

WOMEN: THEIR HUSBANDS, THEIR CAREERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

by

LINSDAY RUDDICK

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Department of Marriage and Family Therapy  
College of Human Ecology

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Anthony P. Jurich

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## **Abstract**

Gender is a constructing concept around which the traditionally structured marriage was formed. An undercurrent of traditional thought still influences how women make their decisions around pursuing a career and caring for their children. Their relationships with their husbands, in part influences both their decision-making and experience of their roles. This was a qualitative multiple case study describing women's decision-making around and their experiences of these roles. Themes found in the participant's narratives related to finances, intentional decision-making, and the fluidity of child-care and work roles. Final reflections during the child launching phase of life showed that role congruency was important for the participants and that they were currently satisfied with their situations.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this to my family and friends for their support in helping me finish this project

## **CHAPTER 1 - Introduction**

Contrary to the traditional theories of human development and family interactions, Feminist Theory acknowledges both the context within which people grow and the intricacies of this process (Walters, 1990). The contributions of Feminist Theory to research and clinical work have been far reaching in that both researchers and clinicians within the field of family studies have readjusted the lens through which they analyze families. Feminist thinkers account for the context of families, instead of looking at families with a purely systemic perspective. Instead, they recognize that not all parts of a system are completely balanced and that in the family system, not all of the family members have equal power. These feminist family experts conceptualize the family within its environmental context, that of a patriarchal society. One of the most prominent themes of Feminist Theory emphasizes that gender is a constructing concept around which the traditionally structured marriage was formed (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005). Looking at marriage within this context, patterns of gender bias began to emerge. According to Nichols and Swartz (2004), a common explanation for family distress has, in the past been biased such that women were held more accountable for the family distress than men simply because they were seen as more responsible for the childrearing responsibilities. Today, arguments are made in favor of equality of responsibility; however these arguments fall flat when one looks beneath the surface of men's and women's relationships. Even within families who believe they have an equal division of responsibilities, the accountability still falls primarily on the women for domestic responsibilities like housework and

child care. This inequality is founded in the traditional belief that women are more biologically predisposed for childcare and should, therefore, be more responsible for the care of children. This covert influence will be referred to, for the purpose of this study, as a “traditional undercurrent.” Although there is movement toward egalitarianism within marriages, the undercurrent of traditional thought still flows beneath the surface influencing the interactions of women and men. A collection of literature has emerged that addresses the effects of gender on marriages and how this unequal expectation of responsibility for domestic duties influences women.

Researchers in the fields of Sociology, Psychology, and Anthropology concur that gender is socially constructed through the interaction people have with each other which either confirms or denies that their behavior is consistent with their biological sex. This feedback moves people towards or away from behavior that is deemed gender appropriate or inappropriate. From this perspective, women are not considered to be biologically predisposed for childcare more than men, but rather are socialized through social reinforcement to be so. These beliefs influence women’s decision-making and interactions in their romantic relationships. Again, some argue that there is a shift toward equalitarianism within relationships between men and women, and yet the divisions of childcare and household responsibilities are still imbalanced for a large majority of people. Studies looking into the division of household labor have found that even when women provide financially for their families through a career, they are still responsible for the majority of the childcare and housework duties (Perone, Web, & Blalock 2005; Yoder 1999, as cited in Betz, 2006). These domestic responsibilities will influence the degree to which women feel they can enter the work world, and therefore, whether or not they choose to pursue a career. This is disconcerting in that many women find value in filling a career role and may experience

stress because they cannot fully engage in a career. Although research supports that it is the extent to which a woman is able to fill the roles she desires, and not whether or not she pursues a career that determines how satisfied she is, women still experience difficulties. Both the traditional undercurrent and women's relationships with their husbands might restrict them from filling the roles they desire, thereby influencing a woman's satisfaction with her situation. It is important to note that "filling the roles they desire" is intended to mean both the actual time a woman is able to dedicate to a role and the perceived quality of time spent in her roles.

My interest in this field has developed out of my own personal experience. As I matured and left my parents' house, I observed both my mother and the mothers of my friends flounder as they tried to decide how to fill the time they had previously dedicated to their children. In what seemed to be a search for a new identity during the child launching life stage, these stay-at-home moms found it difficult to fill their time. The women seemed unhappy at times and yet liberated at other times. I wondered how they had arrived at that place in their lives and how it was related to their relationships with their husbands. Additionally, I wondered if they were experiencing any regrets or if they felt satisfied with their previous decisions. Thinking about it now, I cannot help but suspect that these women were made stagnant by a shifting culture, one that claimed to be moving toward egalitarianism, emphasizing that women and men should be equal, but yet still restricted their ability to achieve equality. My role as a researcher is, therefore, somewhat biased in that I expect to uncover themes relating to this. I am, however, interested in understanding the entirety of women's experiences and not just what fits with my biases. In fact, I am very interested in the exceptions and what helps women be satisfied with their roles so that I might apply it in my clinical work as a premarital therapist.

Applying a systemic perspective, women's *decision-making* about domestic and career roles is influenced by their relationship with their husbands. Additionally, women's *experiences* of these roles are integrally linked to their relationships with their husbands. However, no study has examined this dynamic specifically. Studies have examined the division of labor in marriages and how roles are linked with marital satisfaction, but none have looked at women's decision-making around these roles, how this decision was influenced by their husbands, and how these factors have influenced their satisfaction with their roles. If, in fact, there is a common theme revolving around women's relationships with their husbands, it would be appropriate to incorporate that awareness into clinical work in order to help couples be more aware of the impact of traditionalism on their relationships and be more intentional in their decision-making around the division of roles.

By its very systemic nature, this decision is complex and difficult to identify. Thus, rather than trying to isolate causal interactions, it is more appropriate to examine women's experiences of decision-making more holistically. Understanding how women experience their decision-making and their relationships with their husbands can unearth some of the traditional undercurrent that flows through men's and women's relationships, making it overt and subsequently easier to alter. Identifying this impact is very important for true movement toward egalitarianism. One must first recognize inequalities in order to address them. To add to the body of knowledge, as well as make the covert more overt, I interviewed women about their experiences regarding childcare and career roles. The purpose of this study was to explore, within a feminist framework, how women's relationships with their husbands influenced both their decision-making around childcare and careers and what their experience of these roles was.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review**

### **The Context of Gender**

When thinking about how women make decisions around pursuing a career and caring for their children, it is important to understand the context within which they develop and attach meaning to careers and childcare. Equally as important is an understanding of how the legacy of traditional thought is still a part of this context and influences these meanings. This legacy consists of what Levinson (1996) refers to as “gender splitting.” The concept of “gender splitting” helps one conceptualize the significance of gender in a woman’s life and how it influences her internal experiences, her relationships with others, and subsequently, the different meanings she attaches to her career and caring for her children. “Gender splitting” refers to the rigid division of what is masculine and what is feminine. This division permeates all domains of a person’s life, beginning with the color of baby clothes and extending to what is considered “men’s work” and what is “women’s work.”

Although sex is biological, gender is not. In fact, gender is acknowledged as a social construction (Lober, 1991) and “gender splitting” is the vehicle through which gender differences are constructed. Lober (1994) offers “Whatever genes, hormones, and biological evolution contribute to social institutions, it is materially as well as qualitatively transformed by social practices” (p. 16). Biology is that “what” of human development. “What” genitalia a child has and “what” genetics influences them, but the meanings of these, the “how” they are interpreted, is a social construction. Depending on your perspective, the “what” and the “how” carry different weights. From a social constructionist perspective, gender can be thought of as the result of the social interactions people have with others throughout their lives that reinforce their

gender, or in other words, the “how”. Feedback from others communicates to a person that his or her behavior is consistent or inconsistent with his or her biological sex. Smith and Lloyd’s (1978) foundational study on gender examined social interactions between parents and infants and noted the difference in how parents treated male and female infants during play. The authors found that parents treated infants, not according their sex, but instead according to the gender the infant was dressed as. Male infants, who were dressed as males, were told that they were strong and parents played with them in a more rowdy manner than the females, while female infants, who were dressed as female, were told they were pretty and were treated more delicately by the parents. However, males who were dressed as female, and females who were dressed as males, were treated as they were dressed and not as their biological sex would have dictated. This study supports that social interactions are guided by gender stereotypes, and has implications for the division of roles within a family.

Social interactions that are gender reinforcing can be problematic in that they rigidly define who a person is and place both expectations and limitations on females and males (Lober, 1994). If a young girl does not behave consistently with the stereotypes of femininity, she will receive feedback from her social network that she is not behaving as a girl should. If she is interested in tools instead of dolls or is more directive than she is cooperative with her playmates, she will receive corrections about what is feminine and what is not. Lober (1994) made the argument that the social institutions of gender are dependent on making the members of each group similar, thus “children learn to talk, walk, and gesture the way their social group says girls and boys do” (p. 22). In the interest of maintaining similarities, social interactions diminish the occurrence of behavior not consistent with sex-stereotyped behavior and move girls more toward the stereotypes of femininity, thereby limiting them. Likewise, boys who do not

behave according to masculine stereotypes, receive similar feedback. Gender reinforcement is present in the toys with which the children play, the clothes they wear, and the games in which they participate. Richmond-Abbott (1992) reported that girls often play in small groups of two or three with fewer rules and with an emphasis on cooperation. Play for boys is generally in large groups with more complexity and an emphasis on competition (Richmond-Abbott, 1992). These play experiences teach boys and girls to relate to each other in different ways and reinforce societally defined gender-appropriate traits. Boys learn to be competitive and lead, while girls learn to be cooperative and put others before themselves. If boys and girls behave outside of these gender stereotypes, they receive negative feedback from their peers; girls become defined as “bossy” and boys become defined as “wimps.” These gender specific expectations limit both boys and girls through a process so covert that gender is thought of as a biological predisposition, instead of a social influence. Girls are thought of as naturally less assertive than boys. This overlooks that from birth both females and males pick up cues from their environment that inform them of how to behave according to their gender.

Using a social constructionist lens, it is easy to see that “gender splitting” begins as early as birth when an infant is put in a blue or pink blanket at the hospital. This social construction of gender persists into childhood, when boys and girls are given toys that are preselected to emphasize their gender. Jones, Howe, and Rue (2000) looked at differences in boys’ and girls’ out-of-school experiences related to science, their interests in science topics in school, and their attitudes toward science. The authors found that more males than females reported out-of-school experiences with toys related to science like tools, batteries, electric toys, fuses, microscopes, and pulleys. Contrary to this, more females than males reported experiences outside of school with things like bread making, observing birds and stars, knitting, sewing, and planting seeds.

This study also found that more males than females reported having interests in the physical sciences in school. If more interest in a topic translates into more participation in class and, subsequently, more attention from teachers, this has major implications for students' learning. Any extra experience or help from adults may result in boys being more advanced in math and science related fields than girls, because what starts as only a slight difference in interaction, burgeons over time into a significant difference in ability and preference.

