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Intrinsically Career-Motivated Women & Motherhood

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INTRINSICALLY CAREER-MOTIVATED WOMEN & MOTHERHOOD

by

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the present study was to identify whether maternal regret was present among career-oriented mothers and understand how intrinsically-career motivated women experience motherhood. Data from 20 qualitative interviews with working mothers were analyzed with modified grounded theory and strategies using open, axial, and selective coding. The study identified four themes and fifteen associated subthemes that represent working mothers' experiences: qualities, skills, conditions, and resources. These themes and the theoretical frames of Bowen's family systems theory, rational choice theory, and intersectionality led to several implications for working mothers. While it is possible to contribute to both work and family, experiences in motherhood are made easier largely by conditions and resources. Additionally, there is a significant misalignment of social expectations of working mothers to what they can accomplish. It should be possible for mothers to commit to work and family without the expectation to "do it all."

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my Honors College Thesis to my participants. I was fortunate enough to meet the most amazing people through the twenty or so interviews I conducted. They opened up to me and shared their stories of their careers, families, and struggles. Most of our conversations were positive, but a stark portion of my interviews settled around the stigmatization of working mothers and unrealistic expectations of women. In my thesis, I attempt to tell their stories. I implore everyone who reads this thesis (and everyone else) to recognize and reconsider the presence of working mothers in their lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE/FOREWORD

"A Mother's Day Poem"

I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove

warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your hand

because life is short and you too are thirsty.

I know you are reading this poem which is not in your language

guessing at some words while others keep you reading

and I want to know which words they are.

I know you are reading this poem listening for something, torn

between bitterness and hope

turning back once again to the task you cannot refuse.

I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else

left to read

there where you have landed, stripped as you are.

–Adrienne Rich

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine you have just completed a large project at work. You breathe a sigh of relief and satisfaction of a job well done. You are excited about the progress that you and your team have accomplished today and look forward to embarking on a new project tomorrow. You sneak out of the office a couple minutes early to catch the second half of your son's soccer game. He forgot to put his dirty (formerly) white socks in the hamper the night before, so they were not washed in the early morning load of laundry while completing some last-minute preparation for work this morning. His socks, a few shades muddier than everyone else on the field, are the first thing you notice.

Another mother on the sidelines is chatting about a school social tomorrow. Panicked, you remember that you were supposed to volunteer but committed to dinner with a friend that you have been meaning to catch up with for months. You push it off and tell yourself that you will volunteer extra at the next school event. The other mother turns up her nose but you cannot possibly make time for it.

After the game, you arrive home to a crockpot dinner that your partner prepped last night and you put on before work. You are relieved to spend some much-needed time with family after a long day but cannot help to dread the endless sea of tasks that await you as soon as you wake up. You look at your phone to see a text message from your childless sister asking about an early morning workout class (with the hint that you need to lose weight), an email from your boss, and a text from your teenager in the next room about a bake sale. When will there ever be a break?

For many people that you see every day at work, the grocery store, or in passing, this resembles a wisp of their daily thought process---being pulled in many directions

while trying to exceed all expectations. Working mothers balance their families, careers, and much more, striving to fulfill the demands of those areas while facing impossible social norms about their lifestyles.

Intensive mothering, first coined by Sharon Hays (1996) describes a mother's wholehearted commitment to her children and family (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Grosse, 2022). While mothers may pursue areas outside of their families (a career, social life, hobbies) they are still held to the standards of intensive mothering. Despite an overwhelming majority of mothers working (Schmidt et al., 2023) they are still held to this expectation and a similar intensive expectation at work (Arendell, 2000; Niemisto et al., 2021). Naturally, some things fall through the cracks and working mothers must choose to prioritize what is most important to them (Christopher, 2012; Rizzo et al., 2013; Budds, 2021). Despite prioritization, mothers still face harmful social expectations parallel to intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Gunderson & Barrett, 2017).

In my thesis, I aim to better understand motherhood, maternal regret, and working mothers and contribute to the scholarly literature on understanding the experiences of intrinsically career-motivated mothers. It is my hope that the findings from this study illuminate the experiences of mothers who are dedicated to their careers and families and identify places where mothers could benefit from additional support and improved services. This thesis explores motherhood in the context of intrinsically career-oriented women through two key research questions:

1. Do mothers with expansive careers possess a heightened sense of maternal regret, especially surrounding possible missed career opportunities?

2. How mothers experience having children and an expansive career? Is it possible for women to do both, and can they do it all?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motherhood

Many scholars have attempted to contextualize motherhood. It has been contextualized as ‘the state of being a mother' (Roy, 2016, p. 25), a social institution defined as women raising children (Berg, 2008), and/or the performance of motherhood (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). What is common across most of these definitions is that mothering focuses on a person who does the relational and logistical work of child-rearing, specifically the "social practices of nurturing and caring for dependent children" (Arendell, 2004, p. 1192). For this study, mothering and motherhood are viewed as "dynamic social interactions and relationships, located in a societal context organized by gender and in accord with the prevailing gender belief system" (Arendell, 2004, p. 1193). Motherhood is ever-changing and is both individual and collective, shaped by experiences and influenced by larger societal structures (Arendell, 2000; Niemisto et al., 2021). Additionally, the definition of motherhood varies significantly by socioeconomic status, race, age, area, level of support, and other external factors (Collins, 1994; Grosse, 2022).

In North America, the prevailing ideology of motherhood is *intensive mothering* (Hays, 1996; Arendell, 2004; Budds, 2021), first categorized by Sharon Hays. Hays (1996) defines intensive mothering as an exclusive, wholly child-centered, emotionally involved, and time-consuming interaction with children. This type of mother does not think of herself; her primary role is to exist for the needs of others. This conception of motherhood is wrapped into idealized notions of the family: nuclear, middle-class, white, and heterosexual. These mothers have a substantially easier time truly subscribing to

intensive mothering and operating outside external social forces that more frequently affect marginalized women (Thorne & Yalom, 1982; Budds, 2021). Mothers belonging to marginalized groups have a much harder time meeting this unrealistic, intensive expectation of motherhood because of social forces like racial discrimination, exclusion from healthcare, and income inequality (Collins, 2022).

While many mothers defy the standard of *intensive mothering*, it is pervasive and reinforced by society through family leave policies and media portrayals of mothers within the nuclear family (Rizzo et al., 2013; Gunderson & Barrett, 2017). Mothers of varied socioeconomic status, blended families, and those with high career aspirations inherently contradict intensive mothering because they focus on matters and interests outside their children (Christopher, 2012; Dow, 2015; Budds, 2021). Most types of workl do not allow for many mothers to engage in intensive mothering because of the job's requirements to spend time away from their children (Rizzo et al., 2013). However, different jobs allow mothers to get closer to the standard of intensive mothering. For example, careers with hours reminiscent of a school schedule allow mothers to subscribe closer to intensive mothering. Marginalized mothers historically have held jobs with non-traditional schedules (evening shifts for factory workers or dinner shifts for restaurant staff) and lower pay, or they have had a more difficult time obtaining higher education or higher-status jobs because of systemic racism (Collins, 2022), making it more difficult to subscribe to intensive mothering (Christopher, 2012). Unfortunately, although manifestations of motherhood are culturally specific, the constraining effects of intensive motherhood are widespread and affect mothers disproportionally (Rizzo et al., 2013; Niemisto et al., 2021; Budds, 2021).

Mothers are one of the primary people in a child's life responsible for their socialization into society (Forcey, 2001; Lester, 2015). Much of what mothers *do*, or maternal practice, is raising children. Mothers share the activities related to childrearing even though they vary as individuals and exist in different cultures (Ruddick, 1994). While mothers and parents have varying parenting philosophies, they generally aim to raise happy, healthy children (Niemistö et al., 2021; Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023). In this sense, motherhood as a practice constantly changes because the "dependent children" continually evolve (Leonard, 1996; Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). As a mother grows and progresses, so do her children.

Intensive mothering suggests that children are the whole of motherhood. However, motherhood involves more than raising children. In addition to raising children, a key practice of motherhood is domestic labor completed in the home. In Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift* (1989), she argues that mothers do proportionately more housework (thus, a "double day" of work) than fathers. Contemporary studies confirm Hochschild's research; however, they suggest that the divide in the household is not as extreme as Hochschild first claimed (Milkie et al., 2009). Another concept related to domestic labor performed by mothers is the concept of "invisible" household work introduced by Daniels (1987). She categorizes the household's "unseen" work as scheduling doctor's appointments, making grocery lists, keeping track of the family, and housekeeping and childcare work that generally goes unnoticed and undervalued. Scholars who research family and work agree that women and mothers do more household labor than their male counterparts, whether for unseen "invisible work" or

directly caring for the home (Daniels, 1987; Erickson, 2005; Milkie et al., 2009; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Motherhood is most commonly associated with women and femininity (Glenn et al., 1994) and, for many mothers, is intimately tied to their identities (Arendell, 2004; Niemistö et al., 2021). Even women of childbearing age who do not have children, by choice or by infertility, are impacted by the ideas of motherhood, which shape their identity (Berg, 2008). Feminism has introduced a different kind of motherhood in the last couple of decades, defying the ideas of traditional, wholly child-focused intensive motherhood (Adams, 1955; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Additionally, feminist scholarship has created diverse definitions of motherhood, including minority and working/lower-income class definitions that defy the intensive standard of motherhood (Collins, 1994; Glenn et al., 1994). These definitions highlight the diverse ways that mothers navigate their lives through varying social, political, and economic structures, emphasizing the multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon of motherhood (Glenn et al., 1994; Collins, 2000; Budds, 2021). More contemporary versions of motherhood refer to how discourses around motherhood have shifted in Western culture and how (hetero)normative, repressive, and static ideals surrounding motherhood can be challenged or changed (Huopalaninen & Satama, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2023). While these modern ideas and conceptions of motherhood are beginning to swell, intensive mothering (which parallels white, middle-class, and heterosexual mothers) and the associated expectations remain dominant (Budds, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Motherhood is also a deeply personal and individually defined role, and every mother has a unique definition of motherhood. Unique conceptions result from diverse experiences and access to resources and can also be tied to mothers' experiences as women (Glenn et al., 1994; Arendell, 2004; Rizzo et al., 2013). Marginalized women, on average, have less access to resources, support systems, and childcare, making their conceptions of motherhood vastly different from those who are not marginalized (Collins, 2000; Savas, 2010). While the conception of motherhood is changing in tandem with feminist discourse, cultural expectations around mothers remain rigid (Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Maternal Regret, Child-free, and the Absence of Children

The research on motherhood has established that this important role is varied and dynamic, with major social influences contributing to how women across demographic groups enact the role. What is less well-defined and explored in the literature is a discussion of how women engage in the ideas of motherhood in less traditional ways, or not at all (Blackstone, 2019; Niemistö et al., 2021). Some women who become mothers may regret their decision to have children and have feelings such as anger or guilt as a result, wishing for their lives before raising kids (Donath, 2015; Blackstone, 2019). Other women never become mothers through choice or infertility, which can be challenging due to social expectations. Just as important as those who are mothers are those who reject the ideals of motherhood, and why.

Some women choose not to have children, known as being "child-free" or voluntarily childless (Blackstone, 2019; Neal & Neal, 2024). Child-free adults are the most common type of non-parent in the United States (Neal & Neal, 2024). Because

child-free adults choose not to have children, they are distinctly different from those who desire to have children but have not yet become parents. The number of child-free women is increasing, as suggested by data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), which indicated that the percentage of child-free women ages 15 to 49 has increased from six percent in 2010 to just under ten percent in 2019 (U.S. Centers for Disease Control). People become child-free for many reasons, including not wanting children, health concerns, career plans, access to healthcare, gender equality, political climate, and economic factors (Blackstone, 2019; Neal & Neal, 2024). For some people, becoming child-free is a choice; they would rather explore a life without children. For others, social forces like discrimination against minorities, low pay, career instability, and access to healthcare limit their ability to support children, forcing them to be child-free.

For some mothers who choose to have children, unexpected negative feelings may be significant for them, resulting in feelings of regret. Maternal regret, or the emotional and cognitive stance of regret towards motherhood, is one aspect of motherhood that has yet to be deeply explored (Donath, 2015; Piotrowski, 2021). Donath (2015) explains maternal regret as being distinct from the object (children) and central to the experience (maternity), highlighting that most mothers who experience maternal regret do so outside the relationship with their child(ren) and towards the expectations associated with motherhood. Much taboo surrounds this topic because so many associate maternal regret with the regret of specific children (Donath, 2015). However, some research suggests that those who experience maternal regret do not relate it to their children but associate it with a detachment from maternal identities (Donath, 2015; Piotrowski, 2021).

Piotrowski indicates that the percentage of parents who regret parenthood is "characterized by a higher level of adverse childhood experiences, have poorer psychological and somatic health, are more vulnerable to social evaluation, and experience a strong parental identity crisis and parental burnout" (2021, p. 1). Furthermore, regretting parenthood is "associated with the parent's financial situation and marital status, along with having children with special needs" (Piotrowski, 2021, p. 3). Many factors impact the presence of regret for parents, most of which are correlated with socioeconomic status.

