

Muted Motherhood: A Standpoint Analysis of
Stay-at-home Mothers

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Elisabeth Day McNaughtan

Thesis Committee:

Matthew H. Barton, Ph.D., Chair

Kevin A. Stein, Ph.D.

Lindsey A. Harvell, Ph.D.

We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Professional Communication

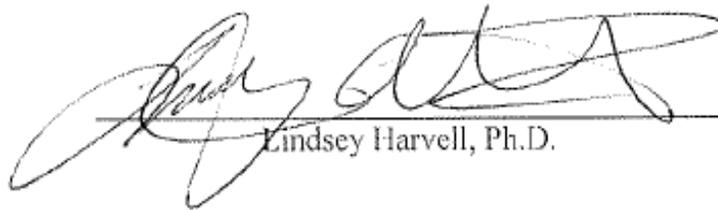
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Elisabeth Day McNaughtan

Dr. Matthew H. Barton, Thesis Supervisor

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study stay-at-home mothers as a muted group. The literature reveals that although motherhood is a popular topic in published works, politics, and the media very little information comes from, or benefits, stay-at-home mothers. Because 20-30% of mothers do stay at home (Porter, 2006; Yen, 2010), their standpoints should be considered in how society views women and motherhood. Using a standpoint framework (Hartsock, 1983) and the three assumptions of a muted group as outlined by Kramarae (1981), this thesis researched the standpoints of stay-at-home mothers through narratives posted on blogs to research whether stay-at-home mothers behave as a muted group. Three themes emerged from the narratives: social stigmas, self-validation, and feelings of guilt. Each of these themes were discussed through four perspectives: feminist perspective, educational perspective, work ethic perspective, and an economic perspective. These perspectives served as subthemes for each main theme, with the theme of self-validation having an additional sub-theme of comparative validation. These standpoints illustrated how stay-at-home mothers feel stigmatized in society, how they validate themselves and their decision to stay at home, and their conflicting feelings of guilt, despite their validations, for staying at home. How these themes reveal characteristics of a muted group are discussed, and give reason to believe that conversations on motherhood need to be more inclusive of all types of mothers.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The 1960's were a time of growing dissatisfaction for women. The women of the 60's had been raised by mothers who had been an essential part of the workforce during World War II. Following the example of "Rosie the Riveter," their mothers entered the work force as a part of the war effort while the men were overseas (Yellin, 2004). By the end of the war, nearly 18 million women were working, and comprised nearly one-third of the workforce. But as essential as the women were during the war, once the war was over these women were expected to relinquish their positions to the returning men. Some women were demoted to lower positions and lower paying jobs, but the majority were simply laid off and expected to return to their homes, which most of them did without complaint (Sorenson, 2004).

While that generation may have accepted leaving the workforce, their daughters, remembering the war-time roles of their mothers, found this unacceptable (Sorenson, 2004). As America entered the 1960's, they also entered a decade of challenging authority and social standards (Tarow, 1994). During this time, women's studies programs were becoming more popular in colleges, creating awareness of unjust treatment of women (Howe, 2000), and also creating an impending feeling of social change. This impending change was catalyzed by Betty Friedan's landmark book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). While many factors were creating dissatisfaction for women, Friedan used her book as a platform to point the blame on just one cause: the mindless, lonely, oppressive work of being a stay-at-home mother. She wrote:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction....As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children,

chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?” (Friedan, 1963, p. 15).

Friedan (1963) called this “the problem that has no name,” (p. 15), meaning housewives were feeling dissatisfied with the monotony and unappreciated work of their lives, but the problem had yet to be addressed openly. By giving a voice to women’s dissatisfaction, Friedan started a revolution that is often credited for sparking not only the 1960’s feminist movement, but also the mass exodus of women from the home and into the workforce (Fox, 2006).

In Friedan’s time, working mothers were the large minority, with as many as 90% of mothers in the home (Sorenson, 2004). Today the roles have almost reversed with an estimated 70-77% of mothers now in the workforce (Porter, 2006; Yen, 2010) leaving a meager 20-30% of mothers who stay at home. This change of dynamics is often directly attributed to the work of the 1960’s feminist movement (Norton, 2005). Thus women can thank Betty Friedan for freeing them from the seemingly oppressive expectation of being stay-at-home mothers.

There was an unfortunate irony, however, in having Betty Friedan as the advocate for oppressed stay-at-home mothers—the irony being that Betty Friedan had never even been a stay-at-home mother herself. In fact, before marriage Friedan had experienced atypical success for women of her decade as both a graduate researcher and a professional writer (Lewis, 2011). After marriage, Friedan’s situation did not change. She stated that “...as a wife and mother of three small children...[I used] my abilities and education in work that took me away from home” (Friedan, 1963, p. 9). This is not to say that Friedan’s book was an incorrect portrayal of domestic life, or that the 1960’s women’s movement was superfluous. This is only to point out that in addition to sparking a feminist revolution, Friedan also sparked a discouraging trend of

discussing the supposedly dismal and oppressive situation of being a stay-at-home mother without actually letting a stay-at-home mother enter the discussion.

Through the years, the trend Friedan sparked has continued, and the discussion about whether women should work or stay at home has been dominated by the voices of working women, leaving stay-at-home mothers with relatively little voice in society. This chapter will illustrate how stay-at-home mothers of today are still misrepresented and caricatured in society by discussing current popular literature, political issues involving mothers, and the stereotypes society has created of stay-at-home mothers.

Stay-at-Home-Mothers in Literature

Contemporary authors continue to write about mothers in society, usually trying to either refute or further promote the original ideas of Friedan. Whatever their position, Friedan's trend continues in that those who try to represent stay-at-home mothers have rarely been in the role themselves. This will be illustrated with popular literature from the past 5 years.

Literature on stay-at-home mothers picked up in 2006 with a provocative book by Linda Hirshman entitled *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World* (Hirshman, 2006). In a day where everyone is concerned with being politically correct, Hirshman was praised for admitting that, as a feminist, she thinks stay-at-home mothers are wasting their lives (Pollitt, 2006). In her book Hirshman (2006) stated:

Bounding home is not good for women and it's not good for the society. The women aren't using their capacities fully; their so-called free choice makes them unfree dependents on their husbands. Whether they leave the workplace altogether or just cut back their commitment, their talent and education are lost from the public world to the private world of laundry and kissing boo-boos. The abandonment of the public world by

women at the top means the ruling class is overwhelmingly male. If the rulers are male, they will make mistakes that benefit males. Picture an all-male Supreme Court. We may well go back there. What will that mean for the women of America (p. 2)?

This excerpt not only shows Hirshman's opposition to women staying at home, but also gives the reader a sense that this was not really a "manifesto for women of the world," but rather a manifesto for well-educated women of the world. Hirshman (2006) stated, "These educated and privileged women matter. They matter because they are the most likely women to become the rising stars of the new economy" (p. 7). She had reason to believe that these educated women would not come through, as 60% of female students at Yale had recently indicated their plans to become stay-at-home mothers in their late adult life (Story, 2005), creating what researchers called an "opt-out revolution" (Belkin, 2003; Wallis, 2004; Story, 2005). Hirschman (2006) addressed one such mother directly: a Harvard graduate who claimed she enjoyed staying at home while still staying involved in her community. She wrote:

Assuming she is telling the truth, and she does live in the perfect land of a Walgreen's ad, is not all this biking and tree climbing a bit too much of the inner child for any normal adult?...My correspondent's life does have a certain Tom Sawyerish quality to it, but she has no power in the world. Why would the congressmen she writes to listen to someone whose life so resembles that of a toddler's, Harvard degree or no (p. 34)?

In Hirschman's eyes, having a highly respected degree is all the more reason a woman should not be at home. But once again, how could society have expected Hirshman to understand stay-at-home mothers when she had never been one, but had always been balancing career and family. ("Penguin", 2011). Like Friedan, she had bold opinions of staying-at-home, but lacked the actual experience.

The same year Hirshman's book came out, Caitlin Flanagan, a writer for both *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*, attempted to give society a stay-at-home mother's perspective with her book *To Hell with All That: Loving and Loathing Our Inner Housewife* (2006). Flanagan tried to illustrate the superiority of traditional housewives by recounting her personal joys of being a stay-at-home mother. But while Flanagan tried to convince readers that the oppressiveness of housework was a lie from feminists, her point was lost when she admitted in the book that she had employed a full-time housekeeper and nanny, which allowed her to continue writing full-time (Flanagan, 2006). Instead of advocating for housewives, she promulgated the stereotype that stay-at-home mothers have a do-nothing life of luxury, and drew extensive criticism from the media (Colbert, 2006; Hulbert, 2006; Paul, 2006).

In an effort to give a voice to both sides of the equation, Leslie Morgan Steiner compiled the book *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face off on their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* (Steiner, 2006). In this book, Steiner collected 27 essays from both working and stay-at-home mothers who described why they decided to either continue working or stay-at-home after having children. This book was praised for giving a balanced view into the minds of the two groups of women (Molinolo, 2007), but in reality only 9 of the 27 essays were written by stay-at-home mothers, three of whom returned to work shortly after submitting their essays (Tyre, Springen, & Juarez, 2006). In the end, it was not as balanced as it appeared to be. The essays themselves did not do a lot to promote the idea of stay-at-home mothering. One woman's essay described how housework drove her mother to hang herself after her job prospects had gone awry, saying that "Work gave my mother a structure that sealed the madness inside" (Feld, 2006). Another woman's essay described how she needed her career to balance out what being a mother was doing to her (Minsky, 2006), which one book reviewer summarized as "...she chose

career over antidepressants, not career over family” (Molinolo, 2007, p. 46). In addition, Steiner herself wrote in the introduction, “I don’t understand moms who find happiness staying home all the time, without work and their own incomes” (2006, p. x). Once again, stay-at-home mothers were left largely unrepresented in a book that claimed to give them a voice.

Ann Crittenden came to the defense of mothers in her book *The Price of Motherhood* (2010). Crittenden, a Pulitzer-prize nominee for her reporting with *The New York Times* who also wrote for *Newsweek* and *Fortune* magazine (Crittenden, 2005), had occasionally written in defense of stay-at-home mothers since the 1970’s (Crittenden, 2010). She admitted, however, in the introduction that she had felt charitable whenever she wrote in behalf of stay-at-home mothers, because in reality she did not understand their motives. Crittenden (2005) wrote:

Deep down, I had no doubt that I was superior, in my midtown office over-looking Madison Avenue, to those unpaid housewives pushing brooms. “Why aren’t they making something of themselves?” I wondered. “What’s wrong with them? They’re letting our side down (Crittenden, 2010, p. 3).

While she did eventually become a stay-at-home mother for a time, her book was not intended to promote the idea of staying at home. Instead she wrote that our country needs to make it easier for women to simultaneously earn an income and raise children to lessen, in accord with her title, “the price of motherhood.”

