argument serves to directly regulate

disagreement by supplying procedures for resolving open disagreements and indirectly by discouraging the construction of potentially disagreeable speech acts (Jacobs & Jackson, 1981).

Trapp (1992) explains that people use “reason-giving” in interpersonal argument as an attempt to find some shared view of reality other than the original disputed view; the individual can then link the shared view to the original disputed view in hopes of producing a “good reason” for the other person to adjust or change their original position. In most cases reason-giving is used in conversational argument as a tool to change disagreement to agreement (Trapp, 1992). As a result, initially disputed conversational claims can become accepted or retracted on the basis of later moves in the dialogue, when supporting or defeating claims are themselves accepted (Rips, 1998). Achieving success in conversational argument depends upon negotiating the required amount of support or justification (Jackson & Jacobs, 1992). For example, a participant in my research could describe an instance that occurred with her partner in which she asserted her point of view about how certain maternal and paternal roles should be managed, and in doing so, she formulates an argument:

Wife: “We should make an effort to have dinner at the table as a family.”

Husband: “Why?”

Wife: “I’ve read in my parenting magazine that children who eat regular meals with their parents are more secure, better-adjusted and are more likely to seek out our input.”

Husband: “I guess we can try and do that more often.”

In this case, the female partner made a claim and when prompted by her spouse to provide reasoning, offered support for her claim, which was accepted by her spouse.

In an exploration of how informal arguments are described and retold by

participants navigating the transition to motherhood, consideration of background or context of the argument situation may be informative. Lance Rips (1998) describes how participants choose their conversational moves on the basis of many background factors, including their knowledge of the argument's subject matter, their memory of previous conversations, and their judgment of whether a retort is likely to offend the other person. The new mothers in the study may have gathered knowledge about motherhood and other interconnected roles from various sources, including the direct and indirect input from spouses, parents, friends, and coworkers. Perspectives gained from these sources, coupled with previous conversations each woman has had with these individuals and her understanding of their positions and perceived responses creates a backdrop within which argument in conversation operates. In addition, Rips (1998) notes that people sometimes organize their arguments around a global attitude, a general point of view that does not appear in the dialogue as a specific claim. Global attitudes about motherhood and how motherhood should be managed among wife, worker, and daughter roles may also influence how a mother and her significant others frame and organize their arguments.

Spouses often have difficulty negotiating the development and enactment of parental roles that are mutually acceptable, particularly because those responsibilities also may affect their enactment of spousal roles (Roloff & Johnson, 2002). In addition, marital arguing seems to increase with the introduction of children (Roloff & Johnson, 2002). Cowan & Cowan (1992) report that couples raising babies and young children can have frequent disagreement over seemingly mundane issues because so many decisions previously made by one spouse alone suddenly require complex discussion. For example,

one partner's desire to leave the house might result in extensive negotiation. Cowan & Cowan (1990) found that couples who had recently transitioned to parenthood argued most frequently about "who does what."

One of the frequently reported explanations for the increase in marital arguing postpartum is centered on violated expectations and sex-role attitudes concerning the division of household labor and childcare responsibilities (Ruble, Hackel, Fleming & Stangor, 1988; MacDermid, Huston & McHale, 1990; Cowan & Cowan, 1990; Roloff & Johnson, 2002). Several factors seem to contribute to disagreement and serial arguing. One contributing factor is that pregnant women who report expecting a relatively equal distribution of household and childcare responsibilities postpartum than what actually transpires express feelings of irritation and negativity towards their spouses, as well as a decrease in marital satisfaction (Ruble, Hackel, Fleming & Stangor, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 1990; Cowan & Cowan, 1997). In addition, men who reported traditional sex-role attitudes but who were involved in child-care and household tasks more equally than expected reported greater marital negativity (MacDermid, Huston & McHale, 1990). To that end, wives who endorse traditional gender roles but whose postpartum division of labor was more equally shared with their husbands' reported high levels of marital arguing (MacDermid, Huston & McHale, 1990). Thus, some of the conversational arguments reported by the participants could incorporate elements that denote disagreement and struggle between role expectations and role realities.

My goal is to describe examples these women reported of conversational argument to reveal argument themes within the context of the dialectical experience

navigating the transition to motherhood among the adjacent roles of wife, worker, and daughter. The arguments may have transpired among several pairs or triads: participant and her spouse, participant and her mother and/or father, participant and work colleague(s), or some combination. The participants' own understandings and interpretations of their arguments will contribute to the analysis, including their reasoning as to why some argument positions are worth engaging and why some are not. Participants will be describing arguments that have occurred in their relationships from their individual perspectives, which will be different than getting feedback on the exchange from both parties or by observing the interaction firsthand. The women's individual perspectives will show how the participants each have experienced, engaged, and responded to argument situations from their own points of view. This perspective will be valuable in further uncovering the spectrum of dialectic experiences reported by women transitioning to motherhood.

2.4 Work and Motherhood

After reviewing the literature on relational dialectics and conversational argument, the scope of my study warrants a truncated review of the research addressing how women have managed work, motherhood and marriage, and how their decisions are informed by input from spouses, work place culture and broader society messages. Not all women who become mothers will engage this work/mother struggle, but in this section I will review research literature about those new mothers who do face work/family decisions. When a woman becomes a parent, she may assess how her motherhood role will function among her existing roles. One aspect of her role

management challenges might be to address the interplay between her role responsibilities as a new mother and her role responsibilities as a worker. The dynamic and complex nature of work and family life means she will have to make difficult decisions about how she will accommodate her work life for motherhood and accommodate her family life for paid work. New mothers struggle to come to terms with conflicting desires, seeking to achieve the ideal of the “good mother” and to maintain their real selves that are part of the real world of economic activity and adult interaction (Lupton and Schmied, 2002). They attempt to determine the extent they could or should be a worker and a caregiver, often revisiting and reassessing how they engage these roles at various points throughout their lives.

As a woman transitioning to motherhood navigates work and family life, many factors contribute to her approach and management of these roles. She may converse with her spouse, parents, friends, and work associates about how she will balance responsibilities of a worker and a mother and to what extent she will or should accommodate one role for the other. The direct and indirect feedback she receives as well as the perception of support or opposition from parties associated with these spheres may all contribute to the way she constructs and modifies her work and mother roles.

Literature on work-family integration also explores how adding the role of mother has affected how women collectively engage and manage all roles. Role theorists note that involvement in multiple domains is often more enriching than detrimental (Marks, 1977). However enriching, engaging both work and home roles has the potential to compete for a person’s time. The Greenhaus and Beutell study (1985) examined the

sources of conflict between work and family roles and determined that participation and pressure associated with one role may make complying with the expectations arising from another role difficult or physically impossible. Women transitioning to motherhood may assess the extent to which pressures associated with their work roles affect motherhood and constraints associated with motherhood affect their paid work. In addition, pressure may produce a preoccupation with one role even when one is physically trying to meet the demands in another role (Bartolome & Evans, 1979). Work stressors can produce strain symptoms such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, depression, apathy, and irritability (Brief, Schuler, & Van Sell, 1981; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). This strain produced when performing the work role can make complying with the demands in the family role difficult.

The Rothberg study (2001) explored the dynamics of engaging both work and family roles and defines role depletion as the idea that people have limited amounts of psychological and physiological resources to expend and they make trade-offs to accommodate these fixed resources. Women who recently have added motherhood to their other roles must determine their physical and psychological capacity to accommodate for competing role responsibilities and also determine whether the resulting trade-offs are depleting or enriching. A stressful appraisal of work-family fit occurs when individuals perceive that the demands of the environment exceed their resources, which can jeopardize their well-being (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Some achieve “enrichment” from managing multiple roles, meaning that the benefits outweigh the costs associated with them, leading to net gratification rather than strain (Rothberg,

2001). In Rothberg's study, enrichment existed for women from family to work, whereas enrichment existed for men from work to family, making a positive emotional response to family roles causally dominant for women and a positive emotional response to work roles causally dominant for men. The results of this research also reported that men seemed to segment their roles more than women, focusing on one role at a time, and women had stronger between-role linkages, engaging multiple roles at any given moment.

As a woman engages spouse, worker, daughter and mother roles, many factors may contribute to her feelings of success juggling the characteristics and responsibilities she associates with each domain. Empirical work determines that variables consistently connected to positive mental health for working mothers are education, positive job conditions, enhanced social contact or support, and equitable marital relationships (Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Pina & Bengston, 1993). Pistrang (1984) found that first-time mothers who had been highly involved in work prior to pregnancy but were not employed after delivery have the highest levels of depression and irritability and the lowest levels of self-esteem and marital intimacy. Women who have created worker/parent role arrangements consistent with their personal ideals tend to describe the greatest fulfillment engaging those roles. Lupton and Schmied (2002) analyzed first-time mothers' decisions regarding paid-employment reported that if a woman was not happy staying at home, then she would have difficulty succeeding as a good mother and in her unhappiness and frustration, she would struggle to demonstrate qualities of patience and tolerance with her children.

Other studies also have explored factors that contribute to women's reported success managing multiple roles during the transition to motherhood. Klein, Hyde, Essex, & Clark (2006) conducted a large-scale longitudinal study interviewing women during pregnancy, at 4 months' postpartum and at 12 months' postpartum and the researchers reported that the groups who experienced the most distress related to multiple role management were homemakers who preferred to be working or employed women who placed high importance on work and who took longer maternity leaves. When the women in the study felt rewards and benefits from their work and care-giving roles, engaging multiple roles had a positive impact on their well-being (Klein et al., 2006).

Researchers also have described a woman's reported success engaging wife, worker and mother roles as being closely linked to factors related to her partner's approach to managing his husband, worker and father roles. Fagan and Press (2008) found that mothers reported higher levels of balance when they also reported higher levels of fathers' job flexibility and lower levels of fathers' negative work-family spillover. A husband who had greater flexible time use at work was potentially more available to assist with other responsibilities, such as childcare and housework, resulting in his wife feeling more balanced in her roles. In addition, to the extent a husband experienced limited work-related negativity (such as stress and preoccupation) that spilled-over into family life, his partner also reported a greater sense of support juggling multiple roles. To the extent that fathers experienced work-related stress, mothers reported experiencing an increased demand on their time and energy (Fagan & Press, 2008).

In addition to a husband's flexible time and negative work-family spillover, shared responsibility of childcare seemed to contribute to a woman's perceived ability to balance motherhood along with worker and spouse roles. Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, and Ziemba (2003) studied couples who perceived themselves as successful in balancing work and family and found that while wives were reported to take relatively more responsibility for childcare, husbands remained actively involved in parenting and both husbands and wives indicated that commitment and active effort toward shared parenting was essential for their happiness and success. Fagan and Press (2008) also reported that fathers' greater level of emotional availability to children was linked as a source of support to mothers. Schwartz (1994) found that equal relationships enjoy high levels of sustained intimacy, marital satisfaction, and commitment, far surpassing those observed in unequal marriages. Shared responsibilities of life have been found by scholars to allow partners to have more in common with each other and thus enjoy deeper friendships (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Schwartz 1994; Steil, 1994). In Zimmerman et al. (2003), couples who moved toward equality tended to challenge traditional gender norms and husbands were constantly working towards partnership in parenting.

Just as the husband's physical and emotional support to his wife has been found to be the most consistent predictor of the wife's positive adaptation to the transition to parenthood (Feldman, Sussman, & Zigler, 2004), a lack of support can diminish the wife's sense of role balance. The Edwards study (2006) revealed that when women felt stress managing the dual responsibilities of work and family, those feelings were associated with a perceived lack of spousal support associated with an unfair division of

household and childcare responsibilities. Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger, & Mannon (2009) reported a direct association between men's abilities to care for sick children and women's positive spillover, which addresses the role women feel their husbands should play in childcare responsibilities. Having her partner help care for children and thus help meet family demands results in a decrease of a woman's role obligations and may allow a woman to feel more positive about the role her family plays in her work life.

Interestingly, fathers and mothers may perceive and evaluate paternal support differently. In a study conducted by Feldman, Sussman, & Zigler (2004) fathers rated the level of marital support they provided to their wives during pregnancy and since childbirth as significantly higher than the wives' perception of the support they received from their husbands.

Since women may potentially perceive and receive support differently than their husbands intended during their transitions to motherhood, engaging discussion about the process of undertaking and navigating multiples roles may be a helpful way to manage the transition. Spouses have a need to create shared meanings through communication about the variety of work and family roles in which they find themselves (Wood, 1986). "The options available to individuals for defining the parental role and redefining the work role are inextricably intertwined with their spouses' choices. . . . The absence of normative role definitions suggests a strong role for communication collaboration on the meanings for the arrangements that couples choose" (Golden, 2002, p.124). In Golden's study, each individual talked about their spouse's work/parenting arrangement in a way that produced two kinds of effects: mirror effects and interlocking effects. Mirror effects

were demonstrated when the interviewee pointed out ways in which some aspect of their spouse's arrangement regarding work and parenting, including role sharing, mirrored his or her own. Interlocking happened when interviewees construed their spouse's arrangements as complementing their own, and collectively the spouses would accomplish all that was necessary for the family in terms of wage earning and childcare, but in complementary rather than symmetrical fashion. Golden's findings pointed more closely to role sharing, regardless of whether both spouses paid work arrangements were equal: "Often they offered rather elaborate descriptions of their domestic arrangements, descriptions that emphasized fairness as a goal and stressed sharing (as opposed to specialization) as a preferred means of achieving fairness" (Golden, 2002, p. 132).

Many factors influence how a new mother may navigate her wife, parent, worker, and daughter roles. The interactions a woman has with her spouse, parents and workplace associates all contribute to the management of her transition to motherhood. In addition to reviewing how interpersonal interactions may impact the women's work role decisions, conducting a brief review of broader workplace policies and culture is beneficial toward understanding how these social structures may potentially impact these women's decisions to engage both work and motherhood and the extent they may be involved in both domains. Communicated social support (or lack of support) from the workplace and larger social system may inform their perceived abilities to successfully balance the responsibilities they associate with work and motherhood.

One of the perspectives that can impact a woman's work and motherhood choices is the explicit and implied messages the woman receives from her workplace. In recent

years the notions of “family-friendly” work environments and family-friendly policies have become increasingly popular, although the meaning behind these policies and philosophies varies greatly. Extensive research has been conducted about what constitutes a work place that is conducive to family life and how accommodations for working mothers have impacted the worker and the workplace.

A supportive workplace culture plays a substantial role in work-family relationships for dual-earner parents (Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger, & Mannon, 2009). If employees receive implicit permission to access work and family support without career penalties, they will feel more comfortable using them. And to cultivate a work environment that supports employee’s multiple roles, organizations need to question gendered assumptions underlying the structure of particular position on the job, as well as go beyond the literal interpretations of policies and laws designed to assist employees with family responsibilities (Swanberg, 2004).

Organizational policies and workplace culture have made strides towards a more balanced work and family life, however, future progress remains buttressed against past practices. During the twentieth century, the gendered notion of an “orderly career” marked by full time, uninterrupted employment became a cultural and institutional template for upward mobility and a better quality life (Wilensky, 1961). Moen and Roehling (2004) assert that age- and gender-related policies and practices have been built around organizational and social expectations of work hours within the day, week, year, and life course. Moen and Sweet (2004) argue that these policies and practices are socially constructed for a workforce in a lock-step path marked by full-time education,

then continuous full-time employment, followed up by an abrupt transition to continuous full-time retirement. This lock-step sequencing fails to respond effectively to the experiences and needs of a significant portion of the workforce.

Feldman, Sussman & Zigler (2004) assert that adequate conditions surrounding work should be extended to new mothers to facilitate a smoother transition to dual-earner parenthood and that family adjustments during this transition have important consequences to family intactness, child development, and overall societal health. Friedman & Galinsky (1992) contend that work-family issues should be viewed from a lifetime perspective and that presumably all employees will experience work-family interference in some capacity at some point in life. To assist with the often stressful transition to parenthood, Feldman et al. (2004) contend that society must provide more generous leave policies and generate public support for longer parental leaves and alternative work arrangements.

Of the family-friendly policies and practices available to working mothers and fathers, job flexibility is the most frequently requested benefit by employees and their top choice for improving role balance between work and family (Glass & Estes, 1997). Job flexibility, or flexible time use, is a more general resource than other benefits like the Family and Medical Leave Act or on-site childcare and can be embedded in a position and used on a day-to-day basis (Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger, & Mannon, 2009). Having flexibility in their time at work allowed working mothers to better balance their multiple role responsibilities. In addition, work factors related to women's time allocations influenced couples' joint experiences of family role quality (Pedersen et al, 2009).

Workplaces that were more rigid about a mother's work hours seemed to have negative impacts on the family role quality for both wives and their husbands. Some of the other policies that benefited working women transitioning to motherhood included family leave, telecommuting, a part-time work arrangement, the ability to breastfeed or express breast milk during work hours, the provision of onsite childcare, and the ability for workers to care for sick children on a short term basis (Pedersen et al, 2009; Swanberg, 2004).

The discourse surrounding the interplay of work and motherhood for women transitioning to motherhood has the potential to be varied and rather complex, taking into consideration responses and influences from spouses, parents, friends, work associates as well as the broad social system.

Conclusion

This review of the literature on dialectical flux and relational dialectics accompanied by the truncated summaries of literature about argument in conversation and about managing work and motherhood provides a perspective from which to view the conversations among women transitioning to motherhood. Dialectical theory drove the analysis of my work, informed by both argument theory and issues regarding the mother-worker dichotomy. Because current research would benefit from more directly addressing these individual communication experiences, this research question emerged: *How did participants in this study navigate the dialectical features of their transitions to motherhood while they also were enacting their multiple roles as wives, daughters, and workers?*

This fundamental question subsumes two subsets of interest. The first subset question addresses interaction among the women's roles. Stamp (1994) asserts that "while many changes occur during the transition to parenthood, perhaps the single biggest change is the actual addition of the parental role and subsequent impact of that addition on other roles" (p. 89). A woman transitioning to motherhood faces the challenges of integrating her emerging mother role with her other identities; in this case, I will focus on the integration of the identities as daughter, wife, and worker. Exploring how the new mother believes her communication functions during her role assimilation is fundamental to understanding how she manages this transition. The first subset question emerged: *How did the participants discursively engage their new role development as mothers as that development interacted with the constructs of their existing roles?*

The second subset area of interest involved the juxtaposition the women perceived between their own communication strategies during the transition and those offered or perceived to be held by significant others. These women's roles were constructed and shaped through the variety of interactions each woman had with significant others, such as their husbands, parents, friends and workplace associates. Their conversations and communication exchanges surrounding the transition to parenthood contributed to their processes of navigating and refining the construction, enactment and modification of their new motherhood identity in conjunction with her other roles. Therefore, the second supporting research question emerged: *How did the participants perceive their interactions with their husbands, parents, and work associates informed their decisions about the participants' adaptations to their multiple roles?*

These questions directed my investigation into women's transitions to motherhood. To investigate these questions, I used an interpretive methodology described in the next chapter, grounding my analysis of the women's discussions in dialectical theory, argument, and mother/worker issues.

3. Methodology

The fundamental research question and the two subset questions will be informed by the literature review and answered through the use of interpretive analysis.

Interpretive analysis is an appropriate method for studying relational dialectics since relating through dialogue is a complex process engaged by individuals to create meanings through their interactions. The complexities of dialectical contradictions would be difficult to capture through positivist means; instead, dialectics should be interpreted through insight and discovery (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Therefore, to achieve the goal of this study to collect reported communication experiences of married women transitioning to motherhood, I conducted a series of focus group discussions and discovered themes generated through the dialogue that captured the characteristics of the women's dialectical experiences.

3.1 Rationale

Data were gathered through focus groups; focus groups comprise a research technique where people with similar experiences or situations are gathered together to discuss a topic determined by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). Participants are grouped together because they have shared a particular experience or problem and are able relate to others who have experienced similar circumstances. In this case, the participants had the shared experience of being married, having worked outside the home, having recently added a baby to their lives, and having begun the transition to motherhood. In addition, these participants had the benefit of having engaged in previous collective discussion

during the Baby and Me hospital group sessions. Having participants who had participated in Baby and Me proved advantageous because these women had prior experience conversing in a group setting about motherhood and were able to facilitate other members' interactions.

Using focus group interviews for data collection for this study accommodates both the topic and the data gathered. Participants share a commonality which allows them to relate to one another and enjoy a level of comfort the researcher cannot provide by herself. When members understand and feel comfortable with one another, they may draw social strength from each other, fostering honesty, rather than socially desirable responses (Lederman, 1990). The women in this study had already established a culture of comfort toward self-disclosure at Baby and Me on topics connected to motherhood. The participants also were able to recall important conversations and events about their transitions to motherhood after hearing discussion from other women. In focus groups, the goal is to help participants stimulate discussion among themselves, suggesting dimensions and nuances of the original issue that might not have been thought of by any one individual (Rubin, 2005). As a result of using this methodology, I was able to gather interactive, collaborative data which could not have been accomplished through individual interviews.

Focus groups also give access to a wide range of topics that may not be otherwise observable. Because of the structure of a focus group and because of the participation of the researcher as facilitator, the focus group process can help ensure data collected will be closely related to the researcher's interest (Morgan, 1997). While the researcher's

presence and direction may have some influence on the responses, the interviewee individually and the interviewees as a group can still decide the structure of the process and their own levels of involvement during the participant discussion. Since my research is interpretive in nature and aimed at giving voice to these women's experiences, open-ended questions that facilitated the discussion rather than forced a direction were important for gathering these women's stories and reflections about how they perceived they have used communication during their transitions to their roles as mothers.

Focus group researchers have mixed opinions as to whether the data collected in groups is richer and deeper than the data collected in individual interviews. If the groups of participants are well-assembled, the rationale is that the group provides a synergy which results in more than the sum total of what the individuals alone could create (Lederman, 1990). One interviewee alone may have a brief response to a question, but when the same person is put in the company of others sharing their ideas on the same topic, the interviewee may find she has more details to contribute. When questions are asked in a group environment and nourished by skillful probing, the results are candid portraits of participants' perceptions (Kruegar, 1994). In contrast, the very nature of individual interviews does not provide any way for the person being interviewed to share ideas with a peer so the two of them can build on or argue about a topic being discussed (Greenbaum, 2000). As the women in my study collectively revealed and clarified their communication approach during their transition to the role of mother, the interactive discussion facilitated a richer, more multi-faceted than could be provided individually.

In addition, in an individual interview participants may feel pressure to come up

with an answer to a question posed by the researcher even if the interviewee may not have a point of view on the particular topic (Greenbaum, 2000). In a focus group methodology, interviewees are less likely to force a response simply because the moderator raised a question. Some participants may be able to answer or respond to a particular point, while others may not. To minimize the propensity for an individual participant to conform responses to the other participants' responses, I clarified to the women before the session began that I was interested in hearing about their communication as they managed the transition into motherhood and that each person experienced that transition differently. In addition, I guided participants away from conformity for its own sake during the sessions. I emphasized not only that some of their communication approaches might be similar and some might be different, but that the intent of the study was to learn about all the various perspectives.

Some parameters were set to ensure sufficient similarity among group members so they may relate to each others' testimonies and even provide support or strengthen each others' positions. Setting these parameters responds to Morgan (1997), who advocates participant selection based on homogeneity to allow for more free-flowing conversations among participants within each group; further, Morgan suggests homogeneity facilitates analyses that examine various perspectives among groups (Morgan, 1997). Toward those goals, the participant population was restricted to married women who have worked for pay outside the home and who have children between 0-2 years old. The paid work restriction was necessary so the participants could engage discussion about their work role adjustments in relation to their new roles as mothers.

The ages of the mothers' children had been restricted to 0-2 to feature communication practices these women reported using to respond to the dialectical forces in the transition of motherhood during or soon after the onset of the transition has occurred. After three or more years, participants will likely have greater difficulty recalling specific communication interactions that occurred earlier during the transition. The restriction to include only married, heterosexual women has been established to focus specifically on the nature of heterosexual, spousal communication and how wives engage these roles with their husbands. The participant population was not restricted to any ethnic group or specific age range. The participants were white, middle class women between 25 to 40 years old.

The size and number of groups was another important consideration. Researchers vary in recommendations for the ideal size of each focus group. Morgan (1997) views 6 to 10 participants as being the ideal range to allow the facilitator to sustain and control a discussion. Greenbaum (2000) reports seven to ten for regular focus groups and four to six for mini-groups which afford more opportunity to share ideas. Kruegar (1994) advocates for between 6 and 10 group members but sees benefits between anywhere from four to twelve participants. I organized participants into groups of four to six people, which will be small enough to facilitate rich reflection from each new mother, yet large enough to engage collaborative, multi-layered conversation.

3.2 Process

The participants were asked to share their experiences transitioning to motherhood, explaining how they were communicating and managing their new roles as

mothers while also engaging roles as wives, daughters, and workers. The participant population consisted of two focus groups; each group met twice. Twelve women were invited, six per focus group. The focus group would not have taken place if only one to three women attended because I was interested in the collective conversation among a group of new mothers. Conducting a conversation among fewer than four participants might have altered the dynamic and might not have provided adequate discussion variation. The participants' time commitments lasted for two focus group sessions which were between one and a half to two hours per session.

To recruit participants, I visited a group called Baby and Me at Meridian Park Hospital in Tualatin Oregon, a group that has three sessions (each once a week) and is designed to help new moms by engaging collective discussion about questions and issues surrounding their new babies. The new mothers bring their babies to the session; the babies either play on the floor or are held by their mothers, depending on the developmental stage of the child. Baby and Me typically consists of up to twenty-five mothers per session who gather in a large circle for group discussion. Conversational topics are raised by the mothers during each Baby and Me session and subsequently discussed in an informal open forum where each woman can interject and contribute to the discussion. Topics of these conversations Baby and Me centered on care for the baby.