Interestingly, a study done by the American Association of University Women (1999) found that girls received less attention than boys from teachers in general. These studies support that boys and girls have very different experiences in early schooling and explains why women and men are polarized in the careers they pursue. Jones et al. (2000) concluded that differences in early schooling puts females at a disadvantage for learning the physical sciences and subsequently might lead them down a different career path than males. Baker and Leary (1995) found evidence that science experiences impact science career decisions for girls. These studies make sense because having experience in a field will likely increase confidence and ability, thereby increasing interests and involvement in the field. Interest and involvement with science-related fields in schooling will influence the types of jobs a person enters. Levinson (1996) stated that "to a much greater degree than is usually recognized, women and men have lived in different social worlds and have differed remarkably in their social roles, identities, and psychological attributes" (p. 38). Additionally, having different experiences early in life, as well as different career paths, puts women and men on unequal trajectories for family obligations, thereby influencing which roles they fill in their families (Schieman, 2001). The eventual result of "gender splitting" is then, a sharp division of the domestic and the work worlds. This division becomes so rigid that the restriction of who is allowed in these different worlds is often thought

to be a biological characteristic of gender and not a symptom of a greater societal influence. Gender becomes so pervasive, that it is misconstrued as biology.

The division of these two worlds is ever-present in the lives of men and women, and more than just which careers women select, “gender splitting” influences women’s experiences of their careers. This is exemplified by the double standard described by Coltrane (2004) as a “career advancement double standard.” Women who are involved in the work world and decide to get married are considered less invested in their careers by their employers, because it is assumed that their family obligations will at some point intrude on their work performance. Professional men who marry, on the other hand, are considered more committed to their careers because they are “settling down” and are committing themselves to the financial burden of a family, thus financially committing themselves to their job. According to Coltrane (2004), this double standard influences the jobs available to women, thereby influencing their hiring or advancement in a company.

This difference in career advancement is important because careers are important for women. It offers them a domain for personal fulfillment as well as a sense of mattering (Schienman, 2001). “Occupational success influences our income and self-esteem, our place in society, and the material and social advantage we can provide for our children” (Levinson, 1996, p. 45). In a society where men and women can no longer count on a permanent marriage, careers offer women financial stability following a divorce. Without this, women are left as single parents without the skills or experience needed for a reasonably paying job. This is supported by the 27% decline in women’s standards of living after a divorce (Peterson, 1996). Having a career helps protect women from this decline were they ever to divorce. Even within a marriage, financial equality is important for women. It provides a better balance of power and decision-

making for women within the marriage. According to Burgoyne, Clarke, Reibstein, and Edmunds (2006), even when couples intend to share income like it belonged to both partners, both spouses are aware of who earned the money and this can influence feelings of entitlement. Whoever makes the money essentially has ultimate control over it and thus the authority over it. Having a career offers women equality in their relationships that would otherwise be inaccessible. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2002) explained that in addition to providing women with an equality of authority, careers offer intellectual companionship, adult contacts, mental stimulation, opportunities for self-expression, expanded sense of personal fulfillment, and escape from household drudgery. Moreover, careers serve as a significant part of women's identity.

### **Family Negotiation**

According to the United States Bureau of Labor (2007), dual-earner couples represent the most common type of marital arrangements in 2006. In 51.8 % (29,799) of the 57,509 married-couple families, both husband and wife were employed. Although this shows movement away from the traditional marriage, where the men worked and the women stayed home, the legacy of traditional thought still influences relationships between men and women. Levinson (1996) commented that "gender splitting" is still present in the negotiations made within the family around careers and childcare. Still influenced by traditional societal norms, men can fulfill their family obligations simply by being good providers and helping out with more peripheral childcare duties. Within this framework, any childcare men provide is considered beyond their family obligations and thus indicates a supportive role. This is consistent with the type of childcare men provide their children, according to Lober (1994). Lamb (1987 as cited in Lober 1994), offered three different types of caretaking; "accessibility" (being near child, but not providing direct care), "one-on-one care" (holding, feeding, etc.) and "responsibility" (concerned

with child's welfare and makes arrangements for child). Of these, Lober (1994) explained that men who are not single parents, may provide "accessibility" and "one-on-one" childcare, but rarely give "responsibility" childcare. "Responsibility" child care is the more time consuming type of childcare. This type of childcare is still provided mainly by women. Thus, work and family obligations are mutually supportive for men because their family obligations are more peripheral, and rarely do they experience conflict between them. Those men who do step outside of the traditional breadwinner role and disrupt their careers to provide "responsibility" care for their children risk taking the same pay cuts and promotion restrictions as women, but are often praised beyond belief for their efforts. They are considered extremely selfless and extraordinary (Olarate 2000). For women, the opposite is true. Having a career and caring for children are not considered mutually supportive but instead are thought of as in opposition to each other (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994). Cinamon and Rich (2002) found that women experienced more feelings of conflict between family and work roles when their work interfered with their family obligations. They also found that when family interfered with work, it was experienced as less conflictual because it was deemed to be natural and expected. Women who step outside of their traditional roles to pursue a career are not praised but rather are judged negatively for leaving their children with someone else (Olarate, 2000).

It is likely that this double standard is due to the traditional undercurrent of our society that covertly influences this negotiation between men and women. Men are socialized that both childcare and housework are women's work, and that they can expect their wives to care for their children and manage their homes (Olarate, 2000). Contrary to their female counterparts, it is not particularly common for men to struggle with how they will care for their children while they pursue a career (Olarate, 2000). Thus, they do not have to make the decision between having a

career and having a family. It is with this decision, to stay home or pursue a career that society's underlying traditional assumption, that women are responsible for childcare and men for the financial stability of a family, emerges. When one contrasts a woman's decision between pursuing a career and raising a family with that of a man's decision to do the same, the discrepancy becomes obvious for the simple fact that it is women who are the ones having to decide. Men are not faced with the decision to choose between career and family and do not experience guilt for choosing to pursue a career instead of staying home to care for their children (Olarde, 2000). Thus, the decision between childcare and career is women's alone, and results in different obligations for women.

### **Multiple Roles**

Because many women do not want to have to make such an absolute choice, they will fill both the childcare provider role and pursue a career in an attempt to "do it all." The United States Bureau of Labor (2007) cited that 66.8% of mothers in married-couple families with children under the age of 18 years of age were employed in 2006. Perrone, Webb, and Blalock (2005) found that women participated in parenting and housework at a greater rate than their spouses, even when their salaries were higher. Women can hold a career role that equals their husbands' but will at the same time, feel as though they should also fill the domestic role to a greater extent than their husbands. This is a good example of how the traditional way of thinking still supports that domestic work within the home is considered women's work. Consistent with this, Yoder (1999, as cited in Betz 2006) found that married and employed women in their study did 33 hours of household chores and childcare, while their husbands averaged 14 hours, thus taking on a "second shift" when they leave work. These findings demonstrate that a large majority of women fill an employment role and a domestic role simultaneously. This leaves many women

susceptible to role overload; defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as the conflict that occurs because of role pressure from mutually incompatible work and family domains. Because more women fill both roles, it makes sense then that as an aftereffect of traditional thought, they would more often than men, experience stress and conflict among the multiple roles of pursuing a career and their domestic responsibilities. Consistent with this, female participants in the study done by Higgins et al. (1994) reported significantly more role overload than their male counterparts. This experience of role overload often leaves women feeling stressed, overwhelmed and experiencing conflict among their many roles.

The stress of filling multiple roles may influence women's decision-making around their careers; causing them to scale back one of their roles in order to accommodate the other roles. Often this scaling back occurs in the employment or career role. Farmer (1997) found that the women she interviewed, who reported being interested in science-related fields, decided to pursue nursing because it would fit well with their childcare responsibilities. These women adjusted their career investments in order to accommodate their domestic responsibilities. According to Betz (2006), because women experience the combination of guilt and role overload, they more frequently scale down their career aspirations in order to accommodate the more pressing responsibility of childcare. Women are influenced by the legacy of traditional thought and plan their careers accordingly. Levinson (1996) stated that "girls are raised not to make a strong investment of self in a future occupation or career and women are discouraged from full participation in the occupational system" (p. 41). A professional woman, pursuing a career instead of staying home to care for her children, is in a sense, challenging the traditional gender role stereotype that women should be the sole childcare providers. Even though these patriarchal pressures are unfounded, this understanding does not reduce the amount of guilt

experienced by women who choose to focus time on their careers. Even when women fill both roles, caring for their children and working, they still feel society's pressure to fill the motherly role to an even greater extent than they do. Olarte (2000) wrote, "We tend to pathologize any other care taking arrangements that do not follow this idealized mother-child dyad" (p. 295). Thus, according to Olarte (2000), childcare arrangements that do not involve the mother are considered to be inferior arrangements. As a side note, it is interesting to consider that childcare which does not include the father figure is not considered abnormal or inferior. Women may feel guilt for pursuing a career instead of caring for their children as a traditional stay-at-home mom would (Olarte, 2000). These feelings of family obligation can influence their career decisions and often result in women's careers being fragmented and more delayed than their male peers (Higgins et al., 1994). This is very different than the experience of men during their career development.

### **Challenges to Feminist Assumptions**

Although a majority of literature focuses on the negative effects of multiple roles and the employment limitations put on women because of child care expectations, some studies challenge these assumptions. While stressful, the multiple roles filled by women do not necessarily influence women's life satisfaction in as negative of a way as it originally seemed (Carr, 1997). Carr found that women's mental health was influenced by the attainment of their occupational aspirations, but at the same time, it also found that there was a buffering effect of family successes. This study looked at whether or not a woman's mental health at midlife was affected by her level of fulfillment of her earlier career aspirations. The four main hypotheses in this study are described as follows:

- (i) A discrepancy between a woman's early occupational aspiration and midlife occupational attainment will influence mental health.
- (ii) The direction of the discrepancy matters: a negative discrepancy (i.e., one's actual occupational attainment falls short of one's earlier occupational aspiration) will have a negative effect on mental health.
- (iii) The size of the discrepancy matters: the larger the discrepancy between one's aspiration and attainment, the greater the effect of the discrepancy on mental health.
- (iv) The negative mental health effect of failing to reach one's goal will attenuate when marital and parenting characteristics are controlled (Carr, 1997, p. 332).<sup>1</sup>

The results of the study supported all four predictions made by Carr (1997). The women in her study experienced more positive mental health and less depression when they had achieved their earlier career aspirations. Moreover, falling a great distance short of a career goal significantly raised the level of depression in her participants. Interestingly though, the women in her study did not experience an increase in depression when they missed their career goals by only a short distance and family characteristics were controlled for their effects. This means that although having a family will not protect against the negative affects of missing her career goals by a large margin, the negative effects of missing a career goal by only a short distance might be buffered by having a family. More to the point, success in a family role can shield a woman against minor disappointments and stresses she may experience in not meeting her professional career goals. These findings support that multiple roles can be positive for women by means of offering them multiple avenues through which they can experience success and self validation. A

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<sup>1</sup> Formatted for easier reading

woman may think, “I may not have met my sales goals for this month but at least I am successful as a mother to my children,” and she will not experience a drop in her life satisfaction.

Barnett and Marshall (1992) also supported the positive effects of having multiple roles, but they observed that the effect also occurred in the opposite direction, from work to family. The authors found that female job satisfaction influenced home life in a positive way, regardless of the stress of having multiple roles. Betz (2006) found that women who are considered traditional stay-at-home moms and do not have another outlet for achievement beyond their domestic lives have a higher susceptibility to psychological distress. Multiple roles can offer women a variety of domains for success and fulfillment in their lives. A unique study done by Cavan (2006) also explained multiple roles, but did so by challenging the assumptions that domestic lives limited women and put an extra burden on them. Cavan (2006) explained that there is an assumption made by the literature on women and careers that women want to work full-time and that children are seen as a barrier to careers. His article challenged the idea that all women experience careers and childcare as opposing one another. Cavan (2006) cited multiple authors who supported the idea that women are not forced into multiple roles when they have children but instead, make intentional decisions to pursue careers and motherhood. He explained that because women wanted to care for their own families, they did not experience family life and careers as conflicting. In the interviews done for this study, there was a theme that emerged that “there’s more to life than work” (Cavan, 2006 p. 48). This was consistent with the foundational argument made by Cavan (2006), that much of the literature on careers and women devalues the role of motherhood. Further, Cavan asserted that this is a misrepresentation of the true feelings of women who still value the motherhood role to a great extent.