The correlation between parental regret and socioeconomic status conveys that parental and maternal regret is further correlated with limited access to resources. Minorities and people of low socioeconomic status historically have less access to resources (Collins, 2000; Savas, 2010; Christopher, 2013). This suggests that minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status may be more likely to be detached from maternal ideals and less likely to fulfill the ideals of motherhood (Savas, 2010; Niemistö et al., 2021). After having children, it is more difficult for minority and low-socioeconomic mothers to obtain consistent and low-cost childcare, have a long and stable pattern of partner support, and work in jobs that maintain a regular work schedule (Savas, 2010; Collins, 2022). This makes motherhood more difficult, and some mothers become frustrated with fulfilling their own expectations of motherhood, potentially leading to feelings of regret (Donath, 2015). Because maternal regret is more concerned with a detachment from maternal ideals than regretting children (Donath, 2015), social factors associated with motherhood are crucial to examine when discussing maternal regret.

It is important to note that minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status have limited access to reproductive healthcare, abortions, sexual education, and educational opportunities (Collins, 2000; Savas, 2010; Dermott & Pomati, 2016). Therefore, racial minorities and people of lower economic wealth may possess higher levels of maternal and parental regret (Donath, 2015; Piotrowski, 2021) because they face systems of oppression, such as racism, implicit bias, and career opportunities that limit fulfillment in motherhood. Mothers of color and varied socioeconomic status may have different experiences in motherhood than their privileged counterparts because of existing social structures. Being child-free and possessing maternal regret have important implications when discussing motherhood. Some women with children regret their entry into motherhood, whether or not the decision was conscious, which can stem from their disconnection from maternal ideals and/or inability to fulfill those ideals because of social constraints and not their individual children (Leonard, 1996; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Ornath, 2015).

Working Mothers

In the last several decades, mothers' employment rates have risen exponentially. By 2010, approximately two-thirds of North American mothers with young children worked outside the home (Almey, 2010). In 2022, 70.2% of U. S. mothers in heterosexual married-couple families were employed, up two percentage points from the year prior (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022). Although the number of working mothers is growing, the dominant expectations and government social support of women remain the same (Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023); mothers are expected to commit their time and resources to their children. In addition to the expectations of motherhood, employers also

expect working mothers to represent the ideal employee (Johnston & Swanson, 2007; Niemistö et al., 2021). As more and more mothers work outside the home, a realistic conceptualization of motherhood must expand to involve working mothers.

One key area to consider is the impacts of maternal work on minority families. The separation between work and motherhood is a distinctly white concept—mothers of color have a more integrated view of work and family than their white counterparts (Christopher, 2012). They have historically not possessed the luxury of choosing whether or not to work, and mothers of color have traditionally held employment to support their families (Collins, 2000; Savas, 2010). Because mothers of color have always worked, there is little divide between motherhood and their labor outside the home. While minority mothers have typically worked, they have historically held lower-status jobs than their white counterparts (Savas, 2010). Mothers of color have significantly different experiences than those of white mothers, which also intersects with socioeconomic status (Collins, 1994, 2022; Lamphere et al., 1993; Savas, 2010). For mothers of color, wholly committing themselves to their children (intensive mothering) has never been a choice. They experience motherhood differently than white, class-privileged mothers (Collins, 2000; Christopher, 2011, 2012).

Sociologists have identified traditional hegemonic ideologies that influence women's work and family decisions (Dow, 2015). These ideologies assert that a) a mother's primary responsibility is childrearing and a fathers is breadwinning (Blair-Loy, 2003, 2005; Uttal, 1996, 1999; Dow, 2015), b) mothering should occur in a self-sufficient nuclear family (Hays, 1996; Macdonald, 2011), and c) employment conflicts with motherhood (Blair-Loy 2003; Damaske, 2011). These ideologies are modern creations

that emerged in white, middle-class families during the Industrial Revolution (Segura, 1991) and have left their mark on society (Dow, 2015; Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023). However, many mothers defy these expectations, working outside the home and relying on external support networks (Christopher, 2012). Being a working mother inherently requires a deviation from the standard of traditional motherhood (Arendell, 2004; Rizzo et al., 2013; Gunderson & Barrett, 2017).

Sharon Hays, author of *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, conducted in-depth interviews with 38 mothers of preschoolers. She coined the idea of intensive mothering, or that mothers only exist for their children (1996; Rizzo et al., 2013; Budds, 2021). Hays found that the employed women in her sample did not meet the expectations of intensive mothering. Employed women were "pressed for time, a little guilty, a bit inadequate, and somewhat ambivalent about their positions" (Hays, 1996, p. 89). Hays also found that the employed women in her sample justified their employment and careers by what they could provide for their children and families rather than themselves. Other scholars expand on this idea by arguing that mothers place themselves within ideological expectations of intensive mothering (Garey, 1995, 2006; Rizzo et al., 2013; Budds, 2021) but reframe their careers by their commitment to intensive mothering when they are not at work. Intensive mothering is a strain and forces working mothers to question their commitment to motherhood, as jobs and careers inherently contradict the ideology.

Contemporary studies have begun to explore how employed mothers manage the expectations of intensive motherhood (Christopher, 2012; Rizzo et al., 2013; Budds, 2021; Grosse, 2022). These mothers viewed working as complementary, not

contradictory, to motherhood. Some mothers from their samples claimed that working made them better mothers. Hattery identified three mothers who "worked outside the home, strongly identified with their careers, believed their children thrived in public childcare settings and did not report feeling guilty about their decisions; they said that they were 'better mothers when they pursue their own interests and have time away from their children'" (2001, p. 28). Hochschild claimed that mothers increasingly work long hours to avoid stressful home lives (1997). Johnston and Swanson (2006) ask 'where are the full-time employed mothers who work for the sake of their career identity…yet still strongly identify with their parenting role?". Johnston and Swanson (2007) later conducted in-depth interviews with 98 married mothers. They found that mothers were ultimately unable to escape the idea of intensive motherhood, instead choosing to reframe both motherhood and their careers to fit within the ideology of intensive motherhood (Johnston & Swanson, 2007; Christopher, 2012).

Although all working mothers have to overcome systemic barriers to balancing work and home, mothers belonging to minority groups have additional obstacles in achieving this balance. Mothers of color have historically worked to support their families. However, they have not traditionally held high-paying or high-status positions. This is largely due to the opportunity gap and occupational segregation (Savas, 2010), which results in marginalized communities largely holding lower-paid positions. As a result, many mothers of color may not fit a traditional definition of "high-achieving" because being high-achieving usually requires an advantage in terms of race, family and socioeconomic status, and resources (Richie et al., 1997; Savas, 2010). Opportunity to

fulfill high-achieving standards should take an intersectional approach, considering that mothers of color often do not have the same opportunities as white mothers.

Intrinsically Motivated Working Mothers

Extensive mothering, the inverse of intensive mothering, has recently made waves, especially in Western society (Christopher, 2012; Chelsey & Flood, 2017). Christopher (2012) defines extensive mothering as a "way mothers respond to the cultural constructions of the ideal mother and worker and reframe how employment fits into good notions of good mothering in their lives" (p. 73). Contrary to other studies, she identified that many employed mothers "justify their employment by discussing the personal benefits they themselves receive from paid work, in addition to the benefits accrued to their children (Christopher, 2012, p. 74). Her study included a diverse sample, suggesting that a reframing of motherhood along the lines of extensive motherhood is not limited to class-privileged women (Christopher, 2012). If adopted, the ideology of extensive mothering justifies a career and a family (Christopher, 2012; Chelsey & Flood, 2017).

Extensive mothering is promising because it relieves mothers from some of the vast time and guilt required of intensive mothering (Christopher, 2012), freeing them to focus their physical and mental energy on other avenues of their lives. Although the dominant narrative of intensive mothering assumes that mothers have no other interests, many want to work and contribute to society (Christopher, 2012; Niemistö et al., 2021). However, extensive mothering highlights that the division of labor (an egalitarian division) is crucial for working mothers, whether with a partner, childcare, or live-in help (Niemistö, 2021). This defies the cultural expectation in intensive mothering that women are primary caregivers. Although many women are beginning to break the mold of

intensive mothering by exploring extensive mothering, working mothers are still held to the expectations of child-centered, intensive mothering (Christopher, 2012; Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023).

I define intrinsically career-motivated mothers as those dedicated to their careers outside of financial and status gains (Blair-Loy, 2003; Niemisto et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation "often arises from the individual's positive reaction to the task itself, such as interest, involvement, curiosity, satisfaction, or positive challenge, which serves as a type of reward of the work" (Yidong et al., 2013, p. 444). For these mothers, they have an innate desire to work and parent their children, they seek to contribute to the world beyond their families and pursue an area of interest to them. This contradicts intensive mothering because intrinsically career-motivated women are not wholly committed to their children. They are pulled in multiple directions, all equally important to them. While mothers may appreciate financial incentives and the increased social status tied to their career choices, *intrinsic* career motivation indicates an innate desire to work, contribute to their workplaces, and/or better themselves professionally (Roy, 2016; Huopalainen & Satama, 2019).

Many mothers have different interests and career motives. However, intrinsically career-motivated mothers are defined by their desire and need to find fulfillment in their work. This primarily reflects mothers' individual personalities and an innate desire to work and pursue their career passions. Unfortunately, external forces like socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity can limit who is more generally described as career-motivated. Some interpretations of "career-motivated" might correspond to salary or social status related to job titles, such as doctors or attorneys. Minority mothers and those of lower

socioeconomic status may have a more difficult time fulfilling this interpretation of "career-motivated" because of social barriers to education and wealth (Collins, 2000; 2022; Christopher, 2012). I seek to explore career motivation pertaining to an innate desire to work and contribute to society, no matter the career or profession.

Theoretical Frames

Several key theories are essential for understanding the challenges of contemporary motherhood for women choosing to have a successful career and balancing their families' needs. Bowen's family systems theory states that the family is an emotional unit with multiple interrelated systems. Rational choice theory argues that individuals choose the path that makes the most sense for them, and intersectionality recognizes that pieces of an individual's identity come together in a unique blend of privilege and discrimination. These theories emphasize an understanding of individuality and choice within a family system and guide the study's conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1972, 1978) defines family as both a relationship system and an emotional system whereby family members influence and are influenced by one another at individual, dyadic, systemic, and intergenerational levels. Bowen argued that the family, like other natural systems, is governed by natural rules, similar to nonhuman groups. He later claimed that two principal factors are uniquely human and relevant to families: chronic anxiety, or the dilemma of maintaining self while making meaningful connections with others, and differentiation of self, or adaptive strategies to regulate such anxiety (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Family systems are powerful factors that influence all members of the system, and because women are embedded in

both their family of origin (parents, siblings, aunts, grandparents, etc) and their families of procreation (spouse/partner, children, grandchildren, etc.), understanding the unique impacts of these systems is essential (Cox & Paley, 1997).

Only once individuals can manage the conflict between chronic anxiety and differentiation of self are they able to engage in healthy familial and romantic relationships or differentiation of self (DoS) (Erdem & Safi, 2018). DoS is a constant internal push and pull, cutting through families. Additionally, DoS is central to Bowen's Family Systems Theory. DoS determines how family roles, rules, and boundaries are constructed (Erdem & Safi, 2018), manifesting at the intra- and interpersonal levels. Making a distinction between thought and emotional processes and how one relates to significant others and children while maintaining a sense of self is crucial to DoS and Family Systems Theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Erdem & Safi, 2018).

Rational Choice Theory, or RCT, seeks to explain how a person selects one action when several are presented (Voss & Abraham, 2000; Weiske et al., 2015). RTC is based on three simple assumptions:

1. Actors (people) have preferences, which are the sum of expectations and evaluations of a specific action option.
2. Further underlying conditions include positive (chances) and negative restrictions (restraints) of action, which may derive from a myriad of internal and external sources (finances, social norms).
3. The actors select the action which, among the given constraints, is most promising for implementing their preferences. This is reflective of the subjective expected utility (SEU) theory, or the idea that actors select the option from the available set

of options that seems best suited to achieve their goals (with consideration of the effects) (Savage, 1954; Opp, 1999; Weiske et al., 2015).

Rational Choice Theory applies best when the choices given to each person are laid out and considered. For motivated working mothers with children, these choices may consist of self-care, various aspects of a career, romantic time with a partner, and more.

The final theoretical frame that will be applied to my research is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a popular lens in the social sciences and addresses the question of how "multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time" (Gillborn, 2015). Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw first developed intersectionality. She argued that intersectionality is a "concept that enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience that bias" (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 1244). An example of this is considering the inter-connectedness, or intersectionality, of race, class, gender, and more when looking at a person's life experiences.

Crenshaw also stated that "an intersectional approach goes beyond conventional analysis in order to focus our attention on injuries that we otherwise might not recognize…to 1) analyze social problems more fully; 2) shape more effective interventions; and 3) promote more inclusive advocacy" (1995, p. 373). Crenshaw claims that intersectionality has two components: an empirical bias (an intersectional approach is needed to better understand social inequities and how they are perpetuated) and an activist framework (1995). Intersectionality aims to "generate coalitions between

different groups with the aim of resisting and changing the status quo" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 279). To understand how sexism (or any other -ism) works, scholars must understand the other intersections that sexism has with "other axes of oppression at different times and in different contexts" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 281). However, Gillborn argues that it is important to "find a balance between remaining sensitive to intersectional issues without being overwhelmed by them" (2015, p. 285), arguing that while scholars should take an intersectional approach, identity is too complex to divide fully. The theoretical framework of intersectionality is crucial when considering participants' life experiences and choices.

