Qualitative Analysis of Women Who Make Motherwork a Career Choice: Religious Minorities

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Qualitative Analysis of Women Who Make Motherwork a Career Choice:

Religious Minorities

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ABSTRACT

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Interviews were conducted with 44 highly religious women from three demographics: Mennonite, Evangelical Christians and Cajun Catholics. The results provide insight into the reasons that faith appears to play a part in making motherwork a deliberate choice for many women. Comparing and contrasting the interviews within and between demographics as well as allowing for the influences of modern academia and media on attitudes toward motherwork grants voice to these often marginalized religious minorities. The resulting analysis shows that all of these women, to varying degrees, find value in motherwork. Each group seemed to have a perspective of this work which was unique between and yet common within the specific demographic. Across groups was a pronounced unity of thought that motherwork is profoundly important and that one is culpable before God in her execution of this potentially divine work.

Key words: religion, women, mother, God, motherwork, Mennonite, Cajun, Evangelical
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A Qualitative Analysis of Women Who Make Motherwork a Career Choice:

Religious Minorities

In an address before the National Congress of Mothers, The President of United States, Theodore Roosevelt said:

The most important, the most honorable and desirable task which can beset any woman is to be a good and wise mother . . . Into the woman’s keeping is committed the destiny of the generations to come after us. The woman’s task is not easy . . . but in doing it . . . there shall come to her the highest and holiest joy known to mankind . . . and all people who realize that her work lies at the foundation of all national happiness and greatness, shall rise up and call her blessed. (Roosevelt, 1905)

Some consider this view to be the stereotype for women in the early 20th century. It seems plausible that we have been presented with a new stereotype for the 21st century that may no longer reflect the values espoused by Roosevelt. Today we appear to be presented with images of women who are strong, professional and, according to Valenti (2007) “liberated from concepts such as purity, maternity and tenderness.” (p. 6) Socially and politically we may encounter those who question the nobility of the task described in 1905 as “most honorable and desirable” for women (Rich, 1986; Shriver, 2009; O’Reilly, 2008; Friedan, 1963), and seek to marginalize the former stereotypical descriptions of motherhood with which we may be familiar.

Stereotypes, by definition, homogenize what would otherwise be a diversity of ways in which women pursue the meaning of being woman. Whatever may be considered the norm need not be the one and only beneficial direction for all. The cultural array of opportunities
open to women now may be more varied and significant, yet fall short of dictating a woman’s choice of a particular path. Perhaps, if we were to acknowledge the role of woman as far more multifaceted than that which is sometimes portrayed by those generating entertainment and media images, we might rediscover the multiple and diverse ways in which women seek and find fulfillment.

It is the richness of this possible diversity that we seek to explore. If the work of mothering has become marginalized, at least for some, perhaps a study of that marginalized population would provide depth and dimension that may be lacking in ‘mainstream’ or popular culture. We might begin with the premise that the lived experience of motherwork is best investigated by the self-described experiences of women themselves. Those chosen for the current study are women within minority religions, who appear to place motherwork as an essential, perhaps even central, element of daily life. It may be that religion is key aspect of our investigation into the roles of mother and motherwork.

Others, such as Dollahite, Marks & Goodman (2004), have indicated that a woman who finds a significant place for religion in her life may wish to make specific choices from within this unique and perhaps rather definitive perspective. Although it appears that, “The mothering-religiosity connection is particularly important” (p. 47), the growing desire to “facilitate efforts to understand the family-religion linkage among those for whom religion is the center of life” (p. 51), is an on-going effort within social science research and literature.

Why use the term motherwork? In creating a spectrum or continuum of women engaged in this effort one might find, at one extreme, those who have participated in the reproductive phenomenon of giving birth and are thus granted the title of mother and yet who find, by
choice, necessity or a combination thereof, restricted time in their lives for the activities often associated with the care and teaching of these offspring. Among such are those whose social and marketplace activities are seen by them as required, for desired satisfaction and diversion, with the assumption that the needs of their children are being met by various others including other family members, nannies, teachers, babysitters and institutional daycare. At the other end of this spectrum are those whose life’s focus is an ongoing emphasis on the needs of the children. Attitudes toward motherwork is actually a difficult continuum to quantify.

It is possible that the focus of motherwork involves making a choice, day by day, to put someone else’s happiness and well-being ahead of one’s own. To document when or whether that attitude is a burden or a blessing to individual well-being is a purpose of this study. Indeed, whether the needs of the children or the needs of the mother are in conflict, or whether motherwork is a sacrifice akin to martyrdom, rather than a sacrifice that represents “giving up something good for something better,” the possible range of attitudes on this issue will be documented in this qualitative study of motherwork. While terms such as sacrifice may bring rather negative images to mind, it is a concept which may allow for a depth of satisfaction not always acknowledged in pop culture. Yet, as one mother in this study expressed it, “Motherwork to me is giving all of who I am to the development and nurturing of my children . . because I really believe that it is worth all my time and energy and passion. (SSt, 4:08-4:38)

**General Purpose**

The objective of this study is to explore the experience of mothering among women in select minority religious groups, who appear to have voluntarily chosen the category of motherwork. The specific purpose is to examine the beliefs, values and commitments that are
associated with this choice and the possible effect of the socio-political atmosphere of today’s world regarding women who choose immersion in home and family. It appears that this effort will require attention to, and may be distinguished from, what could be called the ‘radical feminist agenda’ (Venker & Schlafly, 2011, p. 17), which is often perceived to be without a religious element (Schlafly, 1981). Thus, this research is focused on groups that may be different from the larger culture, both in belief about motherwork and about religion in general, to document and analyze how their views are similar and different from more generally expressed (or perceived) cultural views of women, work and familial relationships.

We will concentrate on the attitudes of the women in these minority groups, but will not introduce questions about women in non-minority cultures who have made alternative choices regarding whether or how to mother. This is because we do not want to introduce certain contrasts these women may not be paying attention to in their everyday lives. We will, however, look for hints the women themselves give which reveal the ways and degrees to which they have thought about whether their choices are unique or counter to the winds that blow from the outside or reflect more mainstream philosophies regarding the value of motherwork. When our interviewees pay attention to their own uniqueness or minority status, we will acknowledge the influence of this element as it relates to the maintenance of their beliefs and values, rather than contrast the experiences of study participants with alternative social perspectives. The ‘bleed-through’ of feminism may be seen as taking the aspect of a breeze which, while unseen, bespeckles that over which it passes. We chose to study religious minorities to immerse our work in their world, rather than to contrast their ways of doing motherwork with alternative philosophies or influences.
We propose that a visual representation of our focus is rather like the layers of an onion. To use concentric circles of an onion is to show that it is at the core of the onion where the three demographics interviewed reside. The outer rings represent perspectives not included and yet acknowledged as a potential influence on those at hand. Categorizing our demographic as **Motherwork A** and recognizing the diversity along the spectrum previously mentioned until we reach the outer ring where mother is more of a reproductive title, and one that may hold extreme negative connotations (Rich, 1986; Shriver, 2009; O’Reilly, 2008; Friedan, 1963), we create the Motherwork Onion:

![Motherwork Onion Diagram](image)

Recognizing the many layers extant, it is the purpose of this study to deal only with the complexities within the selected demographics. Such issues center upon the thread that may run through all of the layers: religion. Although it may be that a woman can participate in motherwork with or without the presence of God, we entered the study of motherwork through religious women, seeking the nature of the connection for each group between religion and motherwork.

While motherwork and its possible connection to religious belief and practice is a neglected area of research, that neglect has not gone unnoticed by some scholars. According to Mahoney & Tarakeshwar (2005) motherwork, defined as a freely chosen career path for
creating and maintaining home and family, is an “overlooked” (p. 183) area of research. Indeed, Mahoney (2005) states that, “More systematic research needs to occur on the intersection between mothering and religion” (p. 183). Noting that those choosing motherwork as a career are often linked to faith communities (Mahoney, 2001), research may encompass explorations of those in such communities who are actually making motherwork a deliberate choice.

In using the term ‘career’ to define the focus of some women on the work they do in raising children and making homes for their families, we recognize that the marketplace is where the term ‘career’ is most commonly found. That is to say, if motherwork is also seen as a career choice, a Home vs. Marketplace dichotomy dissolves, but also prompts the question of how to categorize full-time vs. part-time efforts in each category which affect income and may enhance or diminish the marketability of the women themselves. Women who have chosen to close the doors to future employment by focusing full-time on their home, children and the efforts required to learn, grow and enhance this, their chosen profession, are the women who appear to have fallen out of the research matrix; thus they are a focus of this study.

Some women feel constrained to fill the roles of both breadwinner and homemaker. This study asks whether the element of religion plays a salient role in making such decisions. That is, does a religious/faith-based family environment factor in for a woman who is making and implementing such choices of dual immersion in home and marketplace careers? Illumination of these areas may be provided by seeing motherwork as a sub-category of motherhood. Perhaps, among these religious minority women who seemingly have chosen motherwork, we will find a
philosophical shift that allows a place for fully focused mothering, unshared by marketplace efforts, to be seen as equally legitimate, socially, pragmatically and familially.

**Critical Context and Review of Literature**

Both research and philosophy inform the way in which this study was conducted. Philosophical essays and research addressing women’s issues, especially topics such as mothers, marriage and religion seem to proceed from a skepticism that stay-at-home moms are able to find fulfillment and/or satisfaction in such circumstances. Therefore, the review of extant scholarly literature sought out specific studies that delve into the context of a woman’s own experience and perspective of motherwork in what is best described as ‘traditional’ and ‘faith-based’ homes. Finding such studies has presented a unique challenge. Studies regarding child-care, marital/spousal harmony, and mothers working outside the home, fail to address the woman’s unique and individual perspective regarding her choice to mother her children. The concept of how and why women make such choices, as well as the manner of execution, the relevant philosophies, and the tasks involved, are yet emerging in research. This issue has been seen in the light of what may be called ‘The Mommy Wars,’ indicating the academic debates regarding the meanings of women’s decisions pertaining to mothering choices.

Philosophical volumes such as *Rachel’s Daughters* (Kaufman, 1963) provide insight into the choices and behaviors of women who identify with a particular religious demographic. Other ideological and theoretical volumes, such as *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963), portray traditional homemaking roles as dangerous and demeaning. Friedan (1963) makes the claim that women, *all* women, suffer and experience oppression at the hands of men—especially in the home. Additionally *A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything* (Shriver, 2009), puts forth a specific politically oriented view, that women in today’s world require reparation for past
This particular view seeks not merely an egalitarian status, but a status of privilege and leadership, which many feel has long been denied.

In answer to the claims made in such volumes as those listed above, works such as Wonder Woman; The Myth of ‘Having it all’ (Haussegger, 2005), and The Flipside of Feminism (Venker & Schlafly, 2011), have come forth. The authors of these publications have felt compelled to make public a view about which they feel passionately: motherwork.

The current empirical literature appears to be divided into categories: medical, religious, and feminist, which include anti- and pro-motherwork perspectives. Articles discussing childbirth, pathology of women regarding obstetrics and how women cope with medical conditions of self and family members, make up a large portion of research regarding mothering and motherhood. We begin with this first category of research and work our way to the essence of the study at hand.

**Medical Studies**

Issues such as ‘Off-time Mothering’, that is to say, women who have borne their first child after 35 years of age, may give insight beyond the mere medical. For many of the women who fall into this category motherhood came late due to career choices, for others it was a matter of infertility. A growing number of women fall into this ‘Off-Time’ category (Carolan, 2005). The phenomenon has been termed a “greying of maternity” (p. 764), as women begin their motherwork at a time in their lives later than that which they had originally intended. One insightful work touching on this issue will serve to illustrate the general focus of medical studies on women who are older when they become mothers.

This study was conducted in Melbourne, Australia, in 2005 and explores the motherhood experiences of 22 primiparous [first pregnancy] women using participants ranging in age from
The women were interviewed over three junctures of time: at 35-38 weeks gestation [last trimester], 10-14 days postpartum [after delivery] and 8 months postpartum. In depth interviews were then transcribed and analyzed to find common themes. One of these themes was ‘being older’. This concept includes perceived risks such as complications from elevated blood pressure, and benefits such as maturity, which were manifest in careful life-style choices regarding diet and exercise, as they moved through what was often identified as a powerful and important life experience. Postpartum interviews revealed a duality of concerns: physical [medical] risks and life-style changes. One woman commented to the interviewer that because she had been a very organized person in her professional life prior to giving birth, she was now able to use many of those skills to benefit her new family.

Older first-time mothering may result in a woman placing a greater emphasis on motherwork since it had been long denied or postponed and is thus seen as more precious (Crittenden, 2001). One woman noted, “I already feel far more competent than a lot of women that are 10 years younger than me; more confident.” Regarding her having left behind a successful and prominent position in the marketplace to focus on motherhood she explained that, despite the perspective of others, this was a positive move. It was a matter of an exchange, beneficial to all rather than a sacrifice of what she wanted, for something that was expected or required by others, “I don’t feel like I’m giving up anything!” (Carolan, 2005, p. 737)

This study is typical of current research patterns. It focuses on the role of mother only as it relates to the medical community and leaves unasked questions regarding why these woman have made the myriad choices which have led them to this point in their lives. It demonstrates the need for further exploration which extends beyond the limited view of women as merely patients rather than as a rich source of data regarding women and their choices.
Given that these medically oriented issues are tangential to the purpose of this study, we are merely acknowledging the way in which medical researchers address so called ‘women’s issues’. Our purpose is to focus more on the home environment. Here we find that research on the values within home and family has opened new avenues of understanding. Much of this work is newly emergent but may be promising, providing insight into the perspectives of the individuals directly involved. Perhaps investigating the religious element in the lives of women choosing motherwork will prove enlightening.

**Studies of Religion and Mother**

In investigating motherwork and religion it might be wise to include the potential socio-political influences on women and families prior to the 20th century which fostered a philosophy that was eventually challenged. For many women of these earlier decades, God and Family went hand in hand. Dr. Ann Braude (2001) notes that, “Women throughout the centuries have testified that they find strength in religious faith” (p. 2). Indeed women of strong religious conviction have found, “God’s encouragement more persuasive than society’s discouragement” (p. 37).

Early in the 20th century this attitude appears to have changed somewhat as the culture moved into a ‘modern world’ and shed much of the past. Traditional family roles were perceived by some to no longer be of benefit to the Modern American Family and society as a whole. One very vocal advocate of such change was Sanger (1914), who authored *The Woman Rebel - No God, No Masters* and sought to develop “racial progress” (Sanger, 1920, p. 229), eliminate “a lower order of humanity” and ensure “a new race in America [of] the white strain [who are] physically fit, mentally capable, socially alert . . . we must, therefore not permit an increase in [some] populations” (p. 31 & 44). Eugenics was key to the outcome which she
envisioned. While it challenged traditional beliefs, and left God out of the human equation, Sanger felt this to be a necessary element. The concept of eugenics, by dictionary definition, is “The belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species, especially by such means as discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits” (Dictionary.com, 2013). Engineering the populations of “blacks, Jews and Italians” who were Sanger’s target populations for sterilization as late as the 1960s (Bergman, 2008, p. 62), is often overlooked as her legacy is now assumed to be focused on those things from which women might benefit in an effort to free oneself regarding motherwork—she is currently hailed as the founder of Planned Parenthood. Sanger’s writings discount religion as a potential factor in the decisions a woman might make regarding their involvement in the mothering aspects of human experience (p. 64). Because she appears to be such a key player in much of feminism today her influence may be part of that breeze, blowing from the outer rings of our Motherwork Onion and leaving its mark on the inner layers.

Research on Religion and Family is a large and multifaceted body of work. Mahoney (2001) found that the vast majority of people in the United States still consider religion to be at least a moderately important element in their lives, guiding choices and providing resources both in times of joy and times of sorrow. If it is true that such “Research clearly signals the importance of religion in family life” (p. 220), it may also factor into the ways in which women choose to function, both within the family and as individuals. While not mother specific, these studies of family discuss such issues as parent-child relationships and marital satisfaction in light of religion in the home; creating a springboard from which the study of and with women in these religiously oriented families—mothers, daughters, sisters, et al.—may take place.
Loser (2009) in exploring the influence of religion on familial relationships notes, “Empirical studies have also reported positive links between religion and parent-child relationships” (p. 346). Further research might benefit from examining this link qualitatively. Loser’s work uses data from the on-going Home and Family Living Analysis (HFL-A) project at Brigham Young University. The sample consisted of 224 members of 67 Latter-day Saint families who reported being strong members of their faith communities and families. The families in this study ranged in size from 3 to 15 family members. Recorded interviews were conducted with individuals as well as the family members en masse. Further surveys and observation over an 18 month period supplied a rich data set. As the purpose of the study is family functioning, the aspect of motherwork was a minor emphasis. However, this work does allow a glimpse into the positive influence religion has on spousal, as well as parent-child relationships. Happier and more cohesive marriages appeared to be one result of practicing religious rituals such as prayer and scripture study, “Having family prayers and our scriptures makes a huge difference. A lot more getting along and a lot more kindness” (Loser, 2009, p. 365). We can also glean, from the data gathered, that religion allows for greater focus and foundation for the work in which women find themselves engaged day to day.

In developing her Manifestation of God and Sacred Qualities Scale, Mahoney (2001) found that religion does matter to most American families. The degree to which this influence is felt may vary markedly but is present nevertheless. In exploring motherwork in the lives of the religious minorities chosen for this study we may also question the part that religion plays in the motherwork of the other layers of our onion not a part of this study.

While religion plays a, “salient role in family relationships” (p. 220), Mahoney (2001) asserts that it is poorly studied overall and has much room for elaboration and expansion. Most
of the 97 couples randomly chosen through community childbirth records viewed their marriage as having sacred qualities and believed that God was, “an active part of their marital relationship” (p. 226). If religion matters in the family then can this ‘salient role’ be a part of how the mother of the family functions, the choices she makes and a component of her perspective on these things?