The revolving participation in Baby and Me means that some women attend once or twice and do not return, some attend sporadically over a series of months, while others attend consistently for as long as the group meets their needs. Over the course of time, some Baby and Me attendees arranged play dates with each other and spent more time

interacting privately. I had formerly been an attendee of the Baby and Me sessions; however, I stopped attending about one year prior to recruiting volunteers for my study. None of the women currently attending Baby and Me were people with whom I was having private interactions. Of the few current attendees who had attended one or more Baby and Me sessions while I had attended, none of them were women I had encountered for over a year. Because of that lack of interaction, I elected to accept into the focus group any current Baby and Me attendee in my study. Of the twelve women who were recruited for my study, only two were later identified as having attended at least one meeting with me more than a year before. As planned, these two women were included in the study because of the extended time frame since we had briefly met and because of our mutually low level of acquaintance. Because three sessions of Baby and Me occur, during the present schedule at Meridian Park Hospital not all participants in my study knew each other, but in both focus groups were women who had participated together in Baby and Me on a regular basis.

To recruit women to participate in my focus groups, I contacted the facilitator of Baby and Me, who was a nurse and lactation specialist, and she granted me permission to explain my research study during several Baby and Me sessions. Although I did not need to recruit participants from additional hospitals, had further recruiting been necessary, I had planned to recruit from the following hospitals in ascending order: Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland Oregon and St. Vincent Hospital in Beaverton Oregon.

I visited two Baby and Me sessions; during each session the facilitator introduced me at the outset of the gathering and indicated I was conducting a research study and that

I was interested in recruiting volunteers to participate. I described my study (see Appendix A) which included introducing myself, explaining the nature of my research to each group and outlining the qualifications for participation in the study: each participant had to be married, had to have at least one living parent, had to work outside the home at present or had to have worked outside the home prior to motherhood, and had to have become a mother within the last two years. I also distributed a flyer which also explained the details of the study (see Appendix B). The flyer included examples of the questions the participants would be asked, the approximate time commitment, and the caveat that children could not attend the focus groups with the participants. I circulated a sign-up sheet for those who were interested, requesting their names, email addresses, phone numbers, and dates/times they would be available to participate. In both groups women who were interested in participating began discussing possible meeting times collectively without prompting from me. Groups reached consensus on several times days/times that worked best for their schedules and childcare availability.

After attending the Baby and Me sessions, I set times for the first focus groups and contacted via email potential participants who were available at those times (Appendix C). In those emails, I reiterated the details of my study and provided the date and time for the first meeting. I also indicated that we would coordinate the date and time for the second meeting during our first focus group. I asked recipients to spend time thinking about the communication they use to manage being mothers along with being wives, daughters, and workers. I asked them to recall stories, conversations and interactions that happened while navigating the transition to motherhood. I emphasized

that the study was focused on communication and encouraged them to reread the sample questions in the flyer I had distributed. I also contacted the volunteers via email whose schedules did not coordinate with the times selected, thanking them for their interest (Appendix D).

I initially arranged twelve participants for the study; six in each focus group. The final number of participants was nine women; four in one group and five in the other. Of the three who could not attend, two of the women cancelled several hours before the first meeting due to problems with childcare arrangements. One of these women was willing to attend the focus group with her baby; however, to limit distractions and engage more focused conversations, I could not accommodate her request to bring her baby. The third woman who could not attend had a sudden home repair issue (a water leak) that required immediate attention. The remaining nine participants attended both the focus groups; no attrition occurred between the first and second focus group meeting.

I had wanted to conduct all focus group sessions in a welcoming living room, but legalities precluded me from using a non-public space. As a result, the focus groups took place in a comfortable, private room at the Tigard Public Library where refreshments were provided. Morgan (1997) asserts that conference rooms in a public facility such as a community center, library, or school are often well-suited for focus group discussion.

When the participants arrived to the first focus group session, they read and signed the Informed Consent form (Appendix E). I then provided a scripted introduction to the focus group, in which I spoke extemporaneously from notes (Appendix F), reiterating the purpose of my research, the types of questions the women would be asked,

and process of focus group interaction. I explained to the women that the focus groups were meant to be a collective conversation, guided by me, and that they were encouraged to interject comments and responses as they would in conversations with friends.

I asked five overarching questions during the first focus group sessions (Appendix G). On my interview protocol were a series of prompting questions to be used to promote expansion of an idea or extension of a comment or story. I posed the first overarching question to the participants and as the conversation progressed and reached a logical transition point, I led into the second question, and so on. All five questions were addressed in the first session. At the conclusion of the first focus group, I asked the women to continue pondering the questions and discussion topics and to consider additional examples and stories to contribute during the second focus group.

The time between the two focus group sessions was one week, although the timeline had been flexible and was dependent on participants' availability for the follow-up. During the time between sessions, I listened to the audio tapes, watched the video tapes and began transcribing the data. I identified opportunities to ask participants for additional information and context to enhance and develop the discussions from the initial meeting. At the outset of the second meeting, the participants were asked if they had additional examples and perspectives to contribute. In both groups the participants immediately initiated further discussion on topics and viewpoints they had thought about since the time after the first focus group meetings. I guided the discussion by asking follow-up questions and requesting additional information and clarification. No new interview questions were posed during the second focus groups.

After the second focus groups, I transcribed those data as well, using both the audio and video tapes. Again, I reviewed the transcripts and the video tapes repeatedly until saturation was reached. During the transcription and the analysis, the women's names were used because the participants called each other by name during the focus groups.

Once the data were recorded and the results compiled, however, the identity of each study participant was made confidential. To help protect confidentiality, a pseudonym or alias was used for each participant on all documents used throughout the research project, with the exception of the Informed Consent document. Groups were identified by the letters A and B.

The first and second sessions were noted by A (or B) subscript 1 and A (or B) subscript 2, respectively. Sessions were audio and video taped to accurately differentiate voices, to increase possibilities for interpreting participants' meanings, and to record for observing nonverbal messages and responses accompanying the verbal dialogue. Transcriptions of the focus group sessions were saved on password-protected computer files. The audio and video tapes have been kept in a locked cabinet in a secured location. In the event of any report or publication from this study, the identity of the participants will not be disclosed.

3.3 Analysis

I transcribed and analyzed the focus group data to identify how the dialectical themes in the participants' reported communication interactions addressed the transition to motherhood in conjunction with their wife, daughter and work roles. The participants'

responses were organized into themes, identifying recurring topics of interaction the women raised during the sessions that characterized their communication experiences during the transition to motherhood. I worked toward saturation in my review and analysis of the data; I listened repeatedly to each tape, viewed and reviewed the videotapes, and reread the transcripts, noting responses and comments made by the women. I continued this process until no new data or themes emerged. This intensive process led to the refinement and modification of each theme until the conversations and perceptions of every participant were adequately and fully captured. Themes were identified based on their frequency, repetition, and poignancy.

Each theme emerged from the data as areas of interaction that exemplified and clarified the participants' discourse transitioning to motherhood. I reported examples and stories that typified both their individual and collective experiences. Consequently, some responses represented the voices of all nine participants, while in other cases, data selection was the result of a few poignant examples from two or three participants. Both were included to demonstrate how the transition to motherhood through communication brought forth unique and overlapping perspectives.

Once the data had been topically themed, I identified how dialectic contradictions emerged in the data, providing instances of the internal and external manifestations of Integration-Separation, Expression-Privacy, and Stability-Change as they were demonstrated within each theme. Dialectics were assigned to themes based on the prominence of the dialectic in the example. "Because relational dialectics is predicated on the assumption that relating is a complex and indeterminate process of meaning

making . . . the positivist goals of prediction and control are not the appropriate benchmarks to evaluate this theory . . . instead, dialectical theory should be assessed against the benchmarks of insight and heurism (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006, p130). As a result, the participant-reported data were organized through the dialectics to reveal rich insight into how these women constituted their communicative experience. The dialectics emerged from the women's naturally occurring conversations. The dialectical tensions were found to be operating in various ways across the themes. In some themes, all three competing contradictions were visible in the data, while other themes emphasized one or two contradictions. Conversations were additionally identified by the presence and uses of arguments made by the participants through dialogue when constructing their explanations and providing reasons to justify their interpretation of how motherhood should be enacted and managed.

After listening to the women's reported conversations and based on the frequency of appearance, the depth of the conversation engaged, and the number of participants who joined the conversation, I identified their responses into topic areas. The topic areas then converged into four overarching themes. The excerpts provided for the results and discussion sections do not represent the entirety of the data, but are intended to exemplify and clarify the fullness of the communication experience described by these women as they managed the transition to motherhood while adapting their existing roles as wives, daughters and workers.

3.4 Caveats

The methodological approach of using focus groups resulted in dynamic, multi-

faceted conversations among the participants and was a successful method to gather the data; however, I will discuss a few variations on the methodology may have also proved beneficial. One component that could have affected participants' comfort during the sessions was the location for the focus groups. The location change from a private home to a public meeting space had brought concern as to whether participants would be as relaxed and likely to candidly respond to the questions; however, participants seemed comfortable and readily spoke about the topics presented, so the location did not preclude group interaction or disclosure.

In addition, while the ages of the participants were somewhat diverse, their ethnic and social background as white, middle class women was fairly homogeneous. The geographic location of the hospital undoubtedly affected the participant population, many of whom lived in proximity to the hospital or were able to attend Baby and Me sessions. Gathering participants from a different hospital may have produced greater variation in ethnic representation, which may have also impacted the responses reported by the women in the focus groups.

I had also considered the possibility of beginning with focus groups and then conducting the second meeting through individual interviews. While an individual interview after the first focus group session would have allowed each woman to expound upon her own stories in greater detail, it would have meant losing the interaction captured among the collective discourse which proved to be an essential component of the study. The participants built rapport during the first sessions and that rapport contributed to the openness in their responses during both the first and second meetings.

Another component I considered was giving participants several written, open-ended questions at the outset of each session, allotting them ten minutes to ponder the topic more pointedly before answering in front of the group. Although I developed written questions after the first round of focus groups, these questions could not be used without formal resubmission and approval through the IRB, and delaying the follow-up focus group one month for this purpose did not seem advantageous. However, because the participants engaged rich, insightful discussions directly related to the research questions, the consideration to incorporate preliminary written questions proved inconsequential.

One question that may have been beneficial to explore at the outset of the second meeting was whether the first focus group meetings may have impacted participants' subsequent interactions. Although the participants were reporting examples that occurred throughout their transition to parenthood, their reported communication instances that occurred between the meetings may have been influenced by the topics raised during the first meeting. Similarly asking the women to email me one month later to talk about how the session discussions may have come up within their relationships or within the women's thoughts about events as they occurred may have been helpful toward providing additional insight into the participants' experiences.

Incorporating a follow-up conversation with each participant also may have allowed the women to confirm or adjust the meanings I attributed to them through my interpretation of their discussion. What I uncovered were unique moments that these women had reported; however, the sharing of these unique moments also helped create a

construction of reality. As a result, conducting individual follow-up conversations with each participant may indicate the extent (if any) that sharing and exploring their communication experiences in the focus groups impacted their subsequent relational interactions. Future research could investigate the women's perceptions of how their collective sharing influences their later interactions.

A final variation to the methodology could have been to conduct the first focus groups, and then wait three weeks until the second round of focus groups, using the time in between for participants to journal about their experiences transitioning to motherhood, while allowing me more time to assess the data, read the transcriptions, and watch the videotapes to find the exigencies before conducting the second group interviews. In the end, conducting the focus groups one week apart was still an effective approach because the conversations remained fresh on the participants' minds and the women were anxious to continue the discussions that occurred the previous week. Had I extended the time in between sessions, the discussions could have potentially lost momentum.

4. Results

Women who participated in these focus groups provided insights about their uses of communication as they navigated the dialectical transition to their roles as mothers. The women talked about their competing roles as wives, daughters, and workers as they described their communication choices. Results from conversations in these focus groups were grouped into topics which I identified by sub-themes, and these sub-themes converged into the following four overarching themes: 1) The women's interpretation of "help" messages, 2) the perceived characteristics of motherhood, 3) adaptations to conversations, and 4) the discursive interplay of work and mother roles.

In the following examples, each of the nine participants had a unique arrangement among their parent, spouse, worker roles: Candice (husband, Marshall and child, Nick) and Kate (husband, Owen and child, Evan) worked full time as teachers, Miranda (husband, Trent and child, Tommy) worked 30 hours a week as a pharmacist, Anne (husband, Mark and child, Tyler) worked half to three quarter time as an acupuncturist, Brenda (husband, Brock and child, Emma) was home during the day and delivered legal papers in the evenings, as well as operated a small sewing business online, Danielle (husband, Derek and children, Jeffery and Greer) was home during the week and worked as a restaurant server on Saturdays, Karina (husband, Brad and child, Monica) and Madison (husband, Jon and child, Carson) were stay-at-home moms, Debbie (husband,

Peter and child, Isabelle) was on maternity leave and doing two-day-a-week in-home therapy for autistic children, determining whether to return to work as a special education teacher at the close of her leave, or to take one year off.

4.1 The Women's Interpretations of "Help" Messages

The first theme centered on the women's interpretation of "help" messages which demonstrated the ways in which the women were offered help and their responses and interpretations to that help. While the participants noted that the responsibilities of motherhood often were overwhelming and necessitated help, their willingness to say "yes" to help was juxtaposed against the implication they associated with accepting help. The findings also pointed to the importance the women placed on the manner with which their spouse or parent presented the notion of needing help.

4.1.1 Offering help. The first sub-theme within the women's interpretations of help messages theme focused on the participants' discussions of the significance of asking for and/or being offered help with childcare and household duties during the transition to motherhood. Many of the women reported that they often wanted help or would have appreciated help with various childcare and house-related tasks, but they struggled to accept help during interactions with their spouses or parents.

Debbie: Yeah, I think I have a hard time letting go of managing everything because Peter will ask, "Do you need help?" And I'm like, "Oh no! I got it." And I've got like baby in one arm and I'm trying to do something with the other hand, like unfold a blanket or do something. (He'll say,) "Are you sure you don't need any help?" and I'll say, "I'm fine. It's fine. I'm fine." So yeah, so he's definitely like, "Tell me what you need." And I'm like, "Okay." But then I don't, and then I get mad at him. (A2)

Debbie acknowledged Peter's offers to help and also explained that she did not tell Peter when she needed help and then became angry with him. Many of the participants felt communicating the need or desire for help had ramifications for their abilities to manage motherhood. They felt that asking for help or being asked if help was needed implied they were not capable of handling their motherhood roles on their own, that they needed someone else to take care of a task they connected to motherhood. Debbie offered a reason for saying no when her husband asked whether she needed help:

Debbie: I've been trying to think, "Why do I say that?" Because I could just say, "Yeah, take the baby or hold this for me or something." . . . I think most of the time I'm home with her and I'm doing this by myself anyway, so. . . .What's the difference? Just because it's Saturday I can't fold this blanket with a baby in my arm because he's there? Of course I can do that. I think that must be part of it. And then I think another part is just like well, "I can do everything, I'm super. Super-duper mom. And no I don't need any help!" (A2)

Debbie talked about being with her baby during week days with limited access to her husband's help, which made her less inclined to communicate to him a message that asks for or accepts help. She also verbalized her ability to manage all her tasks, referring to herself as "Super Mom," and that as a super mom, she did not need help; she could capably manage her household and childcare tasks. Some of the women in the study reported feelings of frustration surrounding the question: "Do you need help?" in that answering "yes" implied an insufficient ability to complete the task or manage the responsibility associated with that role.

Brenda: I think it's a control thing. I like to have control, which ahhh makes me crazy sometimes, . . .even my mom will say, "Oh, can I help you with that?" and I'll say, "NO!" And I almost get kind of like, "Don't ask me that. I can do this. I can do everything." . . . Even though really I'm thinking, "I need some help! Take her!" I think it's definitely control for me at least. (A1)

For Brenda, saying “no” to help being offered meant she was retaining control of her tasks and responsibilities she associated with motherhood. She explained she would tell her mom, “No, I don’t need help” even when she wanted help to maintain a degree of autonomy and control over her role as a mother. In this example, Brenda chose articulating control instead of accepting the help her mom offered.

Anne further clarified the notion of developing a sense of control and capability by explaining her reasoning behind saying “no” when asked if she needed help with the baby. For Anne the phrasing of the question made a difference in her response and her perception of its meaning:

Anne: If we’re so capable as women, and then having somebody ask us if we need help. “No, we don’t need help. Would we like help? Would we like you to just take the baby while we’re doing something? . . . That would be great.” But it’s the “Do you need help?” . . . because we’re so capable. And you get kinda resentful. It’s like no, I’m doing this. (A2)

Other focus group members agreed with Anne’s comments by either nodding or verbally agreeing. When a husband asked “Do you need help?” most of the women did not think their husbands were necessarily meaning to imply a lack of capability towards their roles as mothers, but that their word choice gave the women the perception they were not adequately managing their roles as mothers. Several women reported the best way to be helped was for their husbands or mothers to come along side them, see what needed to be done, and do it, thus communicating supporting to the participants without implying she “needed” help. The nonverbal approach of the husband also made a difference to the woman’s response for his effort to offer help. If he came in and tried to take over, saying things like “I’ll do it,” “I’ll take it from here” or if he made a sweeping

gesture for the wife to step aside, she felt frustrated and the attempt to help carried an implication of “I can do this better than you.” For the women to receive the gesture as helpful, a posture of support without overtaking the situation was necessary.

4.1.2 What can I do to help? The second sub-theme within the interpretation of help messages theme centered on the women’s interpretations and responses to the questions: “What can I do to help?” The women in the focus groups varied in their response to this question. Some accepted it as a way to communicate to their husbands precisely what needed to get done regarding baby or home care. Some women described this question as unfair or irritating because it meant being interrupted from her own tasks and responsibilities to develop a description and explanation for her spouse.

Karina: I actually told Brad once, “Don’t ask me what you can do. Find something. . . .” because he was doing that same thing, “What can I do? What can I do to help you?” I was doing the dishes one night and he asked that and I said, “Don’t ask me that again! There’s so much to do like go find what needs to be done.... You know there’s laundry, you know there’s vacuuming, you know there’s dishes to clean!”
(A2)

Many of the women in the focus groups shared that their husbands would express a desire to help with the baby or with a household task in a manner similar to Karina’s example. The issue that proved troublesome for the women was that the men did not know what needed to be done and that having to create a to-do list for their partners increased the workload for the mothers rather than diminished it:

Madison: I’ll tell him like five things, “You go get Carson changed, and I’ll go do this” and he’ll be like, “Where do I even start?” And we laugh about it, but he gets so overwhelmed by it, and he’ll say, “Just tell me the one thing you need me to do and I’ll go do it.” But I have to remember that I need to be considerate of where he’s coming from. He’s still transitioning (from work), and Carson is screaming. So just give him one task and move on.

Kate: But do you ever get irritated that you have to give him a task?

Madison: Yes!

Kate: Owen is the same way. If I gave him a list, he would quietly go through his list and do everything efficiently, but I want to say to him, "Who makes my list?" I'm just thinking of these things. I walk by the trash, and think, "Oh, the trash needs to be taken out." Nobody tells me to do that. (B1)

Some of the participants reported frustration that they balanced multiple roles and the many tasks associated with these roles while their husbands were less aware of the nuances involved in various childcare or household tasks and could not see what needed to be done next to bring a task to completion. Danielle provided an example where making a list for her husband created an issue for her:

Danielle: It's an additional thing that you have to add to your list, is like make a list for him. Like last week, he wanted to go on a picnic as a family and the last thing I wanted to do was go on a picnic with other people. Sunday is the only day of like, calm. I just want that day to be mellow cuz like, I'm just done for the week. So, but we went and I'm like, "Okay, we're gonna have to get everything ready the night before and we're gonna have to pack up the whole car and we're responsible for the barbeque stuff. Can you just get the barbeque stuff? Not even the food part, just like the charcoal." And he's like, "Well, just make me a list and I'll do it." And I'm like, "I can't make a list because I'm busy with the kids and doing my stuff that I have to get done." And we totally got in a fight about it. . . . (B1)

Danielle agreed to go along with her husband's wishes to have a family picnic with friends, but felt frustrated that she was responsible for putting together what was needed, unless she made a list for her husband of items he could gather to help. The notion of making that list felt like an added responsibility for Danielle.

Debbie and Karina shared similar feelings about making a list for their husbands about what needed to get accomplished:

Debbie: ...But I think that I was probably more receptive to taking help before (the baby), or at least delegating what needed to be done, because I think that part of it, is that I really can't think of all the things that need to be done that I need help with. So I say no, because I just can't think of it.

Karina: Yeah, I mean, I don't have a minute to sit down and write a list of what

needs to be done from the highest to the lowest priority.

Brenda: Yeah, and by that time you could have done it yourself! (A1)

Debbie reported that thinking of all the tasks associated with baby care was difficult and both Karina and Debbie reported creating lists for their spouses was not the most efficient use of their time.

Karina described a misunderstanding with her husband in which she expected him to take primary responsibility with their daughter so she could go exercise, but when they got home, her husband began tending to tasks unrelated to watching the baby.

Karina: I was trying to hurry, but I didn't want to get myself all stressed out over going to the gym so I was trying to talk myself down a bit, saying, "It's okay, he's gotta get himself ready," but at the same time I was a little frustrated that he wasn't watching her and so that was definitely coming through in my voice. I was a little short and quick, "Can you please help me?! I have limited time, can you please watch her?" He could tell that I was a little short and he said, "Okay what do you need me to do?" and I say, "Do this and this and this." (A2)

Karina tried to juggle her motherhood role responsibilities while getting herself ready until she became frustrated that her husband did not jump in to help, and she verbalized her need for help.

Karina: And in the meantime she's freaking out because she's tired and hasn't had a good nap and I'm trying to tend to her and I'm trying to give her to him but she's screaming so I'm like, "Hang on, let me calm her down first," so I put her in the car, give her binky and blankie so she's taken care of. And then I looked back at Brad and said, "Let's talk." He said, "I didn't know that you needed me downstairs," and I said, "She's both of our responsibilities and I know it's hard because I have her 90% of the time while you're at work, but we have to switch back into that dual responsibility when we're together." And he said "Yeah, I should have given her lunch and watched her while you got ready." (A2)

She told Brad what he could do to help, but then continued to tend to their daughter in an attempt to calm her down, rather than have Brad perform that task. She initiated talking about the instance once their daughter was calm. Karina articulated that

while she was primarily responsible for their daughter when her husband worked, she wanted them to take “dual responsibility” for their parental roles when they were together as a family. Karina’s example relayed a common theme reported among the women in which the husbands nonverbally communicated an assumption that their wives were handling were motherhood responsibilities and that the husbands did not notice that help would have been appreciated.

4.2 The Perceived Characteristics of Motherhood

The second theme revealed the participants’ interactions during the transition to motherhood that were used to explain the women’s perceived characteristics of motherhood. The topics the women described that confounded their dialogue as they constructed parameters around their roles as mothers emerged as three key sub-themes. The first sub-theme was centered on the women’s use of communicative strategies to establish role boundaries of motherhood. The second sub-theme addressed the expectations the participants put on themselves as mothers. The third sub-theme culminated around the notion that participants engaged motherhood as the primary role and their husbands engaged fatherhood in a manner that directly impacted their wives.

4.2.1 Establishing boundaries in the role of mother. The first sub-theme of the perceived characteristics of motherhood was a communication pattern reported by the mothers that related to the women’s attempt to establish boundaries in their roles as mothers when engaging their relationships with their own mothers or even siblings. Several of the women reported the importance of articulating their places as their mothers in regard to decision-making and care-giving responsibilities surrounding their child.

Kate: But then all the sudden there is Evan, and my mom is taking over and I think she's just doing it because she's grandma and she loves him, but I wasn't okay with it. I was like, "No, no, no, I'm mommy!" and she would grab him and say, "I'll change him" and I'd say "no, no, no." . . . in the beginning it was really hard because I was super emotional, coming down from pregnancy hormones and everything, and there was this "No, this is my baby, my roles, my decisions" so that's hard. (B1)

Kate described her interactions with her mother as important to her own development of her role as a mother. She felt a desire to establish boundaries with her own mother that outlined how she viewed her responsibilities regarding the addition of her new role as mother, which including communicating about what was her job and not someone else's.

Karina described similar interactions, working to establish her mother role boundaries with her own mom:

Karina: It's definitely when we're already together, um, if she's come over to babysit or to say hi, and it's come up. It's something that's come up a lot between us. So Monica's gone to bed and then we'll sit down and talk about it. I would say that when Monica was really young is where I had to draw more boundaries and she (my mom) definitely was trying to step in more, or step on my toes and I had to say, "This is my job and I need to make my own decisions." So I had to say to her, "Okay, this isn't okay. This isn't working for me." So that was definitely an issue in the beginning, but I feel like as time's gone on, like she's kind of realized, "Okay, I can't do this because Karina's gonna get mad." . . . Yeah, we did have one time where I tried to communicate to her things about her involvement with Monica, and she's gotten really upset and just left. But, I mean, my mom and I have . . . our communication is not good. We have a lot of issues, we have a lot of issues there. (A2)

Karina used communication to establish a boundary between her and her mother regarding the respective role responsibilities with Monica. Karina felt her mother recognized that overstepping those boundaries would cause Karina frustration, but her mother did not necessarily agree with the boundaries Karina established, which led to her mother upset feelings as well.

Brenda also described conversations with her mom on the topic of establishing role boundaries:

Brenda: . . . I remember her (my mother) saying, “Oh, let me do this. Let me do that.” And I wanted to do things myself, I always have. And I would say, “Let me be the mom.” And she would say, “Let me be the grandma.” And then I would really have to draw a boundary and say, “I am going to do this.” And push her back. Which I felt horrible guilty about, but I didn’t know what else to do. (A1)

Brenda reported drawing a boundary by indicating that as the mom, she wanted to handle certain tasks and responsibilities surrounding the baby herself and resisted when her mother would step in.

The women discussed communication boundary-setting that occurred between themselves and their mothers, but could also have happened with other family members.

Candice, for example, described her experience articulating her mother role boundaries to her sister:

Candice: but like with my sister; she would be the person that in the middle of the night, when she was visiting, and Nick would be crying and so I’d go in there, she’d be in there already picking him up and I’d be like, “He’s 6 weeks old and I’d like to be the one to do it.” And when you’re . . . I’m not a quiet person and when something’s bothering me I’m very vocal about it. Even at 2 in the morning I’m very vocal about it.