Current Study

This study explores how intrinsically career-motivated women experience motherhood. Building on the ideas of Christopher, 2012; Blair-Loy, 2003; Arendell, 2004; Hays, 1996, and the concept of career-driven mothers, I seek to answer 2 key research questions. First, I ask if mothers with expansive careers possess a heightened sense of maternal regret, especially surrounding possible missed career opportunities. Second, I ask how mothers experience having children and an expansive career. Is it possible for women to do both, and can they do it all?

METHODOLOGY

Inclusion Criteria

This study aimed to interview intrinsically career-motivated full-time working mothers. Participants were required to be over 18, English-speaking, self-identify as mothers, and have at least one child living at home between the ages of two and twelve. Participants also needed to meet two out of three of the following criteria to determine who qualified as an intrinsically career-motivated mother: 1) have formal education at or beyond a master's degree, 2) currently serve in a full-time (32 hours per week) management or executive position, and 3) have at least five years of professional experience. These criteria established that women eligible for the study were not new to their career trajectory and showed evidence that they were actively pursuing their careers.

Motherhood was defined as any individual who identified as such and had at least partial custody and legal responsibility over their child or children. This excluded stepmothers and mothers who identified as a mother because they had foster children. The study also excluded mothers of children with diagnosed disabilities that fell under the following categories: mobility/physical, spinal cord, head injuries, vision, hearing, or severe cognitive/learning categories (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The exclusion of this demographic was intended to control emotions and experiences associated with children's medical history and not inherently having or raising children (Yamanda et al., 2012).

I defined mothers as intrinsically career-motivated if they pursued an advanced degree, had professional experience (not entry-level), and/or held managerial/executive

positions. Having met two of three of these criteria allowed for a more diverse sample of participants. Some professionally oriented women may not have achieved in all areas. For example, not all intrinsically career-motivated mothers had or had access to higher education. Potential participants would still qualify if they possessed five years of experience and served in a managerial or executive position. Additionally, younger participants may not have had the opportunity to serve in a managerial or executive role, so they would still qualify to participate if they had an advanced degree and at least five years of experience as a professional (i.e., a pre-tenured Assistant Professor). These criteria were implemented to ensure participants' dedication to their careers, but only two criteria were necessary to allow for a more diverse sample and broader definition of intrinsically career-motivated (Richie et al., 1997; Savas, 2010).

Participants must have had one child between the ages of two and twelve to participate in the study. Children between the ages of two and twelve require the most active parenting (Clark, 2020) and often require the most attention and focus from their parents. Many children begin to walk, talk, and develop personalities at age two. Mothers exit the new baby phase, allowing their hormones to settle and for them to physically and emotionally return to "normal." Beyond the age of twelve, many children become independent (Eccles, 1999; Lester, 2015), needing less oversight and management. Targeting mothers with at least one child between the ages of two and twelve ensured that participants were engaged in active parenting. Furthermore, participants needed to work full-time to qualify for the study (at least 32 hours a week). While some mothers are intrinsically motivated and work part-time, they do not experience motherhood the same as mothers who work part-time (Carson et al., 2011).

Procedure

This study was approved (2023-03-19) by the University of Maine Protection of Human Subjects Review Board (Appendix A). Mothers were recruited for the study using a convenience and snowball sampling strategy (Emerson, 2015) through flyers (Appendix B) and announcements posted on social media parenting group pages, emails to university faculty in New England, and the All Maine Women Alumni Network, a senior female and nonbinary honor society at the University of Maine. The study targeted between 15 and 25 participants.

Mothers interested in participating in the study first completed a screening survey to determine eligibility for the research study (Appendix C). Potential participants who met the study's eligibility requirements were sent a follow-up email describing the next steps in the research protocol (Appendix D), including a link to book an hour-long Zoom interview, demographic survey (Appendix E), and confidential research participant number. The three participants who did not meet the criteria for the study were sent a short follow-up email listing why they did not qualify. The confidential research participant number was created using Google Sheets' random number generator (=RANDBETWEEN 1-10000000). Participants were asked to book a one-hour time slot using their research participant number and YouCanBookMe software, and then the researcher sent a unique Zoom link. Each participant was later assigned a pseudonym for ease in coding and reading.

All of the semi-structured interviews took place electronically using the Zoom platform and lasted approximately one hour. I reviewed the research project, discussed the informed consent (Appendix F), and allowed participants to ask questions about the

study and their participation in the project before proceeding with the interview questions (Appendix G). Participants who did not complete the demographic survey before the interview were asked to complete it during the first five minutes of the interview. Interviews were recorded through Zoom and transcribed using Rev.com. After the interview, as a token of appreciation, participants were provided a five-dollar gift card to Starbucks or the University of Maine System cafeteria.

Sample

Twenty mothers participated in the study and represented a range of ages, incomes, and careers, with children of various ages. All participants identified themselves as White/Caucasian except one who identified as a Pacific Islander. The average age of participants was 41 years, the average income was $116,850.00, and the average age of the participants' children was 9.88 years. For a more detailed description of the demographic characteristics of the participants, see Table 1, located in Appendix H.

Grounded Theory

A modified grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data for this study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This methodology is based on systematic, recursive, and inductive data analysis to develop a theory specifically related to the research question (Echevarria-Doan & Tubbs, 2005). Glaser and Strauss created grounded theory to "close the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research" (1967). They argued that the analytical process is a constant interplay between collection and analysis, resulting in a formal framework for generating theory, not verifying it. The theory is flexibly built during the research process, where the researchers are the primary arbiters of data collection and analysis (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Because there is little research on the intersections of a desired career and motherhood, I decided to pursue grounded theory to allow for a new framework that can be applied to future research.

Data Analysis

The coding process was completed in a few different phrases. The first interviews were completed in the early summer of 2023, and researchers met to discuss emerging themes and ideas. After a pause, the second half of data collection was completed in early autumn of 2023, and the researchers met during this process to discuss emerging themes from the data. After all data collection was complete, the researchers thoroughly read over each interview and left comments about potential themes as they appeared. Next, the researchers agreed upon ten to twelve key themes that emerged in each interview. This is known as open coding, or examining the data's discrete parts (interviews) (Williams & Moser, 2019). Looking at all interviews, the research team then identified prominent codes that suggested themes among participants. This is axial coding, or drawing connections between codes across individual parts (Williams & Moser, 2019). Finally, the research team sorted the axial codes into central categories, called selective coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). This process, also called "focused coding" (Charmaz, 1995), is a top-down process confirming a comprehensive data analysis.

All research team members read over and coded the data to minimize biases and ensure thorough data analysis. Many discussions with the team were also held during the coding and analysis process in an attempt to extract as much information as possible. This process is known as triangulation in data analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

While it is impossible to eradicate all potential biases, multiple research team members examined the data in an attempt to honor participants' experiences.

Reflexive Experience of Researchers

The primary researcher and student is a 20-year-old white female college student. Implicit biases may include race and affinity (the tendency to favor people like yourself) (Hodkinson & Macleod, 2010). Both of my parents worked my entire childhood, with careers in guidance and civil engineering. I currently reside in rural Orono, Maine, where I have spent most of the last three years attending school at the University of Maine. I have a major in Sociology and minors in Legal Studies, Ethics & Political Philosophy, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in the Honors College. The other two researchers included Lauren Davis, a Graduate Assistant in the Parenting Relationships Research Lab, and Dr. Daniel Puhlman, Faculty Advisor and Director of the Parenting Relationships Research Lab. Ms. Davis is a white student who obtained her undergraduate degree in Canada. Dr. Puhlman is a highly educated middle-class white male who studied in Pennsylvania and Florida before teaching at the University of Maine.

FINDINGS

The data obtained from this study was analyzed to address the two key research questions that were posed earlier in this paper. The first research question stated whether intrinsically career-motivated women experienced maternal regret. Although I had anticipated that mothers would likely have some regret around their decision to have children, none of the participants specifically indicated that they regretted having children. Some mothers did report that they regretted aspects of having children, but not the decision to have children. They looked back on their experiences before children, stressing that they had more time to commit to aspects of their lives besides their families, but expressed overall positive feelings around their children. Ragan stated…

> I don't regret having kids. And I do think back on my life and I'm like, oh, there's some really great pieces of that life. But ultimately, I absolutely love going on adventures with them, going on trips with them, traveling with them. It's so cool to see these two humans grow up and develop.

While Ragan wished for the time and flexibility she possessed before her children, she emphasized that she did not regret having her children. Hope expressed similar sentiments to Ragan, stating, “I certainly don't regret having children, nor do I regret my career, nor do I regret my ambition. I've accomplished a lot over the years. And there's pride in that. Have some things been achieved at the sake of other things? Absolutely.” While Hope was firm in her stance of not experiencing regret after having children, she did emphasize sacrifice to balance her career and family. Participants did not experience maternal regret but instead highlighted the various aspects of their lives that aided them in accomplishing their family and career goals.

The second research question in this study focused on how intrinsically career-motivated mothers experience motherhood. In analyzing the data to address this research question, four major themes emerged among career-oriented mothers: qualities, skills, conditions, and resources that aided them in successfully balancing work and family. Positive qualities, skills, conditions, and resources represented having a more positive experience of motherhood and their management of a work-life balance, and negative conditions and a lack of resources made their experiences more difficult.

Qualities

This theme illustrates distinct personal attributes or characteristics that mothers identified in their experiences of motherhood. Mothers often referred to aspects of their personality or their values that were instrumental drivers in how they engaged with their work and family environments. Participants discussed specific qualities that were grouped into two sub-themes that emerged from the data: sacrifice and having a strong identity. Sacrifice was defined as the nature of forgoing your own priorities in pursuit of something greater. Identity refers to strong core values that exist across participants' ideologies, parenting philosophies, and careers. These two key qualities aided them in their experiences and the balance of their careers and motherhood.

Sacrifice

Twelve participants (n=12) explicitly mentioned the need to make sacrifices in various areas of their lives. Sacrifice, or forgoing your own priorities in pursuit of something else, was necessary for participants to devote the time needed for their careers and families. Sacrifice was considered a quality because participants referred to it as a central personal characteristic. Specifically, participants who identified sacrifice

mentioned it multiple times, indicating that it was something they possessed rather than a one-time occurrence. This sub-theme was critical for participants because their families and careers demanded a large portion of their time and energy—being able to attend to every aspect of their lives was nearly impossible. Participants expressed the theme of sacrifice through stories of grappling with what they needed to give up to either put themselves first or excel at work with a family. While the specifics of what mothers sacrificed in their lives differed (sleep, nutrition, education, a larger career, time with friends and family, teaching their children, and more), participants viewed sacrifice as a necessary quality.

Mothers discussed an internal process where they had to navigate between putting themselves and their families' needs first. Many participants did not sacrifice everything in their lives or their entire careers, but they did need to change their timeline or reduce the scope or frequency of their goals to make things work. Hannah made the choice to start her graduate program for herself, but that came with added sacrifices in other aspects of her life. She stated…

> I won't call it a sacrifice. I'll call it the things that I wish I could do, but I can't for a very good reason…The biggest one was my Ph.D. I needed to wait for my husband to finish his graduate program because I knew that having two people in graduate programs plus me working full-time would not happen…I had to wait for the kids to be older, for my husband to be in the workforce.

Hannah identified that she needed to sacrifice her pursuit of a Ph.D. in order to preserve the best interests of her family. She sacrificed the timing of her graduate program until it was the right time for her family, letting go of personal fulfillment and professional betterment through higher education.

Hope described her personal sacrifice, noting that she gave up sleep, good nutrition, and time with her family for her career. She stated…

> Sleep, I would think, but I'd describe being a working parent as terrible calculus because something always loses, and often it's you. I mean, because that's the choice you make. there have been times in my career where I've definitely sacrificed nutrition and wellbeing and not working out as much and things like that.

Sleep was referred to by several mothers as part of their sacrifice, stating that there was not enough time in the day to accomplish everything, and they stayed up late to work while their families were sleeping. Ellie discussed sleep sacrifice, which impacted her long-term health. She said, "Sleep is a good one…Every time I have my physical and talk to my doctor about ways I want to be more healthy, she always says to incorporate better sleep." While participants varied in what they sacrificed, they often gave up, delayed, or adjusted personal goals and their health to meet the needs of their careers and families.

Strong Core Values

The second key quality that many mothers (n=13) possessed was a strong sense of identity. This was evident through their core values, which were often connected to both their work and parenting/family lives. Core values are defined as concepts or beliefs that guide the selection or evaluation of behavior and events. Examples of core values included communication, kindness, hard work, inclusivity, resilience, patience, education, and more. These core values were central to mothers, and they modeled these qualities to their children, in their workplaces, and with their partners, conveying a strong and grounded identity.

Mothers in this study clearly identified that holding onto their core values in the workplace was essential to their success. When asked about her career, Sadie said she is

most invested in companies that share her core values and beliefs. Sadie, reflecting on her career journey, stated that…

> This is one of the first jobs in a while where I've been able to say, I really, really enjoy my job. I'm a very mission-motivated person, so I've really appreciated the mission of all of the organizations that I've worked for. It's important to me that I can stand behind the mission if I'm going to ask other people to commit their resources to it.

Throughout the interview, Sadie made reference to her company's culture and how it paralleled her own core values: "It's a humanitarian organization, and so I think it attracts a lot of people who are intrinsically motivated to help others, like myself." Amelia also identified that she holds onto her core values in her work. She stated…

> I'm brutally honest. I always believe that's just the way I am. I want people to be honest with me, and I feel like people know what they're getting with me…I think I've done a pretty good job. I've been there 25 years, getting along with people by being honest.