Mahoney’s (2001) findings provide a starting point for investigating more specific aspects of how religion impacts the choices individuals make in relation to familial relationships. For instance Mahoney notes that parents who demonstrate religious aspects to their parenting appear to have, “a greater number of warm and positive parent-child exchanges” (p. 228). Also noted was the quality relationship between husbands and wives as well as among family members. Mahoney notes, “Family members will work harder to protect and preserve relationships” (p. 227) when they see these relationships as having a significant “spiritual status” (p. 228). The scale was created using a Semantic Differential. A horizontal scale with opposing adjectives such as “Holy” and “Un-holy” or “cursed” and “blessed” on either end and a neutral point in the middle constitutes the scale. Participants were asked to select the adjective along the continuum which most accurately applies to the object under investigation. Noting that further investigation is needed to establish the predictive and construct validity of the perceptions people have regarding sanctity and personal relationships, Mahoney feels that it is important for social scientists to seek greater understanding of the unique ways in which religion affects family life.

A woman’s faith background may influence the choices she is likely to make, especially regarding children. In a study of 134 church-going women enrolled in higher education in the Mid- and South West of the United States, Colaner and Giles (2008) performed a cross-sectional survey which examined the potential connection between career aspirations and mothering
aspirations as well as the impact of stereotypical Evangelical gender roles on each of these attitudes. The researchers found that religious ideologies do have a significant impact on the choices these women make. These researchers reported that most young women intend to seek a combination of career and family. However, the fact that, “This group of women is experiencing tension between these opposing desires may suggest that Evangelical gender role ideologies are more salient for these women” (p. 531). These tensions reflect the bleed-through of a radical feminist perspective. The breeze sprinkling its influence on all of the other layers of our Motherwork Onion. Perhaps the answer to such stressors is found in the responses of those for whom God is a resource.

Although the demographics chosen for this study were Christian, other religious peoples also appear to find value in the connection of God and family. Within the Jewish community, motherwork is a thread running through centuries of life and civilization. In a study of Jewish households Seman and Fish (2000) found that practicing Jewish women sought to fulfill their responsibilities as mothers by “dissecting life with a Jewish scalpel” (p.1) in other words, by focusing on their unique ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Doing so, these families appear to have found guidance and support for their day-to-day lives. This ‘scalpel’ informs their, “daily interactions, their parenting styles, and their childrens’ self-perceptions” (p.1). In interviews, these parents spoke of the “emotional stability” (p.131) provided for the family by the rhythm of ritual observance that was a constant in an otherwise unpredictable world. As it is the mother of the home who performs Shabbat [Friday] prayers as well as other sacred observances, religious example and training seem to be a continuous feature of motherwork among observant Jews. Such women may find value in “honoring the past and bringing the family together on a regular basis” (p. 131). One mother put it this way:
Two of the most important aspects of Judaism are the importance of children and the respect for knowledge. . . .Basically, it’s a way of transmitting those values and a number of other things down the generations so that you’re improving the chance of continuity not just within your immediate children, but to future generations. (p. 133)

In an article discussing gendered marital roles, Baker and colleagues (2009) found that among highly religious peoples there is structure which allows for, “The importance of God in directing their families, but also in a necessity for the husband to listen to God” (p. 151). Those who find direction from the words of God also find that while they are, “traditional in attitudes, they incorporate modern ideals of egalitarianism into their language and typify marriage in a special way as a hierarchical union of equals” (p. 151). Perhaps one conclusion we may draw from these data is that building on a firm foundation may allow for progress to be focused on the individual, the family and lastly on the rules themselves.

Faith can also play a role in the way husbands treat their wives and how the marriage relationship works on a very practical level. In a 2010 study by Marks, Dollahite and Baumgartner, In God We Trust, some 445 individuals, representing, “the Abrahamic faiths . . . Christina, Jewish, Mormon and Muslim” (p. 441) were interviewed. One father and husband noted that his wife was doing “God’s work” as he also strived to do. This perspective may allow for a greater emphasis on cooperation as a married couple, as well as parents. The idea that they may have common goals and perspectives may help them to see their partner as standing with them before God:

I look at my wife. I think that her time [and effort], [the way] that she’s able to touch many people [in our church family and community] . . . is a call from God . . . If we have a
relationship together [and] we both do know God, then it’s my responsibility to hold up her end at home if she’s out doing God’s work. (p. 446)

Thus religion has been demonstrated to be a factor in the family lives of men and women as individuals and couples, as well as in their roles as parents. Religion may serve to reframe conflict as both seek to set common goals, not by themselves for narrow and selfish reasons but by God for His purposes. Within the Abrahamic Faith Traditions, Dollahite, et al. (2005) have found that participating in religious activities as a family strengthens the bonds of unity and increases a sense of purpose. Allowing spouses and children to focus on a work greater than themselves may explain why, “faith is the single most important influence in life” (p. 451).

We have looked at spousal interactions and parenting in households of faith and while marital satisfaction and child outcomes could be labeled as indirect motherwork findings, one might theorize that a woman's experience of mothering is unique from that of parent/child dynamics, spousal relationships, religious observance or even the more medical aspects of mothering.

Mahoney and Tarakeshwar (2005) expressed the need for further investigation of this unique aspect of the family religious dynamic, stating that, in current social science research, “mothers as a group seem to be overlooked” and more specifically that, “more systematic research needs to occur on the intersection of mothering and religion” (p. 183). Obtaining a religious perspective for motherwork from the voices of the women who live it day by day, may provide a foundation for study as yet unexplored.

While each of the Abrahamic Faiths is unique, yet they appear to have, “broad similarities on how deity is viewed as well as a shared emphasis on marriage and family” (p.441). Indicating that religion may inform the choices made regarding many things including motherwork.
Feminism—Research and Philosophy

Another research thread which consists of both research and philosophy regarding motherwork, revolves around the socio-political agenda of Feminism. Feminist Literature and Feminist Studies often reflect a specific attitude toward traditional women’s roles such as motherwork. In this study we will touch on this body of research while at the same time acknowledging the divergent views represented therein.

The Feminist Agenda is far from a specific set of ideals and precepts, as is discussed in The Flipside of Feminism by Suzanne Venker and Phyllis Schlafly (2011). At the same time there are many who sing the praises of women like Adrienne Rich in whose volume Of Woman Born (1986) laments the fact that, “The extent and influence of the anti-patriarchal women’s movement is difficult to grasp” (p. 79). Rich expressed a view of “Childcare as enforced servitude (p. 282) [and sees] the women’s movement as the necessary catalyst” in the freedom and advancement of all humankind (p. 80). She is therefore willing to make political any and all aspects of her chosen cause. This zeal may even extend to the social experimentation of legislation.

Some have stepped in to question these bureaucratic solutions, and, “challenged all the big guns of modern politics” in order speak to women about “what they would lose” (Venker & Schlafly 2011, p. 39), by proposed legislation regarding women. These political debates offer evidence against the popular notion that all women think alike. It may be that some, “Women’s Studies classes do not appeal to most women—they are nothing more than feminist indoctrination” and are even self-described as, “training for radical feminists in radical feminism” (p. 17).
Elshtain (1982) has sought to create a separation between Radical Feminism and Revisionist Feminism. The difference may be most apparent regarding the view of family. In an article published in the Feminist magazine Dissent Elshtain (1982), seeks to pull away from what she sees as potentially destructive elements within the Feminist movement. Part of her philosophical argument includes noting that some feminists have sought the “smashing” of the traditional family in order to, “bring it into line with a feminist or left-wing revolution” (p. 148), the repercussions of which we are dealing with today, in the 21st century. This rejection of the traditional family altogether has created an atmosphere in which some young women, while seeking an egalitarian status, also wish to find solutions which, “radicals have failed to provide” (p. 149). Rather than seeing the family as an inevitable “force of violence” and “reciprocal terrorism” (p. 149), some Revisionist Feminists see “family [as] imperative to create a more humane society” and seek to restore the “honorable mantle” once worn by this unit where, “the nourishment of humanity takes place at every point in the life cycle” (p. 153). This division of thinking appears to be a source of concern to many.

The idea that a vocal minority may be defining women and the acceptable roles of same is a feasible concept granted in this study. We seek therefore to recognize the works of both ends of this Feminists Spectrum. Such an approach acknowledges women who appear to be competent, capable individuals who may be viewed as liberated but who are not necessarily a part of a movement that may be labeled Feminism. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, of England, voiced her thoughts regarding a certain brand of feminist activism which she witnessed, by emphasizing the need to remain focused on working hard and, “Getting on with the task in hand rather than by manning barricades and wasting precious time protesting” (Thatcher, 2008, p. 48).
Further reading along these lines can be found in Appendix D, but the influence of such work may be summed up by Virginia Haussegger (2005) in her volume *Wonder Woman: The Myth of Having it All*, who expresses dismay that after pursuing a high profile professional life she was not able to also pursue home and family. She felt that she had been deceived by the illusion that she could make the choice to do both, “It was ours to choose, but we were never told the high price we [would] have to pay for it” (pg. 7). This “Have it All” perspective of motherwork may be the second ring in our Motherwork Onion but will need to wait for subsequent studies and exploration. For now, the literature on mothering will reflect some of the tension of these diverse political ideologies.

An Australian study of, “mothers at home and mothers at work” (Boyd, 2002, p. 463), found that the stay-at-home moms believed that the quantity of time spent with their children, the ability to be a resource 24/7, was an essential aspect of motherwork. The working mothers believed that participating in a marketplace career allowed them to grow in positive ways that would beneficially impact their families when they did make those ‘quality time’ moments. The child-care issue is central to unraveling the beliefs and practices of mothers who must choose from among the several home vs. work options. Child-rearing philosophies provide a glimpse into what concerns women as they decide how to mother their children in a way that blesses and benefits the lives of all concerned. Boyd (2002), director of *The Centre for Research for Women*, led a joint research initiative of four public universities in Western Australia. The purpose of the work was to explore the “bio-social and political” aspects of what she viewed as the “child care debate” (p. 463). This issue, seen in the light of a model where women/mothers are the primary care providers and men/fathers act in the capacity of the primary income provider grants us insight into the dichotomy of “mothers at home vs. mothers at work” (p. 465). The study
questions whether it is a matter of a woman’s nature or a social construct that determines a woman’s commitment to the care of children. Beginning with the premise that, “Work [outside the home] is valued over care: production over reproduction” (p. 466), Boyd seeks to show how politics and society generate specific values relating to these issues.

This study included interviews with 20 mothers in their homes located in suburban Perth, Australia. A theme emerged, “More than two-thirds of the women I interviewed [in referring to the value of their role as mother] used the term ‘being there’ ” (p. 464), as an issue of importance to them. Some of these women also expressed a firm commitment to their children as illustrated by being an educational influence. Jennifer, a middle-class mother from Perth said:

I'm finding, even though I've got a grade one, there's still a lot of things that you can be involved in at school, or just to pick him up now and then, or just to keep up. As long as they want me, I'll be there. (p. 464)

‘Being there’ was a recurring notion which included both the physical and emotional availability which these mothers sought to provide for their children. This aspect of mothering meant that work—in or out of the home—must allow for this primary focus of accomplishing their role regarding motherwork. Both career and child care consist of demands on the time and attention of the individual, thus competing for these limited resources and requiring women to make choices. Noting the need for, “quality time . . . being there for and with” (p. 464), their children, Boyd voices the concern that men remain “alienated from nature” (p. 468), and live in a construct that excludes them from the cycles of birth and maturation of offspring. At the same time she questions the conflict of home/work pressure is gender-based, and an ongoing reality for a woman, regardless of her choice of whether to work outside the home or remain in her home, with her children.
Thus, Boyd concluded that the issues are more delineated by the male/female and
time/labor factors than a woman’s free choice to focus her efforts on mothering. Boyd sought to
divide those issues considered to be ‘public’ from those seen as ‘private’ besides maternal
employment outside the home. The author states that there are certain assumptions regarding the
issues which surround both child care and maternal employment which “must be challenged” in
the public debate which will then enable us to consider more than these limited notions and
provide answers for, “new child care choices” (p. 469). Her study dealt with the reasons behind
women’s mothering choices and provides a jumping-off point for the focus of this study.

Crittenden (2001), in her volume *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job* in
the World is Still the Least Valued, observes that modern western economy undermines the
contribution women make when they choose to focus primarily on the upbringing of their
children. While technology may make obsolete much of the traditional housework that a woman
used to do, it occurred to Crittenden that, “Housewives might become extinct but mothers and
fathers never would” (p. 3).

In a five year research odyssey, through hundreds of interviews with parents in the United
States and Europe, Crittenden searched for answers to the questions raised while on what she
viewed as a most exotic journey to a place she had never even imagined, “The world of
motherhood was as strange and unfamiliar to me as a hidden Himalayan kingdom” (p. 11). She
found motherhood to be a context foreign to that of the corporate world, in spite of skills
seemingly common across those contexts—such as organization, self-discipline and diplomacy.
While such attributes can be valuable in motherwork, the ever-changing needs of a growing child
presented her with challenges as great as those in corporate decision-making, thus potentially
taking motherwork far beyond housekeeping and the domestic checklist. While the
competencies of a homemaker can have a profound impact on the family budget, her monetary worth tends to be measured by a paycheck, or the lack thereof, “For decades . . . women imagined that their moral and domestic authority compensated for [the] lack of economic and political power” (p. 52). But, Crittenden notes, that began to change as women saw their roles being assessed by the use of economic measurements. Women often found themselves shortchanged, literally, due to the fact that their efforts were in producing “human capital” which, to her mind, is what “makes the material world go round” (p. 71). Citing the rising divorce rate as a problem for women who wish to focus on motherwork, Crittenden affirms that when a woman stays home she is at a tremendous disadvantage economically should the marriage end in divorce or even if her husband should pass away. A single woman who has been out of the work force is in financial jeopardy:

The woman who is most vulnerable . . . is the typical educated mother; the one who has voluntarily cut back her career in order to have more time for her children.

Judges who never heard of a mommy trap often assume that such a woman can just breeze back into a full-time job market and pick up where she left off. (p.179)

Crittenden’s conclusion is that we change our attitudes about what is important and devise programs at both the corporate and governmental levels that recognize and reward parents who spend time raising their own children.

One solution she proffers is the creation of a National Child Support Collection System which would require that men who divorce or desert pay an annual and nationally consistent amount, much like Income Tax, to a federal agency. She believes that this would allow women to remain in viable economic situations. Another option Crittenden puts forth is professional child-care which is either provided or subsidized by the employer.
Crittenden’s insights underscore the value of motherwork from a societal perspective. Her solutions to the difficulties faced by women who bear children also take into account societal contexts based—be they corporate or governmental. The current study sees religion as yet another, perhaps less explored, context that is both societal and personal. When a woman undertakes a primary focus on motherwork due to religious ideals might she then seek solutions to the issues which arise from such a focus, within religious channels? This and other questions were addressed as we examined the lives of self-proclaimed religious women and the choice to focus their life’s efforts on motherwork.

In analysis of the religion-motherwork connection Roiphe (1996), in the book Fruitful, devotes a chapter to what she identifies as, “Feminism and Motherhood: A Collision Course . . . feminism, in its emphasis on freeing women from domesticity appears to have created a political vacuum where the home should be” (p. 238). Introduced to the idea that women should seek to be “a woman, not a mom” (p. 12), Roiphe observes that, “The entire [feminist] debate leads us to see men as cocky . . . insensitive brutes who inhabit our homes . . . this kind of feminist language washes away our real tenderness toward the male” (p. 128/132). The “hard uneasy tension between motherhood and feminism” (p. 67), is a subject which this study seeks to investigate.

Schultheiss (2009), in To Mother or Matter; Can Women Do Both, notes that while, “Many women have and will continue to define motherhood as a career . . . none of our career development theories do so” (p. 25). It seems that, theoretically, there may be a gap between what women are thinking and doing in their lives day to day and the assumptions that generate the kind of questions about motherhood and careers which are being explored by the social sciences. Schultheiss asserts there are nearly 6 million stay-at-home parents; the majority of these parents are women. This figure “cuts across economic class, and racial lines” (p. 25),
and according to Schultheiss “drastically underrepresent[s] the number of individuals engaged in the full-time work of parenting” (p. 26). One concern for Schultheiss regarding these studies appears to be terminology, for example if ‘work’ is defined as that for which a paycheck is recompense then women who care for home and family are not engaged in work. If, on the other hand, work is the expenditure of energy (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) it would be difficult to make such a claim. The “costs to women who mother are great” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss found that for friends, family and so-workers those who make the choice to focus on motherwork are often seen as, “throwing away their career or wasting” (p. 28), claims the article, since women must not only forgo the career opportunities of the present but will likely to be ‘off track’ for career advancement permanently. Schultheiss feels that, “It would be helpful to explore with clients how mothering came to be their full-time work” (p. 37). Tradition has often been cited as one reason for making choices to participate in motherwork. Given the link between religion and motherwork noted in the previous research, taking these “traditionally female” (p. 27), roles may stem from a perspective derived from backgrounds of faith.
Religion frequently appears to be a factor for those who find themselves advocating that the role of mother be central in the lives of their offspring. When women of faith experience confusion over which choice to make and emphasize a dichotomy between motherwork as a career and career development outside the sphere of home and family, it would seem their religious beliefs would be relevant to their ultimate decision. Cogent are the findings, in a study of evangelical female college students by Colaner & Giles (2008) that show, “career and home aspirations were negatively correlated” (p. 532).

This may indicate that young women can be torn between the desire to pursue a rewarding career outside the home and an equally profound desire to do the work they believe to be of divine value. The latter philosophy regarding motherhood has been expressed by the following statement, “It is not a hobby, it is a calling . . . not something you do if you can squeeze the time in, it is what God gave you time for” (Andersen, 2011).

Confusing or not, the choice to do motherwork is one that has drawn the attention of the press and is a philosophy commented upon from time to time. The percent of those choosing motherwork may be changing but however small or large the change it may be represented in more than a few cultural contexts, in Ivy League settings as well as the market place. In an article published in the New York Times, Story (2005) asserts that, “Many women at the nation's most elite colleges say they have already decided that they will put aside their careers in favor of raising children.” Some seek a profession that will grant them the freedom to use the education they have achieved and yet to focus on home and family as a primary concern for their life’s efforts. This comparatively new perspective on women’s roles in family and community may be emerging slowly. However, it does show up philosophically in public statements such as that from Dr. Tilghman, president of Princeton University, who noted that it is the goal of that
Those who wish to argue against motherwork seem to be a portion of those Feminists mentioned earlier. A segment of the feminist movement that finds traditional family and motherwork as a seriously negative phenomenon. O'Reilly, creator of ARM (Association for Research on Motherhood) a professor at York University in Toronto, Canada and is a vocal feminist activist whose stated goal is to put the study of mothering into academia with a ‘feminist perspective’ of women’s roles in contemporary western culture (2008). In discussing motherwork, O’Reilly sustains an objection often raised by Radical Feminists regarding traditional families by describing them as oppressive and decrying ‘patriarchy’ as an inherent manifestation of tyranny and oppression. O’Reilly speaks as though the traditional family unit needs no investigation because it is ‘common knowledge’ that the “patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology” (O’Reilly, 2010), is the root of what has, in the past, and still does in the present, hold women down, under destructive male dominance.