Sarah: What would you say?

Candice: Ya know, “I mean frankly Karen, he’s my son, I’ve got this. I know what he needs.” And she’s very sensitive and she took it that I didn’t want her help, that I didn’t want her there. And I was like, “it’s not about you . . . really. It’s about me and this relationship that I’m forming with my son” and it’s very hard to ya know, maneuver that within my family, so sometimes the distance is a good thing. But, it would get tense. (B1)

Candice said that she felt that being the one to get up with the baby during the night was part of her role as a mother and she established this boundary through the communication she engaged with her sister. Candice did not necessarily see her sister as

incapable of helping with her son, but rather she saw night time care as being a responsibility belonging to her as the mother, and getting up with her son during the night helped to establish and define that role, between her and her son, as well as establish and define her role among family members.

Debbie and Karina also reported verbal exchanges with their mothers that were spurred by their desires to establish boundaries on the topic of decision making for their children.

Debbie: I think the biggest thing, cuz we grew up in Florida and she (my mom) came from Florida, and the end of November (in Oregon) for a Floridian is very cold; for someone who has lived in Oregon for 5 years, not so much. And so I think our biggest fights were the temperature inside the house and how I was dressing my child.

Group: Oh, Oh yes!

Karina: Oh, I've had that conversation (pause) many times!

Sarah (to Karina and Debbie): Your mom doesn't think you're dressing her warm enough?

Karina: Yep, yep

Debbie: Nodding...She was following me around, and I was trying to dress her and she's like, "You need to put more clothes on her, you need to do this!" And at one point I just said, "Leave me alone!" And we didn't talk about it for about 3 days, and finally when we were going to get pizza, she said, "I'm really sorry that this happened." And I said, "I am too, but it's over and done with and it's fine. I'm fine." (A1)

Debbie's conversation with her mother about how to dress her child touched a nerve with many of the participants, who agreed that their mothers also expressed concern over the child being underdressed. Many of the participants took offense to the comment, interpreting their mother's advice as overstepping a boundary and as demonstrating a mistrust of the mothers' abilities to manage a small task, like keep their child properly dressed.

4.2.2 Communicating the management of motherhood expectations. The second sub-theme in the perceived characteristics of motherhood theme was that the women reported placing certain expectations on themselves as mothers during the transition to motherhood and if they fell short of their own expectations, then the acknowledgement of failure would often be communicated in the form of apology, guilt, or declarations of stress. The guilt the participants experienced as mothers was later compared to a perceived lack of guilt from the fathers.

Debbie reported apologizing when she felt she had not adequately managed her home and baby responsibilities:

Debbie: I find myself apologizing a lot for not having the house clean because I'm home all day. My husband, he's understanding that I'm home all day spending time with the child. And some days I'm happy because I can get dinner made, but other days there's just different outfits scattered all over the house because oh, she spit up on this one or she blew out her diaper here. And it's just been a horrible day. And I'll be really apologetic that I didn't have dinner ready and the house is a mess. And he doesn't like it that the first thing out of my mouth is an apology. "I don't have dinner ready- I'm sorry. Oh the house is a mess. I'm sorry."

Karina: You find yourself being harder on yourself than he is on you. I do that too.

Debbie: Yeah, because if I didn't have a child and I stayed home all day, the house would be impeccable. So why can't I do all of this? And I'm lucky enough that he doesn't put that expectation on me, but I still have that feeling that as a good mom I should have been able to get something done.

Brenda: Yeah, that expectation that you put on yourself...that aren't really realistic.
(A1)

Debbie explained that for her, a clean house and having dinner ready was part of fulfilling responsibilities that made her a good mother. While she did not think her husband held these expectations, she said she created them for herself. Several of the other participants echoed Debbie's sentiment that they, too, communicated a perspective that revealed their own, self-reflected shortcomings in managing their roles as mothers.

Anne shared that guilt had been a topic of discussion at a recent Baby and Me session:

Anne: I've heard so many moms that don't work, I mean sorry, that don't have jobs outside of working with their children, because that's the hardest job in the world. I've heard so many of them say that they feel guilty if everything isn't done because they think their husbands expect them to do it all and have it managed. We had this discussion last week in our moms group, "What do we want? Do we want a happy, engaged child or a perfectly clean house?" (A1)

Anne reported that many in the Baby and Me group expressed feelings of guilt over their inability to manage housework and other tasks since adding the role of mother, indicating they perceived their husbands had those expectations, even if those ideas were not explicitly stated. Anne also described a story about how her sister resolved her feelings of guilt:

Anne: My sister, when she became a mom, and she looked back on her childhood and we had an impeccable house and mom didn't engage with us that much.... And so she made a choice as a mom, "I'm not going to do it that way. My house is going to be a mess sometimes, but I'm going to play with my kids." So it's been interesting.

Brenda: So does she then feel the guilt?

Anne: Not as much. Not really. Cuz she said, "I'm choosing to do this. I'm choosing to be with the kids." (A1)

Anne's sister communicated with Anne her decision to forgo housework at times in favor of playtime with her children. Anne's synopsis of the Baby and Me group discussion and her sister's story both demonstrate that the women in those conversations seemed to view a "happy, engaged child" or "perfectly clean house" as competing dualities, implying that one could not be achieved without the sacrifice of the other, which was articulated by the women in these two examples through expressions of guilt.

In the group setting, the women in the focus groups communicated support for each other by explaining why certain expectations were unrealistic. They reassured each

other that while having such high expectations of themselves as mothers was normal (and common among women transitioning to motherhood), those expectations often are not achievable. The participants seemed to encourage each other by saying that falling short of unreasonable motherhood expectations did not mean that one another had failed or were failing in their roles as mothers.

Several of the women discussed how they often felt guilty or conflicted over being away from their child and were inclined to check in with their husbands to make sure the husbands were okay with the wives being away. Descriptions such as Candice's provided a contrast for the subsequent discussion about whether husbands felt similarly conflicted when apart from their children:

Candice: (to her husband): "Yes, I want to be home with Nick. I want to be the one that picks him up from day care, but today I really need you to do this." It's a huge, ya know, challenge, because I always perceive Marshall's [her husband] frustrated. Like today, I'm in and out, in and out of the house all day, and it's Sunday and he likes to go golfing, but so I'm like, "Are you mad at me? Are you mad at me?" And he's like, "No, go do your thing, but just go do it. Don't stand in the house and let Nick see you hem and ha over should you go, should you not go."

Madison: We have that same conversation.

Candice: It's a constant pull.

Madison: Yeah, I think we had that on the way here. It's a commitment and you want to go, I wanted to go, but then you always feel that pull like, where should I be and what should I be doing? Like, even if I just want to go somewhere for two hours. (B1)

Candice and Madison both described conflicted feelings over being away from their husbands and children. As the conversation between the participants continued, some of the women articulated they did not believe their husbands experienced similar feelings when their husbands were apart from the children:

Miranda: The sad thing is, I don't think my husband feels that way.

Madison: Yeah, they don't.

Candice: I don't think so either.

Miranda: He could go golfing all day or anything else and I don't think he feels for two seconds "Oh, I should be home...."

Candice: My husband does, because I make him feel bad.

Miranda: I guess I need to start making mine feel bad! (laughing) (B1)

Even though the women laughed about making their husbands feel bad, several expressed genuine frustration that their husbands did not seem to feel bad or conflicted about spending time engaging their own activities. When these women engaged activities for their personal enjoyment, they still felt conflicted about doing so:

Candice: And ya know, he..he..he feels guilty like he knows he should be home and he calls frequently, "How are things going?"

Danielle: Well, that's great.

Candice: Yeah, but I know he's back there thinking, "Don't say you need me!

Don't say you need me!" (laughter from group)

Candice: I can make things really hard for him, and that's...I don't know

Miranda: There's a happen medium in there somewhere, there's a happy medium.

He should be aware that you're home and that he's getting a free pass and that he's appreciative of that time.

(B1)

Candice surmised that while her husband called home to check in, he was secretly hoping he would not be needed and therefore would be able to stay out longer. Even though Candice was frustrated by this, she questioned whether her tendency to provoke her husband's guilt was the right response. Miranda emphasized the importance of Candice's husband's awareness that he was getting a break from his fatherhood role responsibilities and needed to show appreciation for getting time away from family responsibilities.

Kate shared a similar story, in which she rationalized her lack of guilt for working late one evening a week, citing her conjecture that her husband did not feel guilty when he was away either:

Kate: But reversing all that, um you know, being gone five days, home two days, because you're almost reversing it, and with a job share, it's perfect because I don't feel guilty now. Especially now that Owen is home all the time. I can stay late once a week and I don't feel bad. He's got him. He's with his dad. He's not at a daycare center somewhere for 14 hours, so you know, it's really perfect. When it was five days a week, I really did feel guilty, and then I'd get mad at myself for feeling guilty cuz I thought, I know Owen's not feeling guilty right now when he's in Mexico having happy hour with the rest of the pilots.

Candice: No, because he knows you're at home taking good care of his son. (B1)

Kate described feeling guilty being away at work when she worked full time, but not guilty when she switched to working half-time. She mentioned getting upset at herself when she felt guilty, citing her husband's lack of guilt when he was away at work as a reason she should not feel guilty either.

Lastly in addition to declarations of guilt, participants reported experiencing stress. Karina, communicated feelings of stress regarding her personal expectations of how her role as a mother should be managed:

Karina: I just had a talk with Brad about feeling . . . I talk with him a lot about "Oh I'm feeling stressed." So we recently sat down and had a conversation about the expectation that I put on myself as a mom and how sometimes I'm really feeling stressed. So that came up about how I was feeling about myself . . . I think he was understanding and I think just wanting to figure out how he could help and trying to understand why I felt like that. (A1)

Karina's declaration of stress resulted in what she reported as a positive conversation with her husband regarding her enactment of her mother role. She said her husband provided encouragement and was understanding of the stress Karina felt when taking on the responsibilities associated with motherhood. At the conclusion of the conversation, Karina still felt stress about managing motherhood, but she also reported that revealing her insecurities in the form of dialogue with her spouse had the benefit of temporarily lessening the stress she carried with regard to that role.

4.2.3 Engaging motherhood as primary role. The third sub-theme in the perceived characteristics of motherhood was that when women in the focus groups described how they used communication to manage the transition to the role of mother, communicating “motherhood” seemed to be more of an ever-present role for these women than they perceived engaging fatherhood seemed to be for their husbands. Women described “motherhood” as their primary role, regardless of their paid work situation. Being a mother was a fluid, almost constantly engaged role so that even when the participants focused on another role, the duties and responsibilities associated with motherhood remained ever-present. In contrast, most of the participants described their husbands’ fatherhood roles to be supportive, rather than primary when compared to their other roles. The women perceived their husbands as being able to turn fatherhood on and off more easily. As the women told stories characterizing their observations, many were unsatisfied by the discrepancy, alluding to a desire for their husbands’ fatherhood roles to take more primary positions when juxtaposed among their husbands’ other roles.

Danielle, who was home with her two young children during the week and worked outside the home on Saturdays, described an interaction she had with her husband:

Danielle: When Derek’s home . . . and I’ll have an intentional thing I need to do . . . like I was doing the flower arrangements, at home. And so, I got everything I needed to get with kids, did everything, but when it came time for me to do the actual arrangements, I asked for some time, and so then he’s on. But unless I have an intentional thing that I’m trying to do, he’ll kinda help with the kids, but I’ll have to ask him. But if he has a very big chunk of time and I’m gone, I’ll come home and the diaper isn’t changed and I’m like, okay, so when I’m physically in the house, I still kinda have to have like one ear or eyes over there. It’s not that he doesn’t do a good enough job, it’s just that he’s always got something else, besides the kids going on. So when I was doing the flowers, I’m like “Can you just play

with the kids, maybe like, do I craft with them? Just to focus on them.” So that I know, in my mind, that he’s engaged with them. Because I know they’re going to be focused on him. (B1)

Danielle’s story about the interaction with Derek provided a revealing example about how she engaged her motherhood role through communication. Danielle named Derek’s paternal role as a supporting one, but not a leading role the way she engaged her maternal role. She communicated uncertainty, verbally and nonverbally, about Derek’s ability to play primary caregiver role with the same level of engagement and attention to the children’s needs as she did. Through repeated interaction, they established a pattern of Danielle being “on” as primary caregiver until she would ask Derek to be “on” so she could have a break and engage a role other than mother. Now, as a mother, Danielle would ask for personal time, and even then, doubted whether she would get to focus on one of her other roles:

Danielle: So instead of doing that though (focusing only on the kids), he wanted to clean the garage, so he cleaned the garage . . . and that’s where it started for me, my frustration, I’m like, “I just wanted you to focus on them and not clean the garage, so that when I’m doing this flower arranging, I’m not having to think about that. You know, that I could really just shut off, as a mom, for a minute and do something that I used to do.” Because(pause) I used to do floral arrangements and it’s something I enjoy, but it’s something you can’t do with kids around, um so, that’s kinda frustrating to always feel like the one who’s responsible for the kids. And he definitely, you know, tries, but doesn’t, it’s just not his thing. He’s gotta be busy when he has the kids around, he’ll want to mow the lawn or something. (B1)

Brenda described a similar communication pattern in which would ask her husband for a break from engaging the role responsibilities she associated with motherhood, but felt that her husband did not feel the same obligation to ask her permission when he took time away from engaging fatherhood.

Brenda: That’s important when you get it (alone time). One thing that we talk about

too, I think I brought it up and then thought, “Oh okay, probably won’t do that again.” I brought up one time, maybe I didn’t bring it up the right way, but I said, “You just get to go, ‘Hey I’m going to go to the gym and I’ll be back in a little bit.’ Never is there a ‘Hey can you watch the kid? Do you mind putting her down?’ But if I’m gonna go, it’s always ‘Do you have time to watch her? I’m gonna go to the grocery store. And that’s my alone time.’” And he’s like, “Well, you got to go to the grocery store.” And you’re like (sarcastically), “Yay!”

Debbie: Like, “Yay, I bought diapers!”

Karina: That’s still work for you.

Brenda: Yeah, and then one time he said, “I hope you aren’t like tallying like, here was his alone time and here was my alone time.” So then I start to feel like, oh I shouldn’t bring that up. That’s some bad mojo. I don’t want him to think that I’m like, that I am tallying what he gets to do, cuz it’s not a score, we’re in this together but, you know, I just want to make sure I get my time too. (A1)

In addition to feeling an inconsistency in permission seeking for alone time, Brenda also felt like she and her husband defined “alone time” differently in relationship to their mother and father roles. Brenda saw her alone time as an actual break from engaging motherhood responsibilities. Brenda reported that her husband viewed her alone time as grocery shopping, which in Brenda’s mind ultimately still engaged her house and childcare responsibilities and was not a break centered on something specifically for her.

Anne and her husband’s arrangement was somewhat different than Brenda and her husband’s because they each worked a similar number of hours and shared child care role responsibilities. Anne worked outside the home as an acupuncturist and her husband was self-employed:

Anne: Because my husband works from home, most of the time when he’s home he’s working, so I don’t really feel like we have that time where we’re both watching him together, so I kinda feel like whenever I’m at home he’s my responsibility so if I have to do something I’ll say “I need to do this, can you watch him for me?” And sometimes he’ll say “No, I’ve gotta finish this up.” . . . It frustrates me sometimes because his computer is in our kitchen. It’s not like he’s away, he’s right there. So sometimes I’m wanting to engage him in conversation, but he’s only half listening to me or not really at all. . . It’s tricky, it wouldn’t be my first choice. But then again on the flip side, we do that sharing of care for him,

so I don't have to tell him what to feed him. I can just say "Hey can you give him lunch" and he'll know how to do that. It's a trade-off. (A2)

When they were both at home, Anne's husband was usually engaging his work role and Anne also reported feeling a sense of frustration in that she was primarily responsible for managing childcare responsibilities, because her husband was home as well, but not available. Anne found her husband's work-from-home arrangement created periodic difficulties in role management because it blurred the lines of which role responsibilities he was engaging and when. He would be working in the same room as Anne and their son, but not available for support with childcare, giving Anne the feeling that when she was home, she was always engaging motherhood as her primary role and had to ask her husband for a break when she needed it. Anne appreciated, however, that because her husband was around their son during the day, he knew what to feed him without asking.

Brenda shared a similar situation where she attempted to navigate her tasks without her husband's support engaging his role as a father, but later articulated her frustration for the lack of help.

Brenda: It's hard! . . . Last night, I'm trying to cook dinner and she's like, "Eh, eh." She's trying to push me away from what I'm doing because she wants attention. And I'm trying to cook dinner. And I say, "Hey Babe, I know you're watching your like favorite game (sarcastically), could you just hang out with her for just a few minutes?" And usually he does, but he couldn't keep her busy so I got out my little Ergo backpack and put her on my back. Because sometimes, it's just ya know, survival. If we're gonna have dinner you have to do something with them. (A2)

In Brenda's story, she described the scene of making dinner and entertaining her toddler while her husband watched television. She was navigating her roles as a mother and wife. When asked whether she and her husband talked further about this incident, Brenda

described their conversation and her underlying feelings about the event.

Brenda: Yeah, yeah, I just told him that I understand he wants to watch his game, but I need help too sometimes. I can't always do it all. So, he's like, "I know, (with a large exhale) I understand." But I think that in the moment he wants her to hang out. He says, "Come over here and watch the game with me," and you know, a year and a half old, that's boring for her. So you just compromise, I guess. He was fine. We were fine, but then I kinda get resentment a little bit over things that happen like that. But then we try to voice with each other that it isn't always gonna be about what you want. It's always going to be a compromise, or sacrifice, or ya know. (A2)

Brenda had explained to her husband that she needed help at times with childcare responsibilities so she could tend to other tasks. She did not think getting their daughter to watch television was an effective approach. While Brenda acknowledged her feelings of resentment for the imbalance of responsibilities when both she and her husband were home with their daughter, she also mentioned the compromising and sacrificial nature of marriage and parenthood. In her example, Brenda was the one who accommodated; she was primarily responsible for watching the baby and similar to Danielle, Anne, and Karina's stories, asked her husband to watch the baby, in this case to make dinner for the family. She did not get the break she needed, which she reported required her to make accommodations for her daughter so she could complete the task of making dinner.

Karina described a situation requesting her husband's help with their daughter instead of watching television:

Karina: I've had similar things like that where I've been like, "Hey Brad, can you turn that off because I'm trying to do this and I can't play with Monica at the same time and she's wanting me um, like I need you to turn off the TV and come play with her and entertain her."

Sarah: And how does he respond when you say that?

Karina: Well, it usually depends. Sometimes he'll have something on that I'm okay with her if she watches a little bit of it. So he'll be like, "I'm just gonna let her sit with me and I'll play with her with the TV on." But other times he'll just turn it off

because he realizes that something that I have to do is really important and I can't play with her and he'll turn it off and take her up to the playroom. (A2)

Karina would ask Brad to turn off the television to entertain their daughter and sometimes he would comply with her request, while other times he would leave the television on while he played with her.

4.3 Adaptations to Conversations

The women's reported communication experiences navigating the transition to motherhood revealed a third theme, that of adaptations to conversations since the addition of their roles as mothers. Five sub-themes emerged which characterized the key ways the women's interactions were affected by the presence of their mother roles, particularly as their mothering selves interacted with their spouse, worker, friend and daughter selves: 1) the nature of conversational dialogue became more complex; 2) mothers became more selective about revelation/concealment surrounding parental decision-making; 3) communication between spouses was more logistical and intentional; 4) conversational arguing was more multifaceted and somewhat more prevalent; 5) physical intimacy changed and conversations about physical intimacy changed as well.

4.3.1 Complex nature of conversations. The first sub-theme in the theme about conversational adaptations was that all nine women participating in the focus groups reported that adding the role of mother changed the nature of their interactions with others; their conversations with family and friends were shorter, interrupted, and less frequent than before children. When trying to engage spouse, daughter, friend, or work associate roles, many found the role of mother still took a dominant position over those other roles.

Some of the women reported frustration and sadness due to the changed nature of their conversations. Because their children required a significant portion of their attention, motherhood and its responsibilities seemed to dominate their other roles in conversation particularly when the children were present. Karina described how the shift in focus towards the new baby affected her interactions with others:

Karina: In general, I felt like after I had Monica . . . all of the conversations that I had with people seemed to be not sit down conversations but like shorter than they normally would have been because all your focus goes to this baby and it's like you're constantly thinking about this baby and you're trying to hold conversations with people while you are taking care of the baby. So for me a lot of the conversations I would normally have, or like keeping in touch with friends or even . . . family, like it just kinda . . . all of that shut down for a while . . . It wasn't like you have a lot of time to just sit down and discuss stuff. (A1)

Karina experienced transitioning to the role of mother by focusing on that role as her priority, which meant she had less time to engage conversation that involved her other roles. Karina described that shift in availability to converse in an objective manner, accepting it as part of the transition to motherhood. Madison expressed some sadness over the changing nature of her communication experiences with others since adding the role of mother.

Madison: When you have a baby in the background, or even on a playdate with people, I get sad sometimes, I feel like my relationships have been diminished to a certain level.

Kate: A soundbite.

Madison: Yeah! And it's more like details, not what you can fit into an entire picture. So you feel like you know people in a different way, and it's different because kids bring you to an intimate level, but it's not the depth that it used to be before kids. Half your brain is over here with the child and the other half is with the other person. . . talking to him, making sure it's not getting into something, in tune to how he's doing, what he needs, are we getting done before we have a breakdown? So it's like you're fully multi-tasking. . . . (B1)

Madison offered a vivid picture of a mother who was trying to manage the role of friend

or spouse, which had always meant focused attention and active listening before the baby, but described that now the additional presence of a child and that child's needs have made engaging those conversations in the same manner difficult. The resulting affect was that Madison and other mothers in the group reported they felt they could not be fully present and focused on their conversation, but rather partially engaged as a friend and partially engaged as a mother. Candice described a similar experience:

Candice: We just went to Red Robin with a couple of friends today and there was a point in our conversation we were more shifting to the boys with an occasional word back and forth to each other. And then we started to engage in a conversation and what you said just reminded me of that and all of the sudden Nick is over here screaming and banging on the table and I know he's doing it because I'm now engaged with somebody for over two minutes other than him. And that's hard because you're in public and you're thinking, "Okay, take a deep breath" and calming, but the conversation is over and that's hard because you don't get back to that place so easily. (B1)

Many of the women in Candice's group identified with her story, echoing that similar experiences had happened to them. Often when the women tried to focus their attention on their friend or family member, their child would demand their attention, forcing them make a choice about how to manage both roles at the same time. Danielle offered an example of the push-pull she experienced between multiple, at times competing, roles:

Danielle: Even on the phone . . . a girlfriend said, "Wow, that was loud," and I just didn't even notice. I'm like, "Whatever, (about the loud sound from her son) I'm talking to you (meaning the friend on the phone)."

Madison: Yeah, you're just trying to focus.

Danielle: Yeah, but then I realize my mom saying that a few times too and she tolerates it but I thought, "Gosh, what if I'm the person who's on the other end?" and I hadn't thought about it from that perspective yet. So now I tell Jeffery not to yell when I'm on the phone, but now that I've put a rule or like a guideline on it, he knows now that I'm on the phone he screams and so those conversations on the phone are limited. And then I'm like, do I stand my ground on the phone with my

kids and say I'm on the phone and this rule stands, or do you cut your friends or your husband off and say I've gotta deal with this and I'll call you back later?(B1)

The questions of "Which role do I engage?" or "How do I move between roles?" in conversation seemed to be a frequent issue for many of the women. In Danielle's phone conversations, she struggled between focusing her attention on the demands associated with her motherhood role and focusing on the relationship she was attempting to nurture with her husband, mother, or friend. Many of the women reported finding fulfilling the responsibilities of both roles difficult.

Debbie spoke about she and her spouse having difficulty nonverbally focusing their attention on each other rather than the baby:

Debbie: I'd say with Isabelle, she's 4 months old, so we can have conversations that don't involve her, but if one of us is holding her, whoever has her- there's no eye contact. (Looking down and talking to the baby...) "And today at work..." (mimicking smiling down at the baby) . . . You have your conversation, but you're totally staring at the baby, but it keeps her from crying, so it works. (A2)

Every participant in Debbie's focus group verbally agreed that her story was similar to their own experiences; that they each engaged conversation with another adult while focusing on their babies.

Anne explained the importance of being flexible in conversation when the baby was present and the benefit of conversing with individuals who were able to start and stop dialogue, adapting to the presence of young children:

Anne: . . . And having that conversation with our son in the middle of it, we do that all the time too. And you take breaks. And I find myself talking to my friends who are capable of the little interruptions, to be able to have a couple dialogues going on at the same time; people who can hold the train of thought, because you're gonna be doing one of those other things over here with your baby, and then you can come back and go, "Okay, what was I talking about?" and they can remind you and you can go back to the conversation. I think we do, my husband and I will do

that, it's like, "Okay pause," (motions like she's taking care of the baby), "Okay go!" (A1)

Anne said she appreciated when friends or her husband understood and accommodated for the fact that dialogue would have interruptions when children were involved. Kate explained the difficulty accommodating to interruptions could present:

Kate: I was one of the last of my friends in California to have kids and I can remember coming home and feeling so frustrated and telling my husband, "Ahhh, I can't even finish a conversation with her. Every time I start to talk, her mind is off on something else." And boy, am I eating crow now. It happens no matter what you're intentions are. And I think it's more now Owen and I are the ones that, ya know, interrupt each other the most, and so we're more sympathetic to it, but sometimes I do it to him and I see the look on his face like, "Hello? I was right in the middle of a sentence!" And I just want to say, "Excuse me? How many times have you cut me off because Evan's about to ya know, saw his head off? You stop. You just have to stop. It's hard. It is hard. (B1)

Kate's story about interrupting to address a child's needs or wants revealed an aspect of the conversational choices women make when balancing multiple roles during the transition to motherhood. Kate mentioned a shared understanding of the propensity for conversations to be interrupted once she had a child and accepted it as somewhat inevitable. However, when she mentioned interrupting her husband and his frustration as a result of that interruption, three of the other women in Kate's group immediately agreed that her husband was rightfully irritated by being interrupted, even if the reason was to tend to their child. Those women expressed similar frustration when their own husbands had interrupted them to talk to their child. Adding the child's presence created a complex conversational dynamic because the participants did not always agree on the validity of various child-related interruptions, so a conversational participant could have been frustrated by an interruption (even if they are a parent as well) and potentially disagreed

(usually nonverbally) with that parent's decision to attend the child's attention-seeking behavior over their message as the conversant. So while the women in the focus groups reported understanding the inevitability of child-related interruptions, those interpretations also were reported as frustrating components of conversationally managing motherhood with another role.