Mothers also identified that they held onto their core values in their family life, specifically related to parenting. Sadie expressed the importance of holding onto her values in this area when she stated, "Being really clear that academics are really important, that school is important, staying physically active, being kind." Amelia also emphasized the importance of holding onto her core values in her parenting, stating, "My style is a lot of honesty…I like to be very upfront with my children and want to know what they're doing." Sadie and Amelia were two examples of participants with core values that existed across multiple areas of their lives, conveying a strong sense of identity. Bridgit remarked that "Leading people is remarkably similar to parenting children" and that she is "pretty consistent across the board," citing leadership, compassion, and logic at home and work.

Another common way that mothers expressed their commitment to their core values was to share and model them with their children through their parenting. Hannah expressed this sentiment by involving her children in the work that she loves. Hannah stated…

> I wake up in the morning. I'm excited to go to work. I take a lot of pride in the work that I do. I involve my children in the work that I do. They come to events with me...So for me, the work that I do is very closely related to who I am as a person, and I take a lot of pride in the accomplishments of our team and our students.

Hannah emphasizes the closeness of her work to her identity and how she desires to share that with her children. Other participants also involved their children in their work, taking them along for travel or a day in the office. Ragan explained that she and her husband are huge travelers, and now they "just bring our kids with us" on work trips. Mia described that bringing her daughter to work and modeling a strong professional identity was important to her. She stated, "letting her watch…for me, that's what's super important about me doing my job with my daughter is she sees that you can do whatever you put your mind to type thing." Core values translated well between family and work lives, emphasizing participants' strong and grounded sense of identity.

The qualities of sacrifice and identity through core values were apparent in many participants. Sacrifice was discussed by many participants as a key requirement to enable them to balance work and family lives. Many mothers did not sacrifice the qualities of their lives (sleep, nutrition, exercise, friends, education, and more) altogether. Still, a change in scope and timeline was often necessary to balance work and family. Furthermore, many participants identified that having a strong sense of identity consistent between work and home was important. Participants were grounded in a firm

understanding of identity that guided them throughout their lives. These qualities, or demonstrated characteristics, aided participants in pursuing work and family.

Skills

Skills were extremely important to participants, assisting them in a willful balance of work and family. Skills are abilities, knowledge, and expertise that allow people to carry out tasks or activities more effectively. To be skilled at something is to be proficient at it, or better than the average person at that thing. Participants demonstrated two key skills that were instrumental in their lives: balance and intentionality. These skills allowed participants to plan and regulate their lives as much as possible, making room for the chaos of work and family. Balance and intentionality were crucial because participants' day-to-day schedules constantly changed, especially with young children and dynamic careers.

Balance

Balance, including flexibility and adaptability, was evident and explicitly mentioned by many participants (n=16). Balance consisted of keeping the necessary aspects of work and family afloat while managing other facets, like partner relationships, friendships, extracurricular activities, and more. Often, balance requires prioritization among participants. Grace described this balancing act as keeping spinning plates in the air. When asked about the management of her life, Grace expressed, "People will be disappointed that I'm not able to do everything for all the people all the time, and I have to be okay with that, or I will just stress out and burn out and not be effective at anything."

Grace conveyed that her balancing act occurred at all times, making balance a skill that she employs as an intrinsically career-motivated mother. Kathleen used the same metaphor of the spinning plates but argued that something always feels like it is about to fall. She stated…

> Most of the time, something's not crashing, but one of them's always wobbling, and that's okay, but it's totally okay. Before it crashes, you give it a couple of spins. I feel like that, more than anything is how it feels. You're just kind of spinning the things to sort of keep it going. And that's fine, and it works.

Kathleen's skill of balance aided her in keeping many "plates" afloat. Although she cannot spin them all at once with the same speed, she can keep all aspects of her life afloat. Without the ability to keep all of the plates spinning, Kathleen thought that she could not have succeeded as a working mom. Participants displayed balance in their lives as a crucial skill. Because working mothers must attend to many aspects of their lives, balance helps them distribute their energy effectively.

Intentionality

Along with balance, many participants (n=16) expressed intentionality as a key skill that helped them succeed. Intentionality is a strong course or courses of action that express a key desire or theme within a person. Intentionality took many forms across participants, whether this was in partner selection, family planning, scheduling, or the desire to hold an expansive career and/or become a mother. Along with a strong sense of self, most participants were intentional about their actions and planned their lives as much as possible. Nina demonstrated this skill through her partner and family planning. She said…

> Always knew I wanted kids... And so honestly, when I was looking for a partner, a boyfriend when I was in college, it was a huge part of what I was looking for. I was looking for a partner, but I was also looking for someone who would be a

> good dad. When we were dating and discussing things that we wanted, we were also very set that we wanted to be financially stable and have a house before any [kids] happened. So we were very intentional that we needed all of our ducks in a row…So it was a long relationship, I would say, but very intentional in our planning to have kids.

Nina's story was echoed by several other mothers in her and her partner's conscious decisions to have children. When asked about children, Charlotte expressed that "it was ultimately what I wanted to do. I kind of tried to plan having them at the beginning of the summer so I could have about three months with them." As an educator with summers off, Charlotte intentionally planned to have both her children during the long academic break.

Kathleen provided a prime example of family intentionality. When asked about having children, she stated that…

> It was a conscious decision…We told our parents we'd be excited to be parents in five to seven years…We had had our son, and then we had a pretty conscious decision two years after he was born that we were not going to have another. Not to say everything goes perfectly to plan, but we had an intention around it... We had really, really specific guidelines for ourselves.

Kathleen, Charlotte, and Nina echoed many participants in their intentionality surrounding family planning. Unlike Kathleen, Charlotte, and Nina, a few participants did not plan their pregnancies. However, they highlighted intentionality through conversations with their partners and exploring career changes after they became pregnant. Bridgit stated…

> I'm 39 now, far ahead of the original timetable. So having our first was a surprise, and it was very shocking for me and us… then we decided together that we'd have our second one quickly, so they're 22 months apart because if we were going to be in the baby phase, let's be in the baby phase.

Participants' intentionality also extended into their parenting. Hannah communicated her and her partner's intentionality with her children and how it interacted

with her work. She said, “So both in the workplace and at home, I find that the value of clear communication and expectations is really important…And so having really clear expectations of what I can deliver and do for them is really important.” Ruth expressed heightened intentionality in her parenting when she had a stressful day or period at work, stating,

> I try to be very cognizant because also at least two of my kids are really sensitive to criticism and trying to come at it from a sense of understanding that one, their frontal lobes are not fully developed, so let's not expect them to behave or think or act like adults.

Ruth further expressed that she attempts to approach parenting "with more understanding, trying not to guilt them or put my feelings and behaviors on them because that doesn't ever end up well as adults because I want them to be better parents than I am, as we always want to be better parents than our parents." Hannah and Ruth conveyed intentionality in their parenting styles, representing mothers with a driven parenting style.

Although participants varied in their intentionality, most (n=16) discussed deliberate and conscious decisions in multiple areas of their lives. Intentionality was an important skill for participants, whether at work, with their children, or in their parenting. Possessing intentionality as a skill allowed participants to purposefully map out certain aspects of their lives, aiding them in managing competing demands. The skills of balance and intentionality assisted mothers in navigating their muddy lives with a sense of purpose.

Conditions

Conditions were the third theme that was associated with intrinsically career-motivated working mothers. Conditions are defined as the external circumstances that

influence how one lives or works. With this theme, three subthemes clearly defined the key conditions within which women operated: work, family, and society. Work conditions include the factor(s) influencing our sample while performing their workplace duties, including a flexible and family-friendly work environment and women supporting and leading other women. Family conditions include the factor(s) that were impactful for mothers while at home or with their families. These include having a small family size, the age of their child or children, the extent to which they received partner support, and the division of labor between partners. Social conditions involved the larger social norms and structures that mothers experienced in their jobs or their communities. Social conditions included family medical leave policies and cultural expectations that women are held to. When these conditions were positive, participants reported that this made their job easier, but achieving a work-life balance and healthy sense of self was much more difficult when they were negative.

Work Conditions

Supportive working conditions were essential for success as an intrinsically career-motivated mother, including a family-friendly work environment (especially with accepting supervisors) and female leadership.

Flexible Work Environment.

Nearly all of the participants (n=19) stressed that a crucial condition of being an intrinsically career-motivated mother was a flexible work environment. Flexibility was essential for the occasional sick child, disruption in childcare, or need to attend doctor's appointments. Nina said she "get[s] to participate in a lot of family things or mother things that I wouldn't be able to if I worked far away or didn't have a flexible schedule."

Charlotte expressed the importance of supportive colleagues, stating "A lot of other faculty have young kids and understand if there's a snow day or if daycare is closed that you might have your kid on a Zoom meeting or something."

Some participants purposefully sought out working conditions that better aligned with their needs because they were so vital for balance and success. This involved negotiating flexible work hours around picking up and dropping off children, advocating for hybrid work, or choosing different career paths to incorporate their families into their roles. Sharon expressed that her career change to nonprofit work was a direct reflection of the lack of flexibility in her former role. She stated…

> When I had my first child, I worked in government. That was the least flexible environment because if the sessions run long, you're expected to stay, and if you build up over time, you're expected to use that time to then that time to go and "volunteer" on campaigns so you can keep your job. So I had my first child, and then I was like, 'We're not doing this anymore.' And so I moved into nonprofits and had my second child.

While Nina and Charlotte expressed the flexible nature of their current workplaces, Sharon discussed how she changed her career to operate under a flexible working environment. Flexibility at work was a crucial condition for participants to balance their children and careers.

Family-Friendly Work Environment.

In addition to flexibility, mothers (n=18) also stressed that a family-friendly workspace was vital to their career success. Many participants identified their immediate supervisor as an important factor in how family-friendly their workplace was. Sadie discussed her reasoning for taking a particular job and the importance of having a supportive supervisor. She stated…

> The other reason I said 'yes' [to the job] is that she [supervisor] leads by example. She is also a working parent who has three children, including one with special needs, all in elementary school…She's excellent in her role, high, high expectations, high accountability, and yet she also does take that time to be present for her children.

Sadie, like many other participants, stressed the need for active versus passive support in the workplace, citing a supportive female supervisor with children as a key aspect of a supporting work environment. Ragan expressed similar sentiments in terms of a family-friendly employer, stating that…

> I would probably narrow [a family-friendly employer] down for me to being my supervisor. And I think in my current role, I have an extremely supportive supervisor. Where she's a woman, and her two kids are now grown, but she went through what it's like to want to spend time with your kids or want to be able to get home when they get off the bus, or being able to take a day off if they're sick or if they have any types of things going on at school. She's super supportive of allowing us to have a really flexible schedule.

The understanding of other working mothers in a supervisory role was essential for many participants; it was a condition that allowed them to more effectively attend to both their families' needs and their workplace obligations. Family flexibility, especially among female supervisors, was crucial for participants.

Women Leading Women.

In a similar fashion, many participants (n=12) expressed that women leading each other, or "women leading women," was important to them in their work environments. Lilah's company provided key support for women in leadership positions through modeling and support. She said…

> Back when we were acquired in 2019, there were a lot fewer women in leadership positions, and we developed this thing called 'We Lead,' which is the Women's Leadership Network and is focused on five areas…. Still, we kind of developed volunteer committees and sought to raise the issues that we thought were the most important for our employees and developed those programs from the ground up. So I was a key member of the mentorship committee, which launched a few years

> ago, and we've put hundreds of women through that program. It's totally volunteer-based, but something that the company has supported and encouraged.

Lilah works as an engineer, which is a male-dominated field. It was important to her that she and other females were given a chance to grow their skills at work under the company structure and follow a female example.

Other examples of women leading women included informal conversations and creating space for different working moms in the workspace. These forums and conversations helped participants in the workplace and at home—more experienced female leaders and working mothers gave advice that was helpful to new mothers. Hannah stated…

> We've had several women who had children since I was a manager, and one of them ended up leaving last year. And she said that she so appreciated my flexibility with her scheduling and her children's needs. She said, 'I had never felt ashamed or uncomfortable asking for time off or needing to take care of my family.' And so for me, that was a really important thing, just going through that experience and not feeling supported to make sure that other women, that I have the ability to help them in their motherhood.

It was important for Hannah to prioritize space for other working mothers because she did not receive support in the workplace.

Participants in leadership roles wanted to create spaces within their jobs to cater to working mothers. They had either received advice themselves or missed out and wanted to provide that opportunity to others. Brigit talked about creating a family-friendly workplace in her role as a leader. She stated that…

> Being a mom myself, sometimes you have to go to the doctor….So I was always, my goal, was to be accommodating as long as everything was getting done…If there were issues, I tried to make sure it was an instance and not a trend, and then if it was a trend, we had to address it. But overall, it was, 'If you're getting your work done and our internal customers are happy,' then manage your schedule as needed.

Bridgit echoed many other participants in her sentiments. They stressed that it is difficult to be a working parent, but working parents can still succeed in their careers. They may just need a little more flexibility than someone without young children. Whether this be flexible deadlines, accommodating an unforeseen illness, or an unexpected face popping up on a Zoom call, participants in leadership roles emphasized the importance of accommodating working parents and working mothers.