The key element to understanding how there can be such conflicting views, is to consider the intentional aspect of the women in Cavan's (2006) study. The women were described as having made very intentional well thought-out decisions, but the influence of traditional thought is a very covert process. Covert processes are less likely to have as much influence when a decision is made intentionally. Therefore, women in other studies who have not been as intentional in their thinking, may be more persuaded by the covert influence of traditional thought and would experience their roles differently than women who intentionally chose to fill their roles.

### **Role Satisfaction**

All of these studies seem to indicate that it is not a matter of whether or not women should work or stay home with children, but rather to what degree women are satisfied with their ability to fill the roles that are important to them. The importance a person gives to a role in his or her life influences the priority it is given (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). It makes sense that how important a role is in a person's life will influence his or her participation in that role. Subsequently, if a woman is unable to be involved in the roles she wants, according to how she would like to be, she will experience conflict between the roles. Greehous and Beutell (1985) found that work-family conflict increases or decreases according to how salient the roles are that people fill and how central these roles are to the person's self concept. Women who were unable to spend as much time in a highly valued role, would experience conflict between their desire to fill the role and the role they were required to fill instead. This internal struggle can be conceptualized using a concept described by Perrone et al. (2005) as "role congruency." Role congruence is the consistency between the value a person gives a role and his or her ability to participate in that role. In their study, Perrone et al. (2005) found that role congruence was

indirectly related to life satisfaction. This means that women who were able to fill the roles they wanted to fill to the degree they wanted to fill them, experienced higher levels of life satisfaction than those who could not. This is important to consider when looking at the effects of filling multiple roles for women. It is not what roles a woman fills in her life, but rather if she is able to dedicate the time she wants to the roles she most values.

Cavan's (2006) challenge to the literature is important to consider because role congruency will likely influence women's satisfaction with their decisions around their careers and families. However, it is also important to note that the societal context in which these role preferences develop is influenced by the legacy of traditional thought. Gender is socially constructed and not entirely biologically founded, but if a social custom is in place for a long time, it may be confused for a biological predisposition. This makes it very hard to identify what is a social construction and what is strictly biologically based. Thus, the legacy of traditional thought influences which roles a woman "wants" to fill and the value she gives them is a much more covert process than Cavan (2006) considered it to be. This is supported by Cinamon and Rich (2002) who found that gender is a meaningful factor in determining how important certain life roles are for a person. The authors described three different types of role profiles. The "Family Profile" in which high importance was attributed to the family role and low importance to the work role, the "Work Profile" in which low importance was attributed to the family role and high importance to the work role, and the "Dual Profile" in which high importance was attributed to both work and family. The authors found that more women than men fit the "Family Profile" and more men than women fit the "Work Profile." The most interesting dynamic, however, was that the men in the study were equally distributed among the three profiles, whereas the women were by far underrepresented in the "Work Profile," which attributes high

importance to work and low importance to family. Here it seems that the legacy of traditional thought was still present and that women were clearly still getting the message that it is inappropriate for them to prioritize work over family. Moreover, women clearly were not experiencing work and childcare roles as mutually compatible. The men in the study, on the other hand, had a much wider distribution among the profiles indicating more flexibility in their roles. Men have received the message that it is acceptable for them to choose career over family, and to some degree family over career. Women do not have this luxury. This leaves women who wish to dedicate more time to a career role experiencing significant role incongruence as well as conflict between roles. They feel this way because they cannot fill the role they want, but instead have to fill the roles according to society's expectations.

### **The Internal Experience of Women**

Levinson (1996) explained that role preference develops out of an internal struggle between the career and domestic sides of a woman. He considered this internal struggle to be a representation of the "gender splitting" that occurs in society. Levinson (1996) described that, internally women are split between the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure and the Internal Anti-Traditional Figure. The Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure is deeply rooted in traditional thought and emphasizes the rigid domestic roles of women, while the Internal Anti-Traditional Figure pushes women to be more independent and pursue individual career successes. Levinson (1996) provided detailed narratives of this struggle between the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure and the Internal Anti-Traditional Figure described, in the words of female participants as they progressed through the developmental stages of their life.

Levinson (1996) laid this negotiation of role priorities within a developmental framework that consisted of five transitional periods in the Human Life Cycle. During each of the

transitional periods, women experienced changes in their role priorities. This negotiation of role priorities was experienced differently by the two different groups of women included in Levinson's (1996) study; the homemaker group and the career woman group. For the women of the homemaker group, the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure's voice was much stronger and had much more influence on their decision-making. The Internal Anti-Traditional Figure influenced, to a greater extent, the career women's decision-making. Family and career decisions were made during each of the transitional periods according to which figure was predominant for each woman. The first stage, the Early Adulthood Stage (age 17-22), was described as a stage in which women terminated their childhood in order to enter early adulthood. During this time, women began to individuate from their families and began to think about what they would like for their lives. Levinson (1996) found that for the homemaker group, who were guided by the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure, career aspirations were closely linked with the women's marital aspirations. More to the point, the homemaker group of women was interested in careers only to the extent that it allowed them to meet and marry an "appropriate" man. The career women, while still interested in developing a family life at some point, were focused more on their immediate situation and were invested in first making a niche for themselves in the work world.

The Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood (age 22-28), is the second stage described by Levinson (1996). This is when the women made key decisions regarding love, marriage, family, and occupation. Levinson (1996) found that because the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure was dominant for the homemaker group during their twenties (the time for mate selection and deciding for or against a career), homemakers made decisions that moved them out of the work world and into the domestic world. The career women, guided by the Internal Anti-

Traditional Figure, were attempting to modify traditional patterns by making decisions that kept them in or moved them further into the work world. Although each group of women moved in different directions, they were both faced with a similar question: could they pursue a career without jeopardizing their femininity and their involvement in their families (Levinson, 1996). This question was answered in a different way by each group of women. The homemaker group answered “no” to this question. To the homemaker group, femininity involved domestic life and this became their focus. For the career women, this question was answered with a “maybe.” In their narratives, the career women seemed to struggle with this question far more than the homemakers and were continually constrained by the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure. They wondered if they could pursue a career without it interrupting the development of a family life. This struggle repeatedly influenced the career women in their decision-making throughout the third, fourth, and fifth stages of development.

The third stage of the Human Life Cycle described by Levinson (1996) was the Age 30 Transition, which occurs between age 28 and 33. This was described as a time for reappraisal of the decisions that were made in earlier transitional periods and for a reforming of the women’s life structures. The Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood, occurred between the ages of 33 and 40 and was the transitional period in which women “establish a more secure place” for their person “in order to pursue youthful dreams and goals” (p. 26). The fifth and final stage described by Levinson (1996), was the Mid-life Transition Stage (age 45-50), a stage during which women accepted that their youth was ended and terminated their life structure from the previous stages. During this time, women experienced a sense of reevaluation and a shift in roles. Career women in the Mid-life Transition Stage experienced a change in the meanings their careers had for them. No longer did they deem it necessary to prove themselves in the work

world by breaking through the glass ceiling and appearing successful in the eyes of others. Instead, women viewed their careers from a more personal perspective and wondered if their careers were personally satisfying and successful by their own definition. For the homemaker group, their childcare provider role came to an end or at least diminished and they were faced with the “dilemma of the displaced homemaker” (Levinson, 1996 p. 182). They struggled with what to do to create meaning in their lives since their primary life’s work came to an end or was greatly diminished.

What Levinson (1996) referred to as the “dilemma of the displaced homemaker” is commonly referred to in academic literature as the “empty nest” period (p. 182). The traditional understanding of “empty nest” has been that women experience distress and possibly depression as their role of childcare provider comes to an end. The reasoning behind this is that for the majority of her adult life the stay-at-home mom has filled the role of the childcare provider and is left without a role to fill when it ends. This concept was challenged by feminist literature, however, that argued that the empty nest was a symptom of a patriarchal society. From a feminist approach, “empty nest” is a product of the patriarchal idea that a woman’s only source of identity and fulfillment is through her childcare provider role, and thus, her main focus in life should be on children. “Empty nest” reinforces this traditional belief because it insinuates that when childcare responsibilities end, women suffer from depression because it was their role as a mother that was the key to their life satisfaction. The idea of the “empty-nest” has, therefore, been the source of much controversy and is a common theme in the literature. The data in this area of research are conflicting and confusing. Early studies, such as those done by Curlee (1969) and Bart (1972 as cited in White & Edwards 1990), showed that after the launching period of the family life cycle, mothers showed instances of depression. Later studies, such as

White and Edwards (1990) and Kahana and Kahana (1982), demonstrated that the launching period was actually a time of liberation for mothers. Although it is unclear exactly what women experience during the child-launching phase of life, it seems clear that child-launching serves as a catalyst for reflection, and thus, this might be an informative time for questioning women about the earlier decisions they made around their role priorities.

Additionally, the conflicting literature may be explained by considering how Levinson's (1996) Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure and Internal Anti-Traditional Figure influence women's experiences during the child-launching phase of their lives. For instance, when a woman has been guided solely by the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure, she may experience stress when she enters the child-launching phase because her role as a mother served, for a large part of her life, as her main source of fulfillment and satisfaction. When women have been largely influenced by the Internal Anti-Traditional Figure and have developed both a career and a childcare role for themselves, they would have multiple avenues for fulfillment and would be able to rely on their career roles when their childcare roles end. Thus, it seems important to consider how traditional a woman is, or in other words, whether the Internal Traditional Homemaker Figure or the Internal Anti-Traditional Figure has predominated for each woman and how that influences her experience of the child-launching phase of life.

### **Women and Their Husbands**

Another dynamic to consider is the relationship a woman has with her husband and how it might influence both her decision-making and her life satisfaction. Although Levinson's (1996) study explored in depth the internal experiences of women as they negotiated their involvement in their domestic and occupational worlds, the study did not draw out the themes that emerged in the data related to the women's relationships with their husbands. Through the

narratives in the book, it seems that the quality of the women's relationships with their husbands played a key role in their happiness with their decisions, regardless of whether or not they were in the domestic or work world. Additionally, in reading the narratives, it seemed that the success and experience of negotiating careers and childcare were, in some way, linked to the women's marital happiness.

An important question to consider is how women's relationships with their husbands influenced their decision-making around pursuing a career and caring for their children and how this relates to marital satisfaction. Olarte (2000) stated that, if a husband is insecure and competitive it will influence the woman's decision to stay home. Jansen and Liefbroer (2006) found that partners' attitudes about parenthood influenced the number of hours a woman spent in paid labor. Thus, husbands' beliefs regarding childcare influenced women during their decision-making. This seems to be a significant influence and one that might influence women's role congruence.