Feminist Activist Adrienne Rich (1986) represents a philosophical perspective which is often advocated as a majority opinion, research and documentation notwithstanding, her view expresses two fundamental meanings for motherhood. They refer to, [1] “The potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and [2] the institution [patriarchy]—which aims at ensuring that that potential [reproduction] and all women—shall remain under male control” (p. 13). These comments do not appear to be documented as the responses of any particular body of participants in research or the case studies of scholarly investigation, they do appear however the be the opinions of vocal and widely published enthusiasts.
Many women may have grown up in the late 20th century with a professional and social atmosphere which has been largely egalitarian, with cultural male dominance not being seen as inevitable or central to family relations.

It appears to be a cultural anomaly to, on the one hand, recognize that women are different from men and are essential to creating and nurturing the next generation and yet have a segment of that society criticize those who welcome the opportunity for motherhood and even find fulfillment in it. If women no longer bore children, men could not correct for the lack of human reproduction all by themselves. Yet the role of mothering appears to be maligned in media and culture. There are women who consider motherwork so menial and trivial that it deserves both derision and avoidance. Perhaps a recent news article put it most succinctly:

I have to admit that when I meet a woman who I know is a graduate of say, Princeton . . . and therefore ought to know better [emphasis added] but is still a full-time wife, I feel betrayed . . . being a mother isn't really work . . .all the cultish glorification of home and hearth still leaves us in a world where most of the people paid to chef and chauffeur in the commercial world are men. Which is to say, something becomes a job when you are paid for it—and until then, it's just a part of life. (Wurtzel, 2012)

Perhaps to demean and diminish the role of mother is a way to demean and marginalize women who take child-rearing seriously.

It would appear that a philosophical battle rages over childcare, women in the marketplace and the socio-political impact of women in general: in and out of the home. This study acknowledges such warfare and seeks to go to a source for insight that might not have been researched adequately—to the mothers themselves—to study the views of those who may be marginalized for their choices in both career and religious affiliation. This study seeks to
examine the hearts and minds of ordinary women as they report the meaning of day in and day out motherwork and allow their voices to be heard.

**Philosophy of Method**

Contrasting an ideology of women in both the market place and the family, with religious philosophies that affirm a woman’s primary role as nurturer and companion, can be a powerful aspect of social science research (Mahoney, 2001). Until research is done on members of groups who seem to be the targets of media or cultural or activist critics we do not know from insiders—from those who have chosen motherwork—what their joys and sorrows are. We don’t know what they regard as the trials or the triumphs of their career choices. By examining minority groups, we can discover whether and to what degree the beliefs and philosophies of women who choose family and children over the marketplace are in contrast to or in alignment with the cultural criticisms of their choice. Qualitative data gathering allows us to see the variety of views these women hold about their chosen lived experience. Before we looked for themes or recurring attitudes in the data being gathered we attended to whatever breadth or unique understanding we found in the responses to the interview questions. We were cautious about generalizing yet willing to document similarities and contrasts. We did not expect extremes in responses but were willing to collapse and categorize voices, lest they produce stereotypes.

We felt the value of studying minority groups would include respecting both the uniqueness and the individuality of the people we interviewed, however few they may have ended up being. For an extreme example of how studying the few is relevant and meaningful, we may note the diversity of outcomes as Varian Fry (1948) sought, in Nazi-occupied France, to rescue the few while chairing the *Emergency Rescue Committee in France*. He noted that he would tell the story:

In this study we derived from specific stories of lived experience, meaningful illustrations of how specific lives have been lived. In a way we are focusing on a small scatterplot of responses, without attention to how the few data points could be used to create a mean-squared line. The backdrop of Fry’s efforts, from a review of statistics shows that of the 15,000 people [mostly of Jewish extraction] who sought to leave France after the signing of the Armistice with Germany in 1940, only 1,800 made it out before the Vichy [French/Nazi] government took the Free French Zones (Fry, p. 256). The rich understanding of context and the meaning of ‘lived experience’ comes more profoundly and directly by specific stories (however few or unique), such as one Fry reflects on:

Limot, the [Jewish] photographer, living, with his wife, his two children and his aged mother, in a one-room housekeeping apartment in Marseilles [Free France] still hoping—vainly, I’m afraid—that their visas will come before the Germans come, or they all die of hunger, or Limot kills himself because he can’t stand seeing his children growing up to be slaves. (Fry, p. 243)

A contextual narrative, such as that above, provides a rich and more complete view of the individual from whose lives we wish to glean knowledge and understanding. The focus of this study is on everyday life—a context addressed by sociologists in the 1920s, but not emerging as a focus of scientific inquiry until after the Second World War. As Jacobson (2009) noted:
The everyday is indeed a complex and fuzzy phenomenon loaded with meaning, while at the same time it seems deceivingly trivial and tangible. Moreover, exactly because we tend to take the everyday for granted, because we refrain from reflecting upon it unless asked . . . it is difficult, if not downright impossible, to articulate what we actually mean by ‘the everyday’. (p. 9)

What may possibly make this work unique, is that the voices heard in this research are ones we seldom, if ever, hear. Rarely do we find studies where marginalized women discuss their lived experience which may provide a potential bounty for answering questions regarding the meaning of everyday lives and even more importantly, “Provide example” (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The power of example may be profound, as a reflection on individual beliefs or more dramatic stories such as the illustration from Fry.

The need for further exploration into motherwork and minorities may be illustrated in the diverse perspectives expressed by the author Viktor Hugo, through his 1862 work Les Miserables. In an effort to describe the characters of his work, and to allow them a bridge from the fictional, to the lives of his readers various aspects of human nature were portrayed. Motherhood was one such human characteristic, graphically illustrated by the scene of a starving woman and her two young children who were observed, in the novel, by two French soldiers:

She broke her bread into two fragments and gave them to the children, who ate with avidity.

‘She hath kept none for herself,’ grumbled the Sergeant.

‘Because she is not hungry,’ said a soldier.

‘Because she is a mother,’ said the Sergeant.
These two men observed the actions of an isolated and individual woman, one expressed confusion, one understanding. Perhaps there is something in what Hugo gave us that warrants further exploration.

**Methodology**

Currently we have studies regarding childcare, the balance of work done inside the home and the market-place, the conflicts that often revolve around Women’s/Feminist issues and the war being waged by, for and about mommies. However, it may now be appropriate to provide for the voices of the women themselves. Going inside a world inhabited by select, perhaps marginalized, mothers in minority religious groups, allows for cultural perspectives outside that upon which we commonly focus. The seeming retreat of these groups from the common/secular and their immersion in that which is often described as sacred by these women, may provide insights previously unavailable in the literature.

To pursue a qualitative study using interviews requires some measures of validity and reliability that are consistent with quantitative procedures and some that are distinct to qualitative work. Although both quantitative and qualitative work frequently rely on self-reports, quantitative methods often use scales created from the responses on surveys and questionnaires, while qualitative interviews more often extract, record and make notes of interviews and discussions with study participants. Mathews (2005) reminds us that, “The hallmark of qualitative research data is that those who are studied produce them” (p. 800).

The qualitative analyses for this study involves using narrative self-report data to identify themes, recurring points of view or attitudes from those interviewed. This was a challenge since, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008) it requires the researcher to learn how to, “step aside and let the interviewee guide” (p. 28), the interview. Allowing the responses of the person being
interviewed to prompt new questions, raise new issues and take the entire study in an unexpected direction may provide for a better study and more useful results. This hermeneutic or investigative approach to life phenomena, allows us to seek the meaning of what it is to be human in specific ways and circumstances. While quantitative work often seeks to identify the most common or likely behaviors, attitudes and emotions reported or observed, qualitative work first acknowledges the uniqueness of each person’s world view, as derived from the interviews, and yet recognizes commonalities across interviews.

The first quantitative approach is to achieve the goal of documenting the typical and predicting the likely. The second approach is to document the diversity of possibilities as expressed by individuals whose unique perspectives are maintained and attended to in the analysis of the data (Creswell, 2007). It is possible that the two ways of gathering and assessing data spring from differing views of how we know, what we know. One view is an extension of natural science—the study of:

The objects of ‘nature,’ ‘things,’ ‘natural events,’ and ‘the way objects behave.’

Human science, in contrast, studies ‘persons,’ or beings that have ‘consciousness’ and that ‘act purposefully’ in and on the world by creating objects of ‘meaning’ that are ‘expressions’ of how human beings exist in the world. (van Manen, 1990, p. 3-4)

Van Manen’s distinction makes qualitative work more hermeneutic and phenomenological, where the key question to answer is, “What does it mean to be human?” Humans cannot study humans without bringing some version of their humanity—their humanness—to the enterprise. Philosophically speaking, human scientists who invoke a natural science model to study humans bring their human rationality and logic with them, often including the philosophical assumptions that 1) humans behave according to underlying,
immanent laws of nature that dictate human responses, 2) that experiments are designed to produce knowledge that is generalizable to similar human beings (or to all human beings if we could identify all the independent and controlling and mediating variables that impact them), and 3) any action or intervention in a given population is repeatable (because they are all subject to the same immutable laws that govern their behavior).

In contrast, human scientists who invoke a human science model are most often phenomenological in orientation, where a given human being, for all his or her commonalities with others, is yet unique in response to culture, surroundings and in personal meaning-making and their subjective view of experience is also scientifically valid (Slife & Williams, 1995; Gadamer, 1975; Hultgren & Coomer, 1989; Richardson, Fowers & Guignon, 1999).

Knowing is perhaps inescapably cognitive, as well as inescapably interpretive. For example, the very decisions in research of what questions to ask, how to ask them, how to collect the data, how to make meaning of the results, are expressions of a philosophy of science that has been found meaningful. Einstein is credited with the observation that theory gives us permission as to what to look for. The natural science approach to human study gives permission to see humans as objects, subject to certain laws of human behavior that apply to all. The human science approach to human study gives permission to examine the meanings of lived experience and grants that people in the same situations are capable of creating different meanings of their experience for different reasons.

Qualitative, that is phenomenological, work gives space for the uniqueness of human beings and is a philosophy of caution regarding homogenizing human action—making generalization is possible—in favor of contextualizing attitudes and behaviors and being true to the unique threads of understanding which their interviews produce. Those with a natural
science philosophy are willing to be surprised by mathematical anomalies in their analyses, while those with a human science (hermeneutic) philosophy are not surprised by unique attitudes or world views revealed in their interviews, whatever recurring or common attitudes may also be seen.

This review of how different philosophies of science distinguish the different methodologies of quantitative and qualitative research is not designed to favor one over the other, but to make space in family science for both, according to the purposes of the researcher. It is also to point out that every scientific method is guided by a philosophy that dictates what kind of knowledge, and what ways of knowing, are legitimate and meaningful. ‘Objective Science,’ when applied to the study of humans would be better understood if the focus were on ‘logically consistent’ science, meaning that whatever methodologies we choose to use, we understand and use the methods according to the philosophy that gives those methods a logical scientific legitimacy. This is a particularly important reminder as a prelude to the methodology of a phenomenological study of motherwork in several subcultures.

Data Collection

Data have been gathered from one-on-one interviews with women from three specific demographic groups. As ethnicity and religion appear to be significant factors for many women in choosing motherwork as a focus I have incorporated the voices of women perceived to be a part of minority religions; groups which are generally understudied.

In order to examine a woman’s choice to participate in motherwork one must allow for human variation and complexity. Flyvbjerg (2001) tells us that although man seeks continually to find those things which would constitute ‘Universal Truth,’ he must eventually reach the realization that there is not one single definition which can be applied to all instances of a
specific principle or concept. It may be wise to use caution when seeking to put a round peg into a square hole.

For the purposes of this study, we documented lived experience such as described by Daly (1992). That is, we conducted face-to-face interviews in the homes of women/mothers who have chosen to focus much of their life’s efforts on motherwork, and who fall into one of the following demographic groups: Mennonite women (26) from groups in Center Point and Bethel, Pennsylvania, as well as the Tremonton area of Northern Utah, Evangelical Christians (8) from in and around Charlotte, North Carolina, Cajun Catholics (10) from in and around Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. This sample, totaling 44 women in all, provided enough data for a view of those perspectives that constitute representative thinking within and across groups, as well as attending to diversity and the unique experiences of the women as individuals.

It would appear that these particular demographics have been highly marginalized, by their own choice and design, it was necessary to wait patiently for acceptance into the often cloistered communities involved. For example, if one passes out, mails or otherwise distributes surveys to a Mennonite population they will most likely be used to start a fire in the wood-burning stove. While polite and respectful, these people would much rather live their lives without interference, including disruptions to their schedule as much as anything else.

In Utah these very private people allowed me to share their day, including the noon meal. Initially some were reticent about being interviewed but as the day progressed I was able to speak 6 of the 9 women present. I was struck by the harmonious and united manner in which they moved through the day. Young children came and went, their needs being met by whichever adult was at hand: questions answered, hands warmed, faces cleaned and drinks of water provided. Even small babes were cared for by the group as a whole, save for the
occasional diaper change or nursing. As we gathered to share the meal they sang in spontaneous
harmony and sought, in a gentle and somewhat tentative manner, to teach me of their traditions.
They introduced me to a quarterly publication known as *Keepers at Home* to which they
subscribe. This volume ties the Mennonite peoples together over great distance and discusses
topics such as gardening, canning, quilting and sewing, as well as faith and family issues with
which they may be concerned in daily living. [This publication has provided me with great
insight into the lives of these quiet and cloistered people. There appears to be much in common
with other Christian sects and I have found that many non-Mennonite women also receive this
periodical]

One of the outward characteristics of this demographic is their clothing. Mennonite
women wear dresses: those in Bethel and Tremonton use the distinctive pattern of pastel and
floral print dresses, with ¾ sleeves and a natural waist which come well below the knee. In
Center Point the congregation is, by their own definition, a more ‘liberal’ congregation. While
the women dress modestly and eschew the wearing of ‘trousers’ they choose their clothing from
common retail outlets. A woman’s head it always covered, following the injunction of the
Apostle Paul in the New Testament, however the head coverings vary. While the more
‘conservative’ congregations wear the more traditional, heavily starched, white net coverings, the
Center Point women wear small kerchiefs or scarves. These latter women also attend school
longer than the other two groups; even extending their education to college and vocational
training, although generally only with those institutions maintained by Anabaptist
administrations. These distinctions appear to affect only the more superficial aspects of
Mennonite life-style.
Some of the women in the study began life in Amish—even “Old Order” [horse and buggy] communities. The Anabaptist peoples consider themselves all to be ‘cousins’ and change congregational affiliation, generally, without censure. While excommunication is known among some groups, there is also tremendous fellowship between groups and congregations the world over. The purpose of choosing a particular congregation is, generally, to meet the needs of the family. For some, the more austere life-style serves to eliminate ‘distractions’ which might lead them into ‘worldly ways’ while for others the less technological life may be burdensome and even serve as a distraction from relationships with one another and potentially serve to estrange one from God. This back and forth is not uncommon. One woman, who had made such a change, noted that:

I was raised Amish, but our beliefs, as far as what the Bible says, are the same. Both my husband and I were raised Amish but after our marriage he wanted to have a vehicle for his business (stone/brick mason) and the Amish don’t have vehicles so it was easier. (MZ, 5:31)

It remained important for her to teach their children Pennsylvania Dutch (German) as their first language in order to retain their heritage, but she found it quite comfortable to blend her Amish youth with the Mennonite world of her adult years.

This said, there was one woman who spoke of her experience upon leaving an Old Order Amish congregation. I will refrain from identifying her in any way but note her remarks as potential outlier, regarding her experience in moving from a very strict Old Order Amish community into a Mennonite congregation. The group to which she made reference was, to her mind, far more concerned with works than with accessing the Grace of God towards salvation. This meant that when some of their number chose to leave the Old Order it had very negative
repercussions and in the eyes of these former associates they are ‘lost,’ with no more hope in Christ. She notes that there is tremendous variation among the Amish. Those congregations which she classified as ‘very strict’ are often more disapproving of such changes, feeling that the works reflected in an Old Order life-style provide greater hope of salvation. While there were many Amish communities who saw access to God’s love and grace as being just as likely in one congregation as another making such things a very individual choice.

Tapping into the resource of long-standing relationships within my own personal experience allowed access to potentially closed societies—in the case of the Mennonites most especially. The opportunity to conduct personal interviews allowed for a brief cameo into the lives of each of these individuals as well as the groups represented in this endeavor. It was my desire to allow these women to speak their minds on issues they find of greatest import, regarding mothering, motherhood and motherwork. I often checked my understanding of philosophies and ideas by reflecting to them that which I perceived. These things they either affirmed or corrected so that the study would accurately represent their views.

The interview questions were divided into three categories; The Whys, The Hows and The Results. These questions were meant to be open-ended and make possible follow-up inquiries such as ‘further thoughts’ and ‘related events/issues,’ including queries regarding how these things might be different if the same choices were to be made anew.

In the first category, the Why questions included those such as, “What are your feelings regarding your decision to have children?” and “To what degree was your decision about motherwork freely chosen?” These provided an opportunity for the women to examine and express their views. These questions tend to prompt other questions such as, “Do you think this view has changed or is changing in the world today?” The point was to provide an open-ended
guide to encourage them to share what they felt was the nature or essence of the experience we were discussing (van Manen, 1990).

The How questions were aimed at determining the practical application of the ideology which influenced the choices these women had made, are now making and which they will continue to make that guide their choices in the future. Questions such as, “At what age should women begin preparing for motherwork?” and “Are mothering activities and fathering activities interchangeable?” directed this aspect of the interview process. Follow-up questions such as “In what ways are they interchangeable—or not?” had the potential to elicit responses involving specific incidents and experience.