Family Conditions

Family conditions, or factors influencing how participants operated in reference to their homes, were crucial for many participants. These included small family size, the age of children, a supportive partner, and household division of labor. While these conditions were not necessary for participants to successfully balance work and family, many participants expressed that positive family conditions made their lives easier.

Small Family Size.

About half of the participants (n=10) conveyed that having a small family size was critical in balancing their work and family lives. Although ten participants specifically talked about small family size, sixteen participants had two or fewer children (eight with one child and eight with two children). Participants explained that having a smaller family size was easier to manage regarding scheduling, financial obligations, travel, and time allocation. Alice, a working mother with limited financial resources, stated, "I chose to have only one child because of my circumstances." Additionally, with fewer children, participants had more time to spread to different avenues of their lives, including their careers. Lilah stated that…

> I think I always wanted to have kids….I always wanted more than one until I had one. And then I was like, 'That's enough'... I think it's just where we're at in our

> lives right now, and we've got a good balance, I feel, and I just can't imagine going back to changing diapers again. We are past that stage. And we're able to do a lot. We travel a lot…And I feel like with our little unit of three, we're able to do so much still and she's just a fun kid.

Other mothers like Mia echoed Lilah's sentiment. Mia originally desired a large family, but said, "if you would've asked me five years ago how many kids I wanted, it's definitely more than I would say now." With the demands of Mia's career, she had to scale her family size back to fit her goals. Ellie expressed that having one child is critical for her and her partner to have time alone and time for self-care. Ellie expressed…

> Part of our decision to have one child is that we're always, we call it two-on-one, so we can always have one of us take her and do something, and then the other one can get some of that time….My husband and I both recognize that for our mental health, we both need some time alone. And so it's really helpful in that I've heard when you have multiple kids, there's never any true alone time…If the kids outnumber the parents, you're really in trouble. We really try to take full advantage of the parents outnumbering the one child and give each other breaks.

Most participants operated with a small family size of two or fewer children, identifying this condition as something that made it easier to balance the needs of their family and have a career. Many participants directly referred to small family size as a condition that made it easier for them to live as intrinsically career-motivated mothers.

Age of Children.

Ten participants (n=10) shared that their lives became easier as their children grew older. Participants generally indicated that it was easier to manage family life as their children grew older, and parents with older children made up a majority of the participants in the study. Ava mentioned that her eleven-year-old son is at "a good age where he's now quite independent. So we spend less time negotiating childcare than when he was younger…When he was younger, I had no choice but to prioritize his needs." Bridgit expressed similar sentiments but also emphasized that the early years were

tougher because of the intense scheduling, emotional burden, and sacrifice it took to be an intrinsically motivated career woman with small children:

> It was incredibly challenging, especially when they were very little, like babies, because you would work all day and then you would come home, and then you only had one to two and a half hours with them before they went to bed for the night. That, I don't think, was hard on the kids. I think that was hard on me.

As children age, they become more self-sufficient and in less need of direct parenting and supervision. Kathleen commented that she has "slowly opened up my career again as my son now has different needs," demonstrating that she is able to commit to more at work now that her son has aged. Amelia stated, "My kids, my son's 10, he's going to be 11, and my daughter doesn't even live here for most of the year. So things are starting to calm down for me as they get older." As children grow even older, they no longer need direct help and supervision, which eases the strain on working mothers and allows them to pursue other opportunities.

Partner Support.

Working with a supportive partner was extremely important to many participants (n=15). Participants often identified, sometimes multiple times in the interview, that partner support or partners who understood and advocated for their careers were instrumental. Grace stated…

> I do not know how we could have done it without his support… I'm super lucky. My husband really believes in egalitarian division. We talk a lot about what's going on, and who needs to do what, and he's so willing to do what I would consider we each are doing fair share.

While Grace described an overarching example of her partner's support, Charlotte identified a small, but substantial, impact on her mental and physical health. She expressed that "[her partner] has always been very helpful and supportive when I like to

work out or exercise." Another mother, Ragan, expressed a similar sentiment, stating that her partner let go of his job when their children were little so they did not have to spend money on daycare. Additionally, Ragan's partner supported her career ambitions. She expressed…

> I think that my husband is incredibly supportive. He moved to Maine with me when I started my job. He stayed home to take care of the kids. He is definitely the more nurturing, supportive parent. He is happy to take them to many of their school activities or do anything of that nature. He's just really, really helpful.

Ragan possessed a partner who was both supportive and understanding of her ambition. Participants with partner support claimed that their partners were critical to their and their family's success.

Division of Labor.

The final family condition that allowed intrinsically motivated career mothers to operate more or less efficiently was the division of labor in their family. Most participants (n=14) expressed that the division of labor was relatively even, with one partner picking up the slack while the other was busy at work. Kerrie stated, “It's more of splitting it right down the middle so that way we can really be there for each other. Obviously, there are some days where if we're getting really home late, we'll take on a little bit more responsibility to give them a little bit more of a break.” Kathleen conveyed something similar: "I feel like that's quite a bit of trade-off back and forth. And we do it day-to-day almost," emphasizing the evenness of the physical household labor with her partner.

However, almost all participants (n=19) expressed that more or all of the invisible work of the household fell on them. Invisible work included managing healthcare visits, grocery shopping, planning and scheduling, packing lunches, communicating with

classroom teachers, and more. Sadie stated, “I definitely do all of the organizing….just all of the pediatrician appointments, all of the school calendaring, all of the sports schedules, the meal planning. I do all of that type of work, and he does more of the implementation.” Ellie indicated a similar situation with her partner, expressing…

> My daughter has allergies, and I am the one always making sure her appointments are scheduled…I'm always sort of planning the meals in my head and making the grocery list….It's like when you try to share that, it's things that don't even occur to your partner to do. If I left this to him, there would just be so many crucial things that I know wouldn't probably get done.

Ruth commented, "A lot of the things that I do are kind of unseen by him," echoing Ellie and many other mothers. All but one participant stated that they shouldered the invisible labor of the home. While a few participants said that "invisible" work factored into their even split with their partner, most participants completed invisible labor in addition to their equal split. This contradicted their own statements of equal balance with their partners, suggesting that participants may not be aware of how much invisible work they are contributing.

Although the above family conditions are not essential for the success of intrinsically career-motivated mothers, most participants expressed that a combination of a small family size, a supportive and/or involved partner, and older children made their lives easier. The division of labor between participant and partner served as a more neutral condition. Still, the participant and not their partner almost always contributed invisible labor. Among the dominant themes of qualities, skills, conditions, and resources, the subtheme of family conditions was the most dominant across participants and throughout the data collection.

Social Conditions

Social conditions are defined as the larger social norms and structures that mothers experience in their jobs or their communities. Participants stressed two social conditions that made it more difficult to be a working mom: workplace social policies and the cultural expectations of women. Unlike all work conditions and most family conditions, social conditions were barriers for participants to balance the needs of their work and families.

Workplace Social Policies.

While participants resided in different places across the country, concerns regarding the larger social expectations and conditions emerged from participants. Many mothers advocated for better United States social policies regarding maternity leave and inclusivity for new mothers in the workplace. Participants referenced other cultures and countries' policies when explaining what would have worked better for them.

Hannah immigrated to the United States and has close ties to family members overseas. She stated, "Coming from a European country, maternity and maternity leave, pregnancy and maternity leave, have very different social policies in those countries. I was very aggravated by how difficult it was in the U.S." While Hannah was the only participant who experienced other cultures regarding childbirth and expectations around maternity, other participants desired changes in family policy similar to those seen in other countries. Ava expressed that "as a new mom, I fantasized about living in Sweden where they had a whole year [of maternity leave] or more." When asked about maternity leave, Ruth stated…

> …paid family leave is a huge thing because we are the only civilized country that doesn't have actual paid family leave built into what we do for our new families. Other countries get six to nine months or even a year or longer of paid family leave, and we get nothing guaranteed.

Hannah, Ava, and Ruth expressed the views of many mothers surrounding maternity leave, noting the lack of policy in the United States and desiring experiences in other parts of the world. All but three participants (n=17) expressed that their maternity leaves were not long enough and that they would have benefitted from more time at home, similar to more inclusive policies worldwide.

Some participants identified that policies supporting mothers beyond the first few months of childhood were also problematic. Amelia and Sharon gave up breastfeeding earlier than they had wanted to because of workplace environments that did not provide adequate access to safe and secure locations for pumping breastmilk. Amelia explained,

> At the time of my son, we had an office manager who was not that nice of a person, and she made me stop nursing. I nursed my son and my daughter, but it was very difficult for me to have to go to another office and pump in between patients, and she made that more difficult for me. So I kind of gave that up a little earlier than I did with my daughter.

Sharon echoed Amelia, stating…

> I can remember it was before the legislature had a pumping room, so I would have to go to a bathroom to pump breast milk…So that was added stress in the day because you're trying to make time to do that as well as get all your tasks done. And I remember having a coworker at the legislature who said, who was also a mother, and she said, 'How long do you think you're going to do that for? Because you take these breaks, and you're gone, and people need you.'

Sharon, Amelia, and other participants (n=13) stressed the need for more inclusive social policies in the United States. Participants expressed that the United States does not have adequate family leave or workplace policies that accommodate mothers, especially working mothers.

Cultural Expectations of Women.

Participants (n=16) emphasized the impossibility of conforming to social expectations of women. This extended to weight and exercise, spending time with extended family, nutrition, and involvement in their children's lives. Sadie expressed that while she relies on external factors and support, she still feels like she is not meeting the societal expectations of motherhood. She said…

> I have all the supports in the world, but that doesn't mean I didn't call my friend as I was driving late for a meeting bitching about having to drive a child to school, and having just been driving as late as nine o'clock the night before driving a different child home from a team dinner. So I think what it's like for me, it's about as doable as it can be for any American woman. And yet I've got three weeks paid vacation a year, which isn't enough to cover the gaps in schooling. And I feel like I miss out on a lot of things in their lives because, by comparison, I am not volunteering in the classroom or I'm not coaching that soccer team. I really admire people who, even with a full-time career, make the time to do that, or they figure out a way to prioritize it. I don't do it as much as I would like to, but I don't think I could do either thing as well if I took on any anymore.

Even with Sadie's children being older and relying on external support networks, Sadie still feels like she is not doing enough in terms of her children and motherhood. Grace echoed similar feelings, stating that…

> So I'd say being a working mom is just sort of always wondering if you're doing a good job. If you're meeting expectations, then it's the question of are the expectations reasonable. Are the expectations I think that are on me, are those self-imposed, or is this really cultural? Or am I making it harder for myself that I need to? I think my expectations for myself as a working mom are probably wildly different than what my husband expects of me. I think I'm much, much harder on myself.

Grace explained an internalized pressure from impossible social norms of mothers, especially working mothers. She commented on this again later in the interview when asked if women can have it all:

> You think about all the things that you should do to be successful. There's having an interesting career, having a good relationship with your spouse, and contributing to your local community. If you're a mom having kids, then you get into how you look and that whole scenario, having all of that, it's completely

> impossible. I just don't think that anyone can do that, and that's okay. And then you pick a couple of areas that are important to you, but then you just always feel like shit. 'Oh, well, I might be a really great mom and a really involved community member, but I feel bad about myself because I'm not a size two, and I don't work.' And there's just always this feeling of not being enough. It's a trap. And so then it's like redefining what it is to have it all. I do have it all. I really do. I have the things that are most important to me. I don't have every single box fully checked out. I'm not a size two, and yeah, my in-laws, I'll tell you that. But it's deciding what's important to you, making that the priority, and being okay with letting go of the other things.

Grace's comments were consistent with the sentiments expressed by several of the other participants. They felt it was impossible to achieve the expectations of society, themselves, family members, and their communities, especially with the demands of their careers. However, many participants (like Grace) took a matter-of-fact approach, stating that they do their best to ignore an unachievable standard set by society. They chose to prioritize work and family, and they were okay with sacrificing other elements of their lives despite feeling societal pressure and judgment. While they were disappointed at the expectations that larger social norms enforce, most participants were happy with the choices they had made for themselves.

The most common social conditions faced by participants were a lack of support in overarching social policies and larger societal expectations of women and mothers. Unlike many work and family conditions, these social conditions made it more difficult for participants to manage their lives.

Resources

Resources are assets that could be drawn upon in times of need, or to make participants' lives easier. Participants stressed two key resources that aided them as intrinsically career-motivated mothers: finances and external support networks. These

resources helped mothers operate effectively when they needed something that their immediate family and workplace could not provide.

Finances

Finances were key resources to help participants, their partners, and their families in terms of paying for services such as childcare and cleaning assistance, or materials such as nutritional foods and items that could simplify family life. Mothers expressed that outsourcing some of their household tasks relieved a burden that allowed them to spend more time at home and work. Jane said she can… "outsource a lot of the household chores because of my salary." She further elaborated on this, stating,

> A cleaning lady comes every other week to do the tidying and whatever, and so they basically just clean the house. I do laundry. We have an au pair. She lives with me, so she does the kids' laundry, and I have a lawn service that comes and mows my lawn, but we have this cleaning service that comes every other week.

Bridgit echoed this sentiment, stating that "because of our economic level, we are able to outsource some of the work, the food, the cleaning, the mowing of the lawn." Participants utilized finances as a significant resource to ease their responsibilities at home.