Furthermore, many studies have linked marital satisfaction and the negotiation of housework. Perrone et al. (2005) found that marital satisfaction depended on the equity of the division of housework. Coltrane (2004) found that when men perform more of the routine housework, participants reported higher levels of marital satisfaction. Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2002) explained that counselors, working with dual-career couples can expect to help the couples address issues related to work-overload problems, gender-role conflict, struggles over power and dependency in marital relationships, conflicts over achievement and competition, tensions over childcare, and relationship difficulties. Although it is unclear exactly how women's relationships with their husbands influence them, these studies indicated that there is some kind of connection.

Perhaps the level of egalitarianism in a relationship influences women's satisfaction with their marriage and their decisions regarding careers and childcare. Frisco and Williams (2003) reported that for women, perceptions of inequity were negatively associated with their marital satisfaction. Although Rhoden (2003) found the marriages of traditional and nontraditional women to have equal levels of communication, marital quality, and marital stability, the researchers reported that non-traditional marriages showed greater levels of flexibility, an important component of the Circumplex Model of marital and family functioning (Olson 1991, as cited in Rhoden 2003). Flexibility in a marriage allows for new roles to emerge and be incorporated in the marriage. Thus, it seems that the type of marriage a woman has with her husband influences her decision-making around her roles and would be important to include in an analysis of women's experiences.

A constant theme in Levinson's (1996) narratives seemed to be that the purpose of the marriage changed from early in life to later life and influenced women's marital satisfaction. For instance, if the marriage served as an avenue through which each member could raise children, a common reason given by the homemaker group, there would be little purpose for the marriage when the children are raised. During the Mid-Life Transition, along with reevaluation of roles, was a reevaluation of the purpose of marriage (Levinson, 1996). During this reevaluation, women began to desire something different from their marriages. After launching their children, they seemed to be more interested in pursuing individual pursuits and having a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands. Here again, the type of marriage a woman had might influence her experience of her relationship. Women in more traditional marriages, with less flexibility (Rhoden, 2003), might experience more resistance if they attempt to alter the earlier purpose of their marriage. Levinson (1996) explains that the women in his study "were disappointed that,

despite the partial emptying of the nest, the marital relationship did not improve (p. 197). This shift from a traditional to a more non-traditional marriage might cause conflict. Consequently, it is important to consider that women's relationships with their husbands have changed since the launching of their children.

### **Focus of the Study**

The purpose of this investigation is therefore to determine, from women's perspectives, how their relationships with their husbands influence their decision-making around, their experience of, and their satisfaction with their childcare and career roles. Thus, this investigation explored four study questions. The first study question of this investigation is "*How did the participants make the decision to provide care for their children, pursue a career, or do both?*" To address this question, the first part of the interview focused on what the participants felt influenced their decision-making. This included inquiries about the participants' relationships with their husbands. More specifically, it focused on how much the woman felt her husband influenced her decision-making around career and childcare roles. Therefore, the second study question of this investigation was "*How did the participants' relationships with their husbands influence their decision?*" As a part of capturing how women made their decisions, this study also considered the context in which their decisions occurred. As discussed earlier, the legacy of traditional thought, that women are biologically predisposed for childrearing and more responsible for it, is still an undercurrent of the interactions between men and women today. This was, therefore, a part of the context that was considered and explored. Thus, this study investigated how traditional participants perceived their relationships with their husbands to be; as well as well as to what extent the "Internal Traditional Figure" guided their decision-making.

The third study question of this investigation centered on women's experiences of their roles asking: "*What was their experience of their roles?*" This study addressed whether women were able to fill the roles they wanted to fill to the extent they wanted to fill them, or in other words, their role congruency. Because the literature supports that role congruency influences women's experience of their roles by influencing their stress, this was included in the analysis. Moreover, the literature supports that women's relationships with their husbands influence their experiences of each of these roles. To investigate this, the interview included questions related to how participants felt their husbands influenced their experience of their roles.

The fourth and final study question of this investigation was "*What are the participants' current situations and feelings?*" This included how they felt about the decisions they made earlier in their lives as well as how their situations have changed since their children moved out. Additionally, as a part of their current situation, it was important to inquire about how the women perceived their relationships with their husbands have changed since their children moved from their house.

Although this was an exploratory study, I expected that the data would show themes consistent with the following:

- 1) The legacy of traditional thought would influence women's decisions and experiences of their careers and childcare roles.
- 2) That the women who were involved in both domestic and work roles would experience role overload, that this would influence their involvement in one or both of their roles, and subsequently this would influence their satisfaction with their decisions in a negative way.

- 3) That both women's decisions and experiences would be moderated by their relationship with their husbands.

It was an intention of this exploration to uncover linkages between these variables and described women's experiences in an in-depth manner.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Methods**

This was an ontological study of women's perceptions of how their relationships with their husbands influenced their decision-making around their experiences of and their satisfaction with their childcare and career roles. Because of the subjective nature of the participants' experiences, I believed it appropriate to investigate primarily the women's perspectives. Thus, it was an assumption of this study that reality is subjective and that asking women about their perceptions of their reality is, in fact, capturing their reality (Cresswell, 2007). Another potentially covert influence of this study that is important to note, is my role as a researcher. Both my personal experiences of being a woman and my early observations of my mother and the mothers of my friends, will impact my understanding of the participants' lives. As both the investigator and the interviewer, my biases may have influenced my execution and my interpretation of the participants' interviews. Be this as it may, my experiences also may have offered me insight into the subtleties of the participants' experiences that I might not have otherwise caught. My experiences may have allowed me to be more empathic while interviewing the participant than someone without similar experiences. These characteristics allowed me to join with the participant in a way that induced personal and insightful answers to the interview questions.

Not only might my biases have influenced my execution and interpretation of the interviews, but they also may have influenced the construction of this study. It was during my mother's child-launching phase that I observed how she and the mothers of my friends struggled. It seemed that the ending of the childcare provider role served as a catalyst for self-reflection and a reorganization of roles. From my own experience, I identified this as a life phase that seemed

to instigate self-reflection, and although my initial interest in women's experiences during the child-launching phase developed from my own observations, it was consistent with the findings of Levinson (1997). Thus, my personal experience helped me look in the correct direction, but my hypotheses were formalized through the support of academic research. Additionally, to make certain that my analysis of the participant's narratives was accurate and unbiased by my personal interpretation, a PhD student with experience in qualitative data analysis reviewed the codes given to each narrative for accuracy.

## **Participants**

Reflection and change during the child-launching phase of life may offer women perspective on their earlier decisions and experiences. Thus, participants consisted of six middle aged women (53-61 years), all of whom have mothered a child or children and whose youngest child has moved out of the house within the past 1-2 years, ensuring that the participants had recently entered the child-launching life stage. Equal representations of "stay-at-home moms" and "career" women were included in the study; however one participant did not fit into either category and was included in a "dual-identity" category. Two of the six women in the study were "stay-at-home moms." They lived mainly as traditional "stay-at-home moms" in a family-centered situation and did not work at any point in a high-status occupation. Although the women included in the "stay-at-home mom" group may have worked temporarily outside of the home, to fit the "stay-at-home mom" criteria, participants had to consider themselves to be primarily a "stay-at-home mom" and had not pursued a high-status job. The other participants in the study were categorized in the "career" women group (3 participants). These women fit the "career" criteria because they had at one point in their life worked in a high-status occupation and during that time, they tried to make it an important part of their life. One participant

currently works as a lawyer, one participant worked early in her life as the vice president of an architect firm and now works as a bank manager, and the third participant works as a dietitian for a four year university.

The additional demographics of the participants were intentionally limited to women of Anglo cultures with mid to upper socioeconomic status who were residents of a Mid-western city and were at some point married to the men who fathered their children. Although including women of different ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and family structures would have added an interesting dynamic to this study, there was a need to hold constant as many variables as possible in order to draw conclusions about the emerging themes. There are many ways that varying demographics might have confounded the analysis. For instance, within the African American culture, families are close-knit with strong kinship bonds, have flexible family roles, and are more likely to have extended family networks with fluid economic support (Sue & Sue, 2003). Thus, women of non-Anglo cultures sometimes have obligations to extended family that increases their demands on discretionary income and influences their experience and decision-making. Women from different socioeconomic levels sometimes experience restrictions to their career path, like access to education that women with higher socioeconomic status would not (Hanson, 1994). Equally important to consider was the idea that launching children might be limited to the experience of women in Anglo cultures. For instance, the idea of launching children does not fit with the traditional Hispanic value of *familismo* that emphasizes the unity of and loyalty to the family (Sue & Sue 2003). The *familismo* belief of the Hispanic culture often results in a large close-knit extended family that is contradictory in principle to the idea of launching children into the independent life phase of adulthood. I was, therefore, very intentional

about selecting the population included in this study in order to hold some crucial variables constant.

Participants were recruited for this study using a snowball sampling method. The primary contact for the snowball recruitment was made by the investigator through an acquaintance. For those who fit the target population, contact information was provided through the acquaintance to the investigator with the women's permission. The women were then contacted via phone by the investigator and informed of the general purpose for the study. Women who fit the criteria and agreed to be interviewed were included in the study and were asked about other women whom they thought might be interested in participating. Contact was then made with other potential participants. Using the snowball method for recruitment of participants was effective in that it allowed me to find participants who were in similar phases of life and who had experience with the variables I was hoping to explore, however it was also limiting. The snowball method is intentionally narrow and so by its very nature, it lacks diversity of participants. Thus, a limitation of using the snowball methods is that the participants are not diverse. The participants of this study represented a specific cohort of women and their responses are limited to this specific group.

## **Procedure**

### ***Child care and career roles***

A collective case study was conducted using a semi-structured interview with standardized open-ended questions (Appendix A) to collect the stories of six women (Creswell, 2007). Each interview lasted between 30-50 minutes and took place at the participant's home or office. Participants were asked questions about their decision-making regarding their roles, their experience of their roles during the time they raised their children and their current situation. The

question relating to their decision-making about their roles consisted of the following: “How did you decide that you wanted to... (pursue career, be a stay-at-home mom)?” Participants’ experiences of their roles were addressed using questions like: “Reflecting on your earlier comments about which roles you wanted to fill, were you able to fill the roles you wanted to fill, to the extent to which you wanted to fill them?” , “If yes, what supported you in filling these roles?”, “If not, what challenges did you face in filling these roles?”, and “How did your relationship with your husband influence which roles you filled?” Finally, questions asking the participants to reflect on their experience and their current situation included: “How do you feel about your earlier decisions?”, “Would you make the same choices again with regards to child care and pursuing a career?”, “In what way has your relationship with your significant other changed or stayed the same since your last child moved out of your house?” and “What is your life like now?”

### ***Influence of Tradition***

Again, it was important to consider the context within which the negotiations between the participants and their husbands around childcare and careers occurred. More to the point, the degree to which the participants prescribed to and were influenced by the traditional undercurrent likely influenced their responses to interview questions, and therefore, the participants’ traditionalism was assessed. To inquire about the participants’ traditionalism, the participants were asked to describe how traditional they felt they were.