If the case for stay-at-home mothers was in a slump the past five years, it was brought even lower with the publishing of Rahna Reiko Rizzuto’s memoir *Hiroshima in the Morning* (2010). Rizzuto, who had been a stay-at-home mother, not only recounted how she decided to return to work, but also how she left her entire family in the process. After seven years of marriage, Rizzuto left her husband with custody of their two sons to pursue her writing career.

She defended herself in an interview saying, “We have created such a culture around care giving and love that I think we often confuse the two. So now you have to prove you love someone by taking care of them” (Hampson, 2011, p. L1). While this raises an interesting question of who will take care of children if the ones who love them think it is not their responsibility, Rizzuto moved on to explain why love was not enough for her to take care of her children: “I totally bonded with my children and they didn’t annoy me, but I didn’t get any writing done either” (Hampson, 2011, p. L1). Thus her desire for a writing career trumped her responsibility over children who “didn’t annoy” her. But if writing was her goal, it was worth it to leave her family, as her memoir became a 2010 finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award (“Feminist Press”, 2011).

Thus the past five years of literature have left society with very little to understand stay-at-home mothers and their motives. With there being so little representation in written works, it is no wonder society misunderstands the stay-at-home mother.

Stay-at-Home Mothers and Politics

Unfortunately, political figures have not done a lot to help the image of stay-at-home mothers either. In the 2004 presidential election, as John Kerry campaigned against President George W. Bush, Teresa Heinz Kerry was asked why she would be a better first lady than Laura Bush. She responded, “Well, you know, I don’t know Laura Bush...But I don’t know that she’s ever had a real job....my experience is a little bit bigger” (Rosin, 2004, p. C01). Of course, by not having a “real job” she was referring to Laura Bush being a stay-at-home mother to her twin daughters. Hours after her comments became public, Mrs. Kerry realized the uproar her comments had caused, and issued an apology saying, “I had forgotten that Mrs. Bush had worked as a school teacher and librarian, and there couldn’t be a more important job than teaching our

children....[I] am sincerely sorry I had not remembered her important work in the past” (Rosin, 2004, p. C01). By failing to acknowledge what she had implied about stay-at-home mothers, and only recognizing Mrs. Bush’s “important work in the past,” she reaffirmed that she did not consider being a stay-at-home mother an important job.

Teresa Heinz Kerry is not the only politician to have sent conflicting messages about mothers in the home. While she may have shrugged off Laura Bush’s mothering efforts, several other politicians have sent the message that raising children *is* a priority in our country. James Heckman, a Nobel prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago, is known for telling politicians that investing in children is the best place our country’s money can go (Crittenden, 2010, p. ix). In accordance, Lawrence H. Summers, a Harvard professor who served on both the Clinton and Obama administrations (Rose, 2010), has said that raising children is the most important job in the world (Crittenden, 2010, p. 2). Additionally, President Clinton declared the welfare of children to be one of his administration’s top priorities (Gallagher, 1998). The obvious reason for politicians to care about the careful and effective raising of children is because it is economically beneficial to our country. As economist Shirley Burggraf explained, two-thirds of all wealth is created by human skills and creativity, making parents and children the wealth producers of our country (Burggraf, 1998). Thus our politicians should be concerned about how our children are being raised, if for no other reason than for the nation’s economic well-being. This is where the conflict of messages comes to play.

Ironically, while they recognize that the careful raising of competent children is important, they rarely encourage mothers, or even family, to be doing the majority of this work. Instead, states are expanding their pre-school and kindergarten programs to allow longer days with younger children, and providing funding for parents to afford child-care (“New York

Times”, 1998; Crittenden, 2010, p. ix). In fact, President Clinton’s fulfillment of making the welfare of children his top priority was by expanding child care options, and even offering tax credits to those who used commercial child care facilities (Gallagher, 1998), while those who either stayed at home or left their children with relatives went unrewarded. Additionally, the government is doing very little to help *working* mothers spend time with their children. For example, working mothers with a newborn baby are not guaranteed paid maternal leave, which is standard in every other developed country (Heymann & Earle, 2009), but instead are given government-mandated breaks *at work* to express milk for their baby (Grady, 2010). This legislation, or lack thereof, points to wanting mothers in the workforce, even during critical points in their children’s lives. By failing to support mothers who remain in the home, and even failing to support mothers who balance time between work and home, our politicians send the message that the time a mother spends with her child is not an important part of society.

Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home Mothers

While society is not supporting the mothers who stay at home, they definitely are forming a lot of stereotypes about them. With health reports showing that stay-at-home mothers are 50% more likely to be obese than working mothers (Kane, 2006), and also get more hours of sleep (Edmund, 2004), it is easy to assume that many stay-at-home mothers lead a life of idleness and ease. This stereotype of idleness leads many to form one of two conclusions: stay-at-home mothers are either extremely rich, or extremely poor. Sociologists have insisted that in today’s economy only the very wealthy can afford to have their mothers stay home (Tyre, Springen, & Juarez, 2006), but Ann Crittenden (2010) has claimed the opposite calling motherhood the single biggest risk factor for poverty. She explains, “Anything that discourages mothers from earning income, especially during a recession, endangers an entire family’s security” (p. xii). She called

this risk the “mommy tax”—meaning mothers lose money while out of the workforce that they will never be able to earn back. Either assumption, however, of prosperity or poverty does not accurately reflect reality. Reports show that stay-at-home mothers are not unique to either the higher class or the lower class, but are spread throughout various earning brackets (St. George, 2009). But this does not stop Crittenden (2010) from insisting that staying at home is a severe handicap to women (p. 3).

In a sense, Crittenden (2010) is not completely wrong. It seems being a stay-at-home mother is becoming a handicap to women. It is becoming increasingly harder for stay-at-home mothers to get a personal credit card independent of their husband (Carnns, 2011), or buy a home with their spouse, even when their spouse has a steady income (Cohen, 2004), all because they lack a current job and personal income history. While it may appear that being a stay-at-home mother is a financial liability, financiers have estimated that stay-at-home mothers perform work that would earn over \$100,000 a year in the work force (Lim, 2006), and warn families to have a life insurance policy for a stay-at-home mother because many families are not prepared to pay the difference for the lost source of free childcare and housekeeping when a mother passes away (Lankford, 2001). In the end, stay-at-home mothers may not ever get a \$100,000 paycheck, but they are saving their family money by performing tasks they would otherwise have to pay others to do.

Although they can have this piece of mind that they are saving their family money, many women still worry that staying at home will create a gap on their resume and hinder their ability to someday return to the workforce. This is another stereotype as some advisors have claimed that stay-at-home mothers can get away with a gap in their resume as long as their employer senses their work ethic (Halper, 2006), while others have claimed that employers are just

becoming more accepting of gaps on resumes in general (Belkin, 2008). Brenda Barnes illustrated how inconsequential a resume gap can be when she resigned as CEO of Pepsi in 1997 to be a stay-at-home mother, and then returned to the workforce eight years later as CEO of Sara Lee (Jones, 2005), seeming to have lost none of her competitive advantage in the process.

But even with savvy minds like Brenda Barnes joining the ranks of stay-at-home mothers, society has still tagged the majority of stay-at-home mothers as uneducated. The U.S. Census has fueled this stereotype by reporting that the more education a mother has obtained, the more likely she is to keep on working (Tyre, Springen, & Juarez, 2006). This means statistically one can assume a stay-at-home mother has obtained less education than a working mother. In addition, reports show that the less education a woman has, the more children she is likely to have (Rochman, 2011). Thus not only is staying at home a mark of being uneducated, but each additional child should statistically confirm this notion.

Society's demeaning views of stay-at-home mothers, and perhaps motherhood in general, is evident in more than just statistical reports, but in the very language society is adopting. Douglas and Michaels (2004) illustrated how language is discouraging the idea of motherhood by showing that society is increasingly using the word "mom" in lieu of "mother." They explain, "'Mom'—a term previously used only by children—doesn't have the authority of 'mother,' because it addresses us from a child's-eye view. It assumes a familiarity, an approachability to mothers that is, frankly, patronizing" (p. 19-20). Not only is it patronizing, but they additionally claimed that this casual language is most commonly used for "stay-at-home moms" and not "working mothers" (p. 20). King (2007) further explained this degrading language:

We don't regard motherhood the way we used to. As usual, language reveals what people think they are hiding. Take the word "mommy." When Republicans call Democrats the

"Mommy Party" it conveys weakness, meekness, and whatever other ignominious "-ness" the speaker has in mind. A decade ago, "Mommy Track" expressed contempt for the woman who, opting to interrupt her career to raise children, took herself out of the fast track of promotions and partnerships for the perpetual juniorships of the second tier: i.e., a loser. (para. 5)

As King says, language reveals what we think we are hiding, and America is not doing well at hiding their slipping respect for stay-at-home mothers.

But amidst all this evidence of stay-at-home mothers being disrespected, the same piece is still missing that was missing back when Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)—the missing piece being that stay-at-home mothers have still not been given the chance to represent themselves. The literature shows the lack of voice stay-at-home mothers have, the politics show the lack of support, and the stereotypes show the lack of respect they receive, but the question still remains, how do stay-at-home mothers feel? Do they feel marginalized? Do they feel disrespected, disadvantaged, and misunderstood? These are the questions this thesis will attempt to answer. Feminist studies commonly refer to marginalized, disadvantaged, or misunderstood groups as “muted groups” (Ardener, 1975; Kramarae, 1981), and this thesis will analyze narratives of stay-at-home mothers and research whether they display the qualities of being muted.

The following chapter will provide a literature review explaining the dynamics of muted groups and the associated research that has been conducted. The literature review, like the introduction, will attempt to illustrate the lack of attention that research has given to stay-at-home mothers. Chapter 3 will explain the method used to collect and analyze narratives of stay-at-home mothers. The results of the analysis and how they apply to the research questions will be

discussed in Chapter 4. This thesis will then conclude with Chapter 5, which will explain the importance of the results, the relevant implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and possible directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Just as the introduction shows that stay-at-home mothers have not had a voice in society, academic research shows that women in general have historically been robbed of their voice (Ardener, 1975, 1978). This chapter will review the academic research on Muted Group Theory and associated research on women. The research will be presented by topic in five sections: Muted Group Theory, power to name, supporting theories, women muting women, and working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers. The last section also comprises the rationale and research questions for this thesis.

Muted Group Theory

The belief that one gender (male) is traditionally favored over another is what originally led to the creation of Muted Group Theory by husband and wife anthropologists Edward and Shirley Ardener (1975). The Ardeners (1975) realized while studying other cultures that they and their colleagues were frequently drawing conclusions after only talking to the culture's leaders, who were most often times men. Edward Ardener (1975) explained, "Those trained in ethnography evidently have a bias towards the kinds of models that men are ready to provide (or to concur in) rather than towards any that women might provide" (p. 2). Realizing that this bias was excluding the perspectives of women, children, and other specialty groups in their research, the Ardeners (1975) theorized that this "mutedness" had occurred throughout history, meaning that the past and present world had been missing the perspectives of women. Years later, using the Ardener's work on Muted Group Theory as a basis, Cherise Kramarae (1981) adapted the theory to specifically serve the field of communications by developing three assumptions.