Additionally, other participants mentioned that money was an added benefit to having a higher-paying career. Alice, who is working on her Ph.D. is looking forward to a job that will pay her adequately. She stated, "I'm looking forward to a comfortable salary, and I'm definitely going to be pursuing that salary pretty hard when I'm done." Alice was excited about the increased financial opportunities available to her after obtaining her Ph.D. Alice and others expressed that they were financially motivated because of what it could bring to their lives. Finances were a resource that enabled participants an easier path to be career-motivated mothers, and some participants took active steps to make more money.

External Support Networks

External support networks were also a crucial resource for about half of the participants (n=10). External support can take many forms, and participants expressed the presence of family members, neighbors, other parents, and online parenting or community message boards that provided support outside of their immediate families and workplaces. Hope stated that…

> I think I'm really lucky. My son has had these two buds since they met when they were three or four. And they're also older working mothers, older than me actually, and they have kids that age. So I'm really lucky that I have peers who are my age and have kids the same age as my kids.

Hope expressed that her son's friend's mothers were sounding boards for her in multiple areas of her life. Hannah emphasized more of an emotional support network. She stated that…

> I was lucky enough to have a coworker who had her kids just a few years ahead of me, and she was the one; we'll just go for walks over lunch, and she'll mentor me and just say, 'These are the things to expect.' And she was my sounding board to say, 'Is this feeling normal? Should I go to the doctor now?' And she coached me about 'You're on maternity leave this and this and this.' And I was still doing email on and off. I would respond just because I felt bad that there was just nobody else to answer stuff. And then when I came back to work, she's the one that was just like, 'Stop beating yourself. It is what it is. Don't stress about some of this, and the world is not going to end.

Hannah did not experience as much partner support as some other participants. She expressed, "I found that I always expected that we'd have 50-50 separation of duties… we've had conversations over the years, he thinks he helps 50%. I think he helps 30%." With less immediate support, Hannah stressed that external emotional support was crucial to her—she “cannot emphasize enough having really strong professional and personal mentors who have gone through these experiences to provide insight." Like other participants, Hannah stressed that emotional support networks were crucial to her.

Hannah relied more on her external support networks because she had a lack of partner support.

Unlike Hannah, Lilah experienced in-home support from her family when her child was born. Her mother traveled across the country during COVID-19 to stay with her and her child. After she exited the newborn stage and in-home help from her family members was no longer available, she and other community members created a support network of their own. Lilah stated,

> …we did a pod kindergarten, and the families that we did this homeschool pod with, it was virtual school, but at someone's house, we've become each other's families. And so I really rely on my parent friend network to help out and play dates and all that stuff so that we cover for each other. And it works out really nicely. They're a built-in family.

For mothers similar to Lilah who do not have family nearby, creating a close-knit group of friends with children the same age was key in balancing work and family. Some form of external support was mentioned as a resource by half (n=10) of the participants in the study. Relying on a network for emotional and physical support was crucial for some participants, and they utilized that resource to better balance their lives as intrinsically career-motivated mothers. Finances and external support were the most prevalent resources for participants in this study. Having abundant resources acted as a pool for participants to dip into when their own families or workplace structure did not allow for the support needed to balance work and family.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how intrinsically career-motivated women experience motherhood. First, I questioned if career-oriented mothers have a heightened sense of maternal regret, especially surrounding possible missed career opportunities from their children. Second, I asked how these mothers experience motherhood in the context of their careers. Is it possible to achieve work and family, and can career-motivated mothers do it all?

In examining the first research question concerning the presence of parental regret in high-achieving women, I found little evidence that mothers regretted the decision to have children. This was largely reflective of my sample's desire to have both a career and a family. Many mothers planned both their careers and their families well before they embarked on either journey, and both pieces were important to them. Thus, there was no maternal regret present because of the largely intensive planning that went into having children. Additionally, Donath (2015) argues that maternal regret is more commonly associated with feelings of detachment from a motherhood ideal, and my sample identified a mostly positive experience in motherhood. Conscious family planning and a positive experience with motherhood may have led to an absence of maternal regret in my sample.

The absence of maternal regret may have also been related to the demographics of my sample. My sample was largely well-educated, white, and financially stable. Piotrowski (2021) states that the percentage of parents who experience regret possess adverse childhood experiences, are minorities, are at a lower socioeconomic level, are not married, and have children with special needs. While adverse childhood experiences were

not known, a majority of my sample did not experience the above factors. It is likely that my sample did not experience maternal regret because they were committed to becoming mothers and possessed a higher socioeconomic status than those who typically experience maternal regret (Piotrowski, 2021).

Theoretical Frames

Bowen's Family Systems Theory (1972, 1978) explains that the family is a relationship and emotional system where family members influence each other and are influenced at numerous different levels. Analyzing the data through this theory allowed for the interplay between family members to arise, especially when participants described their domestic work with their partners and how they experienced raising their children. Mothers identified a push and pull of domestic work with their partners, which influenced how they operated as individuals and within a family unit. Furthermore, mothers identified the changing needs of their children (especially as they grew older), exemplifying the adaptability and interrelatedness of the family unit.

Rational Choice Theory (RCT), explains that an actor (individual) selects the most profitable option when several are presented, weighing the drawbacks and benefits before making a decision. Looking through this lens allowed me to identify the intentionality and consciousness of my participants. Mothers in my sample were aware of their values and how they applied to their actions, whether micro-decisions about nutrition or macro-decisions about career changes and family dynamics (Voss & Abraham, 2000; Weiske et al., 2015. Additionally, most mothers made conscious decisions about when to have children in relation to their careers, partners, and age.

Rational Choice Theory provided a deeper understanding of participants' intentionality and consciousness.

The framework of intersectionality was crucial. Intersectionality argues that individuals possess unique and complex identities resulting from various social inequalities (Crenshaw, 1995; Gillborn, 2015). While my sample was almost exclusively white/caucasian American, intersectionality allowed for a greater understanding of social conditions and how those resulted from multiple forms of sexism. Additionally, intersectionality encouraged a distinctive and individual approach to each participant, recognizing that they are separate people with different experiences in motherhood.

Qualitative Discussion

Of the themes, conditions seemed to impact how participants experienced motherhood most. The conditions, external circumstances that influence how one lives or works, had a powerful influence on mothers and, in many cases, seemed to be the defining aspect of helping them to achieve success in both domains. While resources also acted as an outside variable for participants, participants stressed the prevalence of conditions in their lives more frequently than resources.

Family conditions were the most important for mothers; they emphasized that having a grounded family life made their experiences in motherhood more manageable (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Christopher, 2012; Dermott & Pomati, 2016). Mothers continuously referred to these conditions and stressed that their families were a place of comfort for them. While the division of labor served as more of a neutral condition, a small family size, older children, and partner support eased the lives of mothers. So, if a mother experienced a small family size (two or fewer children), had

older children, and experienced partner support, her experience of motherhood was more positive than a participant who did not experience these conditions. While a small family size is typically a couple's or mother's choice, the age of children depends on time, and partner support can vary. Family conditions suggest that it is easier to tend to both work and home with a small, supportive family as children grow older.

Mothers expressed that with a smaller family, they did not need to sacrifice as many elements of their lives as they thought they would with more children (Niemistö et al., 2021). Participants could travel, carve out time for themselves, and devote more of their time to work. Because a larger family size equates to additional time, money, and emotional and physical labor, mothers with a small family size experienced more ease than those with additional children (Schmidt et al., 2023). After having one child, some mothers expressed that they consciously decided not to have more children—not because they did not want to raise another child, but because they appreciated the level of balance they were currently experiencing with smaller family sizes. Older children presented some of the same feelings as small family size in participants; they expressed that less logistical work was necessary and regained some of the time they had lost in early motherhood (Rizzo et al., 2013; Clark, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2023).

Partner support was also an important factor in relieving stress from the sample. Participants who experienced partner support expressed that having a supportive and active partner made their lives substantially easier (Blair-Loy, 2003; Arendell, 2004). Partners were willing to pick up the slack when mothers were facing a busier time at work. Additionally, partners essentially split the work of the household and raising their children. When partner support was not present, participants stated that they felt they

were alone in their journey of raising children and having a career (Chesley & Flood, 2017). This led to additional stress, more labor, and alienation from their families. Whether this was in the form of emotional support, physical support, and/or understanding of their career ambitions, mothers expressed that partner support allowed them to better tend to their families and careers.

Invisible labor, or the "unseen" work of the household (Daniels, 1987), seemed to have a significant impact on mothers finding a balance between work and family. While most participants identified an equal labor split between them and their partners, all but one participant shouldered the invisible work, including scheduling doctor's appointments, making grocery lists, keeping track of the family, and some housekeeping and childcare that generally goes unnoticed by their partners and children. Around half of the participants took on the "invisible" work of the household but did not factor it into their self-identified even split with their partners. This suggests that this "invisible" work, for around half of the participants, is also invisible to them.

This finding echoes the findings of Kalmijin & Monden, 2012, Namkamura & Akiyoshi, 2015, and Shockley & Shen, 2016, which convey a similar distinction of unaccounted invisible labor. Mothers shoulder household work that is necessary and valid. However, it is not visible to their families and can be barely visible to themselves because it is seamlessly integrated with the rest of their household duties. A clearer record and distinction of domestic work is needed for intrinsically career-motivated mothers to have a more balanced share of the household, accounting for necessary work that often goes unnoticed by multiple parties.

Work conditions among mothers were also prevalent among mothers, including a family-friendly and flexible work environment and female leadership in the workplace. Mothers stressed that having a flexible, family-friendly environment (often including a female supervisor) was crucial for them to obtain the level of family commitment they desired (Richie et al., 1997; Niemistö et al., 2021; Grosse, 2022). While work was important to them, they stressed that they needed flexibility to be present for their families. Furthermore, some mothers changed jobs or careers in search of this flexibility, noting that being present for their families was non-negotiable. For companies to retain working mothers, they need to be able to accommodate their needs and recognize that they can produce the same quality of work despite needing a flexible schedule.

Although resources were less common than conditions among mothers, finances and external support networks played an important role for those who experienced them, easing their experiences in motherhood. Those with financial resources could outsource some of their domestic work, including childcare and nutrition (Roy, 2016). Because resources contributed to outsourcing domestic work, mothers felt that they had regained time that could be spent in other areas of their lives. This was important because it allowed them to be more present with their families or at work. Resources also played into the split of domestic labor between mothers who parented with a partner, alleviating work from both parties (Shockley & Shen, 2016). Financial resources allowed mothers to redistribute some of the household work that belonged to them and their partners, relieving stress and allowing for more time in other areas.

Financial resources directly reflected participant's salaries. If mothers made significantly less money, they would not benefit from economic resources (Savas, 2010;

Schmidt et al., 2023). This meant that they could not outsource some of the work of the home, shouldering it in addition to their careers. Pay scale does not necessarily correlate to time or stress level, so, likely, some participants did not experience financial resources in addition to having a high-stress and high-demand job. Additionally, certain industries (healthcare, technology, engineering) pay more than others (education, non-profit management), which was reflected in my sample's demographics. Mothers with interests in lower-paying fields were still career-driven, but their salaries may not have reflected their drive (Huopalanien & Satama, 2019). Costs also rise exponentially with more children, so mothers with a larger family size are less likely to benefit from financial resources despite having a higher family cost (Grosse, 2022). Financial resources alleviated some of the housework and childcare, but they depended entirely on salary and the needs of each family.

External support networks provided a similar benefit as resources to participants, where they could use the external support to supplement the support their workplaces and families provided (Uttal, 1999). For example, some participants relied on others to share in their children's carpooling and logistical work. Mothers also experienced emotional guidance from outside sources, like friends, co-workers, online chatrooms, or external family members. Increased words of encouragement and advice supported mothers, boosting their confidence and giving reassurance and guidance. This support was affirming and provided a new angle for mothers that their partners could not necessarily provide (Lester, 2015). While resources were less stressed by participants, they provided external benefits to those who experienced them.

While most mothers noted their skillful balance of work and family, many also displayed the quality of sacrifice. Many participants first let go of sleep, nutrition, exercise, and overall well-being, prioritizing their careers and families. Additionally, some participants lessened the scope of their career goals to be more present at home, like further education or promotions at work (Niemestö et al., 2021). When sacrificing, mothers did not give up time with their families or time away from their current careers; these areas were non-negotiable. Instead, they let themselves go, letting their own plate "crash." While participants expressed that sacrifice was necessary to tend to the many facets of work and family, long-term effects on mental and physical health may appear from relinquishing sleep, nutrition, and exercise (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). These are not healthy practices. Although sacrifice contributes to a balance of work and family, sacrificing basic human needs should not be necessary to obtain sufficient contributions to work and family. Sacrifice was most often self-sacrifice, where mothers put themselves behind their jobs and families.

Conditions and resources were the most important to my sample; these are what eased their experiences in motherhood. Mothers with career ambitions can attend to both work and family, but their experiences are much easier with positive conditions and resources (Schmidt et al., 2023). With these conditions and resources, participants indicated that it was possible to fulfill a career and a family within motherhood. However, they stressed that contributing oneself to their careers and families did not leave much room for anything else.