4.3.2 Revealing and concealing mothering decisions based on supportive or critical feedback. The second sub-theme within the discussion surrounding adaptations to conversations that occurred during the transition to motherhood was that the women reported choosing their conversational topics carefully based on their expected responses from the listener. Many participants described the somewhat sacred and personal nature of certain choices and decisions they made as mothers in regard to their child. The majority of the women in the focus groups said their decisions about what they revealed and to whom they revealed it were largely dictated by their perceptions that the listener would voice agreement or disagreement toward their choices:

Anne: I do know that I choose who I have certain conversations with differently based on either their experience as a parent, that I know of, for example: I have a friend who researches everything so if I know that I'm purchasing something, I might call her and say, "What do you know about these things?" because she knows those things. But I also might choose not to call her if I know that I've made a decision about how I'm going to do something that I know she disagrees with because if I've decided to do it, then I really don't want to hear it. (A2)

For Anne, the decision to reveal or conceal information about potential baby product purchases was dictated by whether Anne had already reached a decision or not and would be interested or receptive to her friend's input. Brenda relayed a similar experience in which her friend's vocal opinion censored the degree to which Brenda discussed certain

health issues surrounding her child.

Brenda: I do that too a lot. One of my girlfriend's moms is a nurse in the NICU and also very earthy mama, so sometimes I won't even talk about something that is an issue. Like she doesn't like my pediatrician because of different things that have happened, whom I love but she thinks he's not worthy. . . so she'll say, "Are you still with that pediatrician?" (accusatory tone) and you, you just kinda go, "I'm not gonna go there again," because I don't want to hear. . . you know, that's our decision, not hers, who we take our daughter to. So you really have to be guarded because people will say things and probably not mean to, but really be offensive. Whether it be sicknesses, or just anything, how you put your diaper on your child. You just have to be guarded in what you say.

Brenda felt strongly that the medical care decisions she made for her child could be shared with certain people in her life, but not if theirs was a voice of contention. When asked whether making the decision to exclude certain people from certain child-rearing related topics had been difficult, Brenda reported the following:

Brenda: It depends on who it is. Just because there are certain people who say things that make me feel like they could be a better mom to my child than I could, and so they are definitely on the back burner. It's really easy to not even want to acknowledge people like that. Which is hard, especially if it's family, but you just have to do what works best with your family so and then you choose to just not really talk to those people or not tell them certain things because they blow it out of proportion, or just you know, make it uncomfortable and it doesn't even really need to be an issue because you're the mom, you're the authority, you . . . it's your decision, or you and your husband's decisions. (A2)

As Brenda explained her reasoning behind excluding certain people from certain baby-care related decisions, she emphasized the significance of her role as a mother; she explained that part of embodying the role of mother meant being an authority on decisions that impacted her child. Several of women in the focus group translated their perspective of how motherhood should be navigated conversationally by the extent that the conversant granted them an implicit position of authority, honoring the mother's ability to make the best choice for her child.

Danielle: I don't know if it's like a woman to woman, kind of territorial thing, but if you just have different views on how you parent and you end up talking about those things, like on a playdate and one mom's feeling really strongly about, "You should go discipline them," or if my mom or my mother-in-law does that, I've found that those kind of conversations, like conflicts between your belief systems between friends or parents or even between Derek and I didn't end up happening until I became a mom. Where you just feel like, "These are my kids and this is the way I feel and why should I have to defend that?" And yes, your views, I like to listen to them, but it ends up getting a lot more sensitive when it come to how you do things with your kids and other people's views on them. (B2)

Danielle also explained the potential to feel insecure regarding parental decision-making and that what she revealed about how she was managing motherhood was related to whether the listener's response contributed to her sense of confidence or insecurity about her ability to navigate motherhood.

Danielle: So each relationship is different about whether I'll hold back about things. It's very personal how you deal with your kids. You deal with your insecurities. This is a new thing for me, and I want to be confident in what I'm doing. I don't want to question what I'm doing. (B2)

Debbie further explained how she altered her conversational topic and depth about motherhood-related issues when she sensed a possibility that the listener would disagree with her decisions:

Debbie: Yeah, I think that my conversations with some people about the baby are just very glossed over. We're like, "Oh, she's learning to sit up right now" and that's pretty much it. We don't talk about, you know, what kind of diapers we use or what kind of vaccinations she's gotten, or any of those hot button kind of things. Because, er, you know, we (pause) sleep with her (pause) and so we don't even mention that anywhere because you know, I just know at the Baby and Me group, people will say (whispering), "Oh, we're still co-sleeping," like they are apologizing for it, and I'm just like, "Why do you feel like you have to apologize that you're still sleeping with your child? It seems natural." So I'm just like, maybe this isn't a good place for me to bring this up. I'll just go and find my friends who are okay with it and then we talk about that. And it's like these hot button issues, because you know, it's everybody's own decision. If I choose to do this or not, it's okay, because this is how we've decided to parent. But then there are some people who have really, really strong feelings that that [co-sleeping] is not right, so I just

say, “She’s sitting up right now.” (A2)

From her experience in the Baby and Me group, Debbie had determined that co-sleeping with her child was a contentious, “hot button” issue. As a means of protecting her mothering decision, Debbie chose not to discuss her child’s sleeping arrangement with people she suspected might disagree and might verbalize their disagreement. She had established her own reasons for choosing to co-sleep and felt that hearing arguments to the contrary would undermine her role as a mother to make the best choices for her child. Debbie’s conversational coping mechanism was to choose a less frequently debated topic, like describing a developmental milestone and avoiding more contentious parenting issues.

Anne had a similar approach when discussing her decision for open adoption:

Anne: Probably the one that I had to be most sensitive about was open adoptions, and people’s opinions about open adoptions, and I just had to get thicker skin because I found...finally somebody said something to me that was so insensitive that I went. . . “Clearly, they don’t get it [the adoption process]. They **so** don’t get it, that I can’t be sensitive to it [their comments].” So it made it sort of okay for people to say really dumb things, because they just don’t get it. . . . (A2)

Anne explained how she worked through some of the comments she thought were insensitive made by people surrounding her decision for open adoption. She continued by offering some examples of what some people had said:

Anne: So I still have people who say, “Well, you’re not gonna let the birth mom do this...” And it’s like, “Well, okay we don’t have to talk about this” or if I say, “it’s her son” [they’ll say] “It’s not her son. It’s your son. It’s yours.” And I’m like, “Okay, okay, whatever,” and just have to like move on and get past things and not get into semantics about stuff like that. Because I had to embrace it, in order to be a part of it. So it took a lot of change in my heart and I thought, unless you go through that process and you don’t get it, chances are you aren’t going to get it. And that’s okay. I’m not going to spend my time and my energy for you to get it, because you will still have your feelings and you are entitled to those. So that was

definitely a shift for me, and there are certain conversations I just don't have with those folks and that's okay. (A2)

Anne had decided not to let intensive comments about open adoption become part of her conversation. She reasoned that because people did not understand the process, they did not understand how certain comments made about Anne's mothering choices could be hurtful to her.

4.3.3. Intentional, logistical spousal talk. The third sub-theme in adaptations to conversations during the transition to motherhood involved participants' reported changes in their interactions with their spouses which the women described as more "business-like" interactions. The participants characterized their communication as more intentional, about logistical topics and less romantic. Miranda offered a summary of how her communication with Trent has changed since they became parents:

Miranda: It's much more business like, because it has to be, out of sheer necessity. Like, there are weekends that I work and Trent is home all day and there are certain things that I have to remind him. "This is when Tommy takes a nap. This is what he's eating this week"...and most of those things he knows because he has him a couple nights a week by himself too. But in general, I find our communication is more intentional, it has to be pretty cut and dried, there's much less flirtation and romance, it's much more like what we were talking about...like a business, having a business partner and it's just a lot more logistical topics. (B1)

Miranda described the communication in her relationship as operating more like a business partnership than a romantic partnership. Danielle conveyed similar feelings:

Danielle: Because you are business partners.

Miranda: Yes! You are!

Danielle: It's a hard way to think of it but you're like little daycare associates, because you're constantly switching who's watching the kids, and then your managing your accounting your finances, so it's like. . . it's like you really have to be business partners on top of having like, an attraction, and an emotional relationship, like that filters off. (B1)

In addition to describing the business, logistical type of communication dialogue, Danielle also characterized her interaction with her husband like that of daycare associates. She said she felt that managing those roles made the attraction and emotional connection harder to maintain.

When I initially asked the women to describe their communication with their husbands since adding the role of mother, words such as “minimal” and “nonexistent” were used in a playful manner, but still provided what I interpreted as an honest description of the rather limited opportunities for thoughtful, romantic spousal communication. Debbie described the first time she and her husband recognized the change in the quality of their communication:

Debbie: We realized it at Peter’s Christmas party (laughing) because it was the first time since Isabelle was born that we actually had a conversation with each other. (Laughter from group) She was a little over a month old. So we’re sitting there, having dinner, having conversation and we said, “When was the last time this happened?” And so we talked about at least once a month we have to have a date, because you can’t not have conversations. You almost don’t realize it until you’re alone (pause) how long it’s been. Yeah, we couldn’t believe it. “Wow. We just had a real conversation,” instead of, “Oh my gosh, she just peed all over me!” (A1)

Debbie and her husband realized they had not had a prolonged, uninterrupted conversation since their daughter was born. Debbie reported that only when they were actually engaging each other without the baby present did they realize how long ago their last thoughtful conversation had occurred.

Danielle described how she and her husband had very little time to communicate with one another. She offered an example which characterized the nature of their communication:

Danielle: Very small. I was gonna bring that up when you said you interrupt each

other. I don't think there's much of a chance for Derek and I to interrupt each other because by the time our day is over, like, I'm talking to him last night about toddler beds cuz Greer is like, screaming trying to get out of her bed, and he comes home at 9 o'clock and I'm telling him about this while I'm looking at the computer at toddler beds and talking to him and I look over and he's asleep in one minute! And I'm like, "I barely saw you and now I don't even have time to fit in like a minute of what we need to do tomorrow?!" It's just exhaustion plays a totally big role in our time to communicate with each other now.

Candice: Yeah, we're like roommates now.

Danielle: Yeah, tired roommates!

Candice: Roommates that share a bed.

Kate: Well, we don't always do that. (B1)

Danielle reported the difficulty she'd experienced trying to engage her husband in conversation about her day and their family's plans for the following day, voicing frustration that they did not seem to have any time to talk. She described their communication being affected by feeling tired and exhausted. In addition, Danielle's story prompted Candice, Danielle, and Kate to all make statements about their marriage relationships that resembled roommate relationships.

Candice went on to talk further about how her interaction with her husband had been since adding the role of mother to her other roles:

Candice: Ours (conversations) shift more towards (pause) more about the stress of life and money and things that we want to get done around the house, which isn't good because when things are just about those things we, ya know, we start to fight more. So there's more arguments. And since we don't have family around we don't go out a lot. And I mean, we get sitters from time to time, but it's not like we have mom or mother in law to come over for an hour so we can go get a coffee. So we talk about how we need to make time to do that so we can have time together, but it's hard when your both working full time and you get home and you make dinner and ya know, clean up and it's 8 o'clock and you're trying to get the kids to bed and then it's 9 o'clock and then you're done.

Madison: And you're exhausted.

Candice: Yeah. That's where we're at, in this place of trying to figure out how to maneuver in this place and stay strong. (B1)

Candice offered a description of the types of conversations she and her husband engaged,

explaining that those conversation topics more likely resulted in arguments. She emphasized a desire to spend more time together but explained the difficulty in creating that time since she and her husband also had childcare, household, and full time employment responsibilities.

While many of the women described how their communication had become more business-like, two of the women shared their approaches toward managing the business side of their spousal communication:

Miranda: We decided that we absolutely have to have...we have like a Monday night meeting. Every Monday night, we call it our business meeting; we talk about what needs to get done during the week, how everybody is feeling. And it's been a really life saver because otherwise we'd go forever not knowing how the other person is really feeling. (B1)

Miranda described their weekly business meeting as an opportunity to discuss the week's tasks, as well as an intentional way to put talking about needs on the calendar. Miranda also characterized their communication prior to becoming parents:

Miranda: In general, I don't ever remember consciously scheduling conversation before, I mean you just work together alone so much that everything got covered. (B1)

For Miranda, having a weekly business meeting became essential only after adding the role of mother to her existing roles. Madison reported having similar scheduled interactions with her husband:

Madison: We have kinda the same thing. On Sunday nights we look at the next week, not even the whole month, just that week and what things can I help him in and what he can do for me. Just being more and more intentional (pause) because before we had more time to talk, more money, we were both working, if we didn't feel like cooking we'd say "let's go to dinner. . ." But now that we have a child, now that I'm not working, and have less time too, it's like everything is less, but we still have to produce the same amount. (B1)

Madison also reported using the weekly meeting as a way to talk more intentionally about their weeks and their time together. She also referenced having less time and money since she and her husband became parents, which made intentional communication more of a necessity. Karina also shared that she and her husband had less time to engage focused conversation:

Karina: We just talked about how we're focused a lot on things that need to get done, and on Monica, and how before we had so much more time to sit at the dinner table and look eye to eye and hold a conversation. But now it's like, you're trying to have a conversation, but you're also focused on her and what she needs. So we talked about how we need to schedule that time everyday to sit down and communicate without her there, just have that time, one on one. . . And like have that time where she's not there to distract us. Sometimes we would sit and just watch a tv show and so we were together, but not really communicating. So we talked about having that time everyday without the tv on, or without us on our laptops or paying bills or whatever. And he talked about, he brought up, he wanted to make sure we were doing that. (A1)

Karina reported having more distractions, such as tending to their daughter's needs, since becoming a mother that impacted her ability to have focused conversation with her husband. She mentioned the importance of scheduling time to communicate and removing other distractions. In Karina's example, her husband had initiated the conversation.

Brenda also talked about the lack of alone time she and her husband have had since becoming parents:

Brenda: Oh yeah, because you don't spend any time together. So we usually talk about getting away for the weekend. We talk about things we want to do and usually it doesn't end up happening because of where we live, or we can't get a babysitter, especially overnight because we don't really feel comfortable leaving your child with someone overnight for a while. But we always talk about that, doing something together, because we know we need that. But our daughter goes to bed fairly early so we get that time in the evening. (A1)

Brenda described having frequent conversations with her husband about getting away or spending time together but also about their difficulties actually creating that opportunity.

Brenda also explained when those conversations occur:

Brenda: It's usually like during her nap time. We kinda like meet in the kitchen and have lunch together, or after she's gone to bed at night. When she's awake, we don't talk as much about it because we just don't have that time. You might start a conversation and not come back to it for a couple days because you're so busy with your child. (A1)

The spousal communication between Brenda and her husband was most likely to occur when their daughter was asleep.

4.3.4 The role of argument. The fourth sub-theme confounding adaptations to conversations during the transition to motherhood involved the participants' uses of argument in their reported discursive interactions. Because the participants established arguments in other sub-themes of the results, I will not revisit the examples already reported in other sections of this chapter. Instead, this particular sub-theme will be comprised of additional statements and examples pertaining to argument that are relevant to the overall discussion about how the participants used conversational argument as a means to engage and respond to relational dialectics experienced during the transition to motherhood.

The women described a variety of approaches when discussing how to manage disagreement and its outcome. One common response was that because the transition to motherhood, and particularly the mother role, increased the demands placed on the participants the women often reported being more selective about which arguments were worth engaging:

Anne: Yeah, it takes a lot because I tend to judge my feelings, whether or not they are valid. I guess now what being a mom has done, it has taken away a lot of the judgment because I don't have time for that. We're just going. And you just kinda sift through and say, "I need to talk about this." I've always heard moms say you choose your battles and it seems like they become more obvious. (A1)

Anne explained that she did not have as much time to analyze a multitude of feelings and had to focus on certain points of contention that deserved a forum for discussion. She said she tried to let go of the smaller issues that did not matter as greatly and she clarified and defined what was worth addressing. Anne explained what kind of argument warranted her attention:

Anne: Probably the things that [we bring up] are [what's] necessary for Tyler [our son]. We get that stuff out of the way first. The rest of it can kind of fall into place when there's time for it. (A1)

Danielle echoed Anne's statement and agreed that she often chose to address maternal issues she believed to be very important for her children even at the risk of disagreement:

Danielle: Like being a mom, the things that I think are very very important, those things are centered around the kids, that I don't let fall through the cracks. Which is not to say that I think that's right, because then the other things get brought up eventually. (B2)

Danielle explained that she felt that issues that were significant to her as a mother were the ones she chose to engage and that while other issues might not get addressed, she did not think avoiding those issues was necessarily productive.

Danielle: So I think a lot of the conflicting issues that come up between Derek and I are parental related. "This is very important to me in terms of how we want to raise our kids, how we want to discipline our kids," and since I am there most of the time and I make most of those decisions, it is hard to relay a message and not be like, "Okay this is what you really need to do" because it **is** what he needs to do, but will he receive that if I deliver it that way? (B2)

Danielle reported addressing conflicts that were tied to mothering and fathering and said she often felt compelled to instruct her husband about how he should engage and respond to their children, but she worried that her direction would illicit resistance from her husband if offered in a commanding manner.

Kate expressed that she experienced similar types of arguments with her husband:

Kate: I would say that 90% of our arguments since having Evan are just what you just said “That’s not the way that I would have done it.” And my husband is a pilot and he’s recently been furlowed, so he’s home now, and it’s great but it’s also a little weird because when he was traveling all the time it was easier for me to say, “Well, he’s only here for 3 days so even though he’s doing it wrong, I’ll just let it go.” But now that he’s here all the time, I feel compelled to tell him he’s doing it wrong. It’s really just his way, but it’s not the way we do it. (B1)

Kate explained how she had established certain approaches to parenting issues that she found to be effective and that telling her husband that he should employ her approach rather than his own would often lead to an argument. While Kate reasoned that her tactic sometimes resulted in frustration from her husband, extending rather than resolving the disagreement, she still felt her position was valid and at times necessitated being voiced.

In addition to determining which types of arguments were worth engaging, some participants spoke about the increased need to regulate disagreement because of the prevalence of disagreeing during the transition to motherhood.

Miranda: We’ve had a much harder time since Tommy was born. We’ve had much bigger fights, much more tension it’s just amazing what kind of challenge it’s presented to have that additional factor in there. I mean, we had never really struggled as a couple before. (B1)

Miranda described how the potential for heightened disagreement was a significant issue between her and her husband after becoming parents, noting that they did not have the same pronounced degree of clash before the addition of their parental roles.

Candice explained a shift in her conversational topics with her husband and that the shift had resulted in more disagreement:

Candice: Ours (conversations) shift more towards...more about the stress of life and money and things that we want to get done around the house, which isn't good because when things are just about those things we, ya know, we start to fight more. So there's more arguments. (B1)

By focusing dialogue more on logistical issues, Candice found that arguing increased as well. She also reported wanting to find a balance for her and her husband to have pleasurable interaction in addition to resolving differences over logistics but that striking that balance seemed more difficult while the children were young.

Some participants discussed how the lack of time to discuss issues sometimes meant that disagreement would fester and go unresolved:

Miranda: Um, I think the problem was that we didn't say a lot to each other. We are both the silent, suffering type and we didn't say anything to each other until things got really bad and would blow up. So that's something we're trying to work on...saying more, like before it gets to the point where you're feeling desperate and alone. We decided that we absolutely have to have...we have like a Monday night meeting. (B1)

Miranda and her husband would sometimes ignore issues that festered during the transition to parenthood which only amplified the potential for disagreement. She said that instituting a weekly meeting had been an effective strategy to curb and regulate instances of disagreement.

Madison described that implementing regular, intentional conversation served to manage disagreement before the disputed views became even more pronounced and harder to resolve:

Madison: I say probably most of ours are brought up from not communicating, and we're like, "Okay we need to have a coming together moment, this got drop or this

bill not dropped, and it's kinda like we need talk about this." It's usually more out of desperation than a "this is our weekly meeting" kind of thing, it's not ever that intentional. I just know that if we both get off track than after a couple days we're going to have some arguments. (B1)

Beyond using scheduled talk time as a way to regulate disagreement, Kate addressed an issue that she reported to be more difficult to resolve, a sentiment with which every participant in her group agreed:

Kate: Ultimately every single argument that we have comes back to who's doing more and who's not holding up their end of the bargain. And by the time we hash it out and I've been crying for two hours, you know, and my eyes are puffy and it's 12 o'clock and I was gonna go to bed at 10, what it always comes down to is that we're both doing way too much, and that's why we're arguing. It's not that, neither one of us is dropping the ball, we just have too many balls in the air. (B2)

Kate asserted that although she and her husband made attempts to diffuse disagreement, often the abundance of responsibilities that came with the addition of their mother and father roles were reported by Kate as overwhelming and that addressing spousal shortcomings regarding their role manage approaches was an unattractive symptom of the strain of responding the demands of parenthood.

Lastly, several participants described that the presence of children raised their awareness about how they engaged argument:

Danielle: having kids around...you really have to hold on to that. And wait and not talk about that stuff, because you don't want to put your kids around that kind of emotion. So holding off and dealing with your emotions and processing what's going on . . . so I think both . . . with my parents, with my spouse, and just having kids around, it makes you think about how you want to talk about things and deal with issues. (B1)

Danielle described how she sometimes resisted bringing up issues that were likely to stir emotion when her children were present. The addition of her mother role made her think more about how her responses to disagreement would affect those around her, especially

her kids. Madison had made similar connections as she considered her response to disagreements:

Madison: You're gonna be training your child something, even if it's not that intentional, he's gonna be seeing what you're doing, what you're saying, everything that's going on and we want to protect him, not in the sense of protect him so he doesn't know what's going on, but we want to protect his ears and know what he's really taking in, and what kind of parent do we them to see? (B1)

Madison reported being cognizant of how strained conversations that occurred between her and her husband would potentially impact their son, so they attempted to regulate the types of disagreement they engaged in their child's presence.

Kate found such regulation of conflict with her husband difficult to manage:

Kate: But they [kids] are going to see it all anyway. So he's [my husband] really good at staying calm in front of Evan and I'm the person who's like throwing plates in the background because I'm like [to my husband], "No, you don't!" So that's hard cuz I think there's that awareness that you don't want to be that parent who's like screaming all the time. (B1)

Kate described the difficulty in always monitoring her responses to her husband in their child's presence and she reasoned that because their son would be with them nearly all the time, he was bound to witness some of their arguments.

4.3.5 Discussing physical intimacy. The fourth sub-theme in the discussion of adaptations to conversations were topics raised by the participants in both focus groups surrounding the changed nature of their communication about their physical intimacy since transitioning to the role of mother. Everyone agreed that talking about physical intimacy was very important, but approaches to discussing sex with their partner varied greatly. While none of the research questions asked directly about physical intimacy, the women in the focus groups discussed it as a pivotal part of marital communication during

the transition to parenthood. Miranda described how she and her husband engaged talk about their sexual intimacy since adding the roles of mother and father. Miranda's answer came has a response to being asked: "What other subjects get brought up when you're having a disagreement with your spouse related to managing multiple roles since becoming parents?"

Miranda: I think one of the things for me, is the lack of intimacy. We have different libidos completely, and um, it's something that we don't talk about often. We both know where we both stand. There's no point in discussing it. But if it goes too long, it becomes everything. Trent gets totally critical of me and I get totally sensitive and our relationship just goes down the toilet until that one issue is resolved. It is the only issue. Everything else kinda revolves around that . . . I think as a younger married person, I failed to realize the importance of that and then as a mother (laughs) that's just so down on the priority list. Um, but, you know you, with that particular relationship of wife, that's a huge issue for us, that we have to communicate about. And if we don't, all our communication is negative. (B2)

Miranda acknowledged that talking about physical intimacy was important, but she also explained that she tended to wait until the absence of intimacy became an issue before addressing it. She reported rarely bringing up the topic of sex herself, and said she usually waited until her husband said something directly, or until she could read in their interactions and demeanor that the lack of sexual intimacy was creating other problems in their relationship.

Miranda: You know, it just kinda builds up, and our communication starts getting very unfriendly and hostile when we don't talk about it, and I'm like, okay we need to make a date tonight apparently. And other times, I space it completely and it becomes, "Look, is this ever going to happen again?" (B2)

Miranda described feeling tired since becoming a mother, saying that by the end of the day, she said she would rather choose sleep over sex. She said she felt that transitioning to motherhood had a bigger impact on her desire for sexual intimacy than

the transition to fatherhood had on her husband's desire. When they did talk about sex, Miranda said she felt her husband did not fully understand or could not relate to her decreased priority for physical intimacy since adding motherhood to her existing role as wife. She also described hormonal differences as a reason she gave her husband to explain how the birth of their son had different chemical and hormonal affects on each of them.

In another focus group session, the participants also engaged a discussion about changes in physical intimacy since becoming mothers. Anne explained that decreased attempts at intimacy were true for both her and her husband:

Anne: And I can tell from his nonverbals that we're not connecting like he'd like to.

Sarah: Can you think of an example?

Anne: Well, even an attempt at intimacy...I was trying to think about when was the last time that happened. Even an attempt, whether it was successful one or not because like three weeks ago I got sick and then Tyler was sick and then before that, and then I started thinking, "Wow, if he's not even making an attempt, he must feel really disconnected. Hmm, I need to touch base with him on that one."

Sarah: Did you talk with him about it?

Anne: No, because he's still feeling pretty sick, so I thought, "No, I'll bring that up when he's feeling better." Yeah, I think there's a lot of guilt that goes along with that for me.