### ***Traditionalism of Relationship***

To determine how traditional the participants’ relationships were with their husbands, both the divisions of daily household and childcare tasks, as well as feelings of marital influence, were explored in the interview. The division of daily household chores and childcare tasks were

investigated by asking participants how traditional they felt their relationship with their husband was. The questions included in the interview were as follows: “Please describe to me how you and your husband divided daily household chores and how this compares to how you divide them now” and “Please describe to me how you and your husband divided daily childcare activities while your children were growing up.” The balance of marital influence in the participants’ relationships with their husbands, as perceived by the participants, were explored with questions like “How are major decisions regarding finances made?” and “Who, in your opinion, had the majority of responsibility for major decisions regarding childcare while your children were at home?” Responses to the interview questions were recorded and transcribed by the investigator for an analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed according to a template for coding described by Creswell (2007) for collective case studies. Following the transcription of the interviews, I read the manuscripts in their entirety and noted the overall impression of the interview to provide context. Then responses in each transcript were arranged into text units by question. To do this, I read each transcription and highlighted responses to each question in a different color. After color coding the transcriptions, I moved the women’s responses into an Excel file by question, in order to code the responses using categorical aggregation. Each response was then divided into specific codes, reflecting the content of each aggregate. The codes were written across the top of a work sheet and if a quotation fit the code, a number one was typed into that quotation’s row. These codes were then collapsed into themes for each interview. Once a thorough analysis of each question was done, a cross-case synthesis was completed in order to identify similarities and differences between the different case studies. Looking down a column, I compared how many

women had mentioned a specific code and what theme it reflected. From this comparison, generalizations about the participants' experiences were made and were compared to the findings in the literature.

## CHAPTER 4 - Results

The stories of the women interviewed for this study provided an in-depth exploration of what they felt influenced their decision-making around both caring for their children and pursuing their careers, their experiences of the roles they filled, and their feelings and reflections about the decisions they made along their way. I expected to find themes in the narratives of the participants related to role overload and the influence of traditional thought on their decisions and experiences. Additionally, I anticipated that the women's relationships with their husbands would influence their decisions and experiences of their roles. Themes relating to what ways the women's decisions and experiences were influenced by their relationships with their husbands, were explored. Moreover, I was looking to see if participants' satisfaction with their earlier decisions would be influenced by their experience of their roles and their movement in and out of the roles.

During the process of completing the interviews it became obvious that I had too narrowly defined "career" women and "stay-at-home moms," and that the participants' experiences were more fluid than could fit in any of the categories. As uncomfortable as I am now labeling their fluid experiences, I have fit them into categories that most resemble their experiences for the purpose of conceptualizing my results. Additionally, to capture the women's full experience and describe them accurately, I created a third category called the "dual" category that represented one participant who did not fit into either the "stay-at-home mom" category or "career" category. For the breakdown of participants based on their identities, levels of traditionalism, amounts of children, and the work positions they hold/have held; please refer to the chart in Appendix C.

## **Case Studies**

### ***Participant One***

Participant one is a 53 year old bank manager who lives in a Midwestern city with her husband of 31 years. Currently she works in the wholesale lending department of a large bank, lending money to banks in the form of mortgages. Participant one did not, however, start out in banking. She received her degree in interior architecture from a four year university and worked her way up to the vice presidency of a design firm, where she worked through the birth of her first child. At the time of the birth of her second child, her work was experiencing cut-backs and she decided to stay home with both of her children. While at home with her two children, she participated in mother-mother groups and volunteered to work at a local children's hospital. After her second child started preschool, she decided to go back to work full time. To reenter the architectural field, she would have had to start at an entry level position again. Instead she decided to enter the banking field. Because both of her children were still young when she reentered, she relied on outside childcare for three years until her daughter was old enough to baby-sit her son. Now both of her children have started college and she spends her time working and traveling.

### ***Participant Two***

Participant two is a 61-year-old self identified stay-at-home mom who has raised two biological children and one stepchild. Although participant two described herself as a stay-at-home mom, she also described two very distinct parts of her life. Participant two worked for 19 years as a computer programmer for a major cooperation. At the age of 38, she was married and worked for two more years, until she became pregnant with her first child. After the birth of her first child, she took a six week "leave of absence" that turned into a six months absence and

ultimately into her staying home permanently. This began the second distinct part of participant two's life. For the remainder of her children's youth, participant two was the main child-care provider for her children. In addition to caring for her children, she spent time volunteering at their school and caring for her and her husband's ill parents. Each of her children has left for college and she now spends time traveling with her husband and entertaining guests.

### ***Participant Three***

Participant three is a 55 year old lawyer who has raised two children and has been single for the last 10 years. Her initial goal was to become a high school social studies teacher, but when she encountered an impenetrable gender barrier, her career course was shifted and she decided to enter law school. Married to her daughter's father and with a one year old child, participant three started her program at a local law school. During the years she was in law school, her husband was not very supportive and was gone a lot. By the end of her law program, she was living separately from her first daughter's father and was divorced from him shortly after that. For a number of years, participant three was a single working parent. In her 30's, she met the man who would become her second daughter's father. They were married in 1988 and she moved to her current location, where he was offered a job. Participant three worked continuously throughout the years she was raising both daughters. After being in what she referred to as a "turbulent marriage" for 8 years, she and her second daughter's father got a divorce. Since then she has remained active, working and participating in local politics. As of the Fall 07 semester, participant three travels to visit her youngest daughter who has started at a local four year university.

### ***Participant Four***

Participant four is a 53 year old mother of two children who is married to her husband of 27 years. At the age of 26, participant four became pregnant with her first child as she was finishing up her work on a masters degree in nursing. Because they had just moved and were between jobs, neither her nor her husband's insurance had "kicked in." Funds became tight, and in order to maximize their earning, participant four decided to stay home and care for their children while her husband, who could make significantly more money than she, worked. For almost 20 years, she was the primary childcare provider, until her youngest child entered her sophomore year in high school. When this happened, participant four returned to her work as a nurse in a pediatrician's office and this is where she continues to work today. Currently, when participant four is not working, she spends her time volunteering and learning to play golf so she can spend more time with her husband.

### ***Participant Five***

Participant five is a 53 year old dietitian who works for a four year university in the housing and dining department. She is currently still married to her husband of 31 years and they have had four children together. Participant five and her husband were married right out of college, and for three and a half years, she worked as a dietitian. She continued to work after having her first child but left her job after the birth of her second child. Shortly after her decision to stay home, participant five gave birth to twins. For almost 15 years, she stayed at home to raise her children, but during this time, she also did consulting for a nursing home and worked a part-time position for a school district. Fourteen years ago she was offered a position as a dietitian at a four year university and has been working there ever since. All of her four children

are currently working on varying levels of college degrees at different universities. Currently, participant five spends time with her husband and friends and works at her job.

### ***Participant Six***

Participant six is a 55 year old stay-at-home mom who has been married to her husband since they met 35 years ago. After their marriage she worked for nine years in an office job until she had her first child in 1981. Participant six described always wanting to be married and have children, and through the course of 26 years, she raised three children as a stay-at-home mom. In addition to raising her children, participant three spent her time volunteering at her children's schools and being involved in charity events. Recently her youngest child left to attend a four year university and she spends her time traveling to visit him and her other children.

## **Cross-Case Synthesis**

### ***Traditionalism***

The participants varied significantly in how much they subscribed to the ideas of traditionalism but two women described having very strong feelings relating to their level of traditionalism. Participant three commented "*those kinds of traditional roles are...make me physically ill [laughs] seriously I just...uh, yuck I'd rather be dead.*" On the other end of the spectrum, participant six said "*We're very traditional, yeah very very traditional.*" The majority of the participants, however, seemed to fall between the extremes in how much they prescribed to traditionalism. They would comment that they felt "*pretty traditional*" or "*mostly nontraditional*" but did not have as strong of a reaction as the other two.

Equally as varying was how traditional the participants described their relationships with their husbands as. Of the six women interviewed, participants two, four, and six described themselves as "traditional", participants three and five as "nontraditional", and participant one as

“middle of the road traditional”. Two of the three women who described their relationship as traditional were “stay-at-home moms” (participant four and participant six), while the third fit the “dual” identify category (participant two). The remaining three women were “career” women (participants one, three, and five), and described their relationship as “nontraditional” or “middle of the road traditional.” Many of the participants went into further description recounting certain aspects of their relationship that were traditional and other aspects that were nontraditional.

Participant one described her relationship as “middle of the road traditional” and explained that, although she and her husband shared childcare responsibilities and split up the domestic chores, they were still traditional in their division of these chores. She said, “*Still, the traditional things of cooking, and laundry and things like that, I do, and him doing the more physical yard work and that kind of stuff.*” Participant five described herself as nontraditional and laughed as she explained that she went “on strike” during the beginning of her marriage because her husband had tried being traditional: “*When we were first married, he tried it, I went on strike.*” She explained that, while it was “*probably not a very mature thing to do,*” it had its desired effect and he started to help with domestic work.

When talking about their level of traditionalism, many of the women spoke about how they negotiated finances in their marriage. Participant one said that she and her husband had maintained separate bank accounts throughout their marriage and were individually responsible for certain bills. The remaining women explained that they had joint accounts with their husbands, but they varied in their access to the joint accounts. Of the women who shared finances with their husbands, participant two and participant five explicitly stated that they made their financial decisions together with their husbands. Participant two stated, “*If there’s ever any major decision to be made, we talk it over,*” while participant five elaborated on her answer with

*“when we were first starting out our salaries were very equal so we didn’t ever have any of that ‘well I make more money than you’ kind of stuff. We’ve never done the separate checking accounts. Everything was ours together. Decisions were made together.”* The remaining women described a less collaborative approach to managing finances. Participant four described having relative freedom to spend money how she saw fit but also indicated that her husband would have the ultimate say: *“If I were just a shopaholic and would purchase a whole bunch of stuff, I think he’d probably, it would change.”* Participant six explained that *“he always handled all the money and I always had all that I needed but he would kind of monitor my spending. He was fairly conservative on that.”*

In summary, the participants varied in the amount to which they subscribed to traditionalism and in how traditional their relationship with their husband were. The two women who fit the “stay-at-home mom” category and the one woman who fit the “dual” category described themselves as “traditional” and had more traditional relationships with their husbands. The “career” women described themselves as “non-traditional” with a more “nontraditional,” domestically collaborative relationship with their husbands, with the exception of one who described herself and her relationship with her husband as “middle of the road traditional.”

### ***Factors in Decision-Making about Careers and Staying at Home***

To inquire about how the women made their decision to stay at home, pursue a career, or do both, they were asked what had influenced their decisions. The most common response to this question was that finances were in some way involved in their decision to stay home, pursue a career, or do both. Participant one stated, *“I really enjoyed the fact that my husband’s career was where it was when my son was born, so that I could stay home at that point. We felt like we could afford it, and I got to have time with him.”* Participant two explained, *“I was so big on*

*security I was really having a problem with giving that (job) up. And when I talked to my husband about it, he said, 'Don't worry about the financial situation. I have no problem with you giving up your job if that's what you want to do.'*” The majority of the women explained that before they could stay at home, it was important that they be financially sound. Thus the decisions that women made which moved them out of their jobs and into their home, were in some way dependent on their ability to be financially stable. For other women, the decision was financial in the sense of who made the most money and if it was financially valuable for the woman to work instead of care for the children. Participant five explained why she decided to quit her job to care for her children: *“Financially, to pay for child care for two children, I couldn't make enough money to make it profitable.”* Participant four explained that her husband could make her monthly salary in one weekend and that she *“thought eventually I would probably go back, but we were only going to be there a year and the amount of money I would make was ridiculous. You know, like that's so stupid, he could work one day and then you don't have to worry about any of that stuff.”* Finally, for participant three the decision to begin and stay in a high status occupation was financially based. She commented *“I had a tremendous amount of ambition because I grew up in very humble circumstances and I was very extremely anxious to raise my station in life.”* She continued, *“I needed to do something as far as being able to earn a living and have a career.”* For most of the participants, finances were involved in their decision-making.