Implications

Social Implications

Unlike any other theme or subtheme, social conditions were distinctly negative; they made it harder for participants to manage their lives as career-oriented mothers. Participants named two negative social conditions: a desire for better US social policies and the cultural expectations of women. When discussing maternity leave, many mothers pointed to more progressive social policies worldwide (mostly in Nordic countries), remarking on how their policies paled to the United States and their own experiences. While comparing to other countries may be a product of a highly educated sample, it is important to note that a majority of participants felt that domestic maternity leave policies were lacking. Many mothers were angry that the United States is the only "civilized" country that does not have top-down integrated family leave, and felt that there was a gap between the economic advancement of the United States and its social policies (Grosse, 2022).

Aside from inclusive top-down policies, mothers stressed that managers and companies should be held to a higher standard of care in the workplace. Amelia and Sharon both discussed lacking accommodations surrounding breastfeeding; they both stopped breastfeeding earlier than planned because of stigma at work. Inclusive social policies must continue beyond maternity leave and into the workplace. Although all participants did not share Amelia and Sharon's experiences, it is important that every mother have the opportunity to care for their children as they wish, even if that extends into the workplace. Future policies should be transparent, not buried in a manual, and have consequences for employees, managers, and companies if they are not followed. Workplace training should be mandatory surrounding new motherhood, explaining the physical and emotional transition back to work and how co-workers can be

supportive. This would both make new mothers more comfortable and able to produce more quality work (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017), but also retain them at their current jobs.

Mothers also identified cultural expectations of women as a negative social condition. They felt that it was impossible to conform to all of society's expectations: being fit, having an expansive career, having a good relationship with family, volunteering in the community, raising well-adjusted children, and having a romantic relationship with their partners, to name a few (Donath, 2015; Grosse, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023). Though these expectations do not align with intensive mothering, they portray a specific ideal of a mother that is unachievable, similar to intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; Rizzo et al., 2013; Budds, 2021). As expressed by my sample, expectations of mothers have shifted away from being associated wholly with children to being wholly committed to many aspects of life (Schmidt et al., 2023). This expectation is equally harmful, encouraging women to commit themselves to too much and sacrifice their well-being.

My sample did not describe extensive mothering. Extensive mothering is the "way mothers respond to the cultural constructions of the ideal mother and worker and reframe how employment fits into good notions of good mothering in their lives" (Christopher, 2012, p. 74). Participants desired to work just as much as they desired to have a family; they did not justify employment in relation to their families. While participants identified negative cultural expectations, they felt complacent in prioritizing their careers and families and attempted to ignore the rest. While this is progress, an expectation of mothers wholly committing themselves to various other aspects of life is unobtainable. Additionally, the expectation of "doing it all" remains despite more

mothers entering the workforce. Maintaining the expectation that women can fully commit themselves to multiple dramatic aspects of life, whether that be work and family or another mix of elements, is unrealistic and harmful. Women, and mothers, should be able to prioritize what is important to them and not receive social backlash or stigmatization for it.

Many participants expressed challenges they faced as intrinsically career-motivated working mothers. However, they had an overall positive conception of motherhood. They explained that their children are a highlight in their lives and that they enjoy raising them with their partners. Additionally, participants felt fulfilled by their work and appreciated that they could find purpose (for many, that purpose correlated with their identities and values). Despite the challenges presented by social conditions, participants were happy with their choice of both work and family.

The interview data from this study was extremely rich, with four dominant themes and fifteen subthemes emerging from the data. Mothers identified their unique family and work dynamics, suggesting an individual approach to how each participant manages their competing devotions; however, given the similarities across interviews, there are some common components in doing this complex balance. While the themes and sub-themes discussed were the most prevalent, future researchers must recognize that intrinsically career-motivated mothers each have unique life experiences, families, and work environments that make their lives distinctly different. There are many ways to approach motherhood, and mothers with expansive careers are no different.

Who Is Left Behind?

The dominant themes of the study illustrated a specific sample of largely well-educated, white women. These mothers experienced struggles in balancing work and family but identified several qualities, skills, conditions, and resources that impacted their experiences, largely for the better. Marginalized mothers experience motherhood differently, and it is important to note that systemic barriers and biases likely contribute to a distinctly different and much more difficult experience. If society's most privileged women experience a large misalignment of social expectations to reality, marginalized mothers and mothers of color most likely have a much more challenging experience with an entirely different set of expectations. My findings are not generalizable and represent a specific sample and demographic.

Areas for Future Research

I did not find maternal regret among intrinsically career-motivated mothers. I found that mothers were intentional in almost every area of their lives, including their decisions to have children, often planning them out in tandem with their careers. Furthermore, the privilege of my sample may have contributed to their absence of maternal regret. Future research should focus on marginalized mothers and/or mothers who may not have been planning on having expansive careers, and how their exploding jobs may lead to feelings of hostility or regret towards their children and families.

My sample was almost exclusively white/Caucasian American. While these findings are significant, it is important to note that they cannot be applied outside of the context of the study. Mothers of color experience vastly different connotations of motherhood (Collins, 1994; Glenn et al.; Grosse, 2022), and likely have unique qualities, skills, conditions, and resources, or a different distribution of my dominant findings. For

example, mothers of color rely more on their communities to help raise their children (Collins, 1994; Savas, 2010). Further research into intrinsically career-motivated mothers should focus on marginalized mothers and highlight how they attend to both work and family within systemic barriers.

The last area of future research I recommend is partners and children of intrinsically career-motivated mothers. The mothers in my sample stated that they were present at home and work and could serve both areas effectively. However, this is a personal account of the participants. I wonder how their families feel, and how present they are at home in the eyes of those who love them. Future research should focus not only on working mothers but also on their partners and children.

CONCLUSION

I am struck by one quote from a participant that I continuously returned to when building my findings section. I found my way back to it many times but struggled to include it in any area of my thesis. When asked if working mothers could do it all, one mother stated, “I don’t like that because we can do it all we need to. Just because you can doesn’t mean you should, right?”

It should not be necessary for mothers to orchestrate, possess, or stumble upon the found qualities, skills, conditions, and resources to be a woman dedicated to her family and career. She should be able to do both without the social stigma, added stress, or significant sacrifice that was described by my sample. To do it “all” should not mean to achieve every expectation of women and mothers. Individuals should be able to decide what their “all” is and pursue it to the best of their ability. Although most of my data was positive, the negative findings illustrated that a cultural shift is needed to accommodate working mothers. It should be possible to do both without the expectation of having to do it all.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Form & Approval

APPLICATION COVER PAGE

- ***KEEP THIS PAGE AS ONE PAGE – DO NOT CHANGE MARGINS/FONTS!!!!!!!!!***
- ***PLEASE SUBMIT THIS PAGE AS WORD DOCUMENT***

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS
Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 311 Corbett Hall

(Type inside gray areas)
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Paige Allen EMAIL: paige.allen@maine.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR: Brian Pitman EMAIL: brian.pitmain@maine.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR: Elizabeth Neiman EMAIL: elizabeth.neiman@maine.edu
FACULTY SPONSOR: Daniel Puhlman EMAIL: daniel.puhlman@maine.edu
(Required if PI is a student):
TITLE OF PROJECT: The Intersection of Ambitious Women & Parenting
START DATE: 4/28/2023 PI DEPARTMENT: School of Higher Ed, Ed Leadership, and Human Development

STATUS OF PI: FACULTY/STAFF/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE U (F,S,G,U)

If PI is a student, is this research to be performed:

- ☒ **for an honors thesis/senior thesis/capstone?** ☐ **for a master's thesis?**
- ☐ **for a doctoral dissertation?** ☐ **for a course project?**
- ☒ **other: McGillicuddy Humanities Center Fellowship**

Submitting the application indicates the principal investigator's agreement to abide by the responsibilities outlined in Section I.E. of the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Faculty Sponsors are responsible for oversight of research conducted by their students. The Faculty Sponsor ensures that he/she has read the application and that the conduct of such research will be in accordance with the University of Maine's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. REMINDER: if the principal investigator is an undergraduate student, the Faculty Sponsor MUST submit the application to the IRB.

Email this cover page and complete application to UMRIC@maine.edu

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FOR IRB USE ONLY Application # 2023-03-19 Review (F/E): E Expedited Category:
ACTION TAKEN:

- **XX☐ Judged Exempt; category 2 Modifications required? Yes Accepted (date) 3/19/2023**
- ☐ **Approved as submitted. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:**
- ☐ **Approved pending modifications. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:**
  Modifications accepted (date):
- ☐ **Not approved (see attached statement)**
- ☐ **Judged not research with human subjects**

FINAL APPROVAL TO BEGIN

Date 4/28/2023

10/2018

Appendix B: Recruitment Message & Flyer

You may be eligible to participate in a research study conducted at the University of Maine! I am sending this message on behalf of Paige Allen, an undergraduate student working on her Honors thesis and McGillicuddy Humanities Center Fellowship. This study will explore the relationship between successful women and their experience being mothers. There will be an emphasis on the decision-making process regarding children and how having children may have negatively affected mothers' career trajectories and domestic lives. This research will add to lacking scholarship in sociology, psychology, and philosophy. The project is advised by Dr. Daniel Puhlman, faculty at the University of Maine and head of the Parenting Relationships Research Lab. To complete this study, we need your help!

To qualify for the study, participants must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Speak English
- Identify as a mother
- Work full time (at least 32 hours per week)
- Have at least one child between the ages of 2 and 12

Participants also must identify with at least 2 of the following criteria:

- Have 5 or more years of professional experience
- Have an advanced degree at or above a master's
- Hold a managerial or executive position

Please view the informed consent form, which is part of the initial screening survey (https://forms.gle/oEqaNbGshKCGE2rq6) if you are interested in participating in this study. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. If you are eligible to participate, you will receive a follow-up email with a second 15-minute survey to gather more information and a booking link to schedule an hour-long Zoom interview. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and can be stopped at any time. Your personal information will only be used to contact you to set up an interview and send you a gift card. You will be assigned a research participant number associated with your data, keeping your name and your data separate. All information associated with your participation in the study will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

Upon reaching the end of the interview, participants will be sent a $5 Starbucks gift card to their email addresses.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Paige Allen (paige.allen@maine.edu) or faculty advisor Daniel Puhlman (daniel.puhlman@maine.edu). Thank you for your time!

Help Needed: Research Study

University of Maine researchers Paige Allen and Daniel Puhlman are working on the project **"The Intersection of Ambitious Women & Parenting,"** exploring the circumstances surrounding career-ambitious women and their decision to have children.

We need your help!

To Qualify, You Must Identify with 2/3:

1. Have worked professionally for 5 or more years
2. Have an advanced degree at or above a masters
3. Serve in an executive or managerial role

We will buy you a cup of coffee!

A $5 Starbucks Gift Card will be sent to your email upon responding to our study!

To Participate in the Study:

- 5 minute screening survey
- Qualify for the study
- 15 minute demographic survey
- Hour long Zoom interview

Scan this QR code to complete the 5-minute initial survey!

Questions? Comments? Want more information?
Email undergraduate researcher paige.allen@maine.edu or faculty advisor daniel.puhlman@maine.edu!

Appendix C: Screening Survey

Screening Survey for Ambitious Women & Parenting Study

Please complete this survey if you want to participate in a study investigating the decisions to parent while building a career. If you meet the qualifications for the study, you will be sent an email with a 15 minute second survey to collect more in-depth information and a link to book an hour-long interview. All contact and personal information collected is for scheduling purposes only and will not be included in the study.

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a project by Paige Allen, an undergraduate researcher and Honors College student supervised by Dr. Daniel Puhlman, faculty in the College of Education & Human Development at the University of Maine and head of the Parenting Relationships Research Lab. The project aims to help better understand the circumstances surrounding career-ambitious women and their decision to have children.

To qualify for this study, mothers must be:

- At least 18 years of age
- Speak English
- Have a child between the ages of 2 and 12 years
- Work full time (at least 32 hours per week)
- Meet at least 2 of the 3 following criteria: 1) Have an advanced degree at or beyond a master's, 2) have 5 or more years of professional work experience, and/or 3) serve in a managerial or executive role.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out a confidential short, 5-minute survey asking about your career and familial/parenting life. If you qualify to participate in this study, a follow-up email will be sent to you requesting more information through a second confidential 15-minute survey and an hour-long Zoom interview, asking questions about your decision to have children and your experience being a working mother. If you qualify for the follow-up survey and interview, you must participate in the interview to be considered a part of the study. Answering the second demographic survey is not required, but is highly encouraged to provide the research team with background information. Before the interview begins, you will be asked if the interview can be recorded. If you do not consent to record the interview, the interviewer will jot down quick notes during the interview. A couple of interview questions include:

- Please tell me the circumstances surrounding the decision(s) you and your partner made to have children.
- Do you have a family-friendly employer or work for a business that prioritizes family?
- What is it like being a working mother?

Risks

The only potential risks to participants are a loss of time and added inconvenience.

Benefits

Benefits to you – There are no direct benefits to you for participating.

Benefits to society – Your participation in this study will help provide a further understanding of the relationship between career-ambitious women and their decision to have children. Understanding what motivates successful women to have children and the barriers they may face could provide helpful insight for young women faced with the same crossroad, not to mention the fields of parenting and child development, sociology, and womens & gender studies.

Compensation

You will be sent a $5 Starbucks gift card upon reaching the end of the interview (although you can skip questions). Gift cards will be sent out through email within 72 hours after the interview.