These three assumptions and their supporting research will be illustrated below, but before that happens it should be noted that these three assumptions are not supported as much

with current research as they are with research surrounding the time, and social atmosphere, from when this theory came to be. As will be explained later in the chapter, Muted Group Theory has moved beyond comparing men and women as a whole, and instead is used to compare more specific groups within or between genders on the basis of race (Dugger, 1996; Orbe, 1998; Droogsma, 2007), class (see Rakow, 1992 and Hardman & Taylor, 2000), and sexuality (Orbe, 1998; Martin & Nakayama, 2006). This change in applying the theory could be for several reasons: perhaps women as a whole are no longer muted by men; perhaps feminism has changed the dynamics of society in such a way that attitudes about male and female roles no longer exist; or perhaps researching women as a conglomerate is simplistic because culture, race, class, sexuality, and a myriad of other factors can affect a woman and her world view. Whatever the reason behind the shift, a large portion of the supporting research will be dated and current research will be cited wherever possible. The research, however dated, will nonetheless give insight into the theory, how it was supported at the time of its creation, how it has been supporting since its creation, and how the available research leads into the topic of this thesis. Now, to explain and illustrate the three assumptions:

First, *women perceive the world differently than men because of their differing experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor* (Kramarae, 1981, p. 3). To explain, men and women do not experience the world the same. There are experiences that are unique to each gender, which the assumption claims is due to the division of labor. This division gives each gender a view of the world that the other simply cannot have. For example, men and women may have the exact same job with the exact same hours, but research showed that women will feel a greater burden from the job because they are expected to also be the dominant caretakers of the home (Hoschild, 1989; Wood, 1994) —meaning that women are more likely than men to end

their day at work only to go home and begin a “second shift” of full-time housework (Hoschild, 1989). Because of these differing realities, men and women can approach the same situation, like a required after-hour work meeting, and walk away with completely differing opinions of the necessity and functionality of the situation.

Second, *because of their political dominance, men’s systems of perception are also dominant, and as a result women’s systems of perceiving are seen as less competent* (Kramarae, 1981, p. 3). This assumption claims that society prefers the views of men over the views of women. For example, in the workplace, Conrad (1990) showed that men make decisions on a logical/rational basis, while Marshall (1993) showed that women made decisions based on emotion. Although research shows little to no difference in the effectiveness between these masculine and feminine strategies (Conrad, 1990), the workplace consistently favors the rational male-perspective over the emotional female perspective (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Recent research suggests that while women in the U.S. are now gaining ground by comprising nearly half of the workforce and earning 60% of universities’ degrees (*The Economist*, 2009), this gender bias still holds true today. One study using scripted black and white, male and female actors to serve customers in a controlled situation showed that customers reported greater satisfaction in their service if they were helped by a white male (Hekman, Aquino, Owens, Mitchell, Schilpzand, & Leavitt, 2010). Additionally, a recent Gallup poll reported that more workers admit to preferring a male boss than a woman (Newport, 2011). Thus the research suggests the assumption still holds true that men’s perceptions are dominant making women’s perceptions appear less competent.

One could question whether this assumption is too broad—for surely women’s perceptions are dominant in *some* knowledge areas that are generally unique to women, such as

housework or child-bearing. But research does not support this notion. Even in areas where women should be considered the expert, society defaults to the knowledge of men (Spender, 1984; Dalmiya & Alcoff, 1993; Sterk, Hay, Kehoe, Ratcliffe, & VandeVusse, 2002). Spender (1984) and Sterk et al. (2002) show that when discussing child birth people often talk about the male perspective, from either the doctor or the partner, of how beautiful, joyous, and miraculous the occasion was. These descriptions, however, are outside perspectives that come from *watching* the birth. Rarely is birth described from the mother's perspective. This is not to say that she does not also find birth beautiful and miraculous, but those are usually after-feelings once the birth is complete. When women describe the birth they talk about how painful, tiring, and frustrating the experience was (Spender, 1984), or they decline from describing it at all (Sterk et al., 2002).

Additionally, Dalmiya & Alcoff (1993) described how the phrase "wives tale," a phrase originally coined to describe the knowledge of midwives, is a covert way to denigrate women's first-hand knowledge. When society uses the phrase "wives tale," they often refer to traditional, but inaccurate, knowledge with no scientific backing. Although midwives usually had no degrees or "scientific" data to support their methods, their methods were derived from experience in delivering their own children and attending/aiding in the births of other women. Despite the criticisms of midwives being uneducated, the medical world has reverted back to their birthing methods time and time again (Dalmiya & Alcoff, 1993, p. 223). In contrast, as male physicians took over the birthing process with their scientific knowledge, their methods have gone from hanging women from trees to increase gravitational pull, putting weight on the abdomen to force the baby out, putting women in a semiconscious state so she is unable to assist during the birth, pulling the child out with forceps, and removing the child by c-section (Dalmiya & Alcoff, 1993,

p. 222-223). Presumably some of this trial and error could have been avoided if women had been credited to have accurate knowledge about a situation they had actually experienced. Instead, society has defaulted to trust the “educated” and “scientific” knowledge of a man in an area that he never had nor ever would experience. Thus the assumption that men’s perceptions are ranked superior in *all* areas is supported by research, as is women’s perceptions being seen as less competent.

The third, and final, assumption is that *in order to participate in society, women must transform their perceptions and own models of perceiving into terms of the male system of expression* (Kramarae, 1981, p. 3). As mentioned previously, the female perspective, often associated with being emotional, is not respected in the workplace because it is different than the traditional masculine leadership styles (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). As a result, women must attempt to implement male-strategies to be valued in the workplace (Conrad 1991). This requires women to go through a translation process, transforming their natural ways of speaking into a way that would be respected and understood by the dominant group. As Olsen (1978) explains, this affords men the advantage to “tell it straight” while women have to “tell it slant” (p. 23; as cited in West & Turner, 2010, p. 492).

It should be noted, however, that while translating their perceptions to fit the dominant system does help women participate in society it is not shown to equalize men and women’s performances. Conrad (1991) reports that when women employ the same tactics as men on similar situations, their efforts are viewed as less effective than those of a man, and Kanter (1977) claims that women are informally punished by their organizations when they perform like men. As Buzzanell (1994) describes “In either case, they [women] suffer sanctions by trying to act like men, or by being derided as too soft and unfocused on organizational goals” (p. 361).

Thus while women are better enabled by translating their perceptions, they are still disadvantaged in comparison to men.

Power to Name

From these three assumptions, it is clear that Muted Group Theory claims a language system does not serve all members equally. But what is the root of men being so advantaged over women? Researchers have answered this question by concluding that those who are best served by a language system are those who had a historical part in creating it (Ardener, 1975). In the English language the group that most benefits is men, because they have historically had what researchers call the “power to name,” or the chance to create the language that most benefits them (Taylor & Hardman, 2000; Wood, 2008). Wood (2008) explained the benefit of holding the power to name in the following: “Those who name the world have the privilege of highlighting their experiences and what they consider important by naming them, and the privilege of erasing experiences they do not know or consider important by not naming those” (p. 269). The idea that men did not name female experiences, thus disadvantaging the entire female gender, may seem like an unlikely belief promoted by the agenda of extreme feminists. But how else can society explain why phrases like “sexual harassment” or “sexual abuse” were not coined until the 1970’s (Wood, 2004)—approximately the time the feminist movement was taking place and women were demanding more power? Because unwanted sexual impositions were non-existent until then? Not likely. Sexual harassment is a predominantly female experience, and men did not have a reason to name it while creating the language, because they had never experienced it. This left women handicapped when attempting to explain these situations.

The harm in leaving experiences unnamed goes deeper than just hindering speech. Wood (2004) explains that when an experience goes unnamed there is “no socially recognized way to

name or condemn what happened” (p. 270). Without a name, a problem cannot be properly discussed, and any necessary social action is severely hindered. In this light, Betty Friedan (1963) calling the oppression of housewives “the problem without a name” (p. 15) becomes quite ironic, and further illustrates how naming a problem (e.g. simply calling women’s oppression “the problem without a name”) can result in social action (the second-wave feminist movement).

This loss of verbal power may not just impede social action, but may very well explain research that consistently shows women on the losing end of communication. In comparison to men, women are more likely to use “powerless speech” (i.e. frequent use of hesitations, disclaimers, etc.) (Lokoff, 1973; Timmerman, 2002), are less persuasive in speaking (Burrell & Koper, 1998), are less likely to object to an idea in a group setting (Eagly & Carli, 1981), rely more on non-verbal communication (Henley, 1977), show greater dissatisfaction with communication in relationships (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2005, p. 129), are more likely to be interrupted in a conversation (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Carli, 1990), and are less likely to attempt speaking again after being interrupted (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Carli, 1990). Perhaps this evidence showing how women struggle with communication does not say as much about women as it does about the communication system itself—and that it may possibly favor one gender over another, just as Ardener (1975) and Wood (2008) have suggested.

Supporting Theories

In addition to Muted Group Theory and the power to name, researchers have postulated other theories as to why women feel/are silenced. Cirksena & Cuklanz (1992) proposed the Theory of Dualism to explain the oppression of women. The Theory of Dualism explains that Western culture often thinks in dualism such as hot/cold, pretty/ugly, light/dark. Perhaps without realizing, society turns these dualisms into hierarchal relationships where one term is valued over

the other. They suggest that this happened with the dualism of male/female, with male becoming the valued term in the hierarchy (Cirksena & Cuklanz, 1992, p. 20). This hierarchal ranking consequently results in the oppression of women.

Taking a different view than Muted Group Theory, which believes women are disadvantaged by language and thus cannot express themselves appropriately, Ardener (1978) argued that it is possible women *are* able to adequately express themselves, but do not have a willing audience to listen. Research supports the notion of an unwilling audience by showing that men trivialize women's speech as being nagging, gossiping, or chatty; thus rendering worthless the effort it takes to listen (Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Soule, 2001). Sheriff (2000) calls silence "contractual in nature" (p. 114), meaning that through unequal distribution of power one group agrees/is expected to be the knowledgeable speaker while the other group agrees/is expected to be silent and accept what is being said. This helps explain research showing how women feel unheard in the medical context, where there is unequal distribution of power between them and the doctor (Brann & Mattson, 2004). Thus, if one group feels silenced it is possibly through a social understanding that one group has power while the other does not.

Although these two theories take a different view than Muted Group theory, they do support the notion that muted groups do indeed exist, and give insight into how society creates divisions in groups in order to establish an understood hierarchy.

Women Muting Women

In first studying Muted Group Theory, it may be tempting to assume that the oppression of women is the sole responsibility of men. In fact, the three assumptions of the theory indicate that main conflict is solely between men and women. As a result a main criticism that arises for Muted Group Theory is that it perpetuates essentialism—the belief that all women are alike and

all men are alike. Muted group researchers have taken this criticism seriously, and as a result forthcoming research has been focusing not on the division *between* men and women, but instead on existing division *among* women. As critics note, inter-group studies can be simplistic and ignore the struggles within groups (Kramarae, 2005, p. 58) and thus call it “unimaginable” that feminist researchers focus only on differences between men and women because differences *among* women can be so much greater (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Feminist researchers believe that focusing on differences *among* women illustrates the various needs of women in common situations (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990).