Lastly, the Results questions focused on the hermeneutic process which provides mothers the opportunity to connect the dots, to see what has come of their work as mothers and the generations that have flowed from choices that focused one’s efforts on motherwork. These questions were designed to document the joys and sorrows of family life, and invite the women to reflect upon and assess the meaningfulness of their experience. Asking “What impact do you see on family community and society because of women’s participation in motherwork?” and “Looking back on your experience in motherwork; would you change anything if you could?” provided an opportunity for reflection and allowed input of a more general nature. These interviews generally lasted about an hour but were not limited by time constraints, as the experiences, thoughts and ‘stories’ of these women are what is perceived to be of most value to the study.

An Orientation to the Demographic

Mennonites. Alongside Calvin, Knox and Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, from which a significant portion of modern-day Christians trace their origins, there was a group far less well
known—the Anabaptists. Mennonites are a part of this population, as are their “cousins” the Amish, Hutterites and German Baptists (Good, 1979). They share teachings, some of which are unique to themselves and others which are shared by all Christian peoples. Specifically these shared concepts include the faithful and monogamous marriage of one man and one woman. The division of family responsibilities is also a common element: woman care for the home, bear and raise children, teach homemaking and mothering to their daughters and in the community, as well as alongside her husband, a woman teaches of God. It was Menno Simons (thus Menno-nites) who, in the early 1530s began to encourage men to subjugate themselves to God alone—in order to follow Him with full purpose of heart. Simons held that the study of The Holy Word was to be personal, prayer was to be to God and the supposed authority of the Papacy [Simons was born into The Holy Roman Empire] was to be absolutely rejected. This rejection was to be carried out peacefully—as they are one of the Historic Peace Churches—but completely (GAMEO, 2011). These original Protest-ants were not seeking to reform or correct the corruption within church and state, as were many of their contemporaries, but their protest was one of separation from both church and state.

Seeking to live in harmony with their neighbors and close to God, but to keep themselves apart from the efforts of political conquest and the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church/Empire, they fell into disfavor—sometimes violent disfavor—with existing authority (Kraybill, 1990). Fleeing persecution in central Europe they settled in present day Holland, Ukraine and eventually the Americas.

This highly marginalized group of people has, for centuries, sought to keep itself apart from whatever society by which it finds itself surrounded. Maintaining a history and heritage which is still vividly recounted from parent to child, they keep alive the legacy of sacrifice and
an uncompromising posture that makes them unique and provides a sense of safety and security in an ever-shifting world.

It is often difficult to interview these unique individuals and it is with tremendous respect, and a sense of wariness, that this study was undertaken. Not only do they cherish their anonymity but they tend to find themselves unremarkable. I was often told things such as, “You really ought to talk to someone else, after all I am not an expert.”

Their way of life was, and to a large extent still is, agrarian. As farmers they prosper, due in part to the tight-knit family and community philosophies which are still foundational to Mennonite life. Being pacifists, the home is more a place of lecture and reason than corporal punishment. Historically, physical punishment was always less common for them than for their Puritan neighbors but they lived side by side peacefully, as the Mennonites have always sought to stay out of governmental and societal issues and deal primarily among themselves.

So how does this group factor into the issue of motherwork? Today we find ourselves in a time and place that seeks to move forward and leave all that is past behind. However, the Mennonites retain their heritage, the knowledge that they once had only one another, that family and community are fundamental principles and that they can only move forward because of the past. These things are what Anabaptist mothers teach their children, never allowing the sacrifice and suffering of those who came before to be forgotten. Motherwork is a choice because it is a vehicle that both allows and preserves these foundations to be built generation upon generation, family by family and on into the future as far as time will last.

While the Mennonite people appear to be comfortable with the modern world which surrounds them, they have also kept themselves cloistered and apart regarding specific aspects of society and family life. The rate of retention among the youth, as well as low divorce rates,
appears to be remarkable and perhaps other groups who take family and faith seriously would find compatible meanings in Mennonite life. Again philosophies things are difficult to document as these people are so exceptionally marginalized and not easily open to questions from outsiders. The observations and conversations in this study are a starting point for a contemporary understanding of these groups. My established relationship with members of this unique people did allow me access in a way that is seldom available within academia.

**Evangelicals.** All of the participants in this study were women who feel a powerful connection to religion/spirituality/God. The term *Evangelical* is rather broad and encompasses those of multiple denominations. While common perception of this religious label may be one of rather flamboyant behavior and rigid thinking, by dictionary definition it indicates *The Good Word* and a conviction to follow what that word dictates, with steadfast devotion.

While the term Evangelical cannot properly be applied to a specific sect of Christianity, those to whom the term is generally affixed are often viewed as passionate and eager to share. The women chosen for this study attend services at Baptist, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal units in and around the area of Charlotte, North Carolina. However, some choose to attend no organized unit at all. Many of these women expressed the idea that motherwork involves the aspect of a spiritual calling:

I enjoy mothering and I feel like that’s something I’m called to be is a mother, I feel like every woman with children is called to be a mother, and I just keep gaining children, you know my son-in-law and my daughter-in-law . . . they are just extra children that I have accrued. (LW, 1:16:10-33)

I began by asking my Evangelical acquaintances to discuss with their fellow congregants the idea of allowing me to interview them regarding motherwork. Most were hesitant to allow a
stranger into their home, nevertheless they seemed eager to share their feelings about this topic, in light of the philosophies of today’s world. For many of them it is a time of peril in which they must diligently teach values, principles and heritage in order to ensure a bright future, free from fear and full of faith:

‘The World’ wants moms to work outside the home . . . they know that the church doesn’t have time to change [the indoctrination of the public schools] in one hour a week . . . now I think it still can be done but those parents have to be very, very, very diligent, their gonna’ have to work a whole lot harder than I have to work ‘cause they only have this small window every day to get it in and if they’re not diligent in doing it they’re gonna’ lose those kids. (LW, 1:28:10-33)

Their feelings of support and sense of community which come from this common bond and shared perspective of a faith conviction, appears to be powerful and profound.

Many acknowledge a concern that respect for women in today’s society is generally reserved for those who pursue a career path outside the home and that women who choose motherwork within the home over career outside the home are lazy, uneducated and incompetent—unable to function in the corporate world. Acknowledging these concerns by discussing them with women on their own terms and exploring their own experiences turned out to be invaluable to understanding their take on such issues.

A Cajun World. The Cajun People are, by their own report, “A simple people, who highly value their God and their families.” (Breaux Bridge, 2011, para 2) At the same time that the United States was experiencing birth pains of her own, many French Canadians were brutally expelled from their homes in what is present-day Canada, principally Nova Scotia, but known to the French of that era as Acadia. These displaced peoples were eventually welcomed into
Southern Louisiana and Mississippi, which were at the time French holdings. Here they flourished, building homes, families, communities and prospering in a world of their own, “Eventually, Spanish, French, German, and Native American Indian elements blended with the Acadian culture to form what is now known as Cajun (Cadien) culture” (Breaux Bridge, 2011, para 3). Once settled, many sent for family and friends from France, Canada, other English Colonies in North America and even the Caribbean, where they had literally been ‘shipped’ during Le Grand Dérangement—the expulsion from Canada by British forces. Large migrations came again during the French and Indian War, then again during the War of 1812, this time fighting with the new nation, The United States of America against their long-time enemy the British.

According to the National Capital Language Resource Center, (NCLRC, p. 1-2, 2012) in the early 20th century the French language, which had remained the dominant language of South Louisiana, was banned from the public schools where harsh and punitive measures were instituted to enforce this prohibition. The use and teaching of the French language was not re-instated until 1968.

As a result, there are those who have sought, for the latter part of the 20th century, to again identify themselves with their heritage, they have placed a strong emphasis on creating the, “Perfect balance of great food, history, nature, architecture, and joie de vivre (joy of life)” (Breaux Bridge, 2011, para 4).

[Author’s note: The time I have spent among these people has shown me a glimpse into a world hiding in plain sight. My first journey into this amazing, warm and fascinating world was as an instructor of natural health. Invited to stay in the home of one of the women facilitating the conference at which I was to present, I felt that I had been unofficially adopted into a very
welcoming extended family.] As I began to formulate my thesis work I was freely admitted back for interviews with an ever-growing number of women who were anxious to share what it is like to be a mother within a Cajun family.

Religiously these people appear to be strongly influenced by a unique brand of Catholicism. Crosses and Crucifixes are decoration and well as sacred icons to be worn and displayed ubiquitously. Women in these remarkably cohesive communities have long taught religious classes in school (yes, public schools) and at home; both formally and informally. Meetings of every description, private, political and social, begin with prayer. Parades, festivals, civic events and holidays often center around Saints Days and other Catholic observances.

While smaller families have become more common—2 to 4 children as opposed to the 10 to 12 of just one generation back—extended family units are still strong. It would be inconceivable to be unknown to your aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Whether it is Sunday Dinner or the annual Crawfish Festival, families gather, food, music and stories are shared, with enthusiasm and great joy; laissez les bon temps roulez (let the good times roll).

Family is indeed the foundational unit of Cajun life and one can easily become ingratiated into a warm and welcoming extended family. While they see themselves as sharing a unique heritage with one another, they embrace all who cross the proverbial thresholds of their homes and hearts.

Collection Methodology

These interviews have been recorded for comparing and contrasting of each individual’s take on their tasks and specific challenges. Recurring themes across mothers within each of the three demographics chosen for this study, along with unique (outlying) interpretations by those
engaged in motherwork are presented. Also similarities and differences across groups are noted and meaningful integration of the various points of view are investigated.

The questions [Appendix A] are open-ended and the women were encouraged to relate stories and engage in candid, intimate conversation providing data unique to narrative research. By examining the meaningful fabric of home life, as defined by the individual women of these minority cultures where familial ties are paramount, we hope to find not only the common or standard line of reasoning but that which is unique as well. This way we can achieve a “balanced view” (Flyvbjerg, 2001) of this potentially exceptional human experience: motherwork.

**Data Analysis**

Investigation into topics such as finances, social standing and the impact of the greater faith community also ended up being disclosed in the interviews; however, the emphasis of this study was to go beyond my own limited expectations and allow for those reflective comments that reveal the individual’s approach to life, family and motherwork. Since phenomenological research seeks to capture both explicit descriptions and reflection on meanings, the women’s own words are used to support hermeneutic observations, implications and conclusions.

In seeking to use an approach van Manen (1990) called *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, human science can be, “the systematic attempt to uncover and describe . . . the internal meaning structures of lived experience” (p. 11). The exploration of events and situations which constitute the daily life of human beings is an approach we have sought to implement. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) this allows us the opportunity to participate in what is as much an “art as a science” (p. 274). It provides for the “human element” (p.201) which is designed to bring powerful and profound dimension to research. It is intended that by using the
lived experience of daily life and qualitative gathering analysis methods as outlined, we will add perspective and depth to the outcomes and conclusions.

In choosing these specific religious minorities we sought to provide a voice for those who have been marginalized, often to an extreme, and find themselves under- or un-represented in the literature. The design of the questions was to furnish an avenue for this exploration. The three categories of interview questions; The Whys, The Hows and The Results provide a starting point for exploring the motherwork experience (Appendix A).

As the data analysis progressed it became clear that some of the initial questions collapsed into one another, for example when asked to define motherwork (question #1 of The Whys) the second and often the third question were discussed as well:

1. Define motherwork in your own words.
2. What are your feelings regarding your decision to have children?
3. When did you first make the choice to do motherwork? Was this choice undertaken deliberately (with purpose)?

Likewise the Results questions generally brought combined responses to several questions at once. For questions #1, 3 and 4 of the Results questions, there was often a single response that encompassed other questions. Those questions were:

1. What do you see as the consequences of this, your career choice to do motherwork?
3. What impact do you see on the community, society and family because of women participating in motherwork? and
4. What would you say is the outcome for you personally for having chosen this focus?
In contrast, question #2 (“How do you perceive the future for others making the choice to do motherwork?”) and #5 (“Looking back on your experience, would you change anything about it if you could?”) had separate, non-overlapping and varied responses.

Thus the analysis will treat this section as though there had been just three questions rather than the 5 originally proposed. Specifically, many of the How questions were answered in the Whys and the Results questions. Indeed the richness and extensiveness of the topics in the data make an analysis of each question in all three demographics prohibitive in a single paper, therefore two sets of responses will be analyzed in this work: questions 1, 2 and 3 inclusive of the Whys and questions 1, 3 and 4 of Results. The additional data generated in the How section will be shifted to future analysis.

We begin with the Mennonite sample as they proved to be at one end of the motherwork spectrum. These people repeatedly reported themselves to be quite ordinary and unremarkable. Yet, they articulated views that gave insight regarding ‘keys’ which could unlock understanding why their behavior has produced results proven to be supportive of the stability of home and family over decades, even centuries. Remarks which were most representative of the women in general, as well as those unique and novel responses, are followed by a synopsis of what might be considered the essence or distillation of that which can be gleaned from these data. Without time and resources to transcribe the interviews in their entirety, we have chosen to reference the recorded MP3 files where we have installed quotes from the interviews. We realize that the reader might be concerned that we have ‘cherry-picked’ paragraphs from the narratives to prove some points we were already looking for. However, these comments are meant to be representative of a common theme reflected in the interviews with all the women, unless otherwise noted as outliers. By including copies of the MP3 files of the interviews and exploring
our own intended efforts to validate the subjects’ views in light of the ‘big picture’ we hope to provide our electronic, rather than paper, copy of the data-set. [Appendix F]

Outcomes and Findings

The findings of this study revealed several themes. Some, such as the varied nature of the work or role of the father contrasted with motherwork and the resources which enabled these women to accomplish their motherwork, are not the focus of this study. These themes are broken into seven headings and are divided between the two chosen sets of responses discussed under Data Analysis. Themes analyzed are enumerated using the following seven headings as defined (One theme—God’s Work—was repeated as it took on different dynamics when expressed as a Why to undertake this effort and the Results of having done so).

1) Separation—Being Mennonite (or Evangelical or Cajun)—The way in which the identity of each specific sub-culture, often expressed in contrast to those outside the given community, impacts motherwork may provide valuable insight as to why this work is significant in the lives of the individuals within each demographic.

2) Comprehensive—The multifaceted and encompassing nature of the work as discussed by the women may provide understanding into the potentially profound nature of motherwork as perceived by the women in the study.

3) God’s Work (Why)—Each of the women interviewed spoke of God and His place in their life’s efforts. Most (24/26 Mennonites) described Him in the very definition of the term motherwork and many indicated that they felt a personal ‘call’ from God to them as individuals to participate in motherwork.

4) Example—The need to provide example to live by, or to model concepts and behaviors, appeared to be a profound aspect of motherwork expressed by the women in this study.
5) *Family Support*—This theme within family help (emotional and behavioral) was expressed in regards to efforts to accomplish motherwork as well as the expectations of the benefits in older age of having forged strong and dependable bonds.

6) *Improvement*—Benefits in relationships, personal development and in the values received by the next generation, from participating in motherwork, were expressed repeatedly by these women in their responses throughout the interviews. They included the idea that betterment both on a personal level and for family and society as a whole were a natural result of having put an emphasis on motherwork.

7) *God’s Work (Results)*—While one might expect a religiously focused people to find God in all aspects of life, motherwork was described as uniquely required of mankind by God, rather than man’s efforts which may be supported by God. This was not a mortal effort for which divine assistance was sought but a divine effort, mandated and supported by deity. The consequences of having participated in the actual work of deity were described by many of the women in this study, the most articulate responses are recorded but those less eloquent still make the same point.

**Mennonites (26).** These interviews were conducted in three different locations: the towns of Center Point and Bethel in western and central Pennsylvania, as well as the Tremonton area of Northern Utah. In this last area the Mennonite community is young; less than 12 years old, while the former locations in Pennsylvania have known populations of Mennonites dating back before the founding of this nation—back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The women of the Utah community were asked by a friend in Pennsylvania to meet with me and, in response, graciously invited me to attend a ‘Sewing Day,’ organized at the farmhouse of one of the community families. The Pennsylvania interviews were different as I stayed with friends
belonging to Mennonite congregations and conducted interviews by driving to the homes of the women chosen by my contacts in those areas.

*Separation—Being Mennonite.* Including the idea of being separate, unique or apart from the society or culture which surrounds them, this theme was common among all three demographics but appeared most pronounced (perhaps most successful is a more apt way to phrase it) among the Mennonites. They appear to have little or no regard for those things which might distract them from the tasks set before them by their chosen life-style. Rather than making personal priorities their prime concern, these women seemed content to be about their daily routines unconcerned by the opinions and activities of those outside their close-knit circle.

Indeed, that which is perhaps the most profound response regarding the meaning of motherwork among these Mennonites women came from MZ, a quadriplegic mother of three young children, whose active and tightly scheduled life-style led to a candid observation which seemed to sum up the feelings of many, “‘Define motherwork’—well *motherwork* may mean that I am too busy to be interviewed for this study” (2:00).

During our interviews, each woman was asked what it meant, to them, to be Mennonite. For GG, the mother of 11, being Mennonite means, “Safety and security . . . it means that I know Jesus is my Savior and that I can have a personal walk with him” (1:19-38). As this is a freely chosen identity, a decision made as an adult, it therefore held personal and practical significance for each of the women in the study. It is the connection to this unique society which set them apart from what is often termed ‘the world’ and behaviors in the outside culture which they see as potentially having a negative affect on the individual and the family. The impact of an ‘us and them’ concept, of separating into Mennonite communities rather than embracing the world around them, appeared to be greater for the Utah women than for those in Pennsylvania. Greater
clarification on this issue came from KS, a mother of 11 children who range in age from 35 to 13 years of age. They live a rather stereotypical agrarian Mennonite life in central Pennsylvania. She explained that the separation is often the outcome of choices made regarding a commitment to follow God and give one’s self to Him in meekness, allowing Him to effect a change of heart, “We live a simple life as a result of our commitment to God, rather than as a way to get close to God” (KS, 0:46). For her, the lifestyle is a reflection of having no more need for the, “outward adorning as the wearing of gold and putting on of apparel, but of cultivating the hidden man of the heart, that of a meek and quiet spirit” (KS, 2:55-3:03) seeking the inward adornment of a spiritual nature.