Brenda: I think that's with every mom on the whole planet.

Anne: I think so too, and that's a bummer. (A1)

Anne had observed her husband's behavior and recognized his lack of attempt to approach her for sex. She interpreted his conduct as a result of the disconnection he must have felt, a disconnection she later related to the addition of their parenthood roles; however, she had not yet vocalized her concerns to him. Anne also commented on feelings of guilt in regards to changed sex-patterns post-baby, which Brenda and Anne attributed as common for all mothers.

Brenda: We usually talk about how important that is for us. When we aren't seeing eye-to-eye, it's not easy to talk about, because we're both kinda withdrawn from the relationship and we don't talk about it. Or usually try because we're feeling insecure, because it hasn't happened which we always then, it draws you back together. Then when we can talk about it, it makes it so much easier. I don't know if you just, well, I feel insecure when it hasn't happened, because that's like, the number one need for a man, so you gotta make sure, you know.

Anne: That's one of the judgments we put on ourselves: "Am I being a good wife? Am I keeping my house clean? Am I keeping my husband happy?"

Brenda: Yeah, yeah exactly. It's a tight rope! (A1)

Brenda and Anne reported associating sexual interaction with their husbands as a responsibility of their roles as wives. Communicating to their husbands their feelings of insecurity or guilt was a way of managing and articulating their assumed role responsibilities as wives and mothers.

Karina also described the way conversations about sexual intimacy were addressed between her and her husband:

Karina: We've had conversations about it mainly where we don't sit down and have a conversation about it but it's been like a, like even, we're brushing our teeth at night and we'll talk about it then. So it hasn't been something where we've needed to really sit down, but I think we talk about that a lot. I'm trying to think (pause) I think we probably both bring it up.

Sarah: When you talk about it when you're brushing your teeth, is it playful or serious?

Karina: I think probably both. Sometimes it's serious. For example, after she was born I think him just expressing how he's feeling about it. Because he'd say, "Oh, it's been a really long time." So maybe me listening more to what he has to say, or it might just be something we talk about it, ya know jokingly, he'd make a silly comment about that. (A1)

Karina reported talking about their decreased sexual intimacy a lot with her husband in both a joking and a serious manner.

Anne told a story in which her husband assumed they had begun to establish a particular time of day where sexual intimacy seemed conducive to their schedule and

their son's schedule; however, Anne viewed the circumstances for sex as something that must be explored daily and could not necessarily be compartmentalized to a certain time of day:

Anne: I do remember one conversation: He [our son] went down for a nap and that was a nice time for my husband and I to be intimate. And the next day, when he [our son] went down for a nap, he [my husband] was like (clapped her hands), "Okay, let's go!" and I was like, "Wow, wait a minute," and he got very disappointed like, "I thought this was a good time; I thought this was going to be our time." And I'm like, "Yeah, but I got these things that I (pause) it was a good time yesterday." And I was tired and I was like, "Well, we've got all this other stuff." (pause) and I think he felt kinda bad. I think he often feels like he's supposed to be able to read my mind. He really needs me to be verbal about things like that and sometimes I'm just not. (A1)

Anne explained that her husband had expected that since a particular opportunity had worked well for engaging physical intimacy, he assumed that same time would be appropriate the following day. Anne was surprised by this and articulated to her husband that other factors besides the appropriate time of day played a role in her readiness for physical intimacy. The other tasks and responsibilities Anne managed, coupled with the fatigue she associated with motherhood, contributed to her decision whether or not to engage sexual intimacy. She found those feelings to be difficult to express to her husband at times and said she thought he needed her to express herself verbally.

Kate echoed the sentiment mentioned by other participants that sleep deprivation, hormones, and even sex differences were reasons she and her husband had discussed to explain their diminished post-baby sex life. Kate also reported that in addition to decreased free time, she and her husband talked about the logistical limitations of sexual intimacy when living in close quarters:

Kate: Yeah, but then when you also throw in logistics . . . because even before kids

. . . when time isn't a problem, I'd be like "Yeah alright, we can do that, instead of whatever it is we were gonna do," cuz time isn't an issue. Not now, we live in a loft in the Pearl, so we have no bedroom . . . I mean, it's open. So his crib is next to our bed. So he literally has to be asleep or at my mom's house or else, it can't happen. (B2)

Work, household and parental role responsibilities took up much of Kate and her husband's time, making their personal time more sacred and as a result, they were less likely to make time for physical intimacy. She had talked with her husband about the decreased time and logistical issues of sharing a room with her son as a matter of fact, more as a characteristic of this phase of life and not a statement about their relationship. She never addressed whether her husband articulated similar or alternative notions and whether he had accepted the decreased physical intimacy with the same expression of inevitability.

Kate: And we've tried the living room and stuff, because we talk about how we're both freaked out by the fact that if he wakes up and sees us that he'll be scarred for life . . . And you have to be really quiet and everything . . . So you add being exhausted and then together you add the fact that his crib is next to our bed and I'm like, "Yeah, I'll see you in a couple years, honey." (B2)

All of the women in one focus group reported that their babies slept with them in their beds, either every night or as needed, during the first six months and that similar to Kate's story, they talked with their husbands about the logistical issues that co-sleeping with the baby put on their physical intimacy:

Anne: So yeah, that (co-sleeping) affects things. I remember my husband saying, "When did the bedroom become the only place that that ever happened? And I went, "Wow, that's a good question, I don't know."

Karina: Cuz you obviously can't do it while the baby is sleeping in bed with us. I don't think you ever have to like talk to your husband about that, at least I haven't, but you just both know you're gonna have to find another time. (A1)

Part of the discussion with spouses involved participants articulating the physical

healing process after giving birth and the medical reasons for delaying sex after the baby was born. Several of the women were surprised by their husbands' admitted lack of awareness of their wives' physical recovery postpartum:

Miranda: and there's at least a couple months where you just physically cannot. And somehow my husband missed that part of our prep classes because he said he didn't remember hearing that. And I told him, "The doctor said that. The doctor said it. It's not just me."

Kate: I had to highlight that part of the book for my husband and I said, "You understand the part about not having sex for at least six weeks, right?"

Danielle: I actually postponed that follow-up doctor appointment and I said, "Well, I can't do anything until after that appointment."

Kate: (laughing) "What do you mean honey!? The appointment is always two years after the first child. Did you miss that?" (B2)

And while the participants used a playful tone to describe their conversations with their husbands about the complex nature of physical recovery postpartum, they expressed genuine surprise that their husbands had not reached this conclusion on their own. For these women, pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery had such an all-encompassing effect, both physically and emotionally, that returning to a sexual routine was described as rather overwhelming. In this way, adding the role of mother to their other roles meant that these women communicated with their spouses the altered (short term or long term) nature of their desire for sexual intimacy.

Some of the participants took solace in the fact that when they eventually would have a second child, they (and their husbands) would have more realistic expectations regarding sexual intimacy. The knowledge of what was to come did not minimize the necessity for continued conversations about sex, but created a recognizable backdrop in which those conversations could take place.

Miranda: At least the second time around you'll know. I think, especially for my

husband, he'll be like, "I'll know what to expect. Sex is going to dramatically decrease after the baby is born, and then over time we'll work back up," but I think that initial shock of your first child.

Madison: And nothing seems to ever go back to normal. Yeah, second time around will be easier. (B2)

Danielle's last comment seemed to summarize her group's discussion about their communication with their spouses about sex since adding the role of mother:

Danielle: Yeah, that's a topic of conversation in and of itself. How you communicate about getting intimate and where you get intimate, because it is hard after kids. (B2)

4.4 The Discursive Interplay of Work and Mother Roles

In the fourth theme, participants described the juxtaposition of their worker and motherhood roles. Each participant had carefully considered how her work role would be affected by motherhood and how her mother role would be affected by work. Participants had engaged conversation about work-related decisions predominantly with their spouses, but also with parents, in-laws, siblings, friends, and work associates. While some of the women reported knowing whether working or not working while having a young child at home made sense for them, all nine participants described conversations and perspectives that spoke to the difficult, complex nature of their decision.

Some of the participants described how their interactions in the workplace had improved since adding the role of mother:

Miranda: I'm so much better at my job [since becoming a mother]. My job is being a pharmacist and all these young families come in and (before I was a mom) I'd be like (half-heartedly), "Oh, the diaper cream is over there." And now I'm like, "Oh my gosh (excitedly), Use this! Try this!" and especially with young moms, I feel so useful, because I not only know what the clinical studies say, I also know the reality and in reality, you can give Benedryl before they're six! (laughter from group) those kinds of things (pause) so that's been huge for my particular job. (B1)

Miranda reported being better at her job since adding the role of mother to her existing roles. She described having more enthusiasm and interest when talking with customers. Being a mother had the benefit of providing her experience using and understanding children's medication and she was able to translate her experiences as she related to customers who came to the pharmacy. Candice, a full time grade school teacher, relayed similar feelings:

Candice: But um...as far as how work as been, I definitely have a far better perspective with parents then I ever did before [since becoming a mother]. (B1)

Kate, who was also a full time grade school teacher, discussed the fulfillment she received from her work role since becoming a mom, despite her reported conflicting feelings about full time work:

Kate: And it's weird, but I do still feel like I get a certain fulfillment from working with children. And that was one of the things I was second guessing, I said to Owen, "I really want to keep working, but doesn't it not make sense that I'm leaving our child to go take care of other people's children?" But then there's also the relationship that I have with my colleagues, and there's the professional aspect. When I'm at work, I'm still doing the worker/mom thing, where as soon as it's my lunch time, the first thing I do is call whoever has Evan and say, "How's it going? Did he take a nap today?" I don't put it aside. And I kinda think Owen does. (B2)

Kate emphasized her work associate relationships and sense of professionalism as reasons that continuing work during the transition to motherhood had been fulfilling. She juxtaposed her work role closely with her mother role and stayed connected to her assumed motherhood responsibilities during work hours. She also reported that she did not think her husband integrated his father role into his work role the way she did.

Miranda also reported reasons her work role brought enjoyment and accomplishment in ways that she viewed were not possible with her mother role:

Miranda: But also, there are days (whispering) that I love to go to work. And before, I was just like, “Oh, another day to go to work.” But I feel good at my job now. I know what I’m doing. I can go to the bathroom when I want. I can get a snack when I want and I just feel this sense of accomplishment. Being a parent, I have no idea what I’m doing. Half the time it works, half the time it doesn’t, Tommy never says, “Gee mom, you’re a good mom, you’re doing a good job today!” But people at work say, “Oh thank you, that was really helpful!” And don’t get me wrong, I love being a mom, I absolutely love it, it’s the best thing ever. But, you’re just second guessing yourself a lot. (B1)

Miranda described being more excited about going to work since she became a mother. She reported enjoying certain freedoms at work that she did not get at home with her son. She said she felt more confident in her work-related decisions than her mother-related decisions and enjoyed receiving positive feedback from people at work because she knew she would not receive the same type of confirming messages from her son. Miranda reported more uncertainty and “second-guessing” associated with motherhood. In addition, she described how she felt she had created the right balance between work and motherhood:

Miranda: And I’m only working 30 hours, I’m not working as much as a lot of you . . . It’s so nice for me to have the ability to work that 30 hours and not be quite full time and just be spread really thin. . . .and then I still have that professional life and that sense of satisfaction that comes with that . . . so I was anticipating that I probably wouldn’t want to go back full time when I had the child. And to be honest, when it was time to go back, it was very very hard to go . . . My maternity leave was 3 months, and it was very hard, not that I wasn’t glad to go to work, just leaving my son was the hardest thing ever. . . .that was something I talked about with Trent a lot. (B1)

For Miranda, working less than full time, while also managing motherhood, provided a good balance and gave her a sense of satisfaction. She also reported feeling pulled between work and motherhood, not wanting to leave her son, but also wanting to return to work, and she discussed those competing feelings with her husband, Trent.

Candice discussed how her after work hours had decreased to accommodate for motherhood and caused problems within her teaching team:

Candice: I don't put in nearly the amount of hours that I used to, I know that you can attest to that [motioning to Kate]. I used to work until 6 at night and it wouldn't be a big deal because that's when my husband was getting home and now it's a big deal because having a meeting after school, it's just a constant pressure. Two of my colleagues have kids that have graduated from high school and the other two of us on the team have young one and two year olds, so there's this split that we didn't use to have [before kids]. They are there, putting more time in, putting more projects out, but we're still trying to be cohesive and it's really difficult. There's been a lot of communication breakdown among our team, our teaching team, because of that. (B1)

Candice reported working fewer hours after school and feeling pressure to stay longer, particularly since two other teachers on her team were able to put in longer hours. She described instances of communication breakdown between those in her team who had grown kids and worked more and those who had young kids and worked less.

Kate reported similar communication difficulties balancing her time at work with her time with her son and she described the conflicting feelings she experienced during the transition:

Kate: I went back to full time the first year of his life, and I probably cried 5 nights out of 7 because my whole thing was, "I suck as a mommy and I suck as a teacher this year."

Candice: Exactly how I felt.

Kate: Because I'm never with Evan enough and I'm never with the kids at work enough. I can't get anything done because I had to leave to get home and because of Owen's job and being gone, we handled daycare so that he'd have his few days off while I was working (so we never had days off together) . . . So there was always this pressure to leave. Leave because I want to see Evan, leave because the babysitter is costing us a fortune. Leave because Owen came home tonight and he leaves again in two days, and we only see each other at night, leave because I'm asking my mom for so much time and she's also taking care of elderly parents. So it was awful: communication with my team, communication with my husband, communication with my mom, it was all very emotional and stunted. (B1)

Kate's experience described competing desires between wanting to be a good worker, a good mother, a good wife, and a good daughter. She said she felt pressure trying to manage the transition to these four roles simultaneously. She described the pressure from her multiple roles as having a negative affect on her communication between work associates, her spouse, and her mother. Candice reported a similar push-pull between work and motherhood:

Candice: Well, part of it, I feel it's the pull of being the mom and you don't want to be like "Well, I need two more hours at work." You want to home with your child.
(B1)

Candice described not wanting to delay coming home to be with her husband and son because of work demands; however, she said she felt her work demands were also legitimate.

Candice: Yeah, it's hard, I know Nick even now, on school nights I'm lying in his bed with him, reading stories and he'll say, "Mommy, don't go to work tomorrow." and you just . . . me personally, you just start crying, and but I know you're not supposed to. I don't want him to see mom so emotional. But I'm like, "I know buddy, I know." (B1)

Candice reported having conversations with her son where he articulated his desire for her to stay home and she said those interactions were difficult. She reported enjoying her job and her work life, but also said she felt torn when her son pleaded with her to be with him instead.

The women who chose not to return to work, or worked minimal hours, talked about their identities and their conversations addressing how they viewed themselves since becoming mothers when their work role was temporarily not part of the roles they engaged:

Madison: Jon and I talk a lot about how this is a season I'm in now, how this is not my full identity [motherhood]. Part of me is a wife, part of me is a mom, part of me is a friend, a sister, a daughter. This is just a part of me. And this does not define who I am, there are many things that define who I am. So that was something I just had to come to grips with. My self worth doesn't come from being a mom, or a career oriented person. . . .(B1)

Madison reported having frequent discussions with her husband about how motherhood was not her full identify and that she defined herself by a variety of roles. Danielle also discussed conversations she had about her identity as a worker as she was taking on her identity as a mother:

Miranda: And your identity totally changes.

Danielle: And I struggled with that, I wasn't exactly doing something I loved to do (in terms of paid work), but I was working on getting there, finding something. And I just had to stop and say, "I'm gonna go be a mom," and you know, I think about it in the back of my mind, and I know when I choose to go back to work again, I will fully put my energy into it and be passionate about it. It is who you are, you get an identification from going and working outside the home. (B1)

Danielle reported struggling with the decision to leave her job, missing the identification she received from paid work. She anticipated putting energy and passion into her work role at the point she was ready to return to work.

Madison described receiving competing messages about how motherhood and work should be managed:

Madison: I still feel . . . and we're a very individualistic culture that promotes "You go out there and you be whatever you want to be," And I will do that, in terms of work at some point, but not right now, and I'm okay with that. I encourage all my friends, "Do what works for your family." And some of my friends say they are way more intentional about their time with their kids when they are working. But it's hard, I think being a woman, it's hard, the different camps and one camp says, "Yes! Get a job! Go for it!" and the other says, "Why aren't you staying home with your kids?"

Candice: and the internal pressure, I think innately, you feel that maternal pressure.

(B1)

Madison reported messages from various sources in her life that conflicted regarding whether to engage both work and motherhood and Candice reported a sense of maternal pressure that confounded the difficulty of the decision. Madison went on to describe how she and her husband had regular conversations about whether she should return to work:

Madison: The point is to say, “this is what is going on” it’s not always to find a solution. And sometimes it’s just me. I need encouragement to know this is what I’m supposed to be doing right now...being home (with Carson). We probably talk about that at least once a month right now. Should I be home or should I go get a job again? It’s a constant, constant question. (B1)

Madison said she revisited the conversation about whether she should return to work repeatedly with her husband and their discussions never reached a concrete conclusion, but were engaged over and over again. She provided some of the reasons she continually revisited the idea of returning to work:

Madison: I usually bring it up. Actually, Jon has never brought it up. One, we are tight financially, and two, I didn’t grow up thinking I was gonna be a stay at home mom. I went to school to have a career. That was my mind set. And so even though Carson is two years old, I’m still saying to Jon, “I need to be doing something.” So part of it could be I’ve had a really rough day and I’m bored out of my mind and I’m tired of reading children’s books (laughter from group) and I don’t want to go to the park or talk about dirty diapers anymore and I’m like, “Okay, I’m ready to go to work!” And at the end of the day, we weigh the pros and cons and Jon is supportive of whatever I want to do, and for right now, there is nothing I feel like I should go back to work for. So, the conversation is always induced by me, and more for my satisfaction than Jon’s. (B2)

Madison was always the one who initiated discussion about whether she should reintegrate a work role among her other roles. She reported the difficulty she experienced managing motherhood at the exclusion of work and that certain components of motherhood responsibilities made the notion of a work life more attractive. She described her husband as supportive of whatever choice she made explaining that he would engage

those conversations with her, but never initiated them.

Brenda described the difference between her expectation and the reality of staying home with her daughter. Brenda delivered legal papers five evenings a week, which she did mostly after her daughter went to bed, and she ran an online sewing business, which she did during her daughter's nap times:

Brenda: I remember talking a lot about how it was going to be really fun and stuff to be a stay-at-home mom. I remember talking to my husband and my mom about it a lot, just how different it was, because you don't get that adult interaction, whether you were talking to vendors or customers or coworkers or just anybody, you still are talking to an adult. And I remember talking to my mom and talking to my friends who had babies, talking about how different it was. Because you don't have that same appreciation every day of "Oh, you did a good job, you're going to get a raise." That baby is still screaming at you, no matter what you just did. And um, I remember talking about that, the differences and about how I felt, which was maybe a little depressed, you know, just the feelings that you have. (A1)

Brenda engaged conversation with her husband, her mom, and her friends about how she felt staying home full time. She described missing the adult interaction she had during her work week and she had told others she felt somewhat depressed dealing with the contrast of going from full time employment to full time care-giving of her daughter. Brenda also commented on the lack of verbalized appreciation from others for her job managing motherhood in comparison to the feedback one received in a paid position.

Danielle reported similar feelings about the importance of verbalized confirmation for her role as a mother, particularly from her husband:

Danielle: And Derek comes to me, not all the time, but he does say, "I really appreciate your staying home because I can go to work and I feel at peace. . . I don't worry, I know you're doing a good job." So that to me is like my every once in a while little paycheck or bonus from him.

Danielle reported her husband would affirm her decision to stay home with their two

young children and he verbally endorsed her job as a mother. She found his comments encouraging and they operated as an intangible “paycheck” for her. Danielle went on to explain that while she appreciated the confirmation she received from Derek, she still struggled with the reality of receiving little-to-no paid work compensation:

Candice: That must make you feel so good.

Danielle: But it’s hard, it’s hard to not have that . . . that every two weeks you get a paycheck, or a review, or be told, “you’re doing a good job,” or “you need to work on this.” So for my husband to be my partner in all of this, um, for him to give that confirmation and saying “You’re doing a good job. Hang in there.” And he admits, “I couldn’t stay home.” . . . It’s not an easy job to be at home. You don’t get those kind of rewards like you get at a job where you are getting paid and you are seeing the instant end-of-day gratification.

Danielle reported staying home was a difficult job and she missed not reaping the feedback and benefits from paid work but also valued her husband’s messages of support.

Karina did not engage paid work once she became a mother and she discussed needing personal time since she did not have the separate, alone time that had been part of her former work life:

Karina: And I think staying home and not working outside the home, we’ve had a ton of conversations, mainly coming from me about him getting to have that time away from home at work. We’ve talked a ton about like that we each need our own time away. Just alone time, personal time. . . . Just the sacrifice that the other person has to make for it . . . And I’ve expressed to him that he does have his time where he gets to go and work and I’m just staying with her all the time, but he’s been very understanding. . . . For me, I feel guilty, because I’m doing that thing: “It’s not fair because you get to go drive in your car to work for twenty minutes and you get that alone time.” And he’s like, “I’m making calls to clients on the way to work!”(A1)

Karina spoke pointedly about the juxtaposition of her lack of paid work and her husband’s presence of paid work, indicating that she had engaged discussion with him that his work role allowed him personal time and her full time motherhood role did not

accommodate as well for separate time, but was still important and necessary. She said she feeling guilty that her husband's alone time in the car was a privilege she envied.

Miranda reported that she knew after her maternity leave that she would not be successful staying home full time:

Miranda: I don't know about you guys, but I think maternity leave was wonderful because it was like that practice time of, "Okay, this is what it's like staying home." Granted it was a crash course, but still (pause) I felt like by two and a half months into it, I didn't want to leave my son. I knew that, I knew that, but I didn't think I was very good at being the stay at home person, and I didn't feel like if I did stay at home full time like I would be successful. And so, I still felt like it was the right decision to go back. (B1)

Miranda said she saw maternity leave as providing a glimpse into the characteristics of staying home full time. She described feeling conflicted about leaving her son, but explained that had she not gone back to work in some capacity, she would not have been successful.

The women also described feedback and input they received from significant others in their lives about the participants' decisions regarding the interplay of their work role and mother role choices. Candice reported the responses she received from a work associate when Candice had shared with the colleague that managing full time work and motherhood proved difficult at times:

Candice: . . . even one of my colleagues . . . I've had similar conversations about all the push-pull, and she said, "Well, why don't you just stay home with him then?" And . . . I really like working. I like the job I do. I became a teacher because I'm passionate about children. And yes, my child is very important. And when people say that to me, it just frustrates me to no end. I work because I like to have something for myself. And maybe that's selfish, I know some people think of it that way but I know I'm better for Nick in that I have . . . and that's just me personally, that's my personality.

Miranda: Absolutely

Candice: When I'm home in the summer with him all day every day, I'm like

“Honey, I love ya, but there’s gotta be something more than me.” And he needs something more than me everyday. (B1)

Candice spoke about the frustration she felt when her work associate suggested she stay home as a way to resolve the tension Candice mentioned experiencing between full time work and motherhood. She articulated the reasons she needed to maintain a work role as well as a mother role and indicated that her son also needed a variety of people in his life interacting with him beyond just his mother.

Miranda described the conversations she had with work associates when determining the extent she would return to work after becoming a mother:

Miranda: And many people at work kept saying, “You’re not gonna come back. You’re not coming back.” Because a lot of people do do that. They take maternity leave and then they think, “Why would I go back? This is so wonderful.” But for me, I need external structure. I don’t really thrive in . . . I need a place to be at a certain time and I need that influence of other people in that activity. I’m just a slow starter if I’m left to my own devices. And making a life out of being a full time mom, to me that is much harder than going to work. That is the harder choice. (B1)

Miranda reported needing external structure in her life and her work role provided an element of structure and influence she said she felt was more difficult to achieve with full-time motherhood. She also reported that from her perspective, the choice for full time motherhood at the absence of a work role was a more difficult path.

Anne discussed her process in deciding the extent she would be a worker and a mother and the people who influenced her decision:

Anne: I remember, when I was in between . . . I had my first career and now I have my second career, and I watched my sister and my sister-in-law who both gave up their great jobs to be full time stay-at-home moms and I remember just kind of observing women who were full time moms and full time working and I just kinda did a check-in with myself and I said, “I’m not going to be able to do that. I’m not going to be able to do all those roles and the expectations I’d put on myself with

those roles.” So I thought, what can I do that at the point that I’m a mom, I can do it part time, and on my schedule, when I want to? How do I have that kind of control? So that’s how I decided that I wanted to go to school. Third date with my husband I said, “I want to get married, I want to have kids, I plan on working part time.” (A1)

Anne described observing and talking with friends and relatives about the way they had engaged work and motherhood and she said she felt the balance she chose of part-time employment was right for her. She reported feeling confident enough in the approach she wanted to take regarding work and motherhood that she articulated her preference for her work/mother arrangement at the outset of her relationship with her husband.

The women described many people with whom they had conversed about their decisions to work or not work and the extent they would incorporate work into motherhood. All the women described their husbands as the one with whom they had the most discussion about the interplay of work and motherhood:

Candice: And Marshall has always been really supportive of what I wanted to do, He has always said, “If you want to stay home full time, I’d really love for you to do that and we’ll find a way to make it work. But if you want to be working, I understand that too,” and so, that’s been really great, just to have somebody that, and to know that whatever we decide, either way, we’ll be okay. It was just more about what I personally wanted. (B1)

Candice described how her husband supported her decision to return to work full time or to stay home full time and that the decision was based on her personal preference. She also said in subsequent discussion that she did not think staying home would have been feasible due to financial responsibilities. Madison received similar support from her husband for her choice:

Madison: It was something that Jon was totally supportive of, whatever I wanted to do, and I didn’t decide until I was eight and a half months pregnant. I told him, “I don’t think I’m gonna come back.” It’s something I asked a lot of people about and

it came down to my personality. I'm either going to fully do this job or I'm going to fully not do it, and maybe some jobs it would have worked, but the job I had specifically, I was traveling a lot. There wasn't a part time job in this job.