African American women were one of the first groups to call attention to the differences among women (Dugger, 1996). From their perspective, the 1960’s feminist movement did not represent them at all, but was a movement for middle-class white women. The women of the feminist movement complained that they were forced to stay-at-home, but this was not the reality for African American women at all. In fact, African American women had never even been afforded the luxury of being full-time homemakers, and instead had to seek employment outside of the home. As Dugger (1996) explained, “While nineteenth-century culture in the United States stereotyped White women as too frail and dainty to undertake physical labor, Black women were viewed as beasts of burden and subjected to the same demeaning labor and hardships as Black men” (p. 34). Here Dugger is referring to the slave-labor Black men and women provided, but she goes on to explain that Black women being given the same tasks as men continued after slavery and into the twentieth century: “Racial discrimination has produced high rates of unemployment among Black men and segregated them into low-paying jobs, and thus the Black family needs the labor of more than one wage earner” (p. 34). Because the situation of Black

women sharply contrasted the situation of White women, it became clear that feminist research needed to narrow its lens.

The narrowing of focus is what researchers have called “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989), wherein research focuses on more than just gender, but also race, class, and other factors. In attempts to study intersectionality, researchers began collecting stories and research from different demographics of women to show how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation all bring new issues to the table of feminist research (see Rakow, 1992; Chow, Wilkinson, & Zinn, 1996; Hardman & Taylor, 2000). This research shows just how complex women’s issues are, and how varying factors need to be considered.

But even this narrowed research is a little simplistic, as it suggests that race and class are what make women different. Leaving research at this point would lead one to believe that white women are one entity, while African American women are another and so on, ignoring, once again, the differences that exist inside these groups.

Hardman & Taylor (2000) acknowledge how different women are even in the smallest of groups. They use the example of Matilde Joslyn Gage, a 19th century suffragist whose ideas were too radical for the feminists of her day (who were not many). Even though she was a well-known political figure, her voice has become silenced in history by the ideas of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony because her ideas strayed from the majority of the activists of her day (p. 2). This shows how members within oppressed groups can have differing opinions, wherein one opinion can become dominant while the other becomes further oppressed.

Droogsma (2007) gives a modern example of a muted group amongst women by interviewing American Muslim women who choose to veil themselves. Western feminists reject the idea of veiling for being oppressive, thus making western women who do veil not only a

muted group, but a muted group among women. Droogsma (2007) found that the negative attitudes about the veil are most often spoken by those who have never practiced wearing a veil. When the issue was discussed with American Muslim women who do veil, they revealed that they found it to be a rewarding experience that they believed showed an ultimate level of self-respect. However, because the dominant voices among women in America condemn the veil as a symbol of oppression, the women who value the veil are silenced.

Working Mothers vs. Stay-at-Home Mothers

With the example of Muslim Americans in mind, this thesis questions whether or not stay-at-home mothers are in a very similar situation. While Western feminists condemn the veil as oppressive (Droogsma, 2007), they also condemn the idea of becoming a stay-at-home mother as oppressive; after all it was the championing cause of the 1960's feminist movement (Friedan, 1963). Thus while women are claiming to be a muted group, they are ignoring the members of their group who they are muting—stay-at-home mothers. This is evidenced by the lack of research feminists have dedicated to stay-at-home mothers.

While very little research has been done on mothers in general, what has been done has been dedicated to working mothers. Feminist researchers lament that working mothers are treated unfairly; job applicants who identified themselves as mothers received nearly half as many call backs as women with no children, even though they had otherwise identical resumes (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). They applaud working-mothers, awarding them the title of “superwoman” for balancing work and family (Schwartz, 1992), and create martyrs out of them for working a full shift at work and then working a “second shift” in the form of housework and child-rearing once they return home at night (Hochschild, 1989). The disregard for stay-at-home mothers in research may be explained by some scholars who believe that stay-at-home mothers

no longer exist. For example, Crittenden (1999) claimed that working outside the home has become an expectation of women, and calls this expectation the “new problem without a name,” (p. 83). She states that women no longer feel they have the choice to stay at home, just as women of Friedan’s time did not feel they had the choice to work.

Perhaps the belief that all women work outside the home can account for the lack of research on stay-at-home mothers, but the fact is that nearly 8 million mothers in the United States *do* stay at home (Yen, 2010), and have been overlooked. Cirksena & Cuklanz’s (1992) already mentioned the Theory of Dualisms, wherein they believe society subconsciously forms dualisms and decides which term to value, may also account for the lack of research on stay-at-home mothers. While Cirksena & Cuklanz have established the dualism of male/female, with male being the valued term in the hierarchy (p. 20), this thesis proposes that there is a dualism between working mother/stay-at-home mother, with working mother being the valued term of the duo. This would cause stay-at-home mothers to become a muted group for making the anti-feminist choice of staying at home.

Whether stay-at-home mothers are a muted group is a significant question for the sole purpose that the 1960’s women’s movement gained traction because stay-at-home mothers felt unheard in society (see Friedan, 1963). The result of the women’s movement, however, has not been to give stay-at-home mothers a voice, but instead gives women who venture into traditional male positions a voice. This leaves women who do not join the workforce, choosing instead to stay at home, completely voiceless, to both men and working women.

The danger in leaving this group of stay-at-home mothers unresearched is that Muted Group Theory has already started to move beyond women. Orbe (1998) and Martin and Nakayama (2006) have focused their muted group research on African American men, the

disabled, the elderly, ethnic minorities, non-Christians, and the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community. Chopra (2001) has focused on establishing nurturing fathers as a muted group. In a sense, the conversation of women as a muted group has been interrupted, and as Zimmerman and West (1975) have shown, when a woman is interrupted she is likely to remain silent. Thus, this thesis is an attempt to return the conversation of muted groups not only to women, but to the group where it first started: stay-at-home mothers.

This thesis will research whether stay-at-home mothers do feel muted, both among men and working women, by working off of Kramarae's (1981) three assumptions for a muted group: 1) Women perceive the world differently from men because of women's and men's different experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor, 2) Because men are the dominant group in society, the male perception is also dominant, leaving women's perceptions and system of perceiving less dominant and viewed as less competent, and 3) In order to become participating members in society, women must transform their perceptions and models of perceiving into terms of the dominant group (p. 3).

If stay-at-home mothers are a muted group among women, then these three assumptions would apply to them with stay-at-home mothers being specified as the non-dominant group instead of women in general, and working women being specified as the dominant group instead of men. These observations lead to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do women who are stay-at-home mothers perceive the world differently from working women because of their different experiences and the division in labor?

RQ2: Because working women are the dominant group of women in society, making their perceptions dominant, in what ways are stay-at-home mothers perceptions seen as less competent?

RQ3: In order to become participating (or not muted) members in society, how do women who are stay-at-home mothers transform their perceptions and models of perceiving into terms of the dominant group (i.e. working women)?

Chapter 3: Method

These research questions of whether stay-at-home mothers display traits of a muted group will be addressed through a standpoint analysis, using narratives as the artifact through which the standpoints will be obtained. This chapter will comprise the following: the explained appropriateness of a Standpoint Theory framework, the usefulness of narratives to obtain standpoints, the process in which data was collected, a description of the participants, and the process in which the data was analyzed. Each of these subjects will be addressed in individual sections.

Standpoint Theory Framework

Standpoint Theory relies on first-hand knowledge, and first-hand knowledge, as the first two chapters have attempted to illustrate, has been seemingly absent when it comes to the representation of stay-at-home mothers in the United States. For this reason, a standpoint analysis was chosen as the framework for this thesis. Standpoint Theory, created by Nancy Hartsock (1983), focuses on marginalized voices to understand oppression and dominance, with the goal of “envisioning more just social practices” (Hartsock, 1997, p. 373). Standpoint Theory is able to focus on marginalized voices because the theory rests on the assumption that all people acquire knowledge through their unique experiences obtained by their social position (Hartsock, 1983), and thus considers an individual’s own perspectives the most valid source of information about issues experienced by that individual (Wood, 2007).

Giving validity to individuals’ experiences is a simple concept, but researchers warn that individuals and minority groups are seldom given the authority over their unique knowledge and experiences, and are often overshadowed by groups with more dominant standpoints (West & Turner, 2010). As Hartsock (1983) explains, when there are two different groups with two

opposing life structures and one group becomes dominant, the understanding of the dominant group will be both partial and potentially harmful to the other who is not being heard. The partial, and potentially harmful, knowledge of dominant groups was illustrated in Droogsma's (2007) aforementioned study on interviewing Muslim American women who choose to veil their faces. In American culture, the veil is a symbol of oppression, but as most of America has not had to wear a veil their understanding is both partial, and possibly harmful. The potential harm becomes apparent in light of Droogsma's (2007) unexpected findings that from the standpoint of American Muslim women, many of them cherish the veil and find it rewarding to wear. These findings directly oppose the views of most Americans; thus by uncovering the standpoint of women who value veiling, American culture can then see that their negative attitudes towards the tradition could be harmful to immigrants trying to find acceptance in this country.

Her findings, however, should not be considered truth for all Muslim Americans, and not even for all Muslim American women who choose to veil, because "truth" is a concept that Standpoint Theory rejects. There are so many varying standpoints in society, that the theory views "truth" as a subjective term (Orbe, 1998), and believes all statements, assertions, and theories should not be considered universal truth, but a representation of a subjective social location (Davis, 2008). What one group identifies as "truth" is bound to vary in meaning when observed from the standpoint of another group, and possibly even vary within the group (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). Surely some Muslim American women find the veil degrading, but their voices should not be the only ones heard when Americans, as outsiders to the veiling practice, make their judgments. The same sentiment holds true for this thesis: surely there are women who oppose the lifestyle of stay-at-home mothers, and this thesis has attempted to illustrate the dominance of those opinions, but the views of stay-at-home mothers should still be

considered in discussions about women and motherhood even though they are not dominant, and even though they will not be considered as absolute truth.

This rejection of truth, however, brings to light an important question: is there concrete value in focusing on non-dominant perspectives if not for discovering truth? Is it just a charitable way to include the minority, or does it, as Hartsock (1997) believed it should, lead to better social practices? Dougherty (2001) conducted a standpoint analysis on sexual harassment in the workplace which gives us reason to believe that alternate standpoints can in fact lead to better social practices. Dougherty (2001) explained that sexual harassment is an issue that has traditionally been addressed from the female perspective, which views sexual harassment in the workplace as disabling and dysfunctional. Thus in Dougherty's (2001) study, she researched sexual harassment from the standpoint of the males who are perpetuating sexual harassment in the workplace. She found that the men were engaging in behavior that women viewed as sexual harassment as a way to cope with the stresses of their job, and often were not aware of the discomfort they were causing their female co-workers. Thus while the harassment was disabling and dysfunctional for the women, it was functional for the men in that it helped them feel more comfortable and better able to cope in the workplace. By researching sexual harassment from a non-traditional standpoint, Dougherty (2001) uncovered unexpected reasons as to why sexual harassment was happening; and rather than demonizing men, she was able to suggest non-traditional, and possibly more effective, methods for solving the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. Her study clearly illustrates that yes, considering alternate standpoints can lead to more just social practices.