Each of the women spoke of the positive, supportive aspects of living in a Mennonite world. JS explained it this way:

The culture, to me, means that I just have a really strong supportive stable community around me that really does give me a place to belong . . . another thing that I like about my culture is that we do really stress conservative values. It’s important to me not only to believe the Bible, and to read the Bible and study it, but also to actually practice it in daily life . . . I enjoy being surrounded by people who also feel that’s important, and who live that way. (JS, 4:06-4:59)

These women affirmed how the family is a profound part of Mennonite life. Indeed one young mother, SZ, explained that:

You’ll find that children are very highly valued in our culture . . . I don’t know of anybody who makes the choice to remain childless. A few have issues with infertility or those kinds of things but [it is] never a conscious choice. (3:13-29)

These interviews reflected this value and importance repeatedly.
The following responses provide additional and more specific examples of the separation theme. Often the responses connected with more than one of the seven themes—as if they were describing the threads of a tapestry—where the meanings were understood in a more holistic manner than by only examining individual threads. After brief comments regarding the results in general each of the seven themes are noted within the two sets of responses.

**Questions #1, 2 & 3—Whys.** When asked to define the term ‘motherwork’ many of the women hesitated, concerned that this was a word with which they were unfamiliar. Of the 26 Mennonite women in the study 2 declined the opportunity to define the term but comments from the other 24 all mentioned that they felt God to be at the center of this effort and that the work itself was diverse and all-encompassing in nature.

**Comprehensive.** Discussion of this aspect of motherwork included thoughts such as those of JS, the mother of four who gave up career aspirations to mother her four children and be the wife of her public high-school teacher husband. As members of a self-described ‘Liberal Mennonite’ congregation, they allow for higher education—beyond the teen years—and feel that there are more choices for both women and men, than tradition had previously provided. For her, the role of mother is:

> A lot! It’s like providing a womb outside the womb . . . a place where there is a safe environment and it is conducive not only to physical growth and maturation but also to emotional and spiritual growth. (JS, 5:52-6:14)

The idea of ‘career,’ being only a market-place term, was too limiting for KS who explained that:

> Motherwork is not a career, its far beyond a career . . . it is this way, you surrender your life to the Lord (4:46) . . . you’re supposed to have God’s love in your
own heart and in turn you’re supposed to teach your children, while you walk, when you talk, when you sit in your house. (KS, 17:22-17:32)

A peaceful acceptance of God’s plan or will for them reflects a powerful feeling that God knows and cares about each of His children here on earth. JS told me:

I have my dreams and aspirations . . . but I hold them loosely because I know that my life is to be given to Jesus and to society . . . to these four others . . . and [I keep] thinking ‘what is God going to want to do with me?’ (JS, 9:38-10:12)

The magnitude of this commitment can be so complete that it requires a willingness which includes:

Being there, 24/7. You’re on call all night and all day, doing the different stages of work. When they’re little you’re changing diapers and nursing, when they’re toddlers you’re disciplining, you’re talking, you’re including them in your work as best you can at times. When they are school age you are schooling, giving them chores to do and teaching them to complete their chores, when they’re teenagers you have to be there to talk, you have to teach them the facts of life, lead them. (KS, 25:37-26:32)

SSt was quick to point out that this all-encompassing effort was a little overwhelming, but that this was an acceptable situation:

Motherwork to me is giving all of who I am to the development and nurturing of my children who I see as the next generation . . . because I really believe that it is worth all my time and energy and passion. (SSt, 4:08-4:38)

EH, mother of 11 who lives in northern Utah, pointed out that the aspect of being physically present in the lives of children is an integral part of motherwork, “People talk about
quality time versus quantity time. The thing is that you need to be there for them as much as possible” (3:34-3:55).

*God’s Work (Why)*. This assurance of the value of this work appeared to be universal in the lives of these women. Of the 26 Mennonite women interviewed for this study each of them spoke of God having a prominent place in their motherwork. Two bible chapters were repeatedly cited during the interview process: Titus 2 and Proverbs 31. LL, Pennsylvania mother of 5, speaks of the importance of aligning her life with the counsel found in Proverbs, “The bible describes a righteous woman and all the things she does . . . I’m not saying I do all these things” (3:07-4:02). The effort to use this as a guide and to define aspirations was reflected in the frame of mind of many of these Mennonite women. For them this was a powerful and important endeavor, “I believe that as Christians, the Lord wants us to have children . . . as a whole God gives us the children and we raise them for His glory” (CB, 6:31-7:18).

It was not that each day was without challenge or trial, only that difficulties can be met more easily and with greater peace knowing that God is desirous of being a part of their lives. EH provided insight into these potential difficulties:

I can’t say it was never hard and that I was never a dry well with nothing more to give . . . you pray but mom’s don’t always have time to pray because the children are talking to her, but you try just to do what you think God wants you to do and if you become impatient then you apologize. (EH, 4:52-5:25)

TS summed up this idea by noting that, “It’s not all thorns—it’s not all roses” (TS, 5:45).

Although family is the standard and most women marry and raise children, if God calls a woman into other works they are still His works and there is peace. Motherwork, while sacred
and important to the Mennonites, is only one of many callings that God may extend to his
daughters on earth:

There are sisters in my church that are not married, that God has not called them
to marriage and to be a mother, I know they feel like they’re where they are because of
God— God hasn’t called them to this. I feel like God had this plan in mind for me before
I was born. (SSn, 4:42-5:06)

The Biblical injunction for women to make and keep the home, to be *Keepers at Home*
(Titus 2:5), is a key aspect of the foundational nature of their commitment to motherwork. God
is a big part of the picture of family for these faith-based women. Typifying these feelings are
the comments of JR:

The physical needs are the easy part of caring for children. I think the mental, the
emotional, the spiritual needs of children, providing them with security, is a bit more
challenging but so necessary and I think that’s where I feel my helplessness so many
times and my need to depend on God and to ask Him for wisdom. I go to Him for
wisdom time and time again. (JR, 2:20-2:48)

As a first time mother TS provided this insight regarding her role as mother to her infant
daughter:

I view it as somewhat of a partnership with God. He gave me this little
one and in turn has given me the responsibility, the privilege of teaching and
guiding her heart back to Him. I need His help to do that. It takes both of us
together. Right along with it there’s joy and sorrow. That’s all part of the
package too. (TS, 2:27-3:05)

EH commented on the nature of her motherwork enterprise:
Being a mother is a lot of little things that might seem insignificant but they are important. So many little things, all day long. Like wiping the noses and washing the faces (as she lovingly cleans the face of her young daughter with a gentle laugh) . . . every time you touch them you are speaking to them, you’re giving them security and it’s a language between you. (EH, 2:28-3:19)

Example. For these women the responsibility to model correct behavior and teach truth is another, powerful aspect of motherwork. TS made the illustrative comment:

Right now I am her picture of God and I want to be a reflection of His love to her so that way, someday, her heart can be ready to receive the Lord and His love and she’ll say; ‘Yes, this is something that I’ve known.’ (TS, 11:09-11:39)

This first-time mother was aware of the profound impact her relationship with her daughter might have on that child’s relationship with God. To pattern her (the mother’s) behavior in such a way as to prepare her for a future relationship with God indicates the potentially powerful nature of a parent/child relationship and the responsibility she feels to execute that role both well and properly.

ML, busy mother of an infant daughter, described her efforts as being centered around her children and home first and foremost. Simply put, the ‘work’ portion of motherwork was, for her, a ‘language of love,’ one that may be viewed as, “Working out your love in practical things” (11:06). The ability to engage in motherwork was often spoken of as a privilege. For JR, mother and grandmother (of two other women in the study), looking at the three generations in the room with her, smiled as she declared, “This is really the most important thing we could be doing” (3:14). For 75 year old MN it’s, “The greatest work on earth” (2:25-2:29).
A mother is a part of her children’s lives even after they have left the home. CB, mother and grandmother from Utah, put it this way:

A mother’s work is to love and to care for her children. It should begin before her child is even born and it continues as long as she and the children are living. Of course when the children are mature and on their own it’s different but she still cares about them . . . she still feels a responsibility to warn them if she feels they are on the wrong path, to advise them if they need advice and just to love and pray for them. (4:49-5:42)

While I did find responses from these Mennonite women which could be considered representative of perspectives both in Pennsylvania and Utah, there was one specific individual that was quite singular. She stood out in many ways for her strong, even bold manner. In a statistical analysis this woman would surely skew the data. She adds richness that provides dimension to the overall view. It must also be noted that while she was different from the other Mennonite women in this particular study, she does represent a group of women who can be found within this demographic. Her background, on her mother’s side, was quite anomalous, allowing for a perspective rather unique within her sect. This woman was the daughter of an Old Order Amish father who married an Italian woman, living among the Amish during the Second World War for what was, apparently, political expediency.

When LM was a newlywed, the family, including the Italian mother, joined a Mennonite congregation and there she remained for the rest of her life. It was within this infusion of diverse cultures and personal motivations that LM grew up, speaking Pennsylvania Dutch [a form of German], Italian and English. She learned the baking and cooking of the agriculturally oriented Amish people and incorporated an Italian perspective regarding food and family from her mother as well. Today she owns and operates a catering business in central Pennsylvania. Her
knowledge of other peoples and places enabled her to reach outside the Mennonite community to be of service. In her 30s LM began working with the Pennsylvania Penal System, taking in the infant children of incarcerated women and caring for them until the inmates were released and could take their children home. In a three year period she took in some 28 babies, most of mixed race. In the end she was left with four of these children, one with Down’s-Syndrome. She says, “They’re just our children, just like our others were, it’s not any different. We try not to treat them different than what we did our own” (Tr2, 0:40-0:49). She bore six children and with the four adopted boys, still has a large household. She has taught them all German and some have gone to public schools as well as the religious institutions more common to Mennonite families. LM laughs as she explains that her 14 year old black son enjoys listening in on Amish conversation, when in the city, since they have no idea that he speaks Pennsylvania Dutch or is in any way connected to an Anabaptist world.

When asked about motherwork she said, “It’s a blessing to be a mother, truthfully. These mothers who go away and work and have children and place them in babysitters and such, they have no idea what they are missing out on” (Tr2, 3:48-3:57).

Although unique to this study, LM is representative of other Mennonite women in her area who have taken in the children of inmates. They feel strongly that by living what they call ‘the simple life,’ it allows them to reach out and bless others. For them that is the essence of what it means to be Mennonite: to follow Christ fully and do as He would do, to ground yourself in dedication and commitment that knows no bounds in order be of service in His Kingdom. MG explained this life-style perspective by saying, “Mennonite is what our congregation is called, but it really is just following the Lord’s leading” (0:41-52).
Questions #1, 3 & 4—Results. When these Mennonite mothers were asked about the results of their efforts, for themselves, the community and society in general, the three questions collapsed into a single response or set. Each included some combination of gratitude for the opportunities provided by this life-perspective and the knowledge that she, as a mother, has accomplished a task of multiple dimensions and important consequences was expressed. They see that this benefit is to both family and society.

Family Support. MB, mother of 10, whose family manufactures and markets preserves and pickled vegetables honors her Amish/Mennonite heritage and finds that the natural outcome of her motherwork includes a better world in which to live and a peace and security as she grows old:

Having a mom at home provides the child with security, stability and I think they have a better chance of growing up to be well adjusted adults . . . better equipped to go out and meet the demands of the world. It also means that I have no fear of growing old . . . well yeah there are certain things you know [gentle laughter] but I trust that our children [all 10 of them] will take care of us if need be. (MB, 36:49-38:22)

This quiet assurance proved to be a common element in the lives of these faith-based people. Strong cohesive families that are united in the joys and struggles of life are seen to be nourished by the choice of women to be homemakers and to focus on the success of each member of the family as well as the family as a unit.

EG sees the ongoing support from the family she is raising as a comfort both now and in the future, “When my arms are weary and they have no strength . . . they (my children) help hold my arms up” (31:55-32:02).
One of the benefits for women focusing on motherwork may encompass the surety that it provides happiness and security in later life:

It gives us someone to turn to and gives us the care we gave them when they were little. You know ladies who just raise dogs and don’t want babies—their dogs are not gonna’ care for them when they need care. (GB, 41:08-41-13)

**Improvement.** Following the injunctions of faith and tradition these women continue to make choices that define them as people and send ripples out into the lives of others that extend beyond their view and endure beyond their individual experience. SSt, having four young children, sees her motherwork consequences to be of more immediate effect:

I think the consequences [of having made the career choice to focus your life’s efforts on motherwork] are that I give up pretty much everything, except for being a mom and that it really narrows and defines what I am going to do for the next, actually probably for the rest of my life . . . it can feel constricting but also I believe there’s a lot of freedom in knowing what you are about and what you are doing. (SSt, 27:51-28:28)

This narrowing of one’s activities and efforts, to allow for the expansion of becoming what Father would desire, is seen as one of the blessings of eliminating the extraneous options and the distractions that can accompany such options. Such benefits are seen as extending to children, their parents and society at large.

Mother and grandmother MN expressed the idea that, “If moms are staying home with their children . . . teaching the right things . . . they have a bigger chance of having their children turn out to be a help to our nation” (23:15-23:24).
Some reported the changes they experienced in themselves as individuals. One mother reflected on the impact of being immersed in family life, especially regarding her relationships with those who depend upon her:

I tend to be a selfish person and I think that one of the reasons God has called me to be a mother is to realize that there’s more people than just me in the world: ‘Here’s a family, here’s souls I’m giving to you to train up’ for Him and in doing that I lay down my life so that I can meet their needs . . . how is that saying? ‘The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world’ . . . Christian mothers . . . it would just be a tremendous blessing to have more mothers that are willing to stand up and raise their family to follow the Lord. It would have a positive impact, it would be one at a time . . . like the story of the man who was throwing the starfish back into the water, you know, ‘I made a difference for this one’ we should make a difference one life at a time. (SSn, 31:13-33:34)

The woman who made this observation, that lives can be changed one at a time, was the anomaly in her particular group. Born to a family in Guatemala, where poverty was a life-threatening factor, she was adopted by a Mennonite family in Pennsylvania. For her, the idea that God has a plan for her life, gives her a specific perspective on God’s involvement in the lives of individuals.

CB, of Utah and a mother of 7 children noted, “Sometimes I think that I learned more than the children did . . . I think it’s very fulfilling and I think the reason for that is because it’s God’s plan for us, in His plan we find fulfillment” (18:25-18:41).

God’s Work (Results). Following God’s plan for us includes the concept women can share an experience which may be viewed as priceless and precious even when not seen as such by others. The may even involve an enhanced relationship with God as one result of having made
this life-choice, “I cannot put motherhood in its perspective without God. I need to keep going back to Him how I’m supposed to look at motherhood” (TS, 24:50-24:52). MN spoke of motherwork as allowing for a “A glimpse into the heart of God” (13:53).

Moms who raise their children with deliberate and focused effort hope to provide a positive impact on, “The security children feel, on the character of them . . . it’s a Biblical principle and if we apply it the way God intends us to, it gonna’ come out right” (DM, 39:11-39:45).

This emphasis on God was shared by all 26 of the Mennonite women in the study, without exception. (Appendix B) They each expressed a desire to include God in their motherwork, not for fear of repercussions or punitive outcomes, but because of the notion that God is wise and His precepts provide for happiness and success. LB, mother of 9, took a moment to sit down with me while her nine children were engaged in various activities within the home. Her young daughters sat in on our interview as she spoke reflectively of her work as a mother:

I think we can affect society and the community. When I go to the store and I have all eight of my girls with me . . . I can leave a witness that we can handle this . . . if we are viewing it from how God views motherwork and from a Bible perspective of being a *Keeper at Home* and we show to them that we are teaching our children to be respectful, to be kind and honest, I think that does affect the community . . . I find a lot of joy and contentment just caring for children. There are some days that children can be trying and with nine children we do have some days that don’t go so good but we are still trying, right? . . . It’s not always easy . . . I think, ‘This is where the Lord wants me’ and I turn to Him. (29:54-35:15)
She looked down at her small daughters sitting with her on the couch under their mother’s protective and loving embrace, giggles from both mom and daughters spoke to the apparent success of that effort that her daughters felt protected and loved. Each of them spoke of family and God as potentially positive outcomes of their efforts. SZ put it this way, “I hope they will catch a picture of Jesus that they can carry with them the rest of their lives” (33:37-42).

The second set of interviews were of women whose religious convictions were classified as Evangelical. As this is not a single sect or denomination, I sought to connect with women from various Protestant congregations who, by self-report, express and maintain convictions to follow Christ. While a common perception of this religious label may be one of rather flamboyant behavior and rigid thinking, by dictionary definition being Evangelical indicates a literal belief in the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ and living by biblical principles, or The Good Word. The women in this study were principally Pentecostal in their church affiliations but each one felt comfortable with the classification of Evangelical.

Evangelical Christian (8). The interviews for this demographic were done in the area of Charlotte which borders both North and South Carolina. Crossing back and forth over the border between the Carolinas to meet with women in homes, large and small, with women young and not so young and of varying degrees of material comfort, allowed for a glimpse into a world which is frequently guarded and anxiously protected. These women reveal that they share a passionate commitment to their faith and chosen religious affiliation, yet they often live lives of a somewhat solitary nature.

Separation—Evangelical Christians. Choosing the influences that one allows to be a part of home and family can have value, “I think it’s important to surround ourselves with other Christians and to be ‘in the word.’ ” (GL, 11:51-56)
Answers to the dilemmas of life tend to come from the Bible for these women. For LW this means the study of different translations of the Bible, including seeking the definitions of Greek words to better understand the meaning and potential application of the principles being taught. In discussing God’s perspective of the work women should accomplish she noted that women are commanded to be “Keepers at home” (Titus 2:5). Such a title may have far-reaching ramifications:

The word ‘keeper’ has the same connotation or meaning as a security guard.

Literally one who guards the home . . . who has ever heard of an off-site security guard?