Confidentiality

You will be asked to input your name and email into the first confidential survey for contact purposes only. You will be assigned a participant number at the start of the study, linked to a master key. Your name or other identifying information will not be associated with your survey responses or your interview. The survey data will be deleted from Google Forms in August 2023. However, survey data will be transferred to a unique and separate database and stored indefinitely to allow for new methodologies. Data will be encrypted, linked to a master key, and stored on a password-protected computer that is only accessible to the research team. The key will be deleted on or before August 2023. Recordings of interviews will be deleted from Zoom within 72 hours of the interview. Recordings will be transcribed within 14 days after the interview and deleted from the password-protected computer immediately after transcription. Any notes taken during the interview will be stored on the password-protected computer indefinitely.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this study, you may stop anytime. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer or terminate the interview at any time. Your participation in the survey(s) and interview confirm your consent to participate.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Paige Allen (paige.allen@maine.edu) or Faculty Advisor Dr. Daniel Puhlman (daniel.puhlman@maine.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207/581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

2. Do you consent to participate in this research study? Clicking "yes" indicates your consent. *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Questions

Please answer the questions below. If you qualify for the study, you will be sent a follow-up email with a second Google Forms survey that will take around 15 minutes to complete and booking link for an hour-long Zoom interview in the coming days. To participate in the study, the interview is required. The second survey is not required, but highly recommended to provide the research team with more information. If you receive no response, you do not qualify for the study.

3. Name

_____

4. Email

_____

5. Age

_____

6. Do you speak English?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

7. Do you identify as a mother?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

8. How many children do you have?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ None
- ◯ I am currently pregnant or in the process of adopting my first child
- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4
- ◯ Other: _____

9. Does your child or children between the age of 2 and 12 years live at home?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

10. Are you a legal guardian of your child or children?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

11. Were any of your children born with severe diagnosed and documented disabilities?

_____

12. How long have you been working full-time (at least 32 hours a week) professionally in your field?

_____

13. Are you currently serving in a management or executive position?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

14. What is your highest degree of education?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Some high school
- ◯ High school or equivalent (GED)
- ◯ Some college but no diploma
- ◯ Bachelor's Degree
- ◯ Master's Degree
- ◯ Doctorate Degree/PhD
- ◯ J.D
- ◯ M.D
- ◯ Other: _____

Appendix D: Follow-Up Email

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in an undergraduate research project at the University of Maine! We are pleased to inform you that you qualify for a follow-up interview to discuss your career trajectory and parenting decisions. Please use this link to book an hour-long Zoom interview. Feel free to fast forward to any week or day that works for you. The blocks are an hour and a half long to allow for a break or technical difficulties, but the interview will only take one hour. After finishing the interview, you will be sent a $5 Starbucks gift card to your email address. You may skip any question that you want to.

Please answer this 15-minute survey to gather additional demographic information at least 2 days before your interview. This is needed to participate in the study. Again, thank you so much for participating and if you have any questions, please contact Paige Allen (paige.allen@maine.edu) or Dr. Daniel Puhlman (daniel.puhlman@maine.edu).

Your confidential research participant number is _____. Please change your Zoom name to this research participant number before our meeting.

Best,
Paige Allen

Appendix E: Demographic Survey

Demographic Survey

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please view this informed consent form before responding to this survey if you have not already. This questionnaire will provide more information about your demographics, parenting and career experiences before the interview.

* Indicates required question

1. Research Participant Number *

_____

2. Which race or ethnicity best describes you?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ◯ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ◯ Black or African American
- ◯ Hispanic
- ◯ White/Caucasian
- ◯ Prefer not to say
- ◯ Other: _____

3. What kind of area do you live in?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Rural
- ◯ Suburban
- ◯ Urban
- ◯ Other: _____

4. On average, what is your individual, approximate yearly income?

_____

5. What is your relationship with your child or children's other parent?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] I am married to my child's or children's other parent
- [ ] I am widowed from my child's or children's other parent
- [ ] I am separated from my child's or children's other parent
- [ ] I am divorced from to my child's or children's other parent
- [ ] I live with my child's or children's other parent but we are not married
- [ ] I have no relationship with my child or children's other parent
- [ ] Other: _____

6. How many people live in your household?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4
- ◯ 5
- ◯ 6
- ◯ 7
- ◯ 8
- ◯ Other: _____

7. Age(s) of your children

_____

8. Are your children biological, adopted, or step-children?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Biological
- [ ] Adoptive
- [ ] Stepchild or children
- [ ] Other: _____

9. On average, how often do your kids live with you?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Full time
- ◯ 5-6 days a week
- ◯ 3-4 days a week
- ◯ 1-2 days a week
- ◯ Other: _____

10. What is your job title?

_____

11. What profession do you currently work in? Examples include food service, technology, law, medicine, and others.

_____

12. What are your typical working hours?

13. Where do you work?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ At home
- ◯ In an office or space outside your home
- ◯ Hybrid
- ◯ Other: _____

14. Please briefly describe your job and the day-to-day tasks that you perform in the workplace.

15. Have you received any professional promotions or raises in the last five years?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

Appendix F: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a project by Paige Allen, an undergraduate researcher and Honors College student supervised by Dr. Daniel Puhlman, faculty in the College of Education & Human Development at the University of Maine and head of the Parenting Relationships Research Lab. The project aims to help better understand the circumstances surrounding career-ambitious women and their decision to have children. To qualify for this study, mothers must be:

- At least 18 years of age
- Speak English
- Live in New England,
- Have a child between the ages of 2 and 12 years
- Work full time (at least 32 hours per week)
- Meet at least 2 of the 3 following criteria: 1) Have an advanced degree at or beyond a master's, 2) have 5 or more years of professional work experience, and/or 3) serve in a managerial or executive role.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out a confidential short, 5-minute survey asking about your career and familial/parenting life. If you qualify to participate in this study, a follow-up email will be sent to you requesting more information through a second confidential 15-minute survey and an hour-long Zoom interview, asking questions about your decision to have children and your experience being a working mother. If you qualify for the follow-up survey and interview, you must participate in the interview to be considered a part of the study. Answering the second demographic survey is not required, but is highly encouraged to provide the research team with background information. Before the interview begins, you will be asked if the interview can be recorded. If you do not consent to record the interview, the interviewer will jot down quick notes during the interview. A couple of interview questions include:

- Please tell me the circumstances surrounding the decision(s) you and your partner made to have children.
- Do you have a family-friendly employer or work for a business that prioritizes family?
- What is it like being a working mother?

Risks

The only potential risks to participants are a loss of time and added inconvenience.

Benefits

Benefits to you – There are no direct benefits to you for participating.
Benefits to society – Your participation in this study will help provide a further understanding of the relationship between career-ambitious women and their decision to have children. Understanding what motivates successful women to have children and the barriers they may face could provide helpful insight for young women faced with the same crossroad, not to mention the fields of parenting and child development, sociology, and women & gender studies.

Compensation

You will be sent a $5 Starbucks gift card upon reaching the end of the interview (although you can skip questions). Gift cards will be sent out through email within 72 hours after the interview.

Confidentiality
You will be asked to input your name and email into the first confidential survey for contact purposes only. You will be assigned a participant number at the start of the study, linked to a master key. Your name or other identifying information will not be associated with your survey responses or your interview. The survey data will be deleted from Google Forms in August 2023. However, survey data will be transferred to a unique and separate database and stored indefinitely to allow for new methodologies. Data will be encrypted, linked to a master key, and stored on a password-protected computer that is only accessible to the research team. The key will be deleted on or before August 2023. Recordings of interviews will be deleted from Zoom within 72 hours of the interview. Recordings will be transcribed within 14 days after the interview and deleted from the password-protected computer immediately after transcription. Any notes taken during the interview will be stored on the password-protected computer indefinitely.

Voluntary
Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this study, you may stop anytime. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer or terminate the interview at any time. Your participation in the survey(s) and interview confirm your consent to participate.

Contact Information
If you have any questions about this study, please contact Paige Allen (paige.allen@maine.edu) or Faculty Advisor Dr. Daniel Puhlman (daniel.puhlman@maine.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207/581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

Appendix G: Interview Script

Hello, thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study! I will now remind you of some informed consent highlights before we begin.

- Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate in this study, you may stop anytime. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer or terminate the interview anytime. Your participation in the survey(s) and interview confirm your consent to participate.
- Do you consent to have the interview recorded? Recording the interview will allow the research team to transcribe it. Recordings will be deleted from Zoom within 72 hours and will be deleted from the password-protected computer after transcription (14 days after the interview). If you do not consent to recording the interview, I will take notes on my password-protected computer.
- Your personal information is not connected to any part of the interview process.

It is possible that several participants will be invited to be a part of a panel to talk about their experiences being a working mother. The panel would be on the University of Maine, Orono Campus in the early weeks of December 2023. You and other participants would be asked a couple of interview questions in a public setting for a presentation of my project.

Thank you for listening. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about your career.
    A. Are you excited about going to work each day?

2. Do you have a family-friendly employer or work for a business that prioritizes family?
    A. Are many women in your workplace mothers? Does the company or business you work for prioritize or discredit motherhood?
    B. Did you take additional time off (beyond maternity leave) when or after you had children?

3. Please tell me the circumstances surrounding the decision(s) you and your partner made to have children. Was this a conscious decision? Did you talk about having children before entering a serious relationship?
    A. If you parent with a partner or spouse in the household, are they supportive of your career ambitions?

2. Please describe your domestic responsibilities. How do you work with your partner in your home?

    A. How do you divide domestic work in your household?
    B. Do you feel that work or home is a safe space for you? Do you have another safe space, away from either environment?
    C. How do you make time for yourself?

5. What is it like being a working mother?
    A. Did you ever dream of becoming a mother?
    B. Did you ever dream of having a successful career?

6. What is it like being a mother? How do you parent? What is your parenting style/philosophy?
    A. How do you parent while balancing your work?

7. Given what you know now if you could start again before building a career and/or family, is there anything you would do differently?
    A. Do you feel that your career was hindered when you had children?
    B. Do you consider yourself successful in your career? Is it possible to "do it all?" Why or why not?

Thank you so much for participating in my research study.

Appendix H: Demographic Chart

Name	Area	Income ($)	Marital Status	Age of Children	Adoptive/Biological	Years Working	Education	Age	Field
Kathleen	Urban	350,000	Married	12	Biological	25	Bachelor's	48	Tech Startup (software)
Grace	Suburban	200,000	Married	7, 6, 6 months	Biological	15	Master's	40	Pharmaceutical
Lilah	Suburban	250,000	Married	8	Biological	17	Bachelor's	40	Engineering
Mia	Rural	55,000	Married	4	Biological	8	Bachelor's	29	Collegiate Athletics
Ragan	Rural	85,000	Married	9, 9	Biological	11	Master's	35	Higher Education
Kerrie	Rural	40,000	Separated	4	Biological	5	Some college	25	Animal Care
Amelia	Rural	85,000	Married	18, 10	Biological	25	Associate's	50	Healthcare
Hannah	Rural	100,000	Married	12, 8	Biological	17	Master's	44	Education Administration
Alice	Urban	55,000	No relationship	12	Biological	10	Master's	45	Post-Secondary Education
Ava	Rural	65,000	Married	11	Biological	21	Master's	47	K-12 Education
Jane	Suburban	200,000	Divorced	9, 9	Biological	18	Master's	42	Recruiting
Ruth	Suburban	32,000	Married	19, 10, 8, 6	Biological, Stepchild	13	Master's	37	Nonprofit
Charlotte	Rural	62,000	Married	2, 1 month	Biological	5	PhD	32	Higher Education
Nina	Suburban	135,000	Married	15, 13, 11	Biological	23	Master's	44	K-12 Education
Sadie	Rural	110,000	Divorced and remarried	16, 14, 7	Adoptive, Stepchild	12	Master's	43	Nonprofit Management
Hope	Suburban	155,000	Married	27, 11	Biological, Adoptive	22	PhD	46	Higher Education
Bridgit	Suburban	150,000	Married	13, 11	Biological	17	Bachelor's	39	Supply Chain Management
Melanie	Rural	60,000	Married	12	Adoptive	25	PhD	52	Higher Education
Ellie	Rural	100,000	Married	5	Biological	12	Master's	37	Higher Education
Sharon	Rural	48,000	Married	15, 2	Biological	12	Master's	43	Housing Counseling & Education

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Paige Allen is graduating from the University of Maine in May of 2024 with a major in Sociology and minors in Legal Studies, Ethics & Political Philosophy, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies in the Honors College. She is from Mendon, Massachusetts, and completed her primary and secondary education through the Mendon Upton Regional School District. At the University of Maine, Paige is involved in Student Government as the Vice President of Financial Affairs, the Pre-Law Society as President, the Club Field Hockey Team, and the Parenting Relationships Research Lab as an undergraduate research assistant.

During summers, Paige interned for the Volunteer Lawyers Project and Harrison Barrow, Attorney at Law, and waitressed. During her undergraduate career, Paige was awarded honors from All Maine Women, Phi Kappa Phi, Iota Iota Iota, Alpha Kappa Delta, and Phi Sigma Tau. She was also awarded the James S. Stevens Outstanding Junior Award from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Servant Heart Scholarship, a fellowship from the McGillicuddy Humanities Center, and the Esther Randall Bacus '44 Presidential Leadership Scholarship. Outside of school, Paige likes to explore Maine's trails, read, spend time with friends, watch 2010's sitcoms, and crochet. She is interested in family and juvenile law, parenting, and indigent and juvenile defense. She is enrolled at the Maine School of Law starting in Fall 2024 and hopes to become a family services attorney.