Madison made her decision to stay home shortly before her son was born at which point she told her husband what she had decided. She described feeling that she wanted to full devote herself to her job and at that particular point in her life she was choosing her mother work rather than paid work. She also said that her previous job would not have accommodated to a part time arrangement.

Debbie described her husband's messages of support as she considered the possibility of delaying her return to work as a special education teacher longer than they had originally planned.

Debbie: When my boss told me I could take the rest of the school year off, I was like, "Wow, really?" and so then I talked with my husband, "Do you think we can do this? Can we handle it?" And he was great. His mom took a couple years off when he was born so he was like "Yeah, my mom did it and they survived so why couldn't you?" And even now when I talk about the budget and whether I'll have a job next year, he says "Would that be so bad? Would it be so bad if you had to stay home with the baby?" And I just go, "Well, no, actually I'd probably want to do that more." It's pretty nice that we're able to talk about that. I don't know if I talk to anyone else about that. (A1)

Debbie described that her husband was the primary person with whom she could discuss the prospect of working or not working since she became a mother. Her husband referenced his own mother's decision to take several years off when he was a child and he recalled the success of that experience to mean that he and Debbie could manage her delay re-entry into paid work as well.

The participants had many varied, complex discussions about the interplay of their work roles and mother roles and these conversations incorporated the perspectives

of spouses, parents, friends, and work associates. All nine of the women grappled with the decisions about the extent they would be workers while also being mothers and their interactions with others helped to shape and inform their ongoing assessments of their work/mothering choices.

5. Discussion

I have interpreted ways dialectical tensions operated within the participants' discursive experiences as they navigated the transition to motherhood while they were also enacting their multiple roles as wives, daughters and workers. In addition, this discussion will address how the participants discursively engaged their new role development as mothers as that development interacted with the constructs of their existing roles, as well as identify how the participant' perceptions about their interactions with their husbands, parents, and work associates informed the women's decisions about their adaptations to their multiple roles. Analysis of the interactions reported by these women in the focus groups provided responses to the research questions of this study in each of the four overarching themes presented in the results section.

In the first theme, the women supplied two strategies for dealing with "help" messages; women's interpretations of these messages directly related to their efforts to clarify and integrate their multiple roles. In the second theme, the participants used three discursive approaches to develop parameters around what they interpreted to be their motherhood roles. The third theme revealed five areas in which the women developed strategies to adapt their conversations to accommodate to the dialectical contradictions among their various roles. The fourth theme comprised the women's discursive strategies

to negotiate the interplay of their work and motherhood roles. The themes emerged from the women's discussions based on the participants' responses. Each theme included several sub-themes which correspond to the same themes and sub-themes identified in the results chapter. The collective conversations among the participants captured examples of push-pulls that occurred naturally among competing dialectical forces, capturing how relational dialectics were engaged within these women's relationships as they were adding motherhood to their pre-existing roles through communication.

Throughout this analysis, two of the three supra-dialectics (Integration-Separation and Expression-Privacy) emerged more pointedly in specific instances. The third supra-dialectic (Stability-Change) emerged as a grounding foundation to the other dialectics. The supra-dialectics of Integration-Separation and Expression-Privacy were revealed through the internal dialectics of autonomy-connection and openness-closedness between the women and their significant others, sometimes occurring as the woman replayed the interactions to herself. The external dialectics of inclusion-seclusion and revelation-concealment were revealed between the couples and other parties (parents, friends, work associates). Because I am interested in the women's perspectives, which have been informed by interactions with others, some of the dialectical interpretations will center on the participants' interpretations of their dialectical experiences. "From an dialogical perspective, internal psychological thoughts and feelings are conceptualized as inner dialogues in which multiple discourses are at play" (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006, p.133).

The third supra-dialectic, Stability-Change, was also present in the findings and will be discussed in a few sub-themes of this chapter; however, the competing pulls

between stability and change were found to operate more as backdrop to the other dialectics. While statements addressing the simultaneous exigency of stability and change occurred in the dialogue, the conversations reported by the women spoke more indirectly than directly to its presence. Since the transition to motherhood for the participants involved an all-encompassing assessment of the interplay of their mother, spouse, worker, and daughter roles through discourse, responding to the opposing pulls of novelty-predictability and conventionality-uniqueness remained an underlying issue throughout their discussions, discussions that were then engaged through the Integration-Separation and Expression-Privacy dialectics.

In this chapter, I will present my interpretations of the results, assessing relational dialectics throughout the discussion, as well as conversational argument issues as they occurred in the four thematic categories. Following that discussion, I will draw conclusions for further research.

5.1 The Women's Interpretation of "Help" Messages

One of the key findings that converged as a theme in the study included the significance of the women's reported feelings of frustration surrounding being asked "Do you need help?" and "What can I do to help?" The women reported that answering "yes" to these questions implied an insufficient ability to complete the task or manage the responsibility associated with that role. These questions created dialectical tensions for the women that resonated with everyone in the group.

5.1.1 Offering help. The first sub-theme within the women's interpretation of help messages focused on dialectical dilemmas found to occur for the participants when

they were offered help managing the responsibilities they associated with motherhood. The push-pull they reported experiencing occurred across three dialectical tensions: autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and revelation-concealment. The openness-closedness tension was present between some of the women and their spouses as the women struggled to define and articulate the perceived implications behind help offered and help accepted when evaluated in the context of their abilities to manage their motherhood roles. By saying “yes” to help offered from her husband, a new mother’s open response would potentially suggest that she was ineffective in meeting her definition of her motherhood role. The women talked about their unwillingness to express that vulnerability. Conversely, saying “no” even though help would have been appreciated created a pull towards closedness, keeping the woman’s need for help private and thus drawing parameters around her willingness to disclose that she felt overwhelmed and unable to control the demands of motherhood. Examples of these situations that resonated with all the participants in both groups demonstrated the participants’ push towards closedness:

Debbie: Peter will ask, “Do you need help?” And I’m like, “Oh no! I got it.” . . . So yeah, so he’s definitely like, “Tell me what you need.” And I’m like, “Okay.” But then I don’t, and then I get mad at him.

Brenda: “Oh, can I help you with that?” and I’ll say, “NO!” . . . Even though really I’m thinking, “I need some help! Take her!”

The mothers restricted their levels of disclosure in these instances and chose not to reveal that help was needed, even though they either initially agreed to disclose when additional help would be warranted or admitted later to the focus group to actually needing the help they denied during the exchange. The choice to share personal needs or keep them

private often hinges on the risk-benefit ratio for those involved (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2002) explains that revealing exposes people to a certain amount of vulnerability, as does concealing. Participants had to assess the risk-benefit of revealing their vulnerability they associated with needing help, just as they assessed the risk-benefit of concealing the need. The decision to censor their help response demonstrated the strong pull towards closedness and concealment for these new mothers who likely saw greater vulnerability associated with revelation and openness in the context of accepting help.

Another commonality among many of the participants when faced with the question “Do you need help?” was a sense of surrendering control, or giving up a degree of autonomy, by accepting help. In this manner, conflicting desires across the autonomy/connection tension was evident in the interpretation of help messages. Part of accepting help also meant that whoever was helping could potentially perform the task or manage the responsibility in a way other than how the mother saw as most appropriate for their child and the situation. So as the spouse offered help in a potential attempt to pull toward “connection,” the woman often pushed back toward autonomy, not wanting to give up control over the task itself or yield to the broader implications she perceived saying “yes” to help would have on her capacity to navigate motherhood.

Brenda: I think it's a control thing. I like to have control, which ahhh makes me crazy sometimes, but I don't want to...even my mom will say, “Oh, can I help you with that?” and I'll say, “NO!” And I almost get kind of like, “Don't ask me that. I can do this. I can do everything.” . . . I think it's definitely control for me at least.

Debbie: And then I think another part is just like well, “I can do everything, I'm super. Super-duper mom. And no I don't need any help!”

Brenda's response of “yes” to help offered meant she was giving up some of the

control over the tasks she identified with motherhood. She gravitated toward autonomy as means to dialogically navigate her transition to motherhood, and that autonomy was articulated in the form of exerting control, thus pulling away from connection or inclusion of another's help in a given task. Likewise, Debbie's reference to herself as "Super mom" demonstrated a pull towards the individual, rather than a collective, team-like orientation characteristic of the connected, inclusive component of this dialectical dilemma.

Interestingly, the women clarified that they would be more amenable to help when the help was offered in a manner that did not undermine their autonomy:

Anne: If we're so capable as women, and then having somebody ask us if we need help. "No, we don't need help. Would we like help? Would we like you to just take the baby while we're doing something? . . . That would be great." But it's the "Do you need help?" . . . because we're so capable. And you get kinda resentful. It's like, "No, I'm doing this."

Anne emphasized the important difference communicated in the language choice "needing" help versus "liking" or "wanting" help. The participants in the focus group verbally supported this distinction that appreciating help or liking help was provisional in tone rather than being essential or necessary. As soon as the offer for help was phrased as a need, the accompanying tonality was interpreted differently by the participants. When the women in the focus groups sensed that their maternal capability was inadvertently being challenged, the tendency was to refuse the offer of help.

5.1.2 What can I do to help? The second sub-theme within the women's interpretations of help messages addressed the dialectical feature of openness-closedness between their spouses when the husbands asked the women, "What can I do to help?"

The women described a push-pull with their spouses who wanted to be told how they could help and the women's responses of frustrating that their husbands did not already know where and how help was needed.

The participants grappled with openness-closedness with their husbands as their spouses attempted to facilitate openness by asking questions about how to perform childcare and house-related tasks and the women responded with closedness because they wanted their husbands to be able to manage these tasks independent of their instruction. "I actually told Brad once, "Don't ask me what you can do. Find something," and, "It's an additional thing that you have to add to your list, is like make a list for him. . . . I'm like, "I can't make a list because I'm busy with the kids and doing my stuff that I have to get done." The frustration the women reported experiencing sometimes resulted in conversational argument between the participants and their spouses. This argument was most often instigated by the women during the instances that they chose to acknowledge a discrepancy between their task management responsibilities. Sometimes the husbands were reported to concede to their wives' perspectives and resolved the disagreement by finding something to do without prompting. Other times the husbands were said to articulate why task instruction was preferred and the women would choose whether to disagree with their reasoning and then perform the task themselves or concede and then provide their husbands with a list of tasks to be completed.

The women's frustration about their husbands request for a "to-do" list also spoke to the participants' conflicting perspectives about help messages. On the one hand, the women did not want to seem incapable of managing the responsibilities they had

assigned to motherhood and therefore often refused help. Conversely, the women also saw opportunities where help was in fact necessary and they wanted their husbands to jointly enact parental role responsibilities rather than allowing the responsibility to reside exclusively with the women. The act of asking what needed to be done implied that the women primarily managed those tasks and that providing answers and lists necessitated their involvement with and association to those tasks. (e.g., Kate: “But do you ever get irritated that you have to give him a task?” Madison: “Yes!” Kate: “I want to say to him, ‘Who makes my list?’ I’m just thinking of these things.”)

The “both/and” quality of relating reflects how the women in the focus groups wanted to both accept help *and* deny help; to simultaneously desire to be open about the support they needed *and* desire to be closed; to crave both connection with their partner in managing parenthood and crave autonomy from their partner in managing motherhood as an individual. Fundamentally, relational dialectics embraces the “both/and”-ness of the dialogic experience, acknowledging the simultaneous needs identified through the interplay of unified oppositions (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Couples gain their meaning from the give-and-take interplay of multiple, competing perspectives (Baxter, 2006). Each participant’s opposing pulls towards these competing perspectives could not be resolved into consistent, universal approaches.

5.2 Perceived Characteristics of Engaging Motherhood

The second theme captured the participants’ perceptions of the characteristics involved when engaging motherhood. Based on the frequency of appearance, the depth of the conversation engaged, and the number of participants who joined the conversation

three sub-themes emerged from among several topics. These three sub-themes were managed through specific relational dialectics. The first sub-theme centered on the women's uses of communicative strategies found in the external dialectics of inclusion-seclusion and revelation-concealment to establish boundaries defining their motherhood role. The second sub-theme addressed the participants' expressions of guilt to navigate autonomy-connection surrounding the management of their motherhood expectations. The third sub-theme involved engaging the motherhood role as primary, which revealed how the women engaged the internal dialectic of connection-autonomy, a dynamic which incorporated her child as well as her husband.

5.2.1 Establishing motherhood role boundaries through communication. The first sub-theme within the theme of the perceived characteristics of motherhood was that the women in the focus groups repeatedly emphasized the importance of using communication to establish boundaries to capture mothering responsibilities they believed were theirs. The dialectical contradictions evident during the communicative manifestation of role boundaries were inclusion-seclusion and revelation-concealment. Since the conventionality-uniqueness dialectic was not directly referenced by the participants, I did not include it as a point of analysis in this sub-theme. A push-pull was experienced among all nine participants apparent in their reported examples in which someone close to them, like their mother, sister, or husband, would attempt to assume a particular responsibility with the baby, resulting in the participant voicing displeasure for intervening in her maternal territory. The interplay of the inclusion-seclusion and revelation-concealment tensions during the establishment of role boundaries were most

commonly reported in the context of the mother-daughter relationship. Participants reported examples of their mothers or sisters stepping in and either physically responding to the baby or commenting and providing advice on the appropriate way to care for the baby when the participant said she felt the responsibility should belong to her. (e.g., “My mom is taking over and I think she’s just doing it because she’s grandma and she loves him, but I wasn’t okay with it.”)

The dialectical dilemma of integration-separation emerged from the women’s reported experiences about establishing role boundaries. The participants described conversations that revealed the tension of inclusion versus seclusion. (e.g., “‘Let me be the mom’ . . . I would really have to draw a boundary and say, ‘I am going to do this,’ and push her [my mom] back.” And, “I had to draw more boundaries and she [my mom] definitely was trying to step in more, or step on my toes . . . so I had to say to her, “Okay, this isn’t okay. This isn’t working for me.”) By making statements such as “Let me be the mom,” “This is my job and I need to make my own decisions” and “I’m the mommy,” the participants were attempting to establish a boundary through communication and create autonomy in their roles as mothers. Through role change, boundary connections among and between people become linked and disengaged in a spiraling fashion, coming together and pulling apart depending on the ebb and flow of the information being maintained (Petronio, 2002). When the mothers perceived the grandmothers as stepping over a boundary into their motherhood domain, the mothers verbally pushed back, further defining their autonomy to what they viewed as a mother’s job or responsibility. Baxter &

Montgomery (1996) contend that relationship parties use dialogue to expose each other to different perspectives, interests, and approaches, thus helping one another's selves to become. When the women in the focus group reported verbalizing their perspective on what they viewed as their maternal responsibility, they were developing themselves as mothers through dialogue.

In addition to inclusion-seclusion, the external dialectic of revelation-concealment was also operating for the participants as they described their conversations establishing boundaries with their mothers and sisters. The women reported communicating that a particular task was their job as the mother which revealed and characterized how they wanted to be seen in their motherhood role. When Candice told a story about her sister coming into Candice's son's room at 2am to hold him, Candice vocalized that she viewed comforting her baby at night as her responsibility, not her sister's. By choosing to articulate her perspective on this issue, Candice was revealing information to shape her sister's understanding of Candice as a mother. On a different night, Candice might have been obliged to have her husband comfort the baby instead of her, however she might not choose to share those occurrences with her sister. So by including certain examples of how she mothers and by excluding other examples, Candice used communication to shape and create an impression of how she managed motherhood.

A few of the women did not draw as clear of a boundary distinguishing their maternal role responsibilities from their mother's grandmother role responsibilities. An abundance of praise from the participant's mother about the participant's success managing motherhood negated the need to impose an exclusionary boundary of that

separated and defined the mother role from the grandmother role. (e.g., “And my mom . . . she does a lot of praising in terms of me as a mom. She always says, “You’re doing such a great job.” So she gives me lots of pats on the back about things. So I haven’t had to draw a lot of boundaries . . . they don’t point out the bad stuff, they only point out the good stuff.”) To the extent that the women received repeated positive, endorsing messages from their own mothers regarding their abilities to capably manage motherhood, (and at the exclusion or minimization of negative, condemning messages), they pulled toward inclusion and revelation, as opposed to seclusion and concealment.

5.2.2 Communicating the management of motherhood expectations. The second sub-theme in the perceived characteristics of motherhood centered on the women’s communicated expectations of how motherhood should be managed. The women reported feelings of guilt when they did not perform motherhood sufficiently to their own expectations, and their maternal expressions of guilt were juxtaposed with the acknowledgement that their husbands did not manage fatherhood with mirrored paternal expressions of guilt. The dialectic that operated for these women surrounding their motherhood role expectations centered on the autonomy-connection contradiction.

The participants’ declarations of guilt, apology and stress revealed the power of their expectations of their roles as mothers. When they reported feeling a disequilibrium in their navigation of the transition to motherhood, communication with their partners about their feelings functioned to manage that tension. The women used the discourse of connection to bridge the gap between the type of mother they wanted to be and the type of mother they perceived themselves to be in that moment. (e.g., “Why can’t I do all of

this? I still have that feeling that as a good mom I should have been able to get something done.”) The lack of connection to their assumed motherhood role responsibilities was frequently coupled with pronouncements of confliction, which worked to project a sense of connection through their words when their actions appeared to project autonomy (e.g., “It’s a commitment and you want to go [have time to yourself], but then you always feel that pull like, where should I be and what should I be doing?”)

The findings revealed a fundamental difference between the way these women and their husbands engaged guilt talk as a means to manage autonomy-connection surrounding role expectations during the transition to parenthood. The women’s conversations about guilt quickly morphed into discussion about their husbands’ lack of guilt over similar opportunities to engage autonomy from parental role responsibilities.

Miranda: The sad thing is, I don’t think my husband feels that way [guilty].

Madison: Yeah, they don’t.

Candice: I don’t think so either.

Miranda: He could go golfing all day or anything else and I don’t think he feels for two seconds “Oh, I should be home.”

From the participants’ perspectives, their husbands’ lack of guilt was as equally frustrating as the women’s presence of guilt. (e.g., “I really did feel guilty, and then I’d get mad at myself for feeling guilty cuz I thought, I know Owen’s not feeling guilty right now when he’s in Mexico having happy hour with the rest of the pilots.”) The participants described feeling compelled to offer explanations to justify their need for autonomy to help resolve guilt and pull them back towards equilibrium regarding their motherhood roles. That their husbands were perceived not to experience an equivalent push-pull revealed not only that the men were reported as responding to autonomy and

connection differently than the women in regard to role expectations during the transition to parenthood, but also that the participants wanted both not to experience guilt for autonomy while simultaneously wanted their husbands to project at least some guilt for lack of connection.

5.2.3 Engaging motherhood as primary role. The third sub-theme within the perceived characteristics of motherhood emerged through the interplay of the internal connection-autonomy dialectic as the women engaged motherhood as a primary, continuous role, managing and responding to their motherhood responsibilities while simultaneously managing their other roles. The women placed an intrinsic value on connection and they extended that value toward their husbands' interaction with the children. Since the participants valued and embodied motherhood as a central role, their communication with their spouses revealed a preference for the husbands to manifest fatherhood with the same all-encompassing totality.

Annis Golden's study (2002) described how relationship parties enact a repertoire of "the self" and a repertoire "of other" to define role identities and develop shared meanings. Golden's point can be applied to the women's discussions about how motherhood and fatherhood role enactment should privilege the connectedness dialectic. Golden's research was characterizing the interplay of the internal "self" with the external "other;" however, the participants' discourse demonstrated that the women were also projecting a preference that their husbands should favor connectedness and value "the other" (the child) over the autonomy of "the self." Some of the participants expressed a desire for their husbands to display the same self-other relationship they themselves were

developing with their child as a way to foster connection.

The women's approaches to and philosophy of how mothers and fathers should engage connection and autonomy provided reasoning for the construction of the claim that "good parenting" meant focused attention on the child and often sacrificing personal needs and desires in favor of "the other." The husbands were described as wanting to accomplish a task or enjoy an activity related to "self" (like watching television or mowing the lawn) while the children were present, even if not being directly and singly engaged, and the women argued that their husbands' approaches privileged their autonomy, sometimes at the expense of the women's autonomy. (e.g., "He's always got something else, besides the kids going on . . . I'm like, 'Can you just play with the kids . . . just focus on them?' So that I know, in my mind, that he's engaged with them.") Some of the women reasoned with their husbands that their children received more quality attention when their husbands were not splitting their focus between a personal task and the children. (e.g., "I just told him that I understand he wants to watch his game, but I need help too sometimes. I can't always do it all . . . He says [to her], 'Come over here and watch the game with me,' . . . that's boring for her.") The participants described being less able to focus on their individual autonomy when they observed a lack of connection in their husbands' and children's interactions. (e.g., "I just wanted you to focus on them and not clean the garage . . . so I'm not having to think about that.' . . . that I could really just shut off, as a mom, for a minute.")

An important commonality among the data was that the women commonly asked

their spouses to watch their children. The act of asking implied the responsibility of childcare centered on the mother. Leidner (2006) described how the rise in women's paid employment has not been matched by a proportional rise in men's domestic work, in part because of how closely much of this work is linked to gender identity. When she wanted to engage another task, the woman asked her husband to step in and act as primary caregiver until she had completed her task and could return to her childcare duties. (e.g., "I asked for some time, and so then he's on.") Danielle's language choice reflected the notion that fatherhood could be turned on and turned off, and that turning fatherhood responsibilities "on" came as a result of being asked. (e.g., "Whenever I'm home he's my responsibility so if I have to do something I'll say, 'I need to do this. Can you watch him for me?'"")

The women in these examples offered some kind of explanation to their husbands of why their assistance with childcare was needed. (e.g., "Do you have time to watch her? I'm gonna go to the grocery store.") Previous research on role management shows that men seem to segment their roles more than women, focusing on one role at a time, and women have stronger between-role linkages, engaging multiple roles at any given moment (Rothberg, 2001). This finding was consistent with the way the women in the focus groups described their husbands' abilities to segment their father roles, integrating and separating themselves more easily from this responsibility. However, this role segmentation was a source of frustration for the women because when their husbands engaged fatherhood intermittently and often without negotiation, their spouses approach had a direct impact on the participant's management of motherhood.

Finally, an important underlying observation to autonomy and connection in these examples is that while the women were advocating that the husbands take on a more other-centered approach when spending time with their children, part of their fundamental reasoning behind this desire was so that the women would be able to attend to another task, a task that may or may not involve an other-centered focus (at least not a child-focused task). In this manner, the women were also advocating for their autonomous selves when they advocated for connectedness between father and child. So the fundamental viewpoint of the participants was not necessarily to always sacrifice self for other, but that each partner needed to create moments of fully engaging “the other” to allow their spouse to be free to engage “the self.”

5.3 Adaptations to Conversations

The women’s reported communication events during the transition to motherhood revealed a third thematic category, that of conversational adaptations since adding the role of mother. Conversations were affected by the presence and sudden exigency of parental role responsibilities in several key ways: 1) the nature of conversational dialogue became more complex; 2) mothers became more selective about revelation-concealment surrounding parental decision-making; 3) communication between spouses was more logistical and intentional; 4) conversational arguing was more multifaceted and somewhat more prevalent; 5) physical intimacy changed and conversations about physical intimacy changed as well. I will address each conversational adaptation, drawing connections from the findings to dialectical theory.

5.3.1 Complex nature of conversations. The first sub-theme within the

conversational adaptations theme was the struggle to adapt to the complex nature of conversation, which centered on the interplay of the stability-change dialectic. “Change is inherent in contradiction because the interplay of unified oppositions results in a system that is perpetually in flux” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.10). Of the many ways communication changed during the transition to motherhood, the participants repeatedly described conversations as shorter, more interrupted, and with less depth than conversations were before the addition of children. (e.g., “You’re trying to hold conversations with people while you are taking care of the baby . . . all of that shut down for a while . . . it wasn’t like you have a lot of time to just sit down and discuss stuff.”) Many of the women expressed frustration that focusing their attention and engaging conversation with a friend or family member had become difficult. The push-pull within this dialectical dilemma had resulted in an abundance of novelty and change, and very little predictability. The women grappled with the stability-change contradictions, having to choose between the conversant and their child and inevitably their maternal role responsibilities were often given precedent over their spousal or friendship responsibilities.

Prior to motherhood, the women in the focus groups were free to fully engage their friend, spouse, or relative in conversation with little interruption; their interaction could be more easily controlled and was therefore more stable. Because the addition of the parental role is a period marked by significant change (Stamp, 1994), the women reported the affects of that change extended to their dialogue with others. (e.g., “And then we started to engage in a conversation . . . and all of the sudden Nick is over here

screaming and banging on the table and I know he's doing it because I'm now engaged with somebody for over two minutes other than him.") Conversations such as Candice's and others became more pulled, more unpredictable: (e.g., "And that's hard because you're in public and you're thinking, "Okay, take a deep breath" and calming, but the conversation is over and that's hard because you don't get back to that place so easily.")

The interactions each woman had were in a perpetual state of flux, balancing her desire to engage her child with her desire to engage her friend, spouse, or relative. And for Candice, operating dialogically in a state of flux meant some conversational topics got dropped because she was simultaneously managing motherhood along with her other conversational responsibilities. Adapting to the simultaneous exigence of motherhood and friendship, the women's stories depicted the interplay between these roles as the women characterized their adult conversations as "a soundbite" and "diminished" and "not the depth that it used to be before kids." Participants experienced opposing pulls between their motherhood selves and her friend selves, wanting to be present for their child, but also present in their conversations. (e.g., "Half your brain is over here with the child and the other half is with the other person," "You have a couple dialogues going on at the same time," and, "You're fully multitasking") Multitasking was often used as a way to adapt and respond to the significant change, ambiguity, and unpredictability that now hallmarked their dialogue As the women learn to adapt their conversational approaches, new contradictions will emerge instigating new changes in their management tactics. In this manner, "stability punctuates change, providing the "baseline" moments by which change is discerned" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.10).