How in the world can you truly and rightly secure the gates of your home when you’re off-site? (LW, 7:53-8:42)

She sustains the concept of a mother who is ‘there,’ as the security guard, always on call. What kinds of things does this require? For many of these women it includes the education and instruction of their children, on multiple levels. While there was no specific question in the interviews regarding schooling options, teaching children contrary to the philosophies around them is often felt to be best facilitated by home-schooling, “Part of my motherwork is homeschool, actually that takes up about 50% of my day.” (LW, 56:20-29) This was a common issue among these Evangelical Christians as a part of the social battle fought daily by faithful ‘Christian Soldiers’. For some it goes beyond a way to provide education for their children but was about, “Developing habits . . . a whole way of living” (CA, 24:09). Among the benefits reported by those who had chosen to add this dimension to their motherwork was that homeschooling has allowed one mother to:

Get them through 12th grade, and to teach them, my girls, how to be ‘keepers at home’ everything that they need to know to be a stay-at-home mom, for my son to
understand what it is for his wife to be a stay-at-home mom. . . I want my children to grow up to love the Lord with all their heart, their soul, their mind, their body their strength . . . and to do what God wants them to do . . . that’s just the most important thing in life. (LW, 54:06-56:08)

Making the transition to focus her efforts on motherwork sometimes met with resistance, “My peers thought I was absolutely crazy . . . but it was one of those things that you had to do it, forget what everybody thinks, and then prove to these people that this will turn out for the best” (LW, 1:00:43-1:01:03 & 1:02:51). For her it was a matter of being able to accept God’s will and do what is condemned by others, “I was viewed as lazy . . . not wanting to be there to support my husband financially, as allowing him to have to take all the stress of having a family and home” (1:02:35-53) even if it means that she must do what may be viewed by some, as unpopular.

Women helping other women in this effort can be a fulfillment of the injunction in Titus 2, “I still believe in the scripture of Titus 2: 3-5, that the older women should teach the younger women” (LW, 5:50).

Seeking to correct the misinformation and misunderstanding which might be readily available in popular culture is one reason to keep a degree of separation from ‘worldly’ philosophies and the philosophies of God.

The manifestation of women and their proper role has become distorted in the eyes of some. Knowing how we have developed our views can help us understand our place in this re-education, reclaiming effort regarding home and family, “I think it that most women would prefer to work and be outside of the home. . . it’s a whole life-style and way of doing things. . . that’s that picture that’s put out there” (CO, 11:10-12:24).
Although uncommon in those with whom I spoke, one woman’s reaction may be representative of some Evangelical women. Arriving at the scheduled time and place I met with two smiling, friendly women with whom I shared a light luncheon and some pleasant conversation. When queried regarding my own religious affiliations one woman was physically taken aback, explaining that she must ‘guard against’ what she felt was such an emanate threat that she politely excused herself from the home (her home) while I completed the interview with the other mother. This was most unexpected and yet may represent the feeling that there is danger in speaking with those whose views are unknown or unique. This was an isolated incident and was very much a surprise to my contact in the area who had arranged these interviews and yet, of course, outliers, by definition, can represent a demographic distinct from the majority.

Two other women within this demographic also stood out as being uncommon enough to warrant the label outliers. For GL, her life experiences had provided her with the opportunity to find peace, walking through sorrow. Widowed suddenly at a young age, she found her grounding, at last, through her relationship with Jesus. Raising children on her own was, at first, an idea both daunting and fearful but GL sought, and found, a “Peace which passeth understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and which has become a defining for her life, “God gave me strength, I’m a different person because of what I’ve gone through, I am stronger . . . I can lean on Him” (8:46-57). While she is well aware of the need to stand up for things she considers important, and to seek to be an active member of God’s Kingdom on earth, she has found an uncommon peace in that journey.

The other unique participant was a woman who values the role of mother and her directive from God to engage in motherwork, but also finds herself in a somewhat peculiar
situation. As the daughter and granddaughter of ministers in The Church of Christ, Cleveland Tennessee [the oldest continuing Pentecostal denomination in the country] MK blends her duties and talents as an ordained minister and concert performer, with raising her two very beloved children and being a good wife to their daddy. As we examine this data, both the norm and the outlying perspectives will be analyzed.

**Question #1, 2 & 3—Whys.** When asked to define the term ‘motherwork’ 5 Evangelical women noted that it was extremely time-consuming. Four of the 8 spoke of raising Children unto Christ and to Honor The Father.

*Comprehensive.* “Loving, guiding, protecting” (GL, 7:46-49). Such are the on-going efforts that are a part of motherwork, “It seems all-encompassing . . . you can get caught up so much in all the little bitty wee hours of the days when their little but, wow, raising a child is much harder than giving birth to a child” (CA, 7:22/10:08). CO, the mother of two small children mentioned that it is something that takes center stage in life:

Motherwork is taking the consistent effort to raise children and to run your house in a specific way and making everything else fit around that goal to raise your children up in a certain way that’s your priority and it takes your time and your resources, the main bulk of all of it . . . 95-98% of my time is goes towards my children (0:53-1:16/9:07) [in the long run] there’s nothing more important that you can give besides yourself and your time, I could give [them] toys and super vacations, but at the end of my life I’m not going to look back and think, ‘Wow, if I had just worked more or if I just given them more things’ . . . I can’t get this time back with my children . . . I want to give them the foundation to know what love is . . . so that they’ll be able to understand that about God. (6:03-47)
Comparing her efforts with her one-time career in the market place one mother observed:

When I worked outside the home at least I had my lunch break, I had an hour every day that I could call my own. I might smoke during that hour or I might go out and exercise during that hour, I might read a book but now . . . in order to get that time I have to get up earlier to get that done ‘cause I’m too exhausted at night time to do anything . . . from the time my kids get up to the time they go to bed it’s on. (LW, 1:14:52-15:29)

This was a sentiment that, while not specifically articulated as above, was something with which each woman I met with could identify.

*Example.* The idea of leading by example was expressed by GL when she said, “What better way to show Christ’s love?” (8:14-17) The majority of these women expressed a desire for older women to set a proper example because children, especially those in the public schools, are being taught that there is no value in work outside the marketplace. This effort to counter that to which we are constantly exposed must never slacken. For one woman, the devaluing of the work women do, as well as the women themselves has come about because of:

The Feminism movement, which is a backlash against a misunderstanding, once we get a proper understanding I think we will see . . . ‘Well OK, what could possibly be more important than raising the next generation’ . . . I think a lack of connection is a problem and we lose that by being taken away from our family setting . . . that makes for aggressive, disrespectful, unruly people . . . if we can hold our families together we get a ripple effect for good in society. (CO, 24:59-45/26:02-10)

This misconception can be corrected by women of wisdom setting a proper example. However those who have high aspirations for their motherwork efforts are sometimes chided by others who feel overwhelmed by their participation in motherwork,
“I want to tell them that just because I have all these ideas of how I want things to go that that is how they go every day . . . I’m still just a regular person” (CA, 27:32-55).

*God’s Work (Why).* When asked to define the term motherwork the concept of priorities was a key issue. LW is the mother of 5 and an avid home-schooler who gave up the corner office (literally) and the executive paycheck that went with it, to stay home and care for her children, as she felt God had directed her, “I worked outside the home for 12 years . . . I began to realize that my mission-field was at home . . . then the Lord turned my priorities around” (LW, 1:44-2:06). What are we trading for the material things that can be acquired when a woman divides her efforts by seeking a paycheck, as well as seeking to fulfill her role of mother? This compromise of focus for her efforts between home and the market place can be stressful and leave a painful gap in one’s heart and mind. Faith must fill in that gap, a faith that has been tried and tested can provide wisdom for those less experienced, “I have prayed a lot of moms home from their jobs because that’s one thing that I love doing, is encouraging women to be stay-at-home moms” (LW, 39-40:25).

Motherwork is a term that, for one mother, echoes the efforts of women through the ages:

You hear about parenting or being parents but (motherwork) sounds very different than that. It sounds more holistic and earthy; just maybe connect me to the line and string of mothers who have preceded me in history. And that there are things maybe that bind us together that regardless of whether I’m here in modern age with all its advances in technology and such I can be connected to ladies in ancient times. (CA, 6:02-50)
This sense of fellowship or belonging may be an important element in accomplishing the work of mothers. The all-encompassing effort can be daunting:

Taking a consistent effort to raise children and to run your house in a specific way . . . making everything else fit around that goal, to raise your children up in a certain way, that’s your priority and it takes your time and your resources, the main bulk of it. (CO, 0:54-1:16)

To step up and behave the way Father God would have us do. To be:

Loving, guiding, protecting . . . I just try to teach my children that if you don’t have that love and compassion for everyone, I don’t think we’re ever gonna’ receive that back. What better way to show Christ’s love than through that? (GL, 7:45-16)

One sustaining element comes from remembering that the children we mother, are God’s and a gift from Him, “I think it’s a real privilege and an honor to be able to care for God’s kids” (GC, 2:01-09).

The pressures vary from person to person, but the constant thought that runs through all the responses is the idea that when you are engaged in motherwork, “You define your life around the fact that you have children” (JD, 10:37-41).

As the women in this study are from different sects and socioeconomic backgrounds there is little homogenization, however MK is unique as she travels with her husband and children, putting on concerts and meetings. This woman puts motherwork front and center and yet accomplishes much that is considered ‘outside activity’ as well. When God gives us direction, or ‘a word’ we need to follow it with all our heart regardless of our own opinion, “Does it matter if I like it or not?” (6:12)
When their first child was born it required a radical change of life style, “We had been on the road 350 days a year for seven years . . . it was a major undertaking” (16:02-27). For her surrender to God’s will is paramount, but she stresses that this is a willing and confident surrender, that praises God even through our lack of knowledge and understanding, trusting in Him and casting out fear, “Fear is not God’s truth, in fact it is actually false evidence against reality [f-e-a-r]”. We don’t need to fear as long as we are doing what God requires of us, and motherwork is one of those God-given tasks, “There is not a higher calling . . . than to be a Godly mother” (14:44-51). For her, motherwork is a part of the ministry to which God has called her, “What greater ministry or calling can you have?” (MK, 15:27) than to raise up children to Him and to lead others in His praise all through their lives, just as her family has done for generations.

Questions #1, 3 & 4—Results. When asked to describe the consequences of their motherwork efforts, 4 of the eight noted negative outcomes, specifically in an economic sense. While not particularly in response to these specific questions each of the women mentioned at some time during the interview that it was worth even the troublesome nature of some ramifications of this work since the Lord blesses those who do His work and this is certainly His work.

Family Support. The outcome of doing motherwork can provide ongoing support in life. GL spoke of how she experienced the blessings of her mother’s emphasis on motherwork:

She is my best friend, now growing up it was not that way, she was my mom and I respected her for that . . . but now, looking back, I wouldn’t have grown into the woman that I am if it hadn’t been for her. Still today I feel like there’s times that she can lean on me but mostly I still lean on her for advice or strength, she’s just very wise. (13:14-41)
As well the blessings she anticipates for her own three children, “The security that I want them to feel knowing that I am here and that they are the most important thing” (30:23-27).

The consequences are, to one woman, the effects that her efforts have on her children:

   It’s what the kids would have to deal with because it’s by my choices and by the way I raised them is how it’s going to affect the rest of their lives, if I’ve taught them well they will do well, and if I have failed somehow then I’ve not only failed me and failed God but I’ve failed them and I don’t want to fail them. (GC, 23:30-24)

**Improvement.** Personal improvement was seen as a potential result of focusing on motherwork, “I’m a better all-around person because of my choice in motherwork . . . I’m at peace knowing that this is what I’m supposed to be doing in life” (33:29-51). CA noted that:

   It’s easy to never change, to never let God work on your heart and change and so I noticed that being a mother . . . God’s able to expose things in me . . . it makes you think about yourself different about the things you say and the things you do. (7:22-9:12)

**God’s Work (Results).** In discussing the consequences of the choice to focus on motherwork one woman laughed:

   You mean good or bad consequences? Immediately the negatives popped into my mind. I just live with the positives . . . but there are things I have had to give up. We are not able, as a family, to have things as quickly as other people have things—furniture and things. Most of my home is yard sale and auction . . . we buy when we have saved the cash . . . and we have never done without. God is proving Himself true to these families, that when they choose to stay at home . . . when you do what is in God’s plan and what is
in His divine order, then these things just work out. The negative things are far outweighed by the positive things that I have. (LW, 1:18:36-1:25:55)

The feeling that the scales of good and bad will balance eventually is common, and yet these women acknowledge there are problems for women who choose to leave the workforce and make motherwork their life’s focus. This acknowledgment is tempered by the simultaneous courage of their convictions; that there is strength in accomplishing that which is expected of them in God’s eyes. Three of the 8 women in this demographic voiced a concern that because she had stayed home and been out of academia and the work-force, “I don’t have much of a resume” (LD, 43:05). This provided an uneasy feeling about the financial future, “Less money and less free time” (CO, 22:35) are the result of choosing motherwork. Feeling that God desires a woman to participate in motherwork this makes the trade-off more acceptable. Many of these women they feel that the life experience of women who have raised children and managed homes, appears to be irrelevant in the eyes of potential employers.

Learning about, and growing closer to God is also seen as a result of focusing on motherwork. Mothers have the opportunity to teach God’s word about things like:

Community, family and neighborhoods and fellowship and teamwork, we have to work together to make a good community. We have to teach our kids values . . . we’ve got delinquents running around and gangs, we’ve got to work together and I think [available] mothers are an integral part of that . . . I am overwhelmingly blessed . . . for me, it’s like winning the lottery. Money can’t buy you the happiness, the contentment and the joy that a little child can by just hugging your neck, or saying I love you. (GC, 26:48-18)

Learning about our relationship with Him might also mean that:
Being a mother allows you to grasp God’s unconditional love for us, His children. Until you have kids . . . I had this vision of God sitting up there in Heaven with a bag of lightning bolts waiting to zap you when you did something wrong, and when I had my kids, I thought wow . . . to think that God loved us that much that he would let Jesus come and take our place . . . we can’t ever really know, but we can begin to grasp God’s unconditional love for us. (MK, 53:30-54:32)

For this woman, as with many others weather implicitly or explicitly expressed, the personal outcome is that she is allowed a glimpse of God; to stand in the presence of The Father knowing that, “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:8). [This excerpt from the New Testament hangs in the kitchen of more than one home where I interviewed study participants.]

Evangelical women generally see that their mothering require them to be women of great courage. For the most part they see themselves embroiled in battle of epoch proportions. The conflict is all around and to remain constantly vigilant requires a courage that comes only from tapping into resources beyond the world in which we live—to access divinity is an effort which is integral to motherwork, “God is the single most important thing. Nothing would be possible without that” (25:53-26:02).

The last interviews, of Cajun women, were conducted in the area of Breaux Bridge, St. Martin’s Parish, Louisiana. As described earlier, this is an area of tremendous historic significance to this demographic. The fact that it was a woman who founded the Village of Breaux’s Bridge, is not lost on her population of today. In 1829 this young widow knew that she would be unable to earn a living for her children the way that husbands/fathers generally do, but she had inherited the land her father-in-law had purchased in the 1770s, so she drew up a town map, which included church, school and wide orderly streets and sold plots, thus organizing the
town itself as well as providing for her family. In many ways this unconventional, strong willed woman is stereotypically Cajun.

**Cajun (10).** *Faith, Family, French, Food and Music* make up a Cajun world. They exhibit a zest for life that can be quite contagious. The *joix de vie* (joy of life) is an essential aspect of life for these people; at least 6 of the 10 women in this study made sure I enjoyed myself while visiting the area and learned how to properly say *joix de vie,* “We’re just a happy people I think” (MD, 2:45-47). Although life can be hard it is nevertheless rewarding. For many of the older women in the study being Cajun meant to be uneducated and to live a life of hard work and manual labor:

> My daddy had maybe a third grade education and my mother went up to the eighth grade, they had it rough . . . but I love this area . . . it was mostly work in the fields and the food was mostly crawfish. (BG, 2:00-3:00)

Being Cajun is a heritage that sets them apart from the rest of the world and provides a perspective from which to view life and build a future for themselves and their families.

**Separation.** In contrast to the other two demographics, the Cajun people do not seek to keep a distance from others. The separation seems to come as a natural result of feeling comfortable with their heritage and finding joy in accessing this unique background. One of the outward evidences of this background is speaking French, or at least the dialect spoken in Cajun country, “It [Cajun] is my heritage; my grandparents didn’t speak English, my husband’s parents didn’t speak English, when my husband started school he didn’t speak English” (GB, 4:45-53).

Rather than a caution against those who are not of their own culture they seem to feel that the fact they are Cajun is something that sets them apart, a unique blessing that encourages them
to enjoy life, all of it. While actually being born into a Cajun family may seem to be a serendipitous circumstance, it is freely and happily shared with any and all comers.

**Faith.** One way this has come about is women who teach and work within the church. A major factor leading to the expulsion of these French Canadians from what would become Nova Scotia (Acadia) was their refusal to abandon Catholicism. Upon arriving in the Mississippi delta region they built communities which were centered around this aspect of their lives. According to The Catholic Digest (Neal, 2013), the oldest Catholic school in North America was founded by Ursuline Nuns in the Cajun area of south Louisiana in 1727. Priests traveled with these disenfranchised families to their new homes in the swamps and rivers (Bayous) of this, French-held land and church leadership in France still supports these congregations. One woman mentioned that the priest who baptized her, was from France. [Although mass was still said in Latin at that time, other church functions were in French, as a large portion of residents spoke only French. More than 60 years later census data shows that almost one quarter of the population of this area are still listed as French-speaking.]

Early church administrators recognized the potential of encouraging women to train as teachers in the community, “I taught religion for 47 years . . . now I’m going to the nursing home, I’m a Eucharistic Minister, so I go help them bring communion to those who can’t come to Mass” (MD, 17:17-46). With men away working, hunting and developing this wild and untamed region, women held society/civilization together. Wives and mothers, as well as nuns and other religious authority, appear to have provided structure for a Cajun world to what may be considered an astounding degree. Faith is a big factor for Cajun families, “My religion makes me happy, I can’t picture myself in another religion, you know that do different things” (MD,2:24-39). The idea that God wishes to bless us was expressed by ETr who explained that
happiness is a gift that comes from within: the *joix de vie* or joy of life which is a gift from God, “The *joix de vie* is a beautiful gift that God gives to those of us that know Him and want to live our lives according to what He taught us” (4:32-41).