The fact that Standpoint Theory can lead to better social practices is why the standpoint framework was chosen for this thesis. The introductory chapter to this thesis illustrated that stay-

at-home mothers are in harm's way of unjust social practices, as laws and practices are being passed about women that give greater opportunity to working mothers while disadvantaging the stay-at-home mother (see Gallagher, 1998; "New York Times", 1998; Cohen, 2004; Heymann & Earle, 2009; Crittenden, 2010; Grady, 2010; Carnns, 2011). Perhaps disadvantaging practices and stereotypes would have been avoided if the standpoints of stay-at-home mothers had been simply heard and understood. As Standpoint Theory gives a framework for giving voice to non-dominant groups, and stay-at-home mothers have been illustrated as a non-dominant group, the standpoint framework was deemed an appropriate fit for this research.

Narratives and Blogs

When engaging in standpoint research, Mark Orbe explained "first, research must begin from a person's concrete lived experiences, and must include the experiences of marginalized group members within the process of inquiry in meaningful ways" (Orbe, 1998, p. 5). In the attempt to begin with concrete lived experiences, the standpoints for this research were collected through narratives found on blogs. The appropriateness for both using narratives and using blogs as the medium to obtain them will be addressed below

Walter R. Fisher (1987) asserts that humans create and interpret reality through narratives. In other words, humans tell stories to try and make sense of their experiences. Narratives give insight into topics that may not be well researched, and give individuals a voice who may not have one otherwise (Fisher, 1987). Fisher created this paradigm because he was concerned with the sources that were considered credible and rational. In his words:

I was concerned with the concept of technical reason and the way it rendered the public unreasonable; with the idea of rationality being a matter of argumentative competence in specialized fields, leaving the public and its discourse irrational; with the apparent

impossibility of bridging the gaps between experts and the public and between segments of the public; and with the necessity to learn what was supposed to be of the essence of persons—rationality—so that one class of citizens can always be superior to another (Fisher, 1984, p. 15).

In short, Fisher was concerned that those with greater education and technical knowledge in rhetoric were given disproportional opportunities for their logic and their reasoning to be considered rational, while the average person with an average vocabulary was being stripped of credibility and labeled as irrational. He did not think that creating the narrative paradigm resolved this problem, but he said, “I do think that it provides a basis for reconsideration” (Fisher, 1984, p. 15). By creating the narrative paradigm he opened the path for the average person’s story to be considered as a logical basis for thought and behavior in research and society.

There are many theoretic similarities between the narrative paradigm and Standpoint Theory. Both recognize that some viewpoints are lost among the privileged voices in society: Fisher believed the voices were privileged if they had technical knowledge while Hartsock believed it was simply a part of being in the majority. Neither one considered their method to offer up absolute truth, but did believe their methods gave reason to reconsider what we commonly regard as truth. Just as Fisher claimed that humans tell stories to make sense of their experiences (Fisher, 1987), Wood (1992) explained that a feminist standpoint is realized through interpreting and assigning meaning to one’s experiences. Thus, if a standpoint is realized by interpreting experiences (Wood, 1992), and narratives act as a mechanism to do just that (Fisher, 1987), the narrative paradigm and Standpoint Theory seem to be a very close fit, and thus were deemed appropriate for this thesis.

With narratives thus being concluded as an appropriate way to collect standpoints, one could still question the legitimacy of using blogs to collect narratives. As blogs are a relatively new medium for data collection, some may not understand the usefulness of this medium in research. When discussing all the possible forms narratives could take, Fisher (1984) explained, “Regardless of the form they may assume...each mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a “truth” about the human condition” (p. 6). He goes on to confirm that narratives could take the form of poetry, drama, autobiographies, and other various writing forms and still relate truth (p. 6). Had blog posts existed in Fisher’s time, they would have undoubtedly made the list of potential narrative forms. The usefulness of blog posts, however, goes beyond the speculative approval of Fisher.

For this thesis, blogs were seen as the medium to get the best and most honest information stay-at-home mothers had to offer. The alternative to using blog posts for this thesis was performing individual interviews or a focus group with stay-at-home mothers. In both situations, the researcher is to design questions to evoke the type of information that would be useful to the research questions at hand, and then have the participants answer these questions to the interviewer/moderator. Lindlof & Taylor (2002) explained that the type of interviews people have typically experienced are in the context of being a student, obtaining a job, and other situations where giving the right answer to the interview questions is crucial to the interviewee’s success (p. 184). For this reason, the interviewer/interviewee relationship can create an imbalance of power wherein the interviewees will begin to give the answers they believe the interviewer will want to hear. As an inherent principle of feminist theory, feminist researchers have a vested interest in reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and participants (Kauffman, 1992). This power imbalance is eliminated when using blog posts because the

participants have written the information on their own time, with their own agenda, and they are under no pressure to answer a researcher's questions about their experiences. Hays and Singh (2012) likewise explain, "Without the boundaries—and potential barriers—of digital or tape recorders and face-to-face interviews, blogs truly are 'naturalistic data in textual form'" (p. 293). In fact, blog participants were completely unaware their post would be researched at a later date, eliminating the threat of researcher interference, and making the information obtained from the blog as natural as possible. Thus in the effort to reduce the bias and influence of the researcher, and preserve the unique standpoints of each woman, the use of pre-existing blog posts as artifacts for this study was deemed an appropriate fit for this research.

Data Collection

Narratives for this thesis were collected through a blog search using Google Blog. By using the search term "stay-at-home mom" in the engine, multiple pages of blogs were returned which used this phrase. These results were then examined, and using the criteria below as a guide 30 blog posts were chosen to be used in this study.

The thirty blog posts were chosen based on whether the author of the blog had written a narrative about her decision and experience in becoming a stay-at-home mother. Narratives, as defined by Foss (2004), must contain four elements: 1) at least two events (e.g. *I had a full time job and I became a stay at home mother*) 2) events are organized in chronological order (e.g. *I had a full time job before I became a stay at home mother*) 3) there must be a causal or contributing relationship between the events being described (e.g. *I had a full time job before I became a stay at home mother, but I quit because it was taking too much time away from my child*) and 4) there must be one unifying subject for the narrative (e.g. *How/why I became a stay-*

at-home mother) (p. 334). Blog posts were searched for these four elements before being accepted as data.

While many blogs were generated in the search, a great deal of them did not discuss personal experiences in becoming a stay-at-home mother. Unless a post narrating the author's decision to stay-at-home was found, the blog was discarded and was not used as data in this thesis. The blogs that were returned in the search were analyzed one by one, starting with the top search results and moving progressively down on the list, until 30 blog posts had been collected for use in this study.

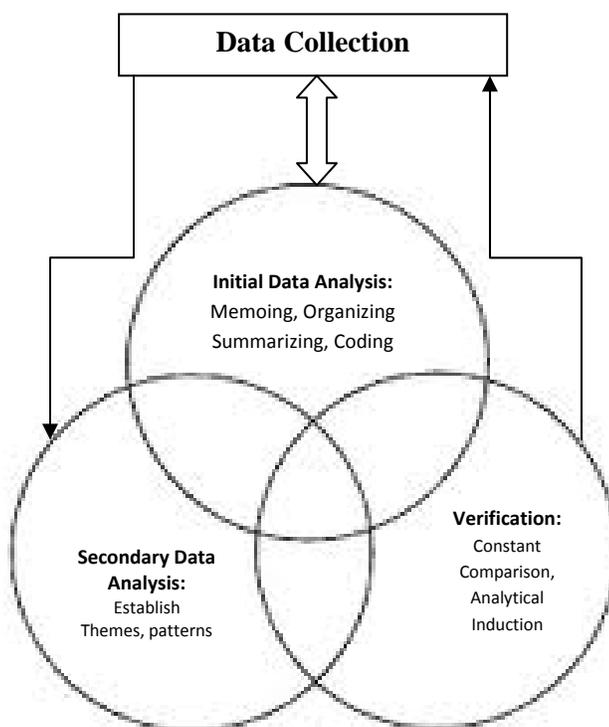
Participants

Due to the level of anonymity the internet can provide, the demographic information disclosed on blogs varied with each participant. What is known about the participants is reported below.

Each of the 30 participants was a stay-at-home mother at the time she wrote her narrative. Of the 30 participants, 24 are U.S. citizens, and the remaining six did not indicate their citizenship. Nineteen participants were Caucasian, one was of Asian descent, one of Hispanic descent, and the remaining nine had no indication. The ages of the participants ranged from 21-40 years old, with 10 participants having no indication of their age. Thirteen indicated they were college graduates, one indicated she did not graduate from college, and the remaining sixteen did not indicate their education level. Twenty-three participants had a career before becoming a stay-at-home mother, two did not have a previous career, and five did not indicate either way. The religion of the participants remained for the most part unknown, with only five indicating they were Christian, and one indicating she was Jewish. Twenty-eight of the participants confirmed they are married, while the remaining two had no indication either way.

Data Analysis

As narratives were found they were compiled into a joint document, which totaled 39 pages. While the narratives were being collected, a cyclical process of data collection, open coding, and interpreting data—a process supported and outlined by both Lindlof & Taylor (2002) and Hays & Singh (2012)—took place. While both Lindlof & Taylor (2002) and Hays & Singh (2012) outline similar processes for analyzing data, for the sake of consistency in this thesis, the Hays & Singh (2012) method will be singularly referenced from this point. Hays & Singh (2012) suggest a four step process of analysis: data collection, initial data analysis, secondary data analysis, and verification. They illustrate this process similar to the following figure (p. 293):



One can see that the process is cyclical rather than linear; meaning that one does not proceed to the next step only once the previous has been completed. Rather these steps are to be done simultaneously, moving back and forth through each step until the researcher is satisfied that all

data has been organized and verified in a satisfactory manner. The process for collecting data has been explained in the previous section, so the three steps for data analyzing will be explained here:

Initial Data Analysis. This step involves preliminary steps such as organizing the narratives, summarizing main points, and coding passages of interest to begin finding patterns and themes.

Secondary Data Analysis. After the initial grouping of information, the codes are then compared with each other and further organized into dominant themes and patterns.

Verification. At this point the researcher takes the themes that have been found, and applies them to new data, which will start the process over again, adding new codes and themes, until all data has been analyzed and the researcher is confident that the all themes have been accurately identified. At this point the researcher can also disconfirm an established theme in exchange for one that is clearer and more complete. Hays & Singh (2012) describe this step as the point when “data analysis moves from exploratory to confirmatory” (p. 307).