In addition, some mothers reported issues they faced when considering how to navigate the interplay of their childcare responsibilities with their relationship responsibilities:

Danielle: Even on the phone...a girlfriend said, “Wow, that was loud,” and I just didn’t even notice . . . but I thought, “Gosh, what if I’m the person who’s on the other end?” . . .So now I tell Jeffery not to yell when I’m on the phone, but now that I’ve put a rule or like a guideline on it, he knows now that I’m on the phone he screams and so those conversations on the phone are limited.

Danielle’s response to managing her son’s outbursts during phone conversations was driven by feedback she received from a girlfriend and her mother. She created a rule to monitor her son’s interruptions after reflecting on how his screams likely affect the listener. Through their jointly enacted communicative choices, relationship parties respond to dialectical exigencies that were produced from past interactional history together (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). So as Danielle altered her parenting approach during phone conversations based on her previous communication with other people, she became faced with new questions: “And then I’m like, do I stand my ground on the phone with my kids and say I’m on the phone and this rule stands, or do you cut your friends or your husband off and say I’ve gotta deal with this and I’ll call you back later?” thus further altering the dialectical experience she may face in the future.

The prevalence of interruption also was reported to be common for participants with the addition of motherhood. Adapting to the immediate needs of children often meant spouses, parents and friends were interrupted. Interestingly, both Danielle’s story (above) and Kate’s story (below) used aggressive, battle language such as “stand my ground” “to cut off” and “saw his head off” which provided vivid metaphors depicting

the potentially combative state when faced with competing pulls in opposing directions. The frustration the women reported permeated their descriptions (e.g., “feeling so frustrated . . . I can’t even finish a conversation . . . I was right in the middle of a sentence You just have to stop. It’s hard. It is hard”). These comments demonstrating how navigating multiple roles had the potential to stir emotion. Kate’s story in which she chose to focus on her son in that moment rather than her husband revealed the potential volatility associated with the interplay of her competing role demands. Questions such as “Which role do I engage first?” and “How do I navigate multiple role demands in conversation?” permeated the focus group discussions and as Kate’s example demonstrated, not everyone agreed on what circumstances made a child-related interruption permissible. The looming possibility that the conversant could be frustrated or irritated by a mother’s sudden shifted focus mid-conversation created another caveat for the mother to consider. So not only was she attempting to navigate and balance competing role demands in dialogue, she also was assessing the listeners’ potential understanding (or lack of understanding) of her shifts in focus, sometimes providing reasoning to justify her particular course of action.

One solution some participants used was to engage dialogue with people who could conversationally adapt to interruptions: “And I find myself talking to my friends who are capable of the little interruptions, people who can hold the train of thought, because you’re here with your baby, and then you can come back and go, ‘Okay, what was I talking about?’” As a result, the interplay of the unified oppositions of stability and change created a complex set of responses and interpretations for each woman as she

navigated conversation since adding the role of mother.

5.3.2 Revealing and concealing mothering decisions based on supportive or critical feedback. The second sub-theme captured under the conversational adaptations theme was that nearly all of the women in the focus groups reported censoring input from certain individuals regarding the participants' mothering decisions after those individuals had responded in a manner the mothers interpreted as disapproving or critical. This sub-theme is similar in nature to the sub-theme about the boundary setting the women did with their mothers; however, it differs because in this case the women used the absence of discourse to manage their mothering decisions while the boundary setting sub-theme involved the presence of discourse to establish parameters around their roles as mothers. If one of the mothers perceived her friend or family member as revealing too much in the form of negative or disapproving opinions toward her maternal choices, she initiated a shift in her subsequent communicative choices with that person: (e.g., "I also might choose not to call her if I know that I've made a decision about how I'm going to do something that I know she disagrees with because if I've decided to do it, then I really don't want to hear it.") The women dealt with the opposing pulls of revelation and concealment as they grappled with what to disclose and what to keep private, favoring revelation when the listener was likely to agree or remain neutral and favoring concealment when the listener was likely to oppose or criticize.

The notion of praxis-- that "people are at once actors and objects of their own actions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.13)-- was at play as the participants engaged the revelation/concealment dialectic. People are actors in giving communicative life to

the contradictions that comprise their social life, but these contradictions in turn affect their subsequent communicative actions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Therefore, a mother's decision to alter what she revealed and concealed to her friend was reached based on past interaction but was perceived to affect her future interaction with that person.

One of the potential participant responses to the openness-closedness dialectic was to choose a withdrawal strategy (Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002) which in this case involved refusing to participate in conversations surrounding a contentious parental issue likely to invoke a disagreeable response from their listener. Anne made a conscious choice not to bring up a particular parenting topic with certain people as a way of managing the dialectic. (e.g., "So that was definitely a shift for me, and there are certain conversations I just don't have with those folks.") Danielle also gravitated towards concealment, after several instances where her openness had resulted in several friends criticizing her parenting approach. (e.g., "Some of my friends who are very verbal because they feel very strong about . . . their parenting, how they do things. So I find that I hold back with those friends.") In this manner, Danielle maintained ownership for her personal boundaries and for her collectively held boundaries by controlling what private information she revealed and concealed (Petronio, 2002).

In addition, some of the women labeled certain parenting conversation topics as "hot button" or "hot topic" and asserted that those topics should be avoided. (e.g., "I almost honestly feel a little more isolated because I've isolated myself. It's just so personal and so "hot-topic" and... divisive." And: "We don't talk about, you know . . .

what kind of vaccinations she's gotten, or any of those hot button kind of things.") As each woman made personal decisions about what she deemed to be a controversial topic, she created conversational boundaries, choosing not to engage conversation related to those topics. Conversational patterns necessitate a dynamic mechanism, allowing for an ebb and flow of revealing and concealing in multiple circumstances across many boundary lines (Petronio, 2002). So if a mother observed that the mention of certain topics yielded patterns in others' responses, then she sometimes chose to conversationally avoid that topic and by extension avoid the undesirable response. (e.g., "So you really have to be guarded because people will say things and probably not mean to, but really be offensive . . . You just have to be guarded in what you say.") Discussing whether someone agreed or disagreed with a participant's decisions seemed to carry greater significance and consequence when the topic centered on parenting related issues. (e.g. "It ends up getting a lot more sensitive when it comes to how you do things with your kids and other people's views on them.")

In addition to participants discussing how a significant other's opposing messages affected the women's responses, another element the participants articulated as a reason to conversationally restrict access toward certain mothering topics was based on their need to emphasize their maternal role responsibilities. They contended that having control over parental decision making was part of being the parent and not the place for an outsider to offer unsolicited criticism. (e.g., "Because I don't want to hear . . . you know, that's our decision, not hers, who we take our daughter to." Or: "If I choose to do this or not, it's okay, because this is how we've decided to parent.") None of the women

who had expressed frustration over external parties' disapproving comments were comfortable hearing a friend or family member's comments opposing their decisions. The participants' language choice underlining their roles as mothers (e.g., "you're the mom, you're the authority, . . . it's your decision, or you and your husband's decisions") could be argued to mean that from their perspective, criticism over their parenting decisions was a commentary on their abilities to capably manage motherhood. Through dialogue, the women made meaning out of their experiences with others (e.g., "These are my kids and this is the way I feel and why should I have to defend that?") and used their interpretation to draw conclusions about what it meant to be a mother and those interpretations drove subsequent interactions.

5.3.3 Intentional, logistical spousal talk. The third sub-theme reported in the adaptations to conversations theme was that spousal interactions became more intentional and more centered on practical logistics since adding the role of mother, necessitating a balance between novelty-predictability and autonomy-connection between the marital partners. The women's stories revealed a dialectical dilemma as they faced competing pulls and tugs between novelty and predictability because navigating parental role responsibilities was chaotic at times and the women used predictability to discursively navigate the chaotic nature of the transition to motherhood, while simultaneously missing the presence of more light-hearted, spontaneous dialogue. In addition, striking a balance between autonomy and connection was also evident in the women's reports of spousal communication because parental role responsibilities dictated a balance between individual and collaborative interaction. On the one end of the spectrum, many of the

women and/or their spouses were said to need scheduled, intentional conversation to address all their personal and families' needs. (e.g., "It's much more business like, because it has to be, out of sheer necessity.") On the other end, having too much practical interaction about baby and household logistics made spousal relationships formulaic, lacking the novelty, excitement and spontaneity characteristic of their relationship prior to parenthood. (e.g., Candice: "Yeah, we're like roommates now." Danielle: "Yeah, tired roommates!")

Prior to the addition of the baby, the couples had more opportunities to communicate. (e.g., "In general, I don't ever remember consciously scheduling conversation before [becoming parents], I mean you just work together alone so much that everything got covered.") Conversations prior to parenthood occurred in a variety of contexts and were reported to be more spontaneous. During the transition to motherhood, each participant described having less time to engage in focused conversation with their spouse and many navigated the shift in available time by arranging conversation to occur at specific times with a pointed agenda. (e.g., "Just being more and more intentional [about spousal conversation] because before we had more time to talk, more money, we were both working . . . But now that we have a child . . . and have less time too, it's like everything is less, but we still have to produce the same amount.")

Participants responded in a variety of ways as they managed the dynamic interplay of novelty/predictability in their marriage relationships. Some of the women demonstrated acceptance of the need for more prescribed communication with their husbands, indicating that the additions of their parent roles would inevitably affect their

interaction, necessitating a more stable, predictable dynamic. (e.g., It's much more . . . like a business, having a business partner and it's just a lot more logistical topics." And, "You're like little daycare associates, because you're constantly switching who's watching the kids . . . it's like you really have to be business partners on top of having like, an attraction, and an emotional relationship, like that filters off). The descriptions portrayed lighthearted, flirtatious interaction as less likely to occur in their conversational dynamic when compared to their interaction prior to becoming parents.

One of the commonly reported ways the participants managed the competing pulls between their motherhood selves and their spousal selves was to create scheduled conversation. (e.g., "Every Monday night, we call it our business meeting; we talk about what needs to get done during the week, how everybody is feeling.") The intentional conversations functioned to engage focused dialogue about logistical topics as well as create opportunities for relationship maintenance, reflecting the exigency of establishing predictability during the unpredictable transition to motherhood. The women who described the importance of setting aside time to communicate said they felt those designated interactions were necessary to maintain connection to their partner and the happenings in their household.

Not all of the participants defined connection with their partner in the romantic, intimate sense. Some characterized relationship maintenance more by maintaining the responsibilities within their various role domains, so that decisions about baby care, household issues, financial concerns, family plans, and the like could be discussed collectively rather than decided upon individually. These descriptions reflected an

awareness of the autonomy-connection dialectic; decisions could be made and actions could be carried out autonomously and often maintaining separateness was important to keep up with every role responsibility. At the same time, individual functioning of role management could not be as successful when performed at the exclusion of collective, coupled-discussion. One participant described arranged conversations as a “coming together moment” necessitated by perpetual busyness and repeated misunderstanding surrounding individual ideologies about multiple role management.

Interestingly, all participants identified intimate, non-logistical relationship communication time as important, but agreed that creating those opportunities proved challenging and tended to be inadvertently prioritized below the logistical topic conversations. (e.g., “So we usually talk about getting away for the weekend, we talk about things we want to do and usually it doesn’t end up happening . . . but we know we need that.”) Other research has noted that married couples realize they might not always have *enough* time to talk about issues, but they hold on to the notion that there are *better* times to talk about issues (Hoppe-Nagao & Ting-Toomey, 2002). Couples who were able to integrate romantic, non-logistical dialogue had discussions about prioritizing intimate conversation:

“So we talked about how we need to schedule that time everyday to sit down and communicate without her [the baby] there, just have that time, one on one . . . we talked about having that time everyday without the tv on, or without us on our laptops or paying bills or whatever. And he talked about [the husband], he brought up, he wanted to make sure we were doing that.”

Ultimately, the descriptions from the participants revealed that creating opportunities to communicate as a couple (without the baby present) had become more

difficult, but was still achievable if prioritized by both spouses as important. If only one spouse made intimate, relational communication a priority, that interaction was often set aside in favor of the logistical talk. Nearly all the couples were reported as being more intentional about their communication towards logistical topics and sometimes towards non-logistical, relational topics. And to that end, these women who were transitioning to motherhood managed the opposing pulls surrounding stability and change in their marriages, both adapting to the predictability manifested through parental role enactment and fighting for the novelty stimulated through intimate, relational, spousal role enactment.

5.3.4 The role of argument. The fourth sub-theme in the adaptations to conversations theme related to the role of argument during the transition to motherhood for these women. As the participants reported how they grappled with interdependent pulls between their new-found role identities, some of their talk with their husbands, parents, friends and work associates was grounded in the characteristics of conversational argument. While the presence and management of dialectical tensions does not automatically create an adversarial stance between relationship parties, the interplay of opposing pulls can create competing, conflicting perspectives and these perspectives can be articulated and negotiated as argument in conversation. I will explain which particular components of conversational argument seemed most prevalent and revealing in terms of how the participants built and defended arguments as a way to manage their dialectical experiences navigating the transition to motherhood.

The findings supported previous research (Cowan & Cowan, 1990, 1992; Roloff

& Johnson, 2002) that found an increase in marital arguing during the transition to parenthood. (e.g., “Ours [conversations since becoming parents] shift more towards...more about the stress of life which isn’t good because we start to fight more. So there’s more arguments,” and “We’ve had a much harder time since (the baby) was born. We’ve had much bigger fights, much more tension it’s just amazing what kind of challenge it’s presented to have that additional factor in there.”)

The fundamental reason participants chose to engage argument was when the issue reflected a core value they attributed to the embodiment of motherhood and/or the way they believed their motherhood role should operate among their other roles. Participants chose to express (rather than censor) these views when an interaction occurred that seem to violate the expectations and responsibilities they attributed to that role. In this manner, the openness-closedness and revelation-concealment dialectics were by managed gravitating towards expression to address conflicting view points. The arguments that the participant’s engaged focus on establishing boundaries for the role of mother, defending their positions when grandmothers, sisters, or even husbands tried to step into what the women had each defined as their maternal domain.

The research findings demonstrated examples which supported conversational argument literature that stated people sometimes organize their arguments around a global attitude, a general point of view that does not necessarily appear in the dialogue as a specific claim (Rips, 1998). The participants established claims and provided reasoning in their conversations as to why their positions about how they believed motherhood should be managed were important; however, sometimes the reasoning reflected a global

attitude rather than support that was provided during the argument event. Global attitudes were used to manage the internal and external manifestations of the integration-separation dialectic. Within the marriage relationship, participants pulled toward autonomy to their roles as mothers, and within the parent, friend, and work relationships, participants pulled toward seclusion to separate and define their explanations of how they wanted to engage motherhood.

Lance Rips (1998) also described how background factors can influence conversational moves in argument, knowledge of the argument's subject matter, their memory of previous conversations, and their judgment of whether a retort is likely to offend the other person, which was also present in the participant-reported data. The findings reflected the literature with regard to the influence of background factors in every day conversation. For example, participants had reported previous instances where their mothers had overstepped a boundary without the participants' consent, so some of the women explained how knowledge of those background factors influenced the arguments the participants made to the maternal grandmothers about how they as mothers wanted to engage motherhood. The findings are relevant because they demonstrate how dialogue, including argument, that was used to navigate the transition to parenthood did not occur for these women as isolated discursive exchanges, but as ongoing and fluctuating perspectives that took place over and over as a means to define and modify interconnected role relationships and to manage dialectical tensions.

The women's reported examples also supported the literature that describes how marital arguing frequently increases in response to violated expectations regarding

childcare and housework related role responsibilities (Ruble, Hackel, Fleming & Stangor, 1988; MacDermid, Huston & McHale, 1990; Cowan & Cowan, 1990; Roloff & Johnson, 2002). Many described an expectation that their husbands would take on more shared parental responsibility, rather than the responsibility resting primarily on the women. The participants violated expectations about shared responsibilities resulted in more disagreements, which were voiced most often through their responses to “help” messages to situations where the women observed their husbands engaging fatherhood in a manner that did not prioritize their father roles in the same way the women prioritized their mother roles.

Another important finding culminated around the notion that the addition of a new baby, and the accompanying role responsibilities resulted in the participants describing specific strategies and adaptations in their approaches to conversational argument. One modification participants made in their response to conflicting positions surrounding issues related to the transition to parenthood was to choose more carefully the instances in which perspectives should or should not be argued. (e.g., “And you just kinda sift through and say, ‘I need to talk about *this*.’ I’ve always heard moms say you choose your battles and it seems like they become more obvious.”) Rather than addressing any and all of the opposing pulls created an opportunity to establish and defend a position, participants chose the competing tensions they felt were worthy of their conversational energy to defend. Statements like “choose your battles” were common among participant descriptions.

Coupled with the observation that relational parties were more selective about the

type and timing of arguments they engaged, participants also reported being more intentional about structured communication as a way to diminish the likelihood of increased clash. The logistical meetings and intentional conversations addressing and discussing each others' feelings related to the tasks and responsibilities associated with their various roles provided a way to circumvent a negative response to the tensions manifested in their relationships. By coming together to focus their approach and sometimes reprioritize their responsibilities, participants favored connection in the autonomy-connection dialectic, citing that increased separateness or "doing things their own way" often led to increased arguing.

A third conversational adaptation developed as a means to manage relational argument was revealed through the participants' nonverbal responses. The presence of the baby in the room, which was a frequent occurrence for couples, meant that the child was witness to all forms of exchange, and some participants reported trying to censor their responses by limiting yelling and other emotionally-infused dialogue to minimize their child's exposure to a tense encounter. Some participants also tried to reserve topics that had the tendency to result in a heated exchange for after the child was asleep or not present in the home and often the act of delaying potentially heated dialogue for the child's benefit also diffused the intensity of the interaction for the couple as well.

Consequently, participants seemed to gravitate toward expression (in the openness-closedness dialectic) and autonomy (in the autonomy-connection dialectic) when the topic was viewed to be in conflict to the fundamental way the women embodied motherhood. And the participants steered toward openness and connection through

intentional talk as a way to avoid future arguments. These findings are significant because they reveal the adaptations the participants made in their discursive arguments during the transition to parenthood. However, a more poignant conclusion in the realm of conversational argument was that the core attributes women associated with their abilities to capably manage motherhood were worth engaging as argument. The women deeply valued their roles as mothers and were willing to defend their positions when others made statements in opposition to the characteristics they attributed as central to motherhood. And as Braithwaite and Baxter (2006) noted, engaging in dialogue means different, often opposing voices interpenetrate one another. Some voices are more dominant and others are more marginalized; thus, these competing, interdependent poles constitute and change one another. In this manner, making arguments as a way to manage the dialectics was fundamental to the women's navigation of the transition to motherhood.

5.3.5 Discussing physical intimacy. The fifth sub-theme in the discussion surrounding adaptations to conversations involved how the openness-closedness dialectic between marital partners was used to regulate autonomy-connection contradictions about physical intimacy during the transition to motherhood. The women reported that their conversations about physical intimacy had changed since the addition of their mother roles, and the openness-closedness dialectic emerged as the central tension in two key ways in regard to their intimacy talk: Participant descriptions alternated between communicating guilt that becoming mothers had resulted in decreased spousal intimacy, while other times voicing justification for the altered sexual dynamic. The women experienced competing pulls between prioritizing an active sexual relationship after their

child's birth, a concession included particularly for their husbands' benefits, and not prioritizing intimacy, needing time to recover and adapt to the ramifications of engaging motherhood.

The expressed feelings of guilt served to regulate connectedness because the women wanted to accommodate their interpretations of their husbands' physical needs, attempting to show deference to spousal connection, rather than to their own individual needs. (e.g., "He knows there's a lot of guilt that goes along with that for me;" and "I think that's true for every mom on the whole planet" [experiencing guilt for lack of sex since motherhood]). Even though the act of physical intimacy was reported to not occur simply because the participants experienced guilt, articulating guilt helped to balance and manage this opposing pull during the transition to motherhood. (e.g., "that [sex] is like the number one need for a man," and, "That's one of the judgments we put on ourselves: am I keeping my husband happy?") In referencing the opposing pulls the women experienced surrounding post-baby physical intimacy, one woman declared: "It's a tight rope!" which pointed to the delicate and risky balance some associated with navigating the transition to motherhood along with their existing roles as wives.

The other pole participants described in the interplay of these opposing pulls was the construction of argument to justify the changed nature of their physical relationships. Several of the participants built arguments and provided reasoning to their spouses that the transition to motherhood had a profound impact on their abilities to maintain the level of physical intimacy that had been characteristic of their spousal interaction prior to the addition of the mother role. Their evidence included various statements such as, "There's

at least a couple months where you just physically cannot . . . I told him [my husband], the doctor said that, the *doctor* said it. It's not just me." And other statements like, "I had to highlight that part of the book for my husband and I said, "You understand the part about not having sex for at least six weeks, right?"

Responses also included statements about scarcity of time and that when couples were alone, the women offered explanations about other tasks that needed to be accomplished and that physical intimacy needed to be set aside to meet the demands associated with their motherhood responsibilities. In response to the changing nature of their physical relationship, many of the women chose avoidance as a way to discursively adapt to the transition of motherhood. (e.g., "It just kinda builds up, and our communication starts getting very unfriendly and hostile when we don't talk about it, and [he says], "Look, is this ever going to happen again!?"") By waiting until their husbands initiated discussion about their sexual intimacy (or lack of sexual intimacy), some of the women chose closedness as a means to manage the dialectics, to deal with the push-pull they experienced between guilt and justification for their altered sexual relationship. Some participants referenced their desire for initiating dialogue about sex, recognizing the importance of openness, but had difficulty choosing openness when the topic came to physical intimacy. (e.g. "He really needs me to be verbal about things like [sex] and sometimes I'm just not"). In this manner, the discourse of "openness" and the discourse of "closedness" manifested through both expressions of guilt and justification of precedence given to the ramifications of motherhood were used to regulate connection and autonomy in the context of physical intimacy during the transition to motherhood.

5.4 The Discursive Interplay of Work and Motherhood

The fourth theme centered on participants' reported conversations about how they integrated and adapted their work roles among their mother roles during the transition to motherhood and those interactions were punctuated by the autonomy-connection dialectic. The discourse of autonomy and the discourse of connection framed each woman's work and mother role decisions, and were informed by the openness-closed dialectic. The participants also identified similarities and differences between their responses and their significant other's responses (e.g. spouses, parents, work associates and friends) to the participant's navigation of the work/mother component of the motherhood transition. The dialectics emerged in three key ways: First, the participants reported conversations privileged autonomy over connection most frequently as a means to explain and defend their need for the presence of work roles while adapting to their mother roles. Second, non-working women used novelty-predictability to keep work role identity perpetually part of their conversations, conversations which were always initiated by the women rather than their husbands. Third, verbalized support for work/motherhood decisions from their husbands and positive verbal appraisal from their husbands and from work associates helped the women manage the autonomy-connection tension. Finally, the influence of broader workplace culture and societal messages was discussed to understand how these messages informed the women's work/non-work decisions.

The first way the dialectics emerged while engaging work and motherhood role discussions was that each woman had reported conversations emphasizing the importance

of autonomy outside of motherhood. The participants' reported conversations privileged autonomy over connection most frequently as a means to explain and defend their need for the presence of work roles while adapting to their mother roles. All the participants reported that the transition to motherhood pulled them closely toward connectedness, focusing on building the bonds between themselves and their children as well as their husbands while both spouses adjusted to parenthood; however, all of the women also reported that the all-encompassing push toward the connection dialectic meant participants also pulled back, creating opportunities for autonomy, which was most often fulfilled through a work role. (e.g., "I work because I like to have something for myself. And maybe that's selfish, I know some people think of it that way but I know I'm better for Nick [my son] in that I have...and that's just me personally, that's my personality.") Women who were employed one day a week, worked occasional, intermittent hours, or not at all showed less identification with a work role but still described the interplay of autonomy and connection in terms of paid and non-paid work. Two of the women voiced a pull between still wanting to experience the autonomy and independent-ness associated with their former working selves, while also describing the value and satisfaction they felt from committing themselves full time to their motherhood responsibilities. The other participant who did not engage a paid work role since motherhood still voiced a strong desire for personal, separate time; however, in her case the dialectical contradiction seemed to converge around her lack of autonomous time when compared to her husband whose work role provided daily opportunities to engage his separate self. Ultimately, every participant wrestled with determining whether and to what extent the role of paid

worker should be part of her role identification while her children were young, a perspective that was shared and informed by conversations with others as well as broader workplace culture and societal messages.

The second dialectic in the discursive interplay of work and mother roles was that those who had decided not to participate in paid work, or worked less than ten hours per week, kept the idea of paid work perpetually intertwined in their dialogue as a means to navigate the opposing pulls of novelty-predictability. The work role conversation managed the pull they experienced between working and not working, at least temporarily, by continually discussing the benefits of changing their work-home arrangement versus keeping it the same. The underlying questions characterizing their talks were: “Am I sure I want to stay home?” and “What benefits am I missing by not working?” and “Can I receive variations of work-related benefits in other ways? The participants repeatedly explored each of these considerations. Discussing whether or not a paid work role should be included in their role domains did not appear to reach a finite conclusion even though these three women had either stopped paid work or worked minimally since motherhood.

While an outsider might have assumed the paid work question to be definitively answered, internally, within the married couple dyad, the topic was always on the table for discussion and always initiated by the women. In this way, engaging work was perpetually part of their dialogue. Rather than reaching a decisive conclusion that made their lack of paid work participation more unequivocal, these women used discourse to manage work and non-work boundaries, leaving a space to implicitly say, “I’m not

working now, at this moment, but I'm considering going back." The women reported always initiating conversations with their spouses about returning to work, or increasing or decreasing work hours, which demonstrated that the tension between the work and non-work poles appeared to operate with greater intensity for the women than their partners, and the participants used dialogue as a way to manage the conflicting feelings they experienced. The participants appeared to be more conflicted than their husbands were about the women's construction of the right balance between worker and parent. The implication that the decision was hers to make and that he supported it also implied that childcare decisions operated primarily within her domain.