When asked if being Catholic was a part of a Cajun life GB explained:

The Catholic faith was the most prominent faith, probably the only church in the area for years and years and years, in fact for the old Cajuns, if you married a person who was not Catholic or not of the Cajun culture they call them ‘Americans’, it was not a complement. (5:33-58)

*Family.* Family is central to Cajun life, this was implicit, while not articulated still it was affirmed by each woman that family is the foundation upon which you build life:

Being Cajun I think is a lot of family . . . my momma was from a family that had five sisters and six brothers . . . mostly on Sunday afternoon they’d all gather there and now it’s like you don’t have this family gathering like we used to and I miss that. (BG, 3:08-44)

*French.* Being of French ancestry, is also a powerful and integral part of being Cajun. According to the Acadian/Cajun Genealogy and History website (2013) there are a finite number of original surnames from those first Acadian transplants in the early 1700s, although many sent for French relatives to settle this new land and even to fight the hated British during the war of 1812. Not all Cajuns trace their people back to Canada, one woman spoke of the two brothers in her family who came from France: one to Mississippi and one to Louisiana. With genuine patriotic pride, she spoke of how these men came to the U.S. in order to join French-speaking settlements and create a life of greater opportunity for themselves and their families, “We should be honored, there are a lot of people in other countries who fight to come here” (KM, 2:03-34).
Once here, they blended with others to create a whole new society with their own unique culture. While French-speaking, there were other nationalities represented in this blend as well: Native American, German, Spanish, Irish and Italian. [I was told that the best Cannoli outside of New England is found in New Orleans.]

*Food and Music.* When asked what it meant to her to be Cajun one woman replied, “Happy . . . close family . . . and ah, we love the food!” (MD, 2:16-44) One way to incorporate all the elements of their unique heritage is through festivals and celebrations. Each May The Crawfish Festival is held in Breaux Bridge, bringing people from all over the world to celebrate this very Cajun event. The Queen is chosen from among the Cajun families of the area. Indeed it has long been a requirement that at least some of the contestants’ grandparents spoke Cajun French as their first language. In this study the mother and grandmother of the 2011 Crawfish Queen were interviewed. As we sat talking one evening Ali [the Queen: whose four grandparents, as well as both of her parents, all spoke French in their homes] got out the four pages of notes which she was given in preparation for the interview portion of the competition. These pages included historic facts regarding the Cajun peoples of South Louisiana. This knowledge of who, why, when and where is important. More than just a beauty pageant, these girls represent a culture and heritage that is valued and honored still today.

Another aspect of Cajun life is music—Zydeco—which has French and Irish violins (fiddles) and German button accordions, combined with Latino rhythms from the Spanish influences of the area. Perhaps the most famous feature of Cajun life, that is all its own, is the food. Beginning with the ubiquitous crawfish, which were plentiful and easy to harvest for the first settlers, much of the cooking has a French flair but is spicy, even hot! Indeed the sauce known as Tabasco has its origins in this region.
Crawfish, also called Crayfish and Crawdads, were an exclusively Cajun food for nearly 200 years, but in the 1920s an enterprising cook began to serve them, Etouffee style, in the restaurant of her hotel in Breaux Bridge—where else. Even still it wasn’t until the 1950s that this food source (Breaux Bridge, 2013, paper 4) The women in this study all have recipes passed down from family members going back many generations. Some looked down upon these little creatures as ‘poor man’s food’ because every family had, “Certain places where they’d go to set their traps to catch crawfish for family suppers” (BG, 3:01-06). Since this prolific food source could be harvested without complicated or expensive equipment everyone could eat well by tapping this resource. For a people coming from cold, even inhospitable, regions of the north, to have game so readily available and in such diversity was a tremendous blessing.

One woman summed it up with great enthusiasm, “To me being Cajun means that I was reared in the country . . . I loved just the fact that I was Cajun and was able to be tough, raised on the Bayou Teche, where Jean Lafitte sailed” (ETr, 5:34-6:30).

**Question #1, 2 & 3—Whys.** Once the Cajun women focused on the specific question of why they had chosen motherwork, a variety of responses followed. Motherwork was referred to as mentoring, being an example and typically connected with matters of faith:

When I hear the word motherwork I hear the word ‘caring’ I hear the word ‘sharing’ I hear the sweetness of a mother . . . we all, in our own way, we want to do mentor work, we want to do work as a mother to bring out the best in our children. (ETh, 9:28-10:25)

**Comprehensive.** It can be perceived as a daunting task, “The first thing I think is ‘Umm, big shoes to fill here’ . . . I mean as a mother you’re the first and the most influential person in
their life” (KM, 0:56-1:07). “It’s the most important thing in life is to raise your family and do for them” (MD, 3:40-49). Even with her children in their 40’s one mother noted:

I still worry about them, I still feel a strong sense of responsibility to be there when they need me, I want to . . . as a mother you worry about them in the crib and you worry about them when they are 50 years old too. (GB, 16:30-58)

Although many choices to bear children were due to the influence of the Catholic church among the Cajun peoples [all 10 of the women in this study were raised in Catholic homes and all but one, 9 of the 10, are currently active participants in Cajun Catholic congregations] there is joy and fulfillment in partaking in motherwork, “We were good Catholics, so we had children . . . when my children would sleep in the afternoon I couldn’t wait for them to wake up . . . I was happy being a mother” (JF, 7:36-8:04). These women did not resent having children or taking care of what were often large families. Indeed they do not seem to resent much in life, they are generally a contented people, willing and able to find joy in life: they seem to want to live and let live, find happiness and good in those around them. ETr observed, “Happiness is hard to come by but it’s within all our grasps, all of us can have it . . . it’s got to have that joix de vie from inside . . . that gift of joy of life” (3:53-4:14). They love the diversity of multiple cultures and ways of living, avoiding condemnation and bitterness. One woman called it a “Low beat” (LB, 6:36) style of living. Through trials of many kinds they continue to look for, and find, the silver linings in the clouds of life.

*God’s Work (Why).* For most women motherwork was a shared adventure that bound them to others who find themselves in the same place in their lives. They are simply fulfilling the role God gave them and they find joy in doing what they were designed to do.
One woman expresses the idea that when we give ourselves over to the work God has for us, our lives become full, rich and rewarding and we are surrounded by those for whom we care and who care for us, we are never lonely because we have, “Les person tous temp dans la maison [People always in the house].” (ETh, 40:30-34)

KM explains that motherwork is a privilege granted by God:

There’s no greater honor . . . you can hold every degree known to man and when you hold the degree of being a mother, in my book that’s the greatest gift . . . I must be something special if He thought I could raise up the next generation. (4:03-5:14)

Example. One woman spoke of her responsibility be the best example:

My job, for me, not for anybody else, is number one; to set an example in my faith and in my life-style . . . I want to build memories for my kids and grandkids . . . my responsibility is . . . to have fun! I want to show them the joix de vie, the love of life, the love of God, the love of family, you know . . . my faith. (GB, 23:16-32)

For one mother the idea of example was powerful. A mother must:

Set the standard . . . if you walk crippled, they’re gonna’ walk crippled . . . I know my son’s gonna probably fall in love with somebody that’s close to who I am, my daughter’s gonna’ be something close to what I am . . . I have to raise the bar. (KM, 9:19-52)

Questions #1, 3 & 4—Results

Family Support. For one woman, trying to fit into an adult world was a profound aspect of her motherwork. Married just before her 17th birthday she remembers:

I married young and I had to fit into his family . . . if I would have a child it would make me equal to them . . . so our oldest one was born 18 months after we married . . . it
was kind of hard . . . but I did what I could . . . then I started teaching religion . . . that made the work easier because we put ourselves into His hands. (BG, 5:14-7:39)

As to the consequences of the choice to do motherwork, one woman answered:

It’s the best decision I ever made, to have children, because they have brought me joy and they have brought me wisdom and more of a caring person than I might have been otherwise because you have to put self aside and know that their needs come first. (ETr, 8:02-9:05)

The women in this demographic all sighted ways in which they feel they had grown because of being involved in motherwork, “Like being more loving and giving and expecting anything in return . . . unconditional love” (BG, 21:04-16).

Improvement. In taking up the work of mother, one can discover capacity greater than ever imagined:

Once I started having children, I recognized the tremendous amount of love that I was capable of having for some other human being, it was just the most miraculous thing I had ever experienced. I mean I loved my parents, I loved my husband but this was like . . . I couldn’t imagine it until I started having kids. (GB, 8:30-58)

I wouldn’t be who I was today if I wouldn’t have had those children . . . I always felt like they were my boundaries, God had given me two of them and I had to be solid because they needed to be solid . . . I know me and without them I’m probably no good. (KM, 21:04-36)

God’s Work (Results). The consequence of women choosing motherwork is that it can bless nation:
Hopefully that will be our salvation. If you leave it up to the TV or music or movies . . . there is such a lack of values . . . [if mother’s teach their children] they will have a foundation. Personally . . . my life is my children . . . oh I’m very social but my kids are my life. (GB, 27:14-29:16)

Because of motherwork a woman may find that she has:

A filled heart, a reflection of each parent in the way the children go forth and do things . . . passing on to future generations . . . we need to be conscious of the choices that we make and the words we speak. (35:42-36:52) I have two aunts who had no children and that’s where the nieces and nephews step up to the plate, that’s for the whole community . . . I see that as such a wonderful blessing. (KD, 37:52-38:22)

The women of a Cajun world seldom see themselves as separate, rather they are part of a greater whole, everybody connected, family and community working together but this phenomenon is seen as best facilitated by the mother:

A mother making a decision to run like they have their heads cut off, or a mother making a decision to have a balanced home life . . . I really do feel that this a factor in the community as a whole. (KD, 41:50-42:04)

One way to bless the nation is by passing on a heritage through motherwork, “My children are doing, with their children, what I did with them and I am pleased with the way they turned out . . . so their children will be the same . . . there is a place for them” (LB, 20:42-55) [in the community as well as the family]. Most of all, motherwork is never the same from one stage to the next, “It’s a journey, the whole thing . . . but I look at other people and I say, ‘OK, they did it and I can definitely do this’ ” (PB, 4:52-5:33). These women declare this satisfaction in their
God-given work, look to Him as a resource and for support from those around them—friends, family and community all working together to find that joix de vie!

It was impossible to identify outliers within this demographic. This is a diverse group who appear to draw few lines of demarcation or label others. It may be said that they are the original ‘big tent’ people. It is as though they might gently acknowledge that years ago they were thrown out of their homes and society, but it was a big mistake in to do so and then with a smile they would place a loving arm around your shoulder and take you to hear wonderful music, eat wonderful food and see what is still available for those who wish share it. It would seem that they seek to include those who might be considered outliers that all may join in and “laissez les bon temps roulez” [let the good times roll]

Analysis Across Groups

As noted at the conclusion of the analysis for each group, there are unique threads contributed by each demographic which create a Motherwork Tapestry. The threads used to weave this tapestry are donated by each of the demographics in the study—each with their own characteristics which provide the colors and patterns of the work.

From the Mennonite women, the threads are simple, using natural dyes and common patterns: patterns that are tried and tested from generation to generation, that work and can provide peace of mind. While aware of the many layers of the Motherwork Onion and the possible influence of the speckling of a Feminist breeze, they seek to maintain a distance from popular culture. They see no need to battle the tide of public opinion or re-invent the wheel. For them it is enough to simply follow that path already trod by faithful and happy predecessors with quiet dignity and Godly peace. The women of this study proved to be gracious, kind, inviting, receptive and were pleased to share with me that which has meant so much to them, as
individuals and as a unique sub-culture. This peaceful and simple life-style represents one end of the motherwork spectrum.

The Evangelical demographic swings the pendulum to the other end of the spectrum, often finding themselves at odds with the world around them. The threads of this Motherwork tapestry, which are provided by the Evangelical women, are strong, as they seek to grow in courage and strength, protecting and standing as guardians or ‘Keepers’ of the home. Seeking order, in a chaotic and often adversarial world is an ongoing effort which provides threads of potentially powerful dimension. These women see themselves as centennials of a world which they seek anxiously to protect against a world that is often seen as a danger to their children who may fall as victims in the was between good and evil. These women, who seek to be creative, capable and tenacious individuals, opened their hearts and homes to me allowing a glimpse into a world carefully guarded from outside peril. Courage to preserver and eventually to be found worthy is the thread, bold and often perceived as course or abrasive, yet this thread in our tapestry allows for a powerful and beautiful textile that is designed to endure.

The bright and entertaining threads—most probably purple and gold—of our Motherwork Tapestry which enliven our work, are provided by the Cajun demographic. Swinging the pendulum of the motherwork spectrum back toward the middle, these women blend the threads of the Evangelical women who struggle with outside force, with the gentle, peaceful, outlook of the Mennonites. A Cajun world sees the trials, challenges and difficulties of life but seeks to focus on that which brings satisfaction and pleasure. These women find the joy in living, joix de vie, which allows for life to be enjoyable, even when it is hard. Cajun women are masters at finding the silver linings in the clouds of life. Far from a naive perspective, women draw from their heritage to find examples of strength and commitment to family and community, like that
provided by Mdm. Breaux. Connecting to their faith and family roots is often accomplished by focusing on food and festival. Celebrations are very much a part of motherwork—traditional or created on the spur of the moment, to fill the ongoing need to socialize.

For all three demographics the bottom-line is found in the books of Luke and Mark of the New Testament. No matter the thread provided, no matter the challenge faced, the knowledge that each woman has performed to the extent of her ability is voiced by the words of Jesus who remarked of the woman who washed and anointed His feet, “She hath loved much . . . [and] hath done what she could” (Luke 7 and Mark 14).
Discussion and Conclusions

Studies such as those cited in this work inform the way many see women and family issues today. Researchers such as Mahoney (2001), Dollahite (2005), Marks (2010) and Loser (2009) give us a springboard to further investigate the link between religion and motherwork. Rather than seeking to change what appears to be a majority opinion regarding women, family and motherwork, perhaps we should seek to examine those in marginalized populations who may in fact represent a view more in alignment with a majority view than has been supposed. Allowing vocal and often poorly researched and documented views to be seen as ‘fact,’ could be corrected through more research. Quality scholarship might be generated to provide a balanced view of the meaningfulness of motherhood for many.

In the western world of today it would appear that motherwork has been diminished in the eyes of a portion of society. It is difficult to know the size of that portion, perhaps it is a small but vocal minority, the previous discussions regarding Radical Feminism represent examples of this idea. Two quite divergent reasons may account for this change in perspective of women and the unique work they accomplish. The first is a change in religious belief, the second involves political correctness. This study explores the attitudes of women in cultural minority groups who find religion to be a significant portion of their life-choices and specifically how this has affected their participation in motherwork. By understanding contrasting views of motherwork within western society, we can unfold differences and similarities relevant to family lives and how they intersect with the general culture.

One possible explanation for contemporary perspectives of motherwork may be the reaction to situations in which women found themselves as political freedoms began to encourage women to be in competition with, rather than to be confederates of, the men in their
lives. [For further discussion of this topic, using examples from Colonial times, see Appendix E]

Suffrage became a central issue for many seeking to achieve a more egalitarian status for women in the 19th century. Eventually suffrage was achieved [restored], however other issues in western society took their place as gender distinctions especially regarding work-family issues became heightened sources of discord. By the middle of the 20th century, gender distinctions were seen as major and inequities, an effort to identify the greatest culprit in this war came to a head. Women such as Friedan (1963) described a woman’s tie to home and family as a type of slavery, where she suffered both ignorance and oppression. There issues were now seen as common, indeed inescapable elements of family life. Motherwork, once revered among early advocates of gender equality, was now named as the primary cause of suffering. So demeaned was this once ennobled and revered aspect of female existence that it seemed good to escape it whenever possible. Only those who were unable to function in a corporate world were seen as suited to this lowest of all possible human endeavors (Haussegger, 2005).

The traditional household was generally headed by a male member of the family. For many this meant that an effective partnership was desired, for others it meant that the man could, and most often did, exercise tyranny and cruelty towards all within his jurisdiction. Those who advocate this latter perspective often overlooked the fact that the day to day affairs of household management was generally accomplished by women and that the benefits to family and community were experienced by all. Motherwork was often seen as the crowning jewel of life’s accomplishments for women. Biblical references to the blessed state of a woman able to bear children were a part of the picture for most of western society. The family was seen as the cornucopia from which all mankind received blessings.
As cited at the outset of this work the national view in the early 20th century, typified by remarks attributed to the President of the United States, was that motherwork was “The most important, the most honorable and desirable task which can beset any woman” (Roosevelt, 1905). A blessing to the individual, the nation and mankind in general was the properly undertaken work of mothers. And yet shortly after this address by President Roosevelt came the cry from such as Sanger (1914) who sought to “liberate” women from motherwork, indeed from motherhood altogether, by providing easily obtained abortion. Radical Feminist volumes depicting traditional home and family as places of oppression and terror (Friedan, 1963) were eventually tempered by authors such as Elshtain (1982) who sought to create a separation between what she termed as ‘Radical’ and ‘Revisionist Feminism’ thus allowing women to seek improved status and remain true to the traditions some felt were foundational to the lives of family and community.

Another reason that motherwork appears to have lost its status in western culture (O’Beirne, 2006) is the multidimensional result of ‘political correctness.’ Some women have sought the opportunity to achieve goals both in market-place careers and family. Pursuing a “career while putting relationships and children on hold is like a huge gamble with high stakes in a game I didn’t even know I was playing.” (Haussegger, 2005, p. 9) These women had once thought of being able to have both ‘careers’, outside and inside the home, but as it turned out this was an either/or choice, whether she knew it or not. Discounting that which was no longer an achievable goal seems to many to be the best option when discussion such issues.

Another aspect of this cultural swing is due to the definition of ‘mother’ itself and the status of women who give birth, regardless of subsequent efforts to provide a plan for the future of these children. On one end of the Motherwork Spectrum is the woman who simply
contributes biologically to the birth of a child: making her a ‘mother’ but having nothing to do with the ‘work’ involved now that this new person has arrived. On the other end of this motherwork spectrum we find women who seek to dedicate their life’s efforts to developing a plan for those within her sphere of influence. A woman who seeks to create a home of study and productivity where she and her children can learn, grow and generate the fruits that will flow from the family cornucopia to all the world. If being a mother carries with it a societal status which is equal for those whose focus is an all-encompassing effort with those who give birth but whose neglect of those offspring may constitute outright abuse, is one of the reasons we have used the term ‘motherwork’ rather than simply discussing motherhood.