An equally common response given by participants to answer what they felt influenced their decision-making was that they felt they were the best quality childcare option for their children. Participant one commented, *“I felt like if I would've continued to work when she'd (daughter) come home after school, she'd just kind of be sitting in front of a television all*

afternoon until I got home. So that was another decision, it was kind of, we didn't find something that we thought was a good alternative for her." Others like participant two were concerned about the well-being of their children: "I would look in her eyes and I'd think you couldn't tell me if somebody did something to you." Participant four and participant five, who had also commented that they were the best child care option, reasoned that they would miss out on caring for their children and that they did not want to spend less time with their children than their childcare provider.

Another interesting theme common among the participants' answer was how unintentional their decision to stay home was. Some of the women talked about how things "*fell into place*" or that they "*didn't consciously decide that.*" Participant four explained that she had never expected to become a stay-at-home mom, stating "*I always intended to work. I never thought I would be a stay-at-home mom.*" Participant six commented that she was "*kind of at the end of that era where you just, that was just how we did it.*" She also continued on mentioning that her father had also influenced her decision; "*I would say my dad was a big influence. He felt very strongly that, if you had children, you should stay home with them.*" Only one woman (participant one) ran counter to the idea of unintentional decisions when she spoke about the intentional discussions related to childcare she and her husband had before their children were born. These responses were given as example of what had influenced their decision-making and reflect a diversity of influence even within the same theme.

In the narratives describing what influenced participants' decisions about their childcare and career roles, a few spoke about the concern of missing out on something. This was the final theme in the narratives addressing this question. The women mentioned that at the time of their decisions, they worried that they would miss out on something. Participant one questioned if she

would miss her career; *“I felt like that, if I quit and stayed at home, I would always wonder, what could I have done, what was I missing?”* Other themes of missing out described by the participants related to missing out on their children. Participant five, who had worked through the infancy of her first baby, explained *“I missed not being home with the kids and I didn’t want to miss that with the second one.”*

### ***Participants’ Ability to Fill Roles***

During the interviews I inquired about whether or not the women felt they were able to fill the roles they wanted to, to the extent they wanted to, and what their experience of these roles had been. Four of the six women said that they were able to fill all the roles they wanted to, to the extent they wanted to. Those who had felt they were able to fill the roles they wanted to fill were asked what had supported them in this. Two (participants five and six) of the four women answered that they had a supportive network of family and friends. Participant five described an uncommonly close neighborhood that supported each other and helped each other out: *“I think having that support in the neighborhood really made a difference. And you knew you had each other there if there was an emergency and our kids knew they could go trust these other parents if something came up.”* Participant one described the importance of getting together with other mothers who also had small children for support.

Interestingly, it was participant three and participant four who commented that they had not been able to fill the roles they wanted to. Both women indicated that the main role they filled prevented them from giving time to other roles. For example, participant four explained that the time she spent taking her kids to tennis lessons prevented her from doing much else. All of the women, including those who felt they could fill the roles they wanted to fill, expanded on what they had found particularly challenging about filling their roles. Two of the career women

(participants three and five) spoke about how it was hard to balance the roles and that sometimes they had to give things up. However, participant five said that it was worth giving them up; *“Sometimes you just have to give stuff up that you may be enjoying, but it may be worth the trade off.”* Participant three was somewhat less positive about the trade off she had to make, stating *“I feel that my career would have been vastly different if I had not had children...I do have a few friends who are childless and their careers are different, and they’ve been able to achieve more. They’ve been able to devote more time to their professions in many different ways.”* Participant four and participant five spoke regrettably about not taking enough time for themselves. Participant four specifically described her involvement with her children’s many activities and how it had taken the majority of her time: *“People put their kids in all the little activities and you think it’s good for them and it keeps them out of trouble and then your kid kind of excels in it so then you go to the premier or whatever and then your life gets eaten up.”* Participant five commented, *“not taking care of yourself or building that down time in that, that time with other women. Um, and I fell into that.”* For these women, this seemed to be the most challenging part of fulfilling their roles.

Women fitting the “career” women identity, the “stay-at-home” mom identity, and the “dual” identity described being able to fill the roles they wanted to. For those who felt they were unable to fill the roles they wanted to (a “career” woman and a “stay-at-home” mom), spending a lot of time in one role influenced their ability to fill the other roles in their life they wanted to fill.

### ***Husbands’ Influence on Decision-Making and Experience of Roles***

When the participants were asked more specifically about how their relationship with their husbands had influenced their decisions around careers and childcare, the women seemed to fit into two different categories; the group whose husbands were supportive, open-minded, and

collaborative, and those whose husbands were more inflexible and rigid in the roles they were willing to fill. Comments of participants one, two, five and six reflected themes of how the support of their husbands had influenced their decisions. Participant five described the influence of her husband as follows: *“My husband was supportive of either way.”* She continues, *“We had a lot of discussions about how to divide things up.”* Participant one offered, *“We had a real good chance before (birth of child) of discussing all of those things, of discussing who was going to be in charge of getting up in the middle of the night and who was going to do the housework.”*

Interestingly, both women mentioned that their husbands participated in the childcare duties, but only participant one described her husband as *“excited about having children and really want(ing) to be a big participant in the raising of the children.”* Participant six explained that her husband never *“wanted me to go back to work so we could buy more things or have a different you know, so I never had that pressure.”* Like participants one and five, she experienced support in her decisions and this influenced her decision to stay at home with her children. When talking about her husband, participant two described, *“He just let me know that financially we would be okay, and that he had no problem with my staying at home, but that he just couldn’t influence me one way or the other.”*

The remaining women, participant three and participant four, described husbands who varied in their level of rigidity, but were nonetheless inflexible and not as “supportive” as the husbands described by the other women. Participant three stated during the interview that she *“knew he was not someone who would be, you know, be Ward Cleaver and get up and go to work and let me stay home and bake cookies.”* Her comment was a part of a larger conversation on how her relationship with her first husband had influenced her decision to continue working even after she had children. She also made very specific mention that she did not want her first

husband or anyone else to “*take care*” of her but indicated that her husband’s lack of help in the domestic domain was in part, responsible for her first divorce. Participant four indicated that as long as she was able to fulfill her domestic role as well as pursue her career, her husband would not have minded her working. However, she commented;

*“I don’t know what would have happened if I would have said I’m unhappy and I want to go back to work. I think he would have supported that. However in fairness, I don’t think he, it prob, it would have put a lot more hassle on him so he probably. If I’d worked part time and could do all the stuff that he couldn’t do at home, or didn’t want to do, or whatever the deal is, that probably would have influenced him, and he probably would have tried to talk me out of it, I guess. But If I just wanted to do it part time I don’t think he would have. I think he would have been fine.”*

Participant four’s comment indicates that the roles she wanted to fill coincided with the roles that her husband wanted her to fill but that she was unsure how he would have reacted had her wishes been different from his.

To summarize, the participants fit into two different groups: those whose husbands were described as very supportive of the participants’ choices and those whose husbands were more rigid about the division of labor within their relationship. The groups were not divided based on their “career” women or “stay-at-home” mom identities. Some “career” women, “stay-at-home” moms, and the “dual” identity participant described their husbands as supportive. Equally as important to note is that two participants, one who fit into the “career” woman identity and one in the “stay-at-home” mom identity, often described their husbands as inflexible in the division of labor.

After speaking broadly about the experiences of their roles, the women were asked to speak more specifically about how their relationship with their husbands had influenced their experience of their roles. Much like their husbands’ influence on their decision-making, the women seemed to fall into two different categories: those whose husbands had been helpful and involved in the domestic side and those whose husbands were not involved in the domestic work.

When the men did not participate in the domestic work, they were described as instead spending their time working and traveling for work. Only two (participants one and five) of the six women interviewed, mentioned that their husbands had been very involved with the childcare and domestic work. Participant five commented, *“When I was working, I went to work at 6:30 in the morning so he had the responsibility of getting our oldest daughter up and out of bed and dressed and to child care and I picked her up mid afternoon. So we were willing to split those kinds of responsibilities. But even after I was a stay-at-home mom, we still spit responsibilities. He gave the baths, cause by night time I was done. I was like who uhuh, I’m out.”* Participant one offered, *“He would get up in the middle of the night...feed bottles, we would kind of discuss it that night, ‘well I’ve got a big presentation tomorrow, I really need my sleep’ or ‘I’ve got a tough day tomorrow, I’ve got a bunch of people coming to the office, so you need to tonight.’ So we were real communicative in the beginning on that.”* These two women spoke positively about their experience and the support they received from their husbands.

Four of the women (participants two, three, four, and six) whose husbands did not participate in the childcare but instead spent the majority of their time working, commented that it had been hard because their husbands were *“gone a lot”* and they were left to do a lot of it themselves. Specifically, participant four commented, *“My problem was more, my husband was gone a lot, so I was doing it a lot by myself.”* Participant six said, *“He kinda left and didn’t really fulfill his obligations here, maybe a little bit. Especially with the last two, and um, so that caused, you know, those were kind of bumpy times.”* She went further, stating that it was even more challenging for her because, *“He would come back and tell me what I was doing wrong with the kids and (laughs) I didn’t like that.”* For her, not only did her husbands’ scarcity influence her experience in a negative manner, but her husbands’ evaluation of how she was

raising her children negatively influenced her experience. Participant three, whose husband was gone a lot commented, *“He was gone for his work and what not and, because of his absences, he quite literally was not around to do anything, so I always was the primary person responsible for domestic duties.”* Additionally, she elaborated on the difficulties of maintaining a career while also being the primary childcare provider; *“My child-rearing years were extremely difficult and challenging a lot of the time, especially since I didn’t have a good...husband.”* Earlier in the interview she described what she meant by a good husband stating, *“who was good around the house and you know, pitched in when I needed him to, that sort of thing.”* For this participant, like the other women whose husbands were gone, her relationship with her husband had a negative effect on her experience of her roles.

### ***Earlier Decisions***

As a part of their contemplation on their experiences, the women were also asked to reflect and comment about how they felt about their earlier decisions. Interestingly, four (participants one, two, five, and six) of the six women commented that they had no regrets with regards to their earlier decisions about their roles. Both participant one and five, who said they had no regrets, also explained that they felt like they had not missed out on anything, including both with their kids and with their careers. Participant one stated, *“I don’t have any resentment on my career or as a mother or any of that.”* Participant five commented, *“I can’t say that I have regrets. I certainly have no regrets about being a stay-at-home mom. I went back to work when the twins were in Kindergarten, but I only worked part time then.”* The third woman who described having no regrets (participant two), was the “dual” identity woman, and she commented, *“I spent so much time there (in a career) before I got married and my kids were born. I got a good taste of that. So it’s not something that I haven’t experienced and I think that*

*has made a difference too.*” Although participant six mentioned she had no regrets about her decision to stay at home, she did mention that she regretted not finishing her degree: *“I wish I had gotten my degree and had that as more of a priority, but I think I didn’t have a real career path in mind so it just never made sense to really go back..”* Interestingly, the same woman spoke often about the different advice she sometimes offered her daughter about relationships. She explained, *“I was always telling my daughter, ‘you might as well find someone who likes to cook,’ I think it’d be fun to not be in there by myself all the time.”* Reflecting on her earlier decisions seemed to play a part in the future this woman wanted for her daughter as well as her current situation. She also commented that at times, *“I’m kind of jealous of her. She’s doing what I probably should have done but you know that’s fine.”* She elaborated further saying that, if she had the opportunity she would have liked to study graphic design: *“If I had know about that, I could have worked at an advertising agency and do graphic design and computer stuff, of course, but, back then that wasn’t really... so...you know... I might have felt differently.”*

When asked to reflect on the path they took to their current situation, two (participants three and four) of the women questioned their earlier decisions. Participant four contemplated, *“Knowing what I know now, would I work as a nurse, you know, nurse practitioner or something like that, um, when my kids were growing up? I don’t know.”* Participant three also questioned if she would have taken the same path: *“Sometimes I wonder if I had known how hard it was going to be, if I would have started it.”*

Reflecting on their current situations, all of the women indicated that they were happy and less stressed than they were when their children were at home. They spoke about having more free time to “just goof off” and to do more socializing. Only participant six stated that having her children gone was *“a little depressing, you know just quite.”* She elaborated further

stating that *“it’s weird having to go back and putting yourself first,”* and that *“it’s just a different phase.”* Although she spoke about it being a little depressing, she also spoke about it in a positive way stating, *“I would say empty nest is probably a good thing for us, but I think our kids think, ‘oh they’re gonna be so sad that we’re gone.’ But we’re really not that sad (laughs).”* The words used by the other participants to describe their current situation were *“freedom”* and being *“spontaneous,”* and all of the women commented on being content and active. Many mentioned traveling to see their children, being active in the community through charity work, and being politically involved by serving on boards.