The third key outcome in the discursive interplay of work and mother roles centered on support for their work-motherhood decision making and verbal appraisal of their performances in these domains. Support and feedback from significant others about the integration of work and mother roles during the transition to motherhood was of critical importance to the participants in their assessment of whether they were capably managing the transition. The participants were able to better navigate autonomy-connection when spouses and work colleagues supported the women's needs for both autonomy and connection. Women reported being influenced in their abilities to navigate autonomy and connection between work and motherhood by receiving two types of support and affirming feedback: Spousal words of support over the participant's decisions regarding whether and how they would engage both work and motherhood, and affirmation from spouses and from work associates that they were performing the functions of their mother roles and work roles well. When husbands verbalized support

about the participants' work choices, they endorsed the women's autonomy as workers and made enacting both roles easier. All nine participants characterized their husbands' feedback as supportive: "He has always said, 'If you want to stay home full time, I'd really love for you to do that and we'll find a way to make it work. But if you want to be working, I understand that too,'" and, "It was something that Jon [my husband] was totally supportive of, whatever I wanted to do." The findings supported Annis Golden's study (2002) that spousal support and understanding in work-family arrangements is of vital importance to one another's subjective emotional experiences in these domains. For each woman, receiving verbalized support from her spouse about her decisions regarding work and motherhood expanded her ability to manage both autonomy *and* connection.

The second type of verbalized feedback that allowed the women to better navigate autonomy and connection were messages from their spouses and individuals in the workplace who acknowledged they were managing and integrating the work and mother spheres well. Nearly all the women saw a work role as providing a sense of measurable achievement, with clearer indicators of success and accomplishment. Succeeding in motherhood was more difficult to assess and the women reported that receiving positive reinforcement about their performances was important towards their feelings of success in their roles, and this reinforcement was perceived as being communicated more naturally and regularly within the context of paid work than in motherhood. (e.g., "Tommy [my son] never says, 'Gee mom, you're a good mom, you're doing a good job today!' But people at work say, 'Oh thank you, that was really helpful!'")

The women who spent all or nearly all of their time during the week with their

children reported statements about missing out on the words of recognition or acknowledgement they perceived to be more attainable in the workplace (e.g., “Because you don’t have that same appreciation every day of ‘Oh, you did a good job, you’re going to get a raise.’ That baby is still screaming at you, no matter what you just did.”) which revealed the importance of verbal confirmation and statements of recognition toward feeling capable about their ability to manage the transition to motherhood (e.g., “It’s hard to not have that every two weeks you get a paycheck, or a review, or be told, ‘You’re doing a good job,’ so for my husband to be my partner in all of this, to give that confirmation and say, ‘You’re doing a good job. Hang in there.’”) Likewise, working mothers named verbal recognition surrounding the ability to effectively complete a task as confirming their ability to navigate their work roles. The few participants who engaged fewer hours of paid work or none at all were able to achieve a similar endorsement through words of recognition from their spouses, but still viewed spousal endorsement of effective motherhood role management as different than workplace endorsement of effective worker role management. Ideally, both were important for the participants to be supported in their responses to autonomy and connection.

The fourth conversational component in the discursive interplay of work and mother roles focused on the influence of broader workplace culture and societal messages toward these women’s arrangements. Work policies and the broader social culture of work impacted some of these women’s work decisions transitioning to motherhood. Some would have chosen a part-time work arrangement rather than full time motherhood, but because their workplaces did not accommodate such positions, the women were left

to choose one or the other. Three women who engaged part-time work left their existing employers and became either self-employed to accommodate to their motherhood responsibilities or found a position in a field unrelated to their interests to create the work/motherhood arrangement they wanted.

Each woman seemed to have a tipping point at which their costs of time spent in paid work began to outweigh the benefits. Most working mothers articulated the ideal work time to be between half time (20 hours) to 4 days (32 hours) per week. (e.g., “And I’m only working 30 hours, I’m not working as much as a lot of you . . . It’s so nice for me to have the ability to work that 30 hours and not be quite full time and just be spread really thin.”) The time given to the organization beyond 32 hours was described to be more out of necessity, based on personal finances or the demands of the position or the expectations of the organization required 40 or more hours a week. (e.g., “It’s still hard to leave [your child] even when you do love what you’re doing. I was working half time but now that Owen [my husband] is furlowed, I’m going back full time again and I’m dreading it, I’m dreading that crazy pull all the time again.”)

The women also reported schedule flexibility as important which mirrored the literature on the benefits of and preferences for flexible time use for working mothers (Pedersen, Minnotte, Kiger, & Mannon, 2009). In addition, participants continually restated the importance of finding a work/motherhood arrangement that worked for them and that each woman had unique perspectives on what constitutes a good work-family fit. They emphasized how there was not a single arrangement that was best for each family, which echoed Moen and Sweet’s research (2004) that workplaces need to view

employment from a life course perspective and that a significant portion of the population does not follow socially-constructed lock-step sequencing.

Overall, the women grappled with a multitude of variables as they engaged conversations about the interplay of work and mother roles during the transition to motherhood. Identifying themselves in some capacity beyond the boundaries of motherhood proved to be important for each participant and through their dialogue, the women privileged autonomy to their work roles in addition to the connectedness to their mother roles. Continuing discourse about the potential to return to work was an important management strategy centered on the revelation-concealment dialectic for those who were not either not working or worked minimal hours. Receiving support for work and maternal decisions as well as the presence of verbalized appraisal in these domains was a necessary means to manage autonomy and connection. And finally, the messages the women received from the broader societal spheres informed some of their choices about the extent they would be a worker while also being a mother.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this study has made four contributions to the literature on the transition to motherhood, communication, and dialectics. First, the study provided insight onto the centrality and poignancy of help messages managed through dialectical tensions for a group of women transitioning to motherhood. The participants engaged extensive discussions surrounding the topic of interpreting and responding to help messages framed by the dialectical tensions of autonomy-connection and openness-closedness. Accepting help revealed vulnerabilities for the participants and affected the women's perceptions that they were capably managing the responsibilities they attributed to good mothering. The participants used openness-closedness (through accepting and rejecting help) in their reactions and responses to help offered as a way to negotiate and regulate their autonomous selves and their connected-relational selves. To expand on this analysis, a future communication research study focusing exclusively on new mothers' interpretations and responses to help messages would provide insight into how this particular dynamic operates during the transition to parenthood. Conducting a larger study that attended specifically to the types of help messages new mothers receive (or do not receive), coupled with the mothers' responses to those offers or to the absence of help

offered would further advance our understanding regarding communication complexities prevalent during the transition to motherhood.

Second, the findings revealed the prevalence and nuances of establishing boundaries through communication around what the women in the study associated to be their role responsibilities as mothers. Defining their roles as mothers by communicating which responsibilities would be coveted and which would be shared proved to be a fundamental part of these women's transitions to motherhood. The study demonstrated an array of interaction strategies used by women transitioning to motherhood to build and modify role boundaries, which were navigated between the interplay of the Expression-Privacy supra-dialectic and Integration-Separation supra-dialectic. The women established boundaries by acting as gatekeepers of their maternal decision-making and role responsibilities, precluding those who had or might have opposed or criticized their choices by filtering what they revealed or concealed, and including those who supported, condoned or remained neutral in their responses to the participants' management of motherhood. In this manner, the participants managed the extent they engaged the autonomy and connection dialectic with her spouses, and inclusion-seclusion dialectic with parents, friends and work associates. By expressing or revealing to external parties what roles others could and not could play, the participants molded and shaped their individual and connected boundaries of motherhood. And by concealing what information was to be protected or unexpressed, the participants censored or limited others' exposure to their motherhood role decisions. While this study contributed to the communication field by showing how the dialectics were experienced from a group of

women negotiating their mother role boundaries as a means to navigate the transition to motherhood, further analysis would enhance our understanding on the importance of this dynamic for new mother's creation and modification of their multiple roles.

The third key finding that permeated the participants' responses entailed the women's perceptions about how their spouses' transitions to fatherhood had affected their transitions to motherhood and their interactions, which involved the interplay of all three internal dialectics: autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness. Many of the participants' comments juxtaposed their responses to and interactions with their roles as mothers with the manner in which their husbands were responding and enacting their roles as fathers and as husbands (since becoming fathers). From the women's perspectives, how their husbands embodied fatherhood impacted how the women experienced autonomy and connection; thus, the participants emphasized a three-pronged internal dialectic, that of mother, father, child. The women projected their preferences for connection between father and child, noting how father-child interactions directly impacted how the women engaged autonomy-connection. This dialectic was affected by the women's communicative choices between openness and closedness, as they determined when to express their desires for their husbands to mirror their approaches toward parental role enactment and when to censor or avoid expressing their preferences. Further research is warranted to more fully understand how women perceive their husbands' responses to fatherhood affect the way they communicate about and respond to the dialectics during the transition to motherhood, including the discourse women engage about how they see the interdependence of the mother and father roles

operating in their relationship.

The fourth outcome of this study emerged through the reported conversational dynamics among mother-worker decisions. The participants emphasized receiving spousal support toward the women's decisions to engage work and mother roles; however, by centering the decision on the women rather than the spousal dyad, the underlying message implied that the mothers were responsible for determining the appropriate caretaker and worker arrangement. The women's repeated emphasis that they initiated all worker-mother conversations and that their husbands remained neutral in their involvement toward these decisions pointed to the dichotomy presented in work-motherhood choices. The women carried the weight of these complex decisions individually, receiving support, but not joint ownership of their choices and the accompanying consequences. On a broader scale, this study also demonstrated examples of how these women's work opportunities and limitations operated within the context of cultural and societal factors that have encouraged these women to "have it all" by pursuing paid work, but limiting the manner by which those roles could be successfully engaged when the women also wanted to pursue motherhood. The participants all spoke to the complex nature of work and motherhood decisions and they used discourse as a means to navigate both roles, and while the input from spouses and others informed their choices, those choices were still ultimately theirs to make.

Finally, as I considered the future implications of this study, I was struck by the impending pedagogical opportunity confounded through the participants' pervasive discussions about how navigating parenthood had affected their spousal interaction:

While all of the women had taken child birth and childcare classes and read books about the arrival of their first baby, they seemed under prepared for the heightened state of relational disequilibrium that occurred in the wake of their child's birth. Meridian Park Hospital, where many of the participants delivered and/or attended Baby and Me classes, does not offer any courses for parents-to-be that focus exclusively on the partnered relationship and their communicative process developing their roles as parents. Expectant parents would benefit from becoming better informed about the presence and exigency. They would be potentially better equipped to manage the transition if the course discussion were informed through relational dialectics, such as autonomy-connection and openness-closedness. These dialectics could be discussed with regard to help messages and establishing role boundaries, and all three internal manifestations of the dialectic with regard to the way the husbands' transitions to and engagement of the fatherhood roles affect the wives' responses to managing motherhood along with their other roles.

If these and other important topics revealed in this study (such as changes and responses to conversational dynamics, arguing, physical intimacy, and work and non-work role discourse) were openly discussed in the context of the dialectic experience, couples could proactively engage and consider how they could work through potential pitfalls common for new parents. A relationship course for expectant parents that centered on negotiating and managing the dialectics could provide couples with strategies and approaches to help them navigate the transition more effectively. To know that the interplay between autonomy-connection, stability-change, and openness-closedness would likely be in a heightened state of flux could be highly beneficial as couples learn

about ways to respond to and manage the interdependent pulls that could help and hinder the issues of construction of self/dialectics and self/other orientation regarding the dialectics.

In addition, this research provides an insight into how these women are perceiving their own roles; future research designed to focus on the revealed issues of identity formation could link results in this study to issues about how these women are perceiving their own identities, investigating the women's perceptions about motherhood and identity formation. Similar focus groups could provide further insight regarding the struggle for developing and managing these roles, focusing on identity issues these women describe as important related to the management of dialectical tensions through communication.

This research is focused on the standpoint of the mother during her transition to motherhood, featuring the initial shift of this new developmental stage. Future research could also expand on this initial standpoint, exploring mothers' perspectives at various standpoints during the transition, perhaps by interviewing the same group of women several years later, or by conducting focus groups each comprised of women at different stages of motherhood.

Additionally, the emphasis these women put on the role of the father suggests that juxtaposing the mother's perspective about the transition to parenthood to the father's perspective would further provide opportunity to compare and contrast these standpoints and could be informative toward understanding men and women's unique experiences navigating the transition. In a separate but related research direction, more conversation

and investigation of physical intimacy as communication related to role expectations of married partners would be useful especially since physical intimacy emerged as a topic spontaneously in both groups.

Further development of the research direction taken by this particular study could include variations of the methodology, in particular the demographics of the participants for future study. Since the women in this study were gathered from a hospital in a predominately white, economically middle-class area, their experiences and responses to the transition to motherhood may differ from the experiences described by women in a more ethnically diverse community, a community centered on a different ethnicity, or a lower-income community. Conducting future research that reveals the conversational themes for some women in these various communities could provide even more understanding about women's experiences of dialectical tensions during the motherhood transition.

The outcomes of the study revealed the complex nature of these women's interactions during their transitions to motherhood. The participants developed a variety of important discursive strategies to navigate the dialectical features they experienced engaging motherhood while also enacting their multiple roles as wives, daughters, and workers. The women reported communicating their interpretations about the key ways they believed their mother roles should be developed and managed. In addition, the women emphasized the significance of their spouses, parents, and work associates responses to the participants' adaptations to their multiple roles. The approaches and responses the participants engaged through discourse were central to the women's

navigation of the dialectical features of their transitions to motherhood.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruiting Script

Description: Recruiting script of the topic and questions of interest for the study, presented orally at the Baby and Me group at Meridian Park Hospital:

“Everyone here fulfills or has fulfilled the roles of partner, daughter, and worker. Everyone here also has recently added to those roles a new role: the role of mother.

I am a mother as well and I am working on my thesis research for my master’s program at Oregon State University. I’m recruiting mothers who would be interested in participating in a discussion group with new moms. I would like to hear your stories and ideas about the communication process you experienced as you added that new role, that role of mother. We will be discussing answers to questions related to this transition, such as: What communication have you had about your role of mother and with whom has this communication occurred? Who did you talk to? When did the subjects come up? How much of what you thought about did you discuss? If you talked only about some of your thoughts, why those topics? Why those topics with those people?

Some of your interactions were probably very clear and direct and maybe even organized; making statements to your husband or your mom such as “We need to talk about . . .” Many of your other interactions probably just happened— sometimes not so direct and sometimes not so clear and not so organized. Some of the topics may have been one-time-only discussions while many may have been on-going interactions or concerns.

I’m interested in hearing all of it. To whom did you communicate? What was the nature of your interaction? What was the situation or context? What have you experienced as you added motherhood to all your other roles?

I’m going to pass around a sign-up sheet for those who would be interested. Please provide your first name, along with email address, phone number and days/times you would be available to meet. Your discussion group would meet two times in the next few weeks and both meetings would last between 1.5 to 2 hours. Thank you.”

Appendix B: Recruiting Flyer

Description: Recruiting flyer distributed to each woman during the Baby and Me group that outlined the details of the study.

Managing the New Role of Mother through Communication

Everyone here fulfills or has fulfilled the roles of partner, daughter, and worker. Everyone here also has recently added to those roles a new role: the role of mother.

I am a mother as well and I am working on my thesis research for my master's program. I'm recruiting new mothers who would be interested in participating in a discussion with other women from this group. I would like to hear your stories and ideas about the process you experienced as you added that new role, that role of mother. We will discuss various questions that address the transition to motherhood through communication.

Questions such as:

- What communication have you had about your role of mother and with whom has this communication occurred?
- Who did you talk to?
- When did the subjects come up?
- How much of what you thought about did you discuss?
- If you talked only about some of your thoughts, why those topics?
- Why those topics with those people?

As you recall your interactions, some were probably very clear and direct and maybe even organized, making statements to your husband or your mom such as "We need to talk about" Many of your other interactions probably just happened— sometimes not so direct and sometimes not so clear and not so organized. Some of the topics may have been one-time-only discussions while many may have been on-going interactions or concerns.

I'm interested in hearing all of it. To whom did you communicate? What was the nature of your interaction? What was the situation or context? What have you experienced as you added motherhood to all your other roles?

If you are interested in participating, add your name to the sign-up or feel free to email me directly. Thank you!

Sarah Hanna

(Email address and phone number were provided here.)

Appendix C: Email Communication A

Description: Email communication sent to volunteers who were available on the selected focus group dates.

Hello,

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in my study. You are an important part in this process and your contribution will give insights as to how some women add and manage the role of mother through communication.

Our focus group discussion will be on ____ (date and time.) You are being contacted because you indicated availability on this date. Please let me know if you are still available on this date and would like to participate.

If so, we will meet at The Tigard Public Library in Tigard, Oregon.

Between now and then, spend some time thinking about the communication you do to manage being a mother along with being a wife, daughter, and for some of you, a paid worker. (Even if you aren't working now, you worked before becoming a mom, which is also significant in terms of how you've adjusted your roles to accommodate motherhood.) This study is focused on communication. I encourage you to reread some of the questions I've already given you in the flyer. To refresh your memory, I would like to hear your stories and ideas about the communication process you experienced as you added the role of mother to your existing roles. How did you accommodate for your new role as a mother through communication? Who did you talk with? What did you talk about? What were your interactions like? Not all your interactions may be clear conversations saying "We talked about....," some of them won't be so direct and organized. I'm interested in hearing it all. To whom did you communicate? What was the nature of your interaction?

These are the types of questions I'll be asking tomorrow, so it might help you to think about the questions and how you'd answer them. Think about stories, conversations and interactions have happened since becoming a mother that relate to how you manage your roles. None of your names will be used in any of my reporting, so you will be free to share without concern that certain comments will be linked back to your name.

Thank you so much!

Sincerely,

Sarah Hanna

(Email address and phone number were provided here.)

Appendix D: Email Communication B

Description: Email communication sent to volunteers whose schedules did not coordinate with the times selected.

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in this study that will explore how some women add and manage the role of mother through communication. The date and time(s) selected for the focus group discussions are _____ and _____.

According to the dates and times you listed on the sign-up sheet, it looks like you will not be available to participate at these sessions. I apologize that I cannot accommodate your schedule at this time. Please contact me if your availability has changed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sarah Hanna

(Email address and phone number were provided here.)

Appendix E: Informed Consent Document

Description: Informed consent document signed by each focus group participant.

Project Title: [**Reported Communication Experiences of Married Women Transitioning to Motherhood: A Case Study**]

Principal Investigator: [**Dr Judy Bowker, Speech Communication Department**]

Co-Investigator: [**Sarah Elizabeth Hanna**]

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to take part in conversations with other new mothers about communication you are using to manage the transition to your new role as mother. To accomplish this research, a series of discussion groups (called focus groups) will be conducted from which we will learn about your communication experiences transitioning to your new role as mother while also performing roles as wife, daughter, and worker. This study will give us a deeper understanding of how you and the rest of these women manage the integration of your mother role through communication. The results will be used in a student thesis. This project is significant because new mothers' roles are becoming increasingly complex and varied, so analyzing your reported interactions will provide important insight into the perceptions of each individual who is transitioning to the role of mother and using communication to do so.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. Please feel free to ask about the research, about your rights as a participant, about possible risks or benefits—any questions you have about participating.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You are being invited to take part in this study because you are a married mother with one or two children between the ages of 0-2 years old, that you have one living parent or in-law, and you have spent time working outside the home. All participants must meet these criteria.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in a focus group, which is a research technique where people with a similar experience or situation are gathered together to discuss a topic determined by the researcher. The discussions will take place in The Tigard Public Library where we will have our discussion in a comfortable room where refreshments will be provided. During the discussion with 4-6 women, everyone may talk about ways they used communication to manage the transition to motherhood. Each focus group will be both audio and video tape recorded, although the researchers will be the only ones who will see or hear the recordings. Your names will not appear anywhere in the finished research paper and the researchers will use coding so that your identity will remain

confidential. We will instruct focus group participants to maintain confidentiality, but cannot guarantee they will do so.

My signature below indicates that I give my informed and voluntary consent for the focus groups in which I participate to be audio and video taped. I understand that the information contained within the recorded focus groups will be used for research and/or publication. I understand that my name will not be used or recorded on the audiotape, except as it might be used in the discussion among the women. A pseudonym or alias will be used for publication of any reference to my statements made during the focus group interviews. I understand that my participation in the focus groups and research project will not be disclosed. Additionally, I understand that the audio and video taped focus groups will be transcribed and the tape will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

(signature) _____ (date) _____

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for two focus group sessions which will be approximately two hours for each session, so four hours total. The time in between the two focus group sessions will be approximately one week, depending on the availability of each group member. Your children will not be involved in the study in any way.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

This study poses little or no risk. Minimal risks or discomfort might include sharing personal information with a small group and feeling vulnerable. You might feel vulnerable because you shared thoughts and interactions that happened between you and your spouse, or you and your parents, or you and your workplace associates.

To minimize the risk of feeling vulnerable, the group facilitators will set the parameters that all participants will be sharing and reflecting on personal thoughts and interactions and that we are to respond and treat each other respectfully. The discussions will occur in a friendly atmosphere of respect and care. These discussions offer you the opportunity to share your stories and find others who have experienced similar or different ways of dealing with the transition to motherhood. While small risks of vulnerability may exist, great benefits of relief, reflection, and humor also exist.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

The potential benefits from participating in this study might be an increased awareness and/or understanding of how you as a new mom use communication interactions to manage the transition to motherhood. Others may manage those same issues in different ways. In addition, you may learn more about how external influences (from your spouse, parents, friends and coworkers) affect communication as you've added the role of mother to your other roles. Last, you may experience a cathartic benefit by discussing this topic among other women.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?

To help protect your confidentiality, we will change the names of each participant and use letter coding to identify each group. The data will be kept on password-protected computer files. The researchers will be responsible for the viewing and listening of the video and audio tapes and the tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet when not being reviewed. No one other than the researchers will have access to the tapes. Transcriptions of the focus group sessions will be kept on password-protected computer files. The tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study. If we write an article about this study or share the study data set with others, we will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. As a participant, you are free to skip any focus group questions you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: **Dr. Judy Bowker, (email address was provided here.) or Sarah Hanna, (email address and phone number were provided here.)**

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-4933 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

Appendix F: Debriefing Script

Description: Debriefing script of the focus group process presented orally to the participants at the start of the first focus group session.

“This discussion is about communication. I’m sure you’ll be reviewing thoughts and feelings you had as you added the role of mother to your other roles. The key piece will be to discuss with the group how you used *communication* to manage this transition. Who did you talk to? What did you talk about? When did the subjects come up?

Some of your interactions were probably very clear and direct and maybe even organized, making statements such as “We need to talk about . . .” Many of your other interactions probably just happened— sometimes not so direct and sometimes not so clear and not so organized. Some of the topics may have been one-time-only discussions while many may have been on-going interactions or concerns. I’m interested in hearing all of it.

As we sit and talk together, I want you to know that I’m interested in your individual stories. You may have a completely different story than the person next to you. Some of your communication approaches might be similar and some will be different. There’s no right or wrong answer here. You are each a new mother balancing multiple roles- and- that makes you qualified to participate. I’m interested in hearing about your communication as you manage the transition into this role and each one of us will have different experiences to tell.

Your kids vary in age between 0 and 2 years olds. I consider your transition into motherhood as being a process that began for each person at a different point and progressed to this moment. For example, you might recall a conversation that happened right after you brought your baby home from the hospital, or it could be something you discussed just last week.

You will hear me use the phrase ‘significant others,’ which refers to people in your life whose input and interaction is significant to you. It’s not a term intended to describe only someone with whom you are partnered romantically.

All the participants will be sharing and reflecting on personal thoughts and interactions and we are to respond and treat each other respectfully. There is a potential to feel emotional during the focus group, and I want to assure everyone that this setting will be a safe and supportive place. We’ve all felt various emotions and responses during this transition to motherhood, and therefore can empathize while others are sharing. I will also be available after the focus group session, should you wish to continue sharing. Any conversation that happens after the focus group time will not be included in this study.

This is a dialogue...it’s a conversation...so I’m not interviewing each one of you separately. I’m interviewing you together, with the idea that there will be a collective conversation that will provide richer insight than just one person speaking alone. Think about what it’s like when you get together with your friends. The difference is that I’m

the one starting the conversation, but you're taking it from there. If someone says something that strikes something in you, feel free to pipe up. 'My mom and I talk about that, too. Why just the other day we were on the phone and....' You don't have to wait to be addressed directly to speak."

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

Description: Brief opening comments introduced the following five focus group interview questions asked during the first meeting and revisited during the second meeting, followed by the prompting questions used to promote expansion of an idea or extension of a comment or story.

Opening comments: Today we will talk about your communication experiences transitioning to motherhood. I would like to hear your stories about the interactions and conversations you've had navigating motherhood among your wife, daughter and worker roles.

Focus Group Questions:

1. Let's begin by talking about how you use communication to manage your new role as a mother. What issues came up for you? Whom did you talk to about those issues? Characterize those talks for me. Tell me stories.
2. Let's talk more about the dynamic between your mother role and your wife role. How have you used communication to navigate the transition to wife *and* mother? Tell me about the issues that come up. Whom do you talk to about those issues?
3. Now let's talk more about the dynamic between motherhood and your work role. How have you managed and adapted your work role as you've transitioned to motherhood? How have you communicated issues that come up when navigating these roles?
4. Now let's talk more about the interplay between your roles as mother and as daughter. What interactions have you had navigating motherhood along with your daughter role? Tell me about the issues that come up. Whom do you talk to about those issues?
5. How does your view and the views of significant others compare and contrast in regards to approaches managing the transition to parenthood? What interactions have you had with others about how to approach this transition? Tell me stories about those interactions.

Prompting Questions:

1. What issues did you think about in regards to integrating your new role?
2. What talk about?
3. With whom did you talk?
4. Why was that the topic that came up?
5. Was this similar for everyone?
6. How make choice: sharing vs. not sharing?
What factors affect decision to engage discussion on that topic at that time?
7. What subjects would you discuss?
Why? When? More than once?
8. Was your experience similar or did your interaction happen in a different way?

9. How did your interaction begin?
Who initiated? What did you each say?
10. What was the context?
Was the context significant for you?
Anyone have something to add?
11. How did this interaction end?
Is it on-going? Is issue settled? Did you understand each other?
12. Does anyone have other comments to share about context of this interaction?