Once these steps are completed, the findings are then reported and discussed. For this thesis, seven narratives were originally collected and coded. After making several comparisons of the texts, three themes clearly emerged from the data. These themes were then assigned colors to facilitate further coding of the additional narratives. As more narratives were analyzed this process repeated, with more themes and subthemes being established, colors being assigned to new themes to facilitate more coding, etc. Throughout this process the original themes were modified and combined with new emergent themes to make the classifications clearer and more inclusive to the additional data being analyzed.

Due to the careful analysis that took place in finding emergent themes under the lens of a standpoint analysis, three main themes, each with subsequent sub themes, were identified in the narratives. These themes will be reported and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this standpoint analysis was to find common themes in the narratives of stay-at-home mothers, and then apply these themes to the research questions. This chapter will define, illustrate, and discuss the themes from the analysis; the application of these themes to the research questions will then be addressed in chapter 5. The analysis found three emergent themes: social stigmas, self-validation, and feelings of guilt. As further comparison and coding was performed on the narratives, it was found that each of the three themes was discussed using four different perspectives: a feminist perspective, an educational perspective, a work ethic perspective, and an economic perspective. The self-validation theme was the only one with an additional subtheme: a comparative subtheme that will be defined and discussed in its respective section. The themes and sub-themes will be illustrated below.

Social stigmas

In the analysis of the stay-at-home mothers' narratives, a theme of discussing social stigmas against stay-at-home mothers emerged. In fact, the theme was identified in two-thirds of the narratives. For the purpose of this thesis, social stigma will be defined as any negative connotation stay-at-home mothers feel is associated with them because they chose to stay at home. As was previewed in the introduction to this chapter, the social stigmas women discussed were sorted into four different categories: feminist stigmas, educational stigmas, work ethic stigmas, and economic stigmas. Each of these stigmas will be further defined, illustrated, and discussed below.

Feminist stigmas. The first stigma that women mentioned feeling is that somehow they were the anti-feminist by choosing to stay at home. These women felt they were labeled as

someone who did not appreciate or support women's liberation. One of the narrators expressed her frustration with this sentiment:

What is wrong with being a homemaker? What is wrong with being a wife and a mother? Why is there so much pressure to work when you're pregnant and to return to work after your baby is born? Why is there this unspoken culture of guilt that says you're not a feminist or a liberated woman if you actually WANT to stay at home? (Ice, 2009, para. 7).

This woman was not alone in wondering why she could not be considered a feminist if she were choosing to stay at home. One woman, who also expressed frustration with this belief, explained that probable roots of this stigma originated with Betty Friedan who "saw domesticity as holding women back from something much greater" (Hohorst, 2011, para. 6). Another woman, who grew up in the era of Betty Friedan, agreed that the Friedan era bred the idea that homemaking was anti-feminist:

Many of us born in the mid-1970s learned from our parents and our teachers that women no longer needed to stay home, that there were professional opportunities awaiting us. ...Homemaking was seen as the realm of the ultra-religious, where women accepted the role of Biblical "Help Meets" to their husbands. They cooked, cleaned, toiled, served and remained silent and powerless (Hayes, 2010, para. 1).

In short, staying at home simply did not fit into the feminist vision, because women now had so many other opportunities outside of the home. The women of this study, however, were not satisfied with this vision, as one woman asked, "Yet what of those women who had happily chosen their life at home, who had not been oppressed, who had found their calling within the family?" (Hohorst, 2011, para. 6). The answer these women had received was that quite simply if

a woman stayed at home, she was submitting herself to a role of oppression, and was thus not considered a feminist. This answer clearly frustrated the women because the sweeping belief that every woman in the home is oppressed overlooks whether or not the woman has *chosen* to stay at home. It fails to consider whether the woman is staying at home because she is happy there, and not because she lacks opportunities outside of the home. These women simply wanted to be included in the feminist vision because they did believe women should have choices, and they also believed that staying at home should be considered one of the valid and respectable choices a woman can make.

It is interesting to note that many of the women who discussed this stigma did not merely discuss it as a stigma they believed existed in society, but as a stigma they themselves once thought to be true before they became stay-at-home mothers. The admittance that they once believed this stigma gives legitimacy that it actually exists. Otherwise it could be easily dismissed as an insecurity of stay-at-home mothers that has no roots in reality. This creates a sort of double perspective, wherein women have experienced both the attitudes against stay-at-home mothers and a change of attitudes once they became stay-at-home mothers. This double perspective can be seen in most of the stigmas discussed.

Educational stigmas. The second stigma women mentioned was being treated like they were less educated because they chose to stay at home. In other words, staying-at-home was a mark of unintelligence. As one woman put it “In my own school experience, homemaking, like farming, gained a reputation as a vocation for the scholastically impaired” (Hayes, 2010, para.1). In other words, she grew up believing that women stayed at home because they were not smart enough to do anything else. Another stay-at-home mother, who was a top graduate from Harvard, explained feeling this stigma, “Through the years, many people have asked me how a

Harvard grad, a woman who loves to think, could become a homemaker” (Goetz, 2009, para. 5). The implications of people asking her this are, of course, that staying at home requires no intelligence, so why would an intelligent woman submit herself to such a position? While she talked of other people questioning her intentions to stay home, she also admitted to having struggled with the decision to stay at home and had asked herself questions such as the following: “Could I actually work up the nerve to do something extremely embarrassing like devote my intelligence and creative abilities to building a good marriage and trying to raise my own children in an exemplary home?” (Goetz, 2009, para. 3). Once again, it is interesting to note the double perspective the women are admitting to: not only do they feel this stigma, but they also once believed this stigma. Of course, these women do defend themselves against this stigma, protesting that staying at home *does* require intelligence, and that it is not a waste of their education, but that is comprised in the theme of self-validation, and will be discussed in that section.

Work ethic stigmas. The third stigma discussed was that women felt others questioned their work ethic. They felt others believed they stayed at home because they do not want to work hard, or in blunt terms, because they are lazy. Some women felt this stigma was simply evident in the title of “stay-at-home mother.” As one woman explained, “It’s that word, ‘stay,’ It sounds like I am just sitting here, biding my time, wasting away, being passive” (Brown, 2010, para. 2). Others felt this stigma every time they were asked the question “What do you do?” One woman explained, “...when people meet each other for the first time they often ask, ‘What do you do?’ I have heard myself say ‘I am at home with my kids, **but...**’ I always have to explain that I do more, as if what I do is not enough” (Brown, 2010, para. 11). Another mother echoed this feeling saying, “In a social situation, if someone asks the dreaded question, *what do you do?*...I sink a

little. I don't scream it from the rooftops. When I have to fill out forms and can't write anything on the "employer" line, I feel like less of a person" (Tena, 2011, para. 8). In a sense, these women feel like their talents and abilities to work and even their contributions to the family and community are being questioned when they reveal they stay at home. This is ironic because, as has been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, politicians such as Bill Clinton had made child care one of his administrations' top priorities (see Gallagher, 1998). Yet by executing this priority by funding child care facilities and extended pre-school and kindergarten programs (see "New York Times", 1998; Crittenden, 2010, p. ix), the message is that society still values mothers in the work place, and thus leaves mothers who stay at home feeling that their work and contributions are devalued by society.

Of course some mothers believed that society judged stay-at-home mothers' contributions solely on the amount of housework they accomplished. One woman described that she only stayed at home because of her strenuous schedule of being a student and studying for law school, and she could not afford child care. She was frustrated that despite all of her other activities, others thought she had done nothing with her day if the laundry had not been done, or dinner had not been cooked, or if the house was messy ("Other" Mother, 2010). Thus a part of the work ethic stigma comes from the assumption that the only "to-do" for a stay-at-home mother is to tend the house. This sole task is assumedly a set list of chores which can be visibly observed as either complete or incomplete by anybody who walks into the house. Additionally, while several chores comprise tending the house, it is viewed as one composite task where if one chore is neglected the entire effort is rendered insufficient and one assumes the housekeeper has a poor work ethic. These are indeed daunting expectations upon which a stay-at-home mother's work ethic is judged.

Economic stigmas. The final stigma was an economic stigma, meaning that people made judgments about a family's economic situation if the mother stayed at home. One woman explained being told that "...with today's economy the way it is, it is no longer a viable option for women to be home with their children" (Goetz, 2009, para. 13), which made her feel like she was a financial burden on her family by not contributing in the workforce. Another woman explained an opposite stigma:

Homemaking, like eating organic foods, seemed a luxury to be enjoyed only by those wives whose husbands garnered substantial earnings, enabling them to drive their children to school rather than put them on a bus, enroll them in endless enrichment activities, oversee their educational careers, and prepare them for entry into elite colleges (Hayes, 2010, para. 8).

While this particular stay-at-home mother's household income was \$45,000 a year, she was still treated as if her family was very wealthy. Thus the economic stigma of stay-at-home mothers is rather polarized: either the family is bordering on poverty because the mother is not contributing financially, or the family is very wealthy allowing the mother to stay at home and indulge the lifestyle of both herself and her children.

Self-Validation

The second emergent theme was that of self-validation, which was found in all 30 narratives. The term "self-validation" was used to classify any instance in which the mother defended herself as a stay-at-home mother. As the first theme was social stigmas and showed that stay-at-home mothers felt attacked in the areas of feminism, education, their work ethic, and their economic situation, it should come as no surprise that women then defended themselves in these four areas. Consequently, four of the subthemes for this section will be feminist validation,

educational validation, work ethic validation, and economic validation. Outside of these common sub-themes, self-validation had an additional sub-theme of comparative validation, which will be explained in detail in its respective section. This section will define, illustrate, and discuss the sub-themes of feminist, educational, work ethic, economic, and comparative validation below.

Feminist validation. To begin, women were concerned with validating themselves from a feminist perspective. This happened in either two ways: either by claiming the feminist ideals are lies, or by showing how their choice to stay-at-home fits into the feminist vision. Those who thought the feminist ideals were lies were most concerned with the sentiment that women can have it all, as the following narrator explains:

I was lied to by an entire generation of bra-burning delusional hippies when I was growing up....I was raised to not only believe, but expect that I could have it all, do anything I wanted and be completely equal to men in every way. It's not true. What's more is that it's okay that it's not true, but it's not okay to continue to spread this bulls--- around like it's gospel. Stop lying to your daughters! (Stayathome, 2010, para. 1)

In essence, like the narrator above, these mothers felt that telling women they could have it all put unnecessary stress on them to do it all, even when doing it all caused them to perform in a mediocre way. One of the women, who had a Ph.D. in economics, went as far to claim that the only thing feminist liberation accomplished was producing a work force that the world could pay less and give fewer benefits (Hayes, 2010, para. 7). These women felt like the feminist messages of today gave women false expectation that they could both work and have children, and be satisfied with both of those worlds interweaving with each other. They believed, however, that this was just not true. One woman summed it up in the following, "I think it's possible to have it all. It's just not possible to have it all at the same time" (Charlotte, 2007, para. 7).