When the women were asked specifically if and how their relationships with their husbands had changed since their children moved from their houses, most commented that their relationships had gotten better and that they were able to spend more time with their husbands. Interestingly, four (participants one, four, five, and six) of the six women spoke about having to “reconnect” with their husbands. Participant five said, *“you do kind of have to reconnect. There’s no doubt about it. It’s very different, but it’s been really good.”* Participant six elaborated on what helped her and her husband reconnect, stating *“I think just kind of focusing back on each other and yeah, the kids, um, some of the difficulties or, you know arguments we would have over raising the kids, that’s gone away.”* No longer having conflict over how to raise their children allowed participant six the opportunity to reconnect with her husband.

Although there was a wide variety of responses given by the participants, themes emerged within the different stories. The themes that emerged, however, were not linked with the identity of the participants. Similar themes emerged in the stories of the “career” women, the “stay-at-home” mom, and the “dual” identity participants alike. More than just the participants’

identity, how “traditional” both the participants and their relationships with their husbands were, influenced the themes that emerged.

## **CHAPTER 5 - Discussion**

### **Legacy of Traditional Thought**

The analysis of the interview responses showed themes that were consistent with the predictions of the study. The first prediction, which received some support, was the idea that the legacy of traditional thought would influence both the women's decisions and the women's experiences related to their childcare and careers roles. Three of the six women outwardly described themselves as traditional and that their relationships with their husbands were traditional. Participant six explained that her father's traditional belief about woman's roles, that woman with children she should stay home, had influenced her decision to stay home with her children. This was a description of a very overt influence of traditionalism. For the remaining women, the influence of traditionalism was somewhat more covert. The women who described themselves as nontraditional, also described patterns of traditional influence in their narratives, but did not state that they considered themselves traditional. Participant one described that, because of her husband's involvement in childcare, she considered her relationship with her husband nontraditional. However, she also added that she and her husband still divided the chores of the house in a traditional manner. Thus, the legacy of traditional thought may have influenced her to a lesser degree, but it did so nonetheless. Also demonstrating the influence of the traditional undercurrent and consistent with the literature (e.g. Farmer, 1997), participant five intentionally chose her occupation because of its flexibility. She explained that she selected her field because it would accommodate her taking time to care for her children. Here again, the participant was covertly influenced by traditionalism. Her feelings of responsibility for caring for

her children guided her movement into a family friendly career long before her children were even born.

Another way that many of the women were indirectly influenced by traditionalism related to the period of time these women were making their decisions. Many of the women referenced in one way or another during the interview, the societal context within which their decisions were made. Participant three commented that the reason she became a lawyer was because of an earlier encounter with gender discrimination. Her movement into the legal field was an attempt to overcome the gender barrier and be involved in the political activism of the time. Participant six referenced the period of time as the reason she stayed home, stating that it was “*kind of at the end of that era where you just, that was just how we did it.*” This participant referred to the norm of her societal context that influenced her decision in the direction of traditionalism.

Interestingly, the same woman later in the interview also spoke of wanting to be a graphic designer and that she would have liked to pursue a career if she had been given the opportunity. Her reflections on her decisions seem to indicate a very subtle influence of traditionalism, because were she not denied the opportunity by traditionalism, she might have pursued graphic design. This experience in particular is a good example of how social interactions influence decision-making. Participant six in some way or another received messages from her social context that there was a particular way to do things, and so that is how she did them.

### ***Intentional and Unintentional Decision-Making***

The theme of unintentional decision-making also identifies the undercurrent of traditional thought. Decisions that are often less thought out are more easily influenced by covert processes. Because one must really be thoughtful in order to identify a covert process and making an unintentional decision implies being limited in one’s thoughtfulness about a decision, it can often

be concluded that covert processes can be involved in decisions without awareness that they are involved. The idea that, “*that’s just how we did it*” implies a lack of questioning and lack of looking at possible alternatives. Unintentional decisions left some participants with limited options and this is the how the legacy of tradition retains its influence: not only through an active campaign of traditionalism but through a covert process of unawareness and unintentional decision-making.

The most consistent theme among all of the participants did not relate to what was said, but what was not said. Again, this was an example of a very covert influence of the traditional undercurrent. None of the women explained that their husbands had ever considered staying home with their children. The women varied in their movement in and out of roles but the roles of the husbands remained stable. Even though some of the husbands helped at home, there was an unspoken understanding that the husbands would fill the primary career role. The experiences of the women in this study support the idea described in the literature that women, not men, are the only ones faced with the choice to stay home or pursue a career (Olarde 2000).

Interestingly, participant one explained that she believed the definition of “traditional” had changed. She considered herself to be very nontraditional for her era, however participant one explained that she realized current perceptions of her might be that she was traditional. This comment was very important because it identified the importance of acknowledging the researcher as a research tool in the study and recognizing potential generational biases that influence the interpretation of the data. Because I am a young woman and I am from a different generation, I might interpret the participants as being more traditional than they would. Acknowledging this limits the conclusions that I can draw as the researcher. Thus, I feel

confident in concluding that traditionalism did influence the women, but can not draw specific conclusions about how traditional the women were beyond their actual descriptions.

To summarize, whether directly or indirectly, the legacy of traditional thought influenced the women's decision-making. Some women described being outwardly told what women should do but others described more covert influences. Interestingly, for a few of the participants, their decisions to stay home or work were linked to their level of traditionalism. In other words, for one "stay-at-home mom" the decision to stay home was linked with her being very traditional, and for one "career" woman the decision to work was linked with her being very nontraditional. For the other participants, however, their level of traditionalism did not seem to influence whether or not they were a "career" woman or a "stay-at-home mom".

### **Role Overload**

One prediction of this study that was not completely supported by the data was that the participants would experience role overload, that this would influence their movement in and out of their roles, and subsequently this would negatively influence their satisfaction with their decisions. Many of the women involved in both career and childcare roles reported role overload and commented that it was "hard to balance" their different roles. Additionally, many made the decisions to prioritize one role at a time by taking breaks from their careers to care for their children. The movement of the participants in an out of these roles is consistent with the literature that describes how women alter their current situations to accommodate new roles like motherhood (Betz, 2006). Although the data collected supported that the participants did experience role overload when they were involved in both career and domestic work and that the role overload helped move them in and out of the roles, it did not support a negative influence on the participant's satisfaction with their decisions during the reflection process. Even though

many of the women moved in and out of their career and childcare roles because of role overload, a majority of the women reported being satisfied with their earlier decisions. Moreover, those who spoke wishfully about their regrets did not seem to be negatively influenced as they reflected on their earlier decisions. None mentioned being upset that they were unable to fill roles. They just seemed accepting that that was the way it was.

### **Influence of Husbands**

The final projection of this study, that the women's relationships with their husbands would influence their decisions and experiences related to their career and childcare roles, was in part supported by the data. When asked how their relationship with their husbands influenced their decisions, a few of the women reported that their husbands liked the traditional division of labor and that this had played a part in their career decisions. Many of the women described themselves as being "*gung-ho career*" and never expecting to stay at home with their children for any length of time. This changed when they were married and had children. This indicates that the women's relationships with their husbands influenced their decisions. The women's relationships with their husbands played a role in their decision-making but it might have served more as a reaffirmation of decisions already made, instead of being a catalyst for new ones. Reflecting on the interviews in their entirety, it seems that some of the women knew on some level what path they wanted to take in their lives and chose husbands that would match this. Thus, fleshing out how the extent to which husbands actually influenced the women's decision-making and how to what degree the women chose their husbands to fit their already intended path can not be done using these narratives.

The narratives do, however, seem to concretely support that the women's husbands did influence their experiences of their roles. A few of the women commented on the support and

help provided to them by their husbands and indicated that this had helped their experience of their roles. Others spoke about the challenges they experienced by having their husbands gone and indicated that, because their husbands were gone so frequently, they were “*quite literally was not around to do anything.*” As described earlier, participant three’s relationship with both of her husbands ended at least in part because of her husbands’ negative influence on her experience of her roles. Whether the women spoke about their husband’s being supportive or not being around much, the women definitely described their husbands as influencing their experiences.

### **Redefining the Participants**

One of the most striking developments that resulted from the interview process was the necessary shift in how I defined participants as “stay-at-home moms” or “career” women before the interviews and how I now define them as I write this summary. The definition of who is a “stay-at-home mom” and who is a “career” woman was much more fluid than was defined before the interviews. For the participants of the study, the decision to care for their children or pursue a career was not a one-time decision. Instead, the women made continual decisions that moved them in and out of career and childcare roles in a much more sinuous manner than was defined by the original more rigid definitions of “stay-at-home moms” and “career” women. Thus, the initial definition of a “career” woman and a “stay-at-home mom” did not apply and the influence of my biases as the researcher became evident. Being a young woman with no children and limited experience, I assumed as I developed the study that it was a one time decision women made. This was not the case. Instead, it was a series of decisions. Without having been through the process myself, I was unaware of this and did not consider it in my original definitions. When asked, the participants would define themselves as one or the other, but during

the interview, they would describe experiences that fit both the definition of a “career” women and a “stay-at-home mom.” Participant one stated, “*(I) had worked my way up to being a vice president of a firm and I really enjoyed my work. So, when I had my first child, it was a girl, and her name was Beth<sup>2</sup>, and I had decided I wanted to continue to work because I was enjoying my job so much and everything.*” The same participant, however, also stated later in the interview “*so I decided to stay home with him (second child) and ended up really enjoying it.*” This participant had experiences that fit the original definitions for both the “career” women and the “stay-at-home mom” categories but was ultimately included in the “career” woman group.

Additionally, the earlier definitions of “career” women and “stay-at-home moms” linked nontraditional division of labor with the “career” woman identity and the traditional division of labor with the “stay-at-home mom” identity. This also was much too rigid. Participant two described a nontraditional division of childcare saying “*he would come home some evenings and he would just look at me and he’d say, ‘Just go to the mall or walk around and do something, just get out of the house.’ So he was really good at helping care for the kids when they were real little.*” Also, a nontraditional division of labor was not linked with the “career” woman identity. Participant three was still dominantly responsible for the domestic work and childcare while working in a career. She commented that, while she was going through school, “*I would study at night while I was in the laundry room washing her diapers, because there was no such thing as disposable diapers back then.*” This participant was working but was also primarily responsible for caring for her children.