Despite a rather generally accepted view of motherhood as a biological phenomenon, or perhaps because of it, the women of this study appear to share the view that this perspective may be more limited than is needed or desired. For them God is the head, the creator, not just in the sense of setting in motion things universal, but in creating life, personally, specifically and uniquely in each family and individual. The women He chooses to take responsibly for the care and nurture of His children are under His care and have all the resources He has at His command, in order to accomplish this sacred work. For these women of such diverse social and religious opinion, the choice is clear: they must take any and all opportunity to stand up and acknowledge that they are strong, capable and powerful, as they seek to execute the many faceted career choice of motherwork seeking to be the person she believes is making a difference in the lives she touches as a result. The scriptural reference regarding what is entailed in motherwork is summed up by the author of Proverbs and seems to describe accurately the majority of women in this study:
“[For] her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life . . . she girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms . . . strength and honour are her clothing . . . she openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness . . . she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.” (Proverbs 31)
References and Resources


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Appendix A - Interview Questions

**Whys**
1. Define “motherwork” in your own words.
2. What are your feelings regarding your decision to have children?
3. When did you first make the choice to do motherwork?
   a. Was your choice default or undertaken with deliberation?
4. What were your expectations regarding this choice?
   a. Have they changed over time?
   b. In what ways?
5. What have you been taught about motherwork?
   a. Where were such teachings received?
6. What are your goals in this work?
   a. Short term - long term
   i. Have these changed over time?
7. What questions do you wish you had been able to ask prior to undertaking motherwork?
8. How have others responded to your decision regarding this career choice?
9. How do you think women are generally viewed who choose motherwork as a focus?
   a. Do you think that view is changing?

**Hows**
1. At what age do you think women begin preparing for motherwork?
   a. How old were you when you began to learn motherwork?
   b. When did you realize you wanted to make motherwork central to you life?
   c. Or was that ever your intention?
2. How would you differentiate motherwork from fatherwork and parentwork?
3. Are mothering activities interchangeable with fathering activities?
   a. In what ways?
4. Are homemaking skills such as cooking and sewing important elements of your work?
   a. What makes them important or unimportant to you?
5. What kind of support from others do you value most in your motherwork?
6. What has helped you in your pursuit of this work?
7. As life and situations change, what aspects of your motherwork do you wish to continue?
8. What legacy do you hope to leave as a result of your efforts?

**Results**
1. What do you see as the consequences of this, your career choice?
2. How do you perceive the future for others making the choice to do motherwork?
3. What impact do you see on the community, society and family because of women participating in motherwork?
4. What would you say is the outcome for you personally for having chosen this focus?
5. Looking back on your experience would you change anything about it if you could?

**Further data gathering -**
What does it mean to you to be ______________________? (Mennonite, Cajun or Christian)
Age - (If acceptable) ________
Number of years married - ________ Years in faith ________ Husband’s years in faith ________
Number of children and their ages - __________________________________________
[Encourage stories, experiences and illustrations of ideas and concepts]
### Appendix B – Tabled Results

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<td>MG</td>
<td>Tr2 0-2:29 Following God’s leading to care for others</td>
<td>Tr4 8:56-9:55 Children reach out/expand on what we began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSn</td>
<td>2:44-59 God’s call</td>
<td>30:06-50 Personal/societal improvement and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EG</td>
<td>(no definition)</td>
<td>31:54-32:02 Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB</td>
<td>4:02 God-given privilege</td>
<td>29:03-10 Fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>1:33 God’s injunction to be a ‘Keeper at Home’</td>
<td>29:06-16 I will make Heaven my home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3:07-4:02 Proverbs 31</td>
<td>29:07-31 Families in the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>29:35 Leading to Lord</td>
<td>29:35-47 Leading to the Lord God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>(no definition)</td>
<td>28:15-19 Family love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>11:40-57 God calls women</td>
<td>38:06-22 No fear of growing old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>6:20-29 Facilitating Jesus</td>
<td>(no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM</td>
<td>3:49 Blessing</td>
<td>21:23 Living for Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>21: 27 See God in all</td>
<td>39:40-45 Biblical principle/work out right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SH</td>
<td>7:00-7:09 God’s help</td>
<td>(no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>4:50-5:16 Tell of God</td>
<td>38:50-59 Family/care for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MZ</td>
<td>42:03 its God’s plan</td>
<td>40:52-57 Proverbs 31:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZ</td>
<td>2:50 Called by god to do motherwork</td>
<td>32:29-33:44 Family/catch a picture of Jesus/all life long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSst</td>
<td>27:17 Model devotion to Jesus</td>
<td>27:07-15 Surrender to Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite Women</td>
<td>Motherwork</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>3:14 Most important/to take children to Heaven</td>
<td>57:33-36 The most important thing we could be doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>6:36 God’s plan</td>
<td>26:18 God gets glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>2:43-46 Teach children to become Christ’s children/follow Him</td>
<td>(no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>2:46-53 “Keepers at home”</td>
<td>13:46-14:10 God’s plan for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MY</td>
<td>7:03-31 Calling/for glory of the Lord</td>
<td>30:18-33 Privilege/blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML</td>
<td>4:33-44 Love Lord/useful in His Kingdom</td>
<td>(no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB</td>
<td>7:7:09-16 God’s work/He gives children</td>
<td>18:30-40 In God’s plan we find fulfillment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals**

- 22 Mennonite women responded.
- 24 women found God to be a part of their motherwork.
- 2 women declined to provide a definition.

The 24 women who responded all found God to be a part of their motherwork. Two women declined to provide a definition. [It should be noted that these two women spoke often during the interview of how God impacts their motherwork.] [As language and education levels were not among the questions however many of the women mentioned that typically their education ends in the mid-teens (14-16) this may have provided subtle intimidation regarding defining terms for a university study. Also there were many for whom English was a second language. This may also have complicated the idea of defining English terminology.]

For four of the interviewees there is no response to these questions. Of the 22 women who answered; 8 mentioned the fortification of family ties and the peace and support that provides for the future, 7 spoke of the privilege they felt in participating on God’s plan for them, 3 spoke of the ability to bless the lives of others because of their involvement in motherwork, 3 spoke of personal fulfillment and 2 mentioned specifically the personal growth which comes from participating in motherwork. [As some of the women mentioned more than one ‘result’ of their motherwork the numbers overlap]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evangelical Women</th>
<th>Motherwork</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LW</td>
<td>14:12-58 Raising children in all aspects of life</td>
<td>1:18:06-1:25:53 Less material things ± glimpse God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>7:45-8:30 Showing Christ's love</td>
<td>30:27 The kids know they are most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>7:22 All-encompassing</td>
<td>19:40 Kids come to know Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>0:48-1:20 Consistent effort 9:09 95-98% time commitment</td>
<td>22:58-35 Less money &amp; free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>1:58-2:07 Privilege and honor for God</td>
<td>23:30-41 Blessing children brings great joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>10:33-41 Define life around children</td>
<td>41:04-41:53 Appreciation from family for teachings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>2:17-48 Bring up children in the Lord</td>
<td>41:40-No resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK</td>
<td>14:44-51 No higher calling</td>
<td>45:38-41 Little &quot;me time&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**

<p>| 8 | Five of the eight women mentioned motherwork as being very time consuming and comprehensive. Four of the 8 spoke if raising children in Christ and to honor Him | Four of the 8 interviewees noted negative consequences especially in an economic sense. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cajun Women</th>
<th>Motherwork</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>5:48-6:13 a lot of work/status</td>
<td>21:04-16 more giving/unconditional love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETr</td>
<td>27:04-07 Their a gift from God</td>
<td>8:02-9:05 joy, wisdom, I became a more caring person/God’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETh</td>
<td>9:28-10:25 Mentor/ Bring out the best in children</td>
<td>40:30-34 never alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB</td>
<td>8:34-57Responsibility/love</td>
<td>26:31-33 example for my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JF</td>
<td>5:39 Life at home</td>
<td>18:18 memories built in my grandchildren 19:18 morals in my children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KM</td>
<td>0:49 a lot of work fill big shoes 4:03-18 no greater honor, when you hold the degree of ‘mother’ that’s the greatest gift</td>
<td>21:08 I am who I am because I had children God gave them to me and I had to be solid without them I’m no good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>6:06 To make choices that bless our children/example</td>
<td>33:28-35 overflow of joy 35:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>4:47-5:03 Responsibility to teach, love</td>
<td>20:42-55 my children do for their children like I did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>3:30-49 Most important thing in life</td>
<td>(no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PB</td>
<td>1:54 A Blessing!</td>
<td>23:49 Excitement, a good thing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C - Feminist Influence on Modern Culture

An examination of the view of Feminist Activists [also known as Radical Feminists] is important as they appear to be actively contributing to the literature. Combined with the philosophical offerings of those who express a perspective similar to Venker and Schlafly (2011) we seek to understand this field more broadly. It allows for those who find more radical ideologies to be valid such as author Jessica Valenti (2010) who defines Feminism as “a social justice movement with values and goals that benefit women. It's a structural analysis of a world that oppresses women, an ideology based on the notion that patriarchy . . . needs to end” (p. 2) as well as women whose lives do not conform to this ideal. However, a philosophy allowing each to choose her personal path is sometimes found to be unacceptable to those who may be considered Activists.

The Feminist Activist view is often espoused by those who, according to Kate O’Beirne in her volume Women Who Make The World Worse (2006), have dismissed the value of motherwork, mothering and often even childbearing itself. This may leave little room for the views of those, non-academics, who find themselves immersed in the work itself.

Rather than considering that some women thrive in a feminist environment and some thrive in the more familial context of motherwork, many feminist philosophies opine that there is only one way for women to find happiness and fulfillment. They may even put forth this idea as though has been scientifically proven.

Indeed, studies and research may be subservient to the publication of political promotion, providing us with opinion-volumes such as Of Woman Born (Rich, 1986), in which the dichotomy is put forth that a woman must either be completely selfless, sacrificing her own life’s potential or completely self-absorbed, seeking to find the freedom and creativity denied a woman
who chooses motherwork. “A woman’s choice [is] an inescapable either/or: motherhood or individuality, motherhood or creativity, motherhood or freedom” (p. 160). The sanctity of womanhood/motherhood is classified as propaganda aimed at enslaving women within the shameful and oppressive practice of ‘Patriarchy’. Seeing women as the quintessential victim with “Only as much of privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval” (p. 58). Men are really the problem and a male dominated society where women acquiesce to male ideals is the root of all oppression. For Rich, “womanliness” is seen as a matter of “passive acquiescence” to the suffering inherent within that male dominated society. For example, a woman’s reproduction should be a matter of her unilateral choices and easily obtained abortion an essential element in “freeing women” (p. 129), from the burdens of male oppressions. Such claims are backed with pages of horrific stories illustrating the desperation and terror experienced by women living in what are claimed to be typical, traditional families. Whether these stories are representative or typical, may be a matter of conjecture, indeed perhaps even fiction or non-fiction, as the research documentation is thin, if at all extant.

For many in today’s world however Radical Feminism may struggle to gain the influence it once held. From the official webpage of the feminist organization, the Fawcett Society, Jayatilakas (2001), who is the Head of Policy and Parliamentary Affairs, voices a concern. Although feminism, by various definitions of that term, has been an active cause since the 1960s there are still “large numbers [who] reject feminism but embrace wholeheartedly the equality agenda.” Many young women today are questioning the rigid “life-style requirements” of late 20th century feminists who felt that perhaps, according to Jayatilakas, “to be feminist is not to be
feminine.” This is particularly disconcerting for Jayatilakas and others of this particular brand of active, vocal and politically prominent feminism.

Still the battles rages and volumes such as *Full Frontal Feminism* (Valenti, 2007) put forth an image far less refined and virtuous than that with which many Judeo-Christian homes may feel comfortable. While women have sometimes been viewed as special, even divine in nature (Wilcox, 1998) and have been expected to exhibit behaviors including “strength, honor, kindness, virtue, [and to be] sure, steadfast, abounding in good works” (Olson, 2006, p. 123) Valenti appears to feel that it is best to remove these difficult-to-achieve attributes by teaching young women that these are foolish ideals which belong to an antiquated and unrealistic past. Philosophies within Feminism which aim at making “the new woman as the old man” (Elshtain, 1982, p. 152) appear to appeal less to the 21st century woman than many Feminist Activists of the 20th century.

Some feminists have sought to use a Feminist Agenda to treat what they perceive to be social ills and to correct social injustice. One such is Collins (2000) for whom “Motherwork” is described from the standpoint of a self-described black feminist activist. Collins’ (2000) discussion focuses on the paid work historically done by black women in raising the children of white families, while at the same time seeking to be a resource and aid to their own families. Both their younger siblings and their own offspring. These mothers seek to improve the situation of burdened and oppressed women by teaching the children within their sphere of influence, truly taking the axiom—“The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world” (Wallace, 1865), quite literally. While this adage sounds appealing, even noble, one may query: “Who is there today who sees what Wallace saw?”
More specifically, what may be seen as an obvious link between motherhood and child-rearing is an ongoing focus of work and family research. In today’s world there appears to be a debate over early child care—one described earlier as “The Mommy Wars” (Steiner, 2006). Steiner contends that there is a conflict between women who stay at home to focus on being a homemaker, raising children and creating the kind of place that meets her personal standard and expectation, and women who seek to develop a career path outside the home. In this treatise the contention seems to center around the interpretation of what is involved in each path and the possibility of taking both simultaneously. The author’s personal experience included a highly successful [read; wealthy] father who was noticed for his professional work and a well-educated mother who took out her frustrations at being “stuck at home raising children” by drinking to excess. Steiner decided to join the “Working-woman tribe” (p. xiii), and felt that her life, and the lives of her husband and children, were enriched due to her choice to blend career with motherhood. Some women in this “tribe” state emphatically “I have to work. I wouldn’t be myself if I didn’t” (p. xx1v). Steiner, in exploring the world of the stay-at-home mother combines the notions that “my children need their mother” and “I haven’t the faintest idea what I am doing” (p. 76). For one of the mothers in Steiner’s book the issue is clear; if you really love your children you will not leave them with “some nanny person all the time” but will ‘be there for them’ yourself” (p. 86).

One volume which examines motherwork without a dismissive view is Opting Out? (Stone, 2007). In this work Stone refers to the “research vacuum” (p. 26), regarding women who make the choice to focus their attentions and efforts within the home, even abandoning careers and impressive academic degrees to do so. The women in this study were married to men who could support the family on his salary alone. They were well educated and socially competent
and yet unequivocally made the choice to stay at home with their families, raise their children and build meaningful lives, not from forced choice but from preference. Stone reports the voices of the women whose lives are changed by motherwork. Stone appears to be one of the first to examine the stay-at-home mothers seeking the perspective of the women themselves. “The goal was to explore women’s reasons for quitting . . . to let the women speak for themselves” (p. 239 & 255).

Fifty-four women were interviewed in the homes of the participants, face to face. The study was exploratory and hypotheses-generating rather than hypothesis driven. It was determined that 54% of the women in the sample had worked in male-dominated, high-prestige professions such as law, business, medicine and science; and yet they chose to stay at home and raise their own children. Stone explored the questions of the impetus for, as well as the outcome from, having made this choice.

While identifying several aspects of this life-style choice, the one that seems foundational is that “Family matters!” (p. 40). Stone sums up this belief, common in this sample by noting that, for many, time with children was the central theme. Observing that “Childrearing has become more demanding” and that “A good mother is to pay close attention to your child’s development” (p. 42), these demands may be more easily accomplished by spending time with one’s children, sometimes a great deal of time. Although difficult and often all-consuming, it is that aspect of mothering that changes the woman. One woman noted that, “Your whole identity, or a big part of it, is tied up in your professional accomplishments” (p. 131), and it is difficult to know how and what will change when one shifts from the market place to the home. The only certainty appears to be that things will not be the same once the choice to that leap of faith and stay at home with children. Stone noted that some women worried about finding motherhood to
be boring. However, what the study reported was a combination of chaos and peace, joy and challenges. Some found time to do things they had not been able to while working outside the home, such as the ability to “pursue their own interests and enhance their physical well-being” (p. 134). In sum, Stone noted that women who left the workforce found that they had replaced it with a job of equal complexity, but of greater personal value.

Thus, in exploring the difference between work outside the home and those who choose motherwork as their career option, one may find that for many this is not a selection of good vs. bad but a good vs. better.
Appendix D – Historic Egalitarianism

Pre-colonial history tells us that when the American continent was young, women were viewed with varied measures of equity and respect. Their contribution to society in leadership, production, procreation, spirituality and many forms of service within the family and community was valued. From the Native Americans, who are reported to have a large degree or equality:

While varying somewhat by region, the women of the western continents took traditional roles as wives, mothers and homemakers, as well as community roles; serving as arbitrators, healers and diviners. The skill level of Aztec women was so high that according to documents from the time of The Conquest women healers were more highly skilled than contemporary Spanish doctors. (Popick, 2006)

These primitive peoples acknowledged the gendered differences of each member of the community, yet valued the distinct contributions of each with equanimity.

As settlements of Europeans began to dot the landscape this egalitarian view was also in evidence. Wives often found it necessary to maintain the family as well as conduct business in their husband’s absence (Kerber, 1980). This was possible because gender distinctions (under the law) had not yet affected a woman’s ability to own land and do business. One account explains that these circumstances occasioned new responsibilities for the women whose husbands were gone; often unexpectedly and for extended periods of time. In the case of Rebecca Pickering, (1754-1828) the unstable times meant that she found herself responsible for the development of a new family farm, complete with the construction of a home, all while bearing and caring for children including a newborn infant. Her husband found greater respect and admiration for his wife explaining that his attitude towards her had changed and that the circumstances had ‘taught me how to value you’. (Kerber, 1980) As the nation aged, it would
appear that a women’s participation in things commercial began to be seen as competition to these newly freed men who, once out from under the King’s thumb, sought to expand their own influence. Sanctions began to be placed upon women until owning property, voting and voicing her opinion were activities which became quite circumscribed (LIZ, 2011). The last state to remove a woman’s right to vote was New Jersey in 1807 when the state legislature joined the rest of the young nation in applying gender qualifications to those who wished to interact in the public domain. What had once been a matter of the exercise of a free people became rare for a portion of that population and it took nearly one hundred years to regain that which was lost in the 1700-1800’s.
Appendix E – MP 3 Files

[A disk containing the interviews in an MP3 format will be inserted here in the printed version of the document. If you are reading this electronically please contact the author for said files]
Appendix F – Real People, Real Lives

“Sewing Day” in Tremonton, Utah

Life-choices; Outliers

Three generations of Pentecostal Ministry

Cajun Crawfish Queen, mother & grandmother