While some of the women wanted to validate the false sentiments of feminism, the majority wanted to validate themselves as feminists. One woman expressed, “I am doing the jobs I once ridiculed and which I once saw as degrading drudgery. Yet I’m happy and I’m still a feminist” (Charlotte, 2007, para. 4). She admits that becoming a stay-at-home mother went against her *former* feminist beliefs, but that she now believed she could be both a stay-at-home mother *and* a feminist. She was not alone in believing a woman could be both a stay-at-home mother and a feminist. Another woman explained why being a stay-at-home mother fit into feminism:

Those of us with academic promise learned that we could do whatever we put our minds to, whether it was conquering the world or saving the world. I was personally interested in saving the world. That path eventually led me to conclude that homemaking would play a major role towards achieving that goal....Home [is] the center for social change....Home is where the great change will begin. It is not where it ends (Hayes, 2010, para. 1, 16-17).

Thus this woman found that her greatest realm of influence upon her children and society was achieved by staying at home with her children rather than working. One woman explained that staying-at-home fits into feminism because feminism was about women making choices instead of being forced to stay at home; thus by *choosing* to stay at home she still was acting as a liberated woman (Goetz, 2009, para 15). Whether disputing feminism, inserting themselves into it, and perhaps even by attempting to redefine the mainstream definition of feminism the women were concerned with validating themselves from a feminist perspective, whatever form this validation took.

Educational validation. The women were concerned with validating themselves educationally, meaning they talked about their education and qualifications that would have enabled them to work outside the home if that is the path they had chosen. As many had admitted to feeling that homemaking was a mark of unintelligence, they wanted to validate that they *are* intelligent. This validation was done by talking about their accomplishments in education. As one woman states, "...I did pretty well in school. I could have had a high-power career in quite a few different directions if that's what I'd pursued. But I didn't. I have stayed home with my kids" (Stayathome, 2010, para. 3). Other women listed off their degrees from M.I.T., Cornell, and Harvard, and touted about how well they performed in medical school (Bishop, n.d., Goetz, 2009). They claimed that their education was most useful in becoming an effective mother and was evident in their daily interactions: "I look forward to trips to the pediatrician because it gives me a chance to discuss the latest research on autism and vaccinations" (Bishop, n.d., para. 12). Thus not only were they validating that they were educated, but also validated that they continue to use their education as mothers.

Work ethic validation. Work ethic validation was done by women discussing their past work experience and the amount of work they were currently engaged in while raising their children. As has been illustrated, many women felt stigmatized as lazy and unable to work hard. Many of the women made it a point to say that being a stay-at-home mother was in fact the first time she *did not* have a job, like in the following example: "I have had a job since I was 7 years old. I worked for my stepfather when I was a child to pay for my school clothes" (Outlawspinx, 2011, para. 1) In fact, none of these women talked about never having a job nor that they had become stay-at-home mothers because it was easy, but instead they all believed they had worked hard throughout their life and were continuing to work hard as a mother. In a sense, their

justification had an interesting dichotomy: on the one hand they claimed working outside of the home should not be the only indicator that a woman had a good work ethic, but on the other hand they wanted their reader's to know that they *had* worked outside of the home and could continue to do so if they wanted.

An interesting caveat that should be brought up is the language used by these women. In validating how hard they work, they begin using terms normally used in the work force. To describe the requirements of being a stay-at-home mother one woman wrote, "We are chefs, laundresses, maids, playmates, imagination specialists, secretaries, chauffeurs, bathroom monitors, personal shoppers just to name a few" (Outlawsphinx, 2011, para. 4). Another woman described, "I work my a— off and I *don't* get a paycheck. I don't get vacations. I don't get a break from my kids...and don't ever get a 'happy hour'" (Tena, 2011, para. 5). Giving themselves titles of paid jobs and describing the hard work using words like "paycheck," "vacations," and "no breaks," these women were validating their work in terms that a person with a paid job would be familiar with, understand, and respect. It was very much like the article quoted in chapter one of this thesis, wherein financiers estimated stay-at-home mothers would earn \$100,000 if they performed the same amount of labor in the workforce (Lim, 2006). In order for people to understand the work of a mother, they put it into terms that the work force would understand: a salary. The significance of this language in relation to the research questions will be discussed later, but is important to illustrate now.

Economic validation. Economic validation was used to refute the stereotype that stay-at-home mothers are either rich or financially irresponsible by not contributing to the family's financial resources. First, to dispute the assumption that stay-at-home mothers are afforded their opportunity because they are rich, one woman stated, "we make sacrifices. BIG SACRIFICES. I

can't lie, it's hard. Lately, more than normal. My husband does not make a ton of money. Probably not even enough to support a family of 7 by most standards. We don't live high on the hog" (Tena, 2011, para. 5). Such was the case of many of the women, all of whom claimed that this supposed "luxury" of staying at home was only afforded to them because of the sacrifices they make to do so. They did not want to be seen as rich and pampered women who had all the time in the world to blog and work on hobbies. They wanted to be seen as women who thought staying at home was so important that they were willing to make hard financial sacrifices to do so. Staying at home was a position they obtained by making sacrifices in a tough economy, not because they were wealthier than the average American.

To dispute the second assumption that stay-at-home mothers are an expense for a family, the women claimed that they were actually saving money by staying at home, mostly because child care would cost more than their jobs would make. One woman describes her realization that staying at home was her family's most affordable option:

By the time my Ph. D [in economics] was conferred...I questioned the value of a 9-to-5 job. If my husband and I both worked and had children...we'd require two cars, professional wardrobes, convenience food to make up for lost time in the kitchen...When we crunched the numbers, our gross incomes from two careers would have been high, but the cost of living was also considerable, especially when daycare was figured into the calculation (Hayes, 2010, para. 2-3).

This particular woman did leave the workforce after realizing these expenses, and claimed that her family lives comfortably on an income of \$45,000 a year by doing so (Hayes, 2010, para. 3). Another woman, who does not really want to be a stay-at-home mother, confirmed that "This situation was completely forced by finances" ("Other" Mother, 2010, para. 7). In other words,

her staying at home was not what she wanted but it was the only thing they could afford. Thus, these women validated that they are being economically responsible and saving their families money by staying at home.

Comparative validation. The final type of validation was comparative validation, wherein women justified staying at home by comparing themselves to the alternative: women who work. These women talked about wanting to be the ones who had the full joy of raising their kids, and not somebody else. One woman who had just switched from working to staying at home stated, “I am seeing every single minute of him growing up right in front of me. And while I loved that he was experiencing the benefits of daycare when I worked, I do have to say that it is so nice to not have to read about what he did that day on a sheet of paper.” (Katie, 2010, para 11). Another woman claimed that because she stayed at home, her kids have “that extra sparkle in their eye” (Goetz, 2009, para. 4) that would not be there if she worked all day.

As can be seen, their comparisons border on arrogance, and some even stereotyped the contributions of working women, as can be seen in this excerpt: “...[I]f pressed, most people would admit they would rather have had their moms around during their growing up years instead of having her off in an office. And they’d probably rather have a clean home with healthy, home-cooked meals” (Becca, 2011, para. 5). While this narrator has assumed that stay-at-home mothers have clean homes with healthy, home-cooked meals, she’s also postulated that working women *do not* have clean homes with healthy, home-cooked meals. She was not alone in her judgments, as another woman wrote, “We *can* still have fulfilling marriages. We *can* still have respectful, responsible children involved with us in a mutually rewarding relationship. But too many minds still remain shut to the intellectually stimulating potential of homemaking” (Goetz, 2009, para. 17). Thus she claims that fulfilling marriages and successful children are

attainable goals *if* a mother stays at home, but are otherwise ideals of the past. These excerpts highlight how much value is placed on contributing in externally obvious ways—e.g. successful marriages, clean homes, extra sparkly children. When those contributions are questioned, what seems to be the natural response is to turn the table and understate the opposing women's contributions.

Feelings of guilt

The final emergent theme was feelings of guilt, which was seen in two-thirds of the narratives. This was an interesting theme to emerge because the previous themes try to discount the stereotypes society has about stay-at-home mothers, but in this theme they admit actually struggling with the stereotypes, and wonder whether they are indeed true. This struggle results in feelings of guilt, defined in this thesis as a feeling of remorse for somehow being in the wrong. As the past two themes have foreshadowed, their guilt can be sorted into four sub-themes: feminist guilt, educational guilt, work ethic guilt, and economic guilt. Each sub-theme will be described and illustrated below.

Feminist guilt. The feeling of feminist guilt refers to women feeling inadequate as they try to fulfill the feminist vision that women can have it all. This was usually a preliminary guilt they felt before becoming a stay-at-home mother, while they were still trying to balance work and family. After having children, they felt guilty not giving everything to their job, but they also felt guilty for not being with their kids. One woman described how she felt split in two directions always trying to get more hours at work, and yet always wanting to spend more time with her kids: "The constant guilt I'd felt as a new mother....I couldn't get the work I wanted. I couldn't *not* be with my kids" (Drebin, 2011, para. 7). They began to realize that they are in a lose/lose situation where either way they will feel guilty for not being able to do it all: "Before I had kids,

I was great at my job. After having kids, I felt mediocre at everything: doctor, mother, and wife...so I made choices....and if you're an educated women, that usually means neglecting your kids or your career, and feeling guilty either way" (Bishop, n.d. para. 14). Emphasizing the lose/lose situation another woman wrote, "Either way you go, you feel screwed. Working moms have to watch while a hired set of hands get the time with their kids, and stay-at-homes have to watch while their career potential atrophies and dies" (Stayathome, 2010, para. 4). The harsh reality that they could not have it all hit them, and they felt guilty that they were unable to achieve what they thought to be "the modern woman." This type of guilt is what ultimately led many women to make the decision to stay at home.

Educational guilt. Educational guilt was seen in women feeling guilty that they are not using their education. One woman illustrated this guilt in the following: "I see the diplomas hanging on the wall and wonder sometimes when they'll be put to use again, or if they were somehow a waste because of what I've chosen to do" (Becca, 2011, para. 4). The question of whether it was a "waste" was repeated through several narratives: "I was embarrassed to be wasting an undergraduate degree from M.I.T. in chemical engineering and a medical degree from Cornell" (para. 20). Essentially, these women felt guilty at the possibility that they were wasting their potential and the educations they worked so hard to obtain in exchange for staying at home.