In this study, only one woman fully fit the original “career” women category (participant three). She described consecutive employment in a traditionally high status occupation while

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<sup>2</sup> Name changed to protect confidentiality of participant

raising her children. Although five of the six women stayed at home with their children for at least part of their children's youth, only one woman fully fit the original "stay-at-home mom" category (participant six). It occurred to me that the definitions I used were dichotomous and unrealistic and that the women, who fit the original definitions might actually be the exception. Thus, in the interest of depicting reality accurately, I have readjusted the criteria for dividing the participants to better match the reality of their lives. "Stay-at-home moms" were defined as women who lived mainly as traditional stay-at-home moms in a family-centered situation and did not work at any point in a high-status occupation. "Career" women were more broadly defined as those who had at one point in their lives worked in a high-status occupation, and had at that time, tried to make it a central focus of their life. Three of the six participants fit this description (participants one, three, and five). Consistent with the literature (Perrone, Webb, and Blalock, 2005; Yoder, 1999, (as cited in Betz 2006)), these women, although considered "career" women, experienced breaks in their careers and spent some time at home with their children. What makes them "career" women with breaks in their careers, instead of "stay-at-home moms" with jobs, is that at one point in their lives they were interested in and pursued a position in a high-status occupation.

As was previously stated, there was a lot of cross-over between the participants' domestic and work lives. However participant two described an experience that fit both the new "career" and "stay-at-home mom" identities. She stated, *"I was older when I had my kids and I had worked myself to a position. I thought I probably would never have children, I just threw everything I had into my job."* She continued on saying, *"The thought that kept running through my mind was 'you thought for so long you would never have a family. Why don't you enjoy your family.'"* She finally ended her explanation with *"The time that I worked before my kids were*

*born sometimes, in some cases, is a longer career than people have just out in the work force.”*

Although her experience is somewhat similar to the “career” women, she was not included in the “career” woman because of the very definite division of the two parts of her life, *“I had that part of my life, and now I’ve had this part of my life.”* For the other women, often there was movement in and out of roles throughout their life times. This was not the case for her. The different parts of her life were very rigidly defined. For this reason, this particular participant did not entirely fit into any of the identities and a third identity (“dual”) was created for her.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are mainly related to its sample population. Because this study included only six women, who were purposefully selected for their demographics, the results can not be widely generalized. Caucasian women, who are a part of the mid- to upper middle class, may be the only group of people for whom these narratives offer insight. Unfortunately, this is representative of a dynamic common in the literature. A majority of the literature in this area only focuses on the experiences of upper/middle class Caucasian women and can misrepresent them as the experiences of all women. Thus my study might also misrepresent the experiences of the participants as those of all women. It is important to note then, that the experiences described in the narratives of this study reflect a very limited group of women and not all women as a collective group. This study does not address the difference in experience related to the diversity of socioeconomic status, marital status, race and ethnicity. Another short coming of this study is that no member checks were done. Interpretations of the participants’ experiences were not returned to the participants to assess their accuracy. This leaves them open to researcher bias. In order to check for accuracy of descriptions, future studies should include member checks. Member checks would offer the participants the opportunity to

challenge inaccurate descriptions, further explain their responses, and add anything they thought of after the interview ended.

Finally, other limitations to this study might be related to the division of who was a “career” woman and who was a “stay-at-home mom.” Since the participants were organized into their categories retrospectively, equal numbers of the “dual” identity participants were not included in the study. This study would have offered even more in sight, had more narratives been from women who fit the “dual” identity category. It is important to note that in spite of these limitations, the study offers enough of a glimpse into the participants’ experiences to draw some conclusions about their experiences.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Future investigations should compare women’s experiences cross-culturally and cross-socioeconomic status. If the themes found in this study emerged in a cross-cultural or cross-socioeconomic status analysis, they would be further solidified and more generalizable to women as a collective group. Thus, areas for future research would look to see if the same themes emerge in more diverse groups of women and what differences exist in their experiences. This would add even more insight into the decision-making process explored in this study. For instance, women of lower socioeconomic status may be limited in the choices they are able to make. Simply put, they may not have had the option of choosing between pursuing a career or staying home with their children. Instead, they may be working out of necessity and because they have no alternatives. Exploring how having limited options influences women’s decisions and experience of their roles as well as their relationship with their husbands would be informative. Additionally, contrasting the experiences of single mothers versus married mothers would also inform the experiences of women as a collective whole. Single mothers may have to fill all of the

roles at once and would experience their roles very differently than those who had help from a spouse. Finally, including women of color in an analysis would provide a fuller description of women's experiences during decision making by incorporating other types of racial and ethnic roles women might fill that draw on their resources.

Future research should also focus specifically on the process of how women select their husbands and if, whether intentionally or through a more covert process they choose their husbands to match their intended path. Studies looking at how explicit or implicit conversations about roles were prior to and during the early years of marriage would offer insight into how intentional women's decision-making was and might better highlight the process through which husbands influence women's decision-making. Another area for future investigation might be looking at what were some of the unexpected things that influenced women's decision-making. Finally, this study found that the discrepancy between the roles to which women aspire and the roles they actually filled was important. Exploring how this role congruency is linked with happiness and what influence it would have on women and their husbands would offer insight into the process and experience of decision-making.

### **Implications for Therapy**

Exploring the influence of intentional decision-making, as it relates to the division of labor in romantic relationships, would help inform clinicians of yet another area to address when working with premarital couples. If it is true that making intentional decisions about the division of labor is linked with more satisfaction at a later point of reflection, this would be an essential thing for clinicians to process with clients during marriage preparation. Having the couple scale their levels of traditionalism would highlight differences and increase self-awareness, allowing them to make intentional decisions about what they will do as a couple.

This study can also inform clinical work with couples who are struggling with conflict resolution. Helping clinical couples identify processes of conflict in which one person is upset with the other over issues related to the division of labor or differences in traditionalism would make the covert overt and potentially help to resolve the conflict. Moreover, exploring what expectations each member of the couple had at the onset of their marriage, what expectations were met or not met, and how this affects their relationship, would help couples resolve this conflict. Processing this dynamic would provide the clients with more self-awareness and an opportunity to connect through the process of identifying expectations and working on compromises.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The most interesting thing I uncovered in this study was the fluidity of the participants' movement in and out of their roles. I attempted to fit them into narrow categories that simplified their complicated experiences. Reflecting on both my findings and the work I did constructing the literature review, it makes sense to me why I made this oversight. A majority of the literature in this area of research simplifies women's complex experiences in order to draw conclusions from them. These findings are then used to construct what appear to be absolute categories of women. Following the definitive manner of the literature I originally used a more narrow approach than could accurately depict the participants' experiences. Their stories provided a much fuller description of their experiences and shed some light on the grey areas left hidden by the black and white approach of some of the literature. In order to capture these shades of grey, I had to make some readjustments during the study. Had I approached the results from a positivist perspective instead of my social constructionist perspective, I would have been lost in the data. Thus, my social constructionist foundation allowed me to readjust my approach in order to

accommodate the complication and complexity of women's experiences. It is hoped that the present research will advance the field of study of women and their roles by reminding us just how complicated the lived of women truly are.

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## Appendix A - Script for Interview

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for taking some time today to answer my questions. Your responses will be so helpful for me in completing my thesis. Before we start, I have a consent form for you to read and sign that explains what this is and your rights as a participant. If you have any questions for me please feel free to ask.

Participant:

Reviews/Signs consent form.

Interviewer:

Let me just reiterate that you are under no obligation to participate in this study and that at any point if you decide you do not want to answer a question it is your right to refuse. If you have no questions or concerns for me we'll get started.

1. Please tell me a little about your family. (How many children do you have? How long have you been in Kansas?)
2. What goals did you have, when you were young, relating to having a career or having children?
3. How did you decide that you wanted to .... (pursue career, be a stay-at-home mom)?
4. Were you able to (pursue your career, be a stay-at-home mom) to the extent you wanted to?
5. What challenges did you face (pursuing your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?
6. What supported you in (pursuing your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?
7. If you experienced (pursuing your career, being a stay-at-home mom) as conflicting, what helped you in balancing this conflict?"
8. How did your relationship with your husband influence your decision to (pursuing your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?

9. How satisfied were you with (your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?
10. How did your relationship with your husband influence how satisfied you were with (your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?
11. Would you make the same choices again with regards to (pursuing your career, being a stay-at-home mom)?
12. In what way has your relationship with your significant other changed or stayed the same since your last child moved out of your house?
13. In what ways have your roles changed since your children moved out?
14. How satisfied are you with your current situation?
15. Please describe to me how you and your husband divided daily household chores while your children were growing up. How does this compare to how you divide them now?
16. Who, in your opinion, has the majority of responsibility for major decisions regarding finances?
17. Please describe to me how you and your husband divided daily child care activities while your children were growing up.
18. Who, in your opinion, had the majority of responsibility for major decisions regarding child care while your children were at home?
19. How much do you feel you subscribe to traditionalism?
20. How traditional do you believe your relationship with your husband is?
21. After completing this interview, would you alter or amend any of your earlier responses?
- 22.

Do you have any questions for me? How do you feel about the interview? If anything questions come up that you would like to talk about, please feel free to call me. Thank you again for your help.

## Appendix B - Informed Consent Document

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

### INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

PROJECT TITLE: Women: their careers and their families

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_ EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Anthony P. Jurich, PhD., Lindsay Ruddick, BS

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Lindsay Ruddick (785) 532-6984

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt  
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects  
1 Fairchild Hall  
Kansas State University  
785-532-3224

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: School of Family Studies and Human Services

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: To investigate women's decision making around their careers and their families, how they experience both, and how their relationship with their husbands influences both.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Face to face interview with principle investigator (Lindsay Ruddick)

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:  
N/A

LENGTH OF STUDY: The survey is expected to take approximately 30-60 minutes. You may omit any item you do not wish to answer, and you may drop out of the study at any time.

RISKS ANTICIPATED: There is little to risk anticipated. If you feel upset about anything discussed during the interview and you wish to talk with someone about your emotions, you may call

Lindsay Ruddick (785-532-6984) for a referral to a professional counselor in your area.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: It may be helpful to reflect upon your experience and your current situation

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: The information you share with me will be confidential. While the words you say may be used in a description of this research for publication or in a conference publication, your name will never appear in connection with the research, and any description of you would be very general (e.g., 40 year old career woman). All data will be stored in a secure location and destroyed after completion of the study, which is expected in December 2007.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: N/A

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: N/A

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.**

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

**(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant**

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

**Participant  
Signature:**

Witness to Signature: (project  
staff)

Date:

## Appendix C - Chart of Participants

Participant	Age	Identity	Work	Kids	Self-defined Traditionalism	Currently working
1	53	Career	Architecture/Banker	2	Middle	Y
2	61	Dual	Computer programmer	3	Traditional	N
3	55	Career	Lawyer	2	Nontraditional	Y
4	53	Stay-at home mom	Nurse	3	Traditional	Y
5	53	Career	Dietitian	4	Nontraditional	Y
6	55	Stay-at home mom	No outside employment	3	Traditional	N