Work ethic guilt. Work ethic guilt was seen as women described feeling that they were not accomplishing anything with their time. In this particular sub-theme the conflicted feelings of stay-at-home mothers really came to light. Until this point, they had talked about the stigma that stay-at-home mothers do not work hard, and then had tried to combat this stigma by validating how hard they do work. But this theme showed that they actually did wonder if they were working as hard as they should, and that they felt guilty for not doing more and not having more

to show for their day. One mother wrote, “Some days I feel down in the dumps that the most significant thing I’ll do all day is clean the master bathroom...I try not to feel guilty” (Duchess, 2011, para. 4-5). While taking care of children is plenty of work—which many women validated in the previous theme—the women still felt guilty for not having a lot to show for their day. One woman described the following: “While my husband never once made me feel that my contribution in taking care of our kids—and our house—was any less than his, I felt wracked with guilt...Guilt for not getting enough work done.” (Drebin, 2011, para. 6). In an effort to get more work done, women then described feeling guilty for working instead of being with their kids: “I’m not interacting with my kids enough when they are home. I’m always telling them to play by themselves so I can vacuum, make lunch, clean the house, make dinner, clean up from dinner, do laundry, etc” (Jodifer, 2008, para. 4). Thus the women either felt guilty for not getting enough work done while taking care of the kids, or guilt for not taking care of the kids in order to get some housework done. Either way, despite the validation the women do in the previous themes, the women doubted themselves and felt guilt for the work they were, or were not, accomplishing.

Economic guilt. Economic guilt was expressed when women admitted feeling guilty for not contributing financially to the family. Many stay-at-home mothers experienced a transition from helping contribute financially to the family to then living on their husband’s income alone. One woman described this transition: “For me, what was harder than adjusting our budget was adjusting to living on ‘someone else’s’ money. It took me a long time to feel like the money my husband made was ours and not his” (Forchelli, 2011, para. 9). Some women’s guilt of not contributing financially stemmed from not feeling appreciation from their family, like in the following:

I've come to a point where I'm feeling that my role in the family is completely under-appreciated. Unfortunately, I don't think my husband thinks my contribution to our family is a big deal. He makes the money, without HIM I wouldn't be able to be a stay-at-home mom. I'm just wondering at what point do I decide to go back to work. Will I be appreciated then? (Jessica, 2010, para. 4-5).

But even when women did feel the support of their husbands, they still questioned their contributions: “[My husband] supports my decision to stay home. Actually, he's the one that really wanted me to take the time off...so I really have no need to feel guilty...but at the same time I feel like I am not contributing enough to our family” (Duchess, 2011, para. 4). In short, by not contributing monetarily, women struggled with whether they were a valuable part of the family. Whether this was because society as a whole judges a person's value by the amount of money they make or because the women themselves had been judging their value this way is undetermined, but it does give insight into how much a financial income affects a woman's view of her usefulness.

Thus in the three themes and the sub-themes, the complicated feelings of stay-at-home mothers have been illustrated. The women expressed a lot of resentment towards social stigmas about stay-at-home mothers, attempted to validate themselves and their roles in society to refute the stigmas, but in the end they admitted to feeling guilty with thoughts that perhaps the stigmas were true, and perhaps they were letting down their families, themselves, and society. These conflicting themes give some light into the research questions this thesis has attempted to answer. The significance of these themes and how they apply to the research questions will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to research stay-at-home mothers as a muted group due to the dominance of working mothers. Estimates indicate that 70-77% of mothers are now in the workforce (Porter, 2006; Yen, 2010) leaving a meager 20-30% of mothers who stay at home. This means stay-at-home mothers are a minority, and thus are at risk of having muted status. As Kramarae (1981) had already established three assumptions of a muted group, this gave a guideline of what behaviors a muted group would display, and therefore the study was designed to investigate how these assumptions applied to stay-at-home mothers. This chapter will discuss how the themes from the standpoint analysis fit into the assumptions of a muted group, the limitations in this study, suggestions for future research, and final thoughts of the study.

Kramarae's (1981) first assumption of a muted group was that women perceive the world differently than men because of their differing experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor. This made the first research question investigate how stay-at-home mothers perceive the world differently from working mothers because of their different experiences and divisions in labor. A preliminary question that might be asked, however, is do stay-at-home mothers perceive the world differently from working mothers? The first evidence that there is indeed a difference of perception was found in the theme of social stigmas. Mothers admitted feeling the social stigmas of being an anti-feminist and being unintelligent, not only because they believed others felt this way, but because *they* believed this to be true about stay-at-home mothers before they had become one. While one could postulate that the stigmas stay-at-home mothers feel are a result of their own insecurities, the admittance from many women that they once believed the stigmas to be true suggests that these stigmas actually do exist in society. Thus the difference in

perceptions between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers can be seen simply through the transformation of perceptions from women who have been in both groups.

Taking the assumption to be true that the stigma do represent actual thoughts of working mothers, the research then shows *how* working mothers and stay-at-home mothers perceive the world differently by comparing the stigmas with the validation section. Both of these themes had mirroring subthemes: feminist, education, work ethic, and economic stigmas/validation. The comparison of the subthemes in each section shows a chasm of understanding between working mothers' perceptions (depicted through the stigmas) and the perceptions of stay-at-home mothers (depicted through the validations). Thus it can be seen that their perceptions differ in the area of feminism, education, work ethic, and economic contributions, and the expectations women fill in each area. For feminism, the stigma was that feminists work, the validation was the feminists could also stay at home. For education, the stigma was that stay-at-home mothers are unintelligent, the validation, however, touted the degrees and successes of the mothers to prove this untrue. For work ethic, the stigma was that stay-at-home mothers are lazy, and the validation illustrated how hard they do work. Finally, the economical stigma was that stay-at-home mothers were financially irresponsible or were luxuriously living, and the validation showed stay-at-home mothers to be either making the financially sound choice or to be making difficult sacrifices to maintain their stay-at-home position. These results illustrate the difference in perceptions between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. Thus, this thesis concludes that Kramarae's (1981) first assumption does apply to stay-at-home mothers and that they do perceive the world differently than working mothers due to their differing experiences.

Kramarae's (1981) second assumption was that because men's perceptions are dominant, women's are less dominant and therefore seen as less competent. Thus the second research

question asked that if working women's perceptions are dominant, how are stay-at-home mothers' less-dominant perceptions seen as incompetent? Again, a preliminary question that should be asked is whether working mothers' perceptions are dominant? The themes of stigma and validation would suggest as much. Not only do they illustrate the chasm between the two groups' perceptions, but also hint at which is dominant. One could simply reason that if stay-at-home mothers' perceptions were dominant then discussing social stigmas would not have been a theme in their narratives, because they would know that most people did not believe these stigmas. But they do discuss the stigmas, which typically led to them validating themselves. Again, one could reason that stay-at-home mothers would not need to validate themselves for staying at home if the perception that "staying at home is good" was dominant in society. But again, they do validate themselves, believing that nobody really understands why they do stay at home. Both of these results suggest that working mothers' perceptions are indeed dominant.

How stay at home mothers are then seen as less competent is illustrated in the themes of social stigmas and guilt. The stigmas stay-at-home mothers feel can all be equated to feeling less competent: the feminist stigma suggests they are less competent in the ways of feminism or else they would not be staying at home; the intellectual stigma goes without saying that it suggests less competence, as many women felt staying at home was a mark of unintelligence; the work ethic stigma suggests they do not work because they do not have the experience or skill to do so—in other words they do not work because they are incompetent; and the economic stigma suggests they are incompetent in financial and economic matters, otherwise they would be working and contributing financially to the family. Thus stay-at-home mothers' perceptions are seen to be incompetent in matters of feminism, education, work ethics, and economics.

The second area that shows the perceived incompetence of stay-at-home mothers' perceptions was the theme of guilt. Although they focus on validating themselves in the topics of feminism, education, work ethic, and economics, they still admitted to feeling a great amount of guilt in each of these areas. These conflicting emotions suggests that even though they are fighting against the beliefs of working mothers (e.g. that stay-at-home mothers are less intelligent, not feminists, not contributing economically, and have a poor work ethic), they still feel the crushing weight of these perceptions enough to make them feel guilty, and in a sense doubt themselves. This admittance of guilt and self doubt can be seen as a struggle with whether they are less competent. Were they wrong for not following the path of working mothers? Did they make a mistake? Essentially the feelings of guilt show that stay-at-home mothers know their perceptions are less dominant, they have insecurities because of this reality, and as a result they struggle with the "competence" of their choice. Thus, with the evidence found in the social stigma and guilt themes, the second research question is supported in that Kramarae's (1981) second assumption does apply to stay-at-home mothers, and they do indeed feel less competent due to their less dominant perceptions.

Kramarae's (1981) third assumption was that in order to become participating (or not muted) members in society, women must transform their perception and models of perceiving into terms of the male system of expression (p. 3). This made the final question ask how women who are stay-at-home mothers transform their perceptions and models of perceiving into terms of the dominant group (i.e. working women) in order to be heard. Evidence that stay-at-home mothers do change their perceptions into terms of the dominant group was mainly seen in the theme of validation.

The theme of validation illustrated how stay-at-home mothers transform their perceptions, but it was not so much evidenced by the subthemes that emerged as it was by the subthemes that did *not* emerge. First, let it be noted that the term is not “stay-at-home women” but “stay-at-home mothers.” This is significant because it suggests that if a woman is staying at home we can assume it is for one major reason: because she is a mother. This could lead to a conclusion that if a woman is validating herself and her decision to stay at home, her argument would revolve around one major topic: her children. And yet this was not the case in the narratives of this study. Using their children to defend why they stay at home was seen in the comparative validation subtheme, but that means that their children were only one-fifth of the way women validated themselves and their choice to stay at home. The remaining four-fifths of their validation focused on the topics of feminism, education, their work ethic, and the economics of their choice. With the lack of their children being the center of conversation, it could be evidence that these women were altering their perceptions so they could be understood by the dominant group comprised of working women. While not all working women would understand the reasoning behind spending more time with children, perhaps they are more likely to understand terms in economic reasoning, matters of education, feminist reasoning, and arguments about work ethic—hence why the stay-at-home mothers reasoning revolved around these areas of logic. These results are not conclusive evidence, but do give reason to believe that stay-at-home mothers do change their perceptions, believing it is the only way for the dominant group to understand their perspective.

It is further interesting to note that when they do validate themselves and their decision to stay at home by discussing their children, they do it as a matter of comparison. The discussion centers more on what they would be missing if they worked rather than what they are gaining by

not working. Again, this gives reason to believe they are designing their reasoning to be understood by working women, especially working mothers. Working mothers understand the amount of time they sacrifice with their children to work, so for stay-at-home mothers to frame their validation of being with their kids as “I get to spend more time with my kids than a working woman does,” they are designing that argument to be understood by a working mother.

The subtheme of work ethic validation showed additional ways women altered their perceptions to be understood by the working majority. To repeat one example that was quoted earlier, one woman explained how hard stay-at-home mothers work by saying, “We are chefs, laundresses, maids, playmates, imagination specialists, secretaries, chauffeurs, bathroom monitors, personal shoppers just to name a few” (Outlawsphinx, 2011, para. 4). The language she used here is of greatest interest. Why have the household chores of cooking, cleaning, driving her kids around, playing with her kids, grocery shopping, and laundry all been reassigned professional terms? Could it possibly be because she is altering her perceptions into terms that would be understood—and possibly more respected—by the dominant group? This may be a likely reason, and illustrates how this translation process happens.

It is important to note that translating one’s experiences into more respected terms comes with consequences. The damage of the translation process is that the original meaning of the message can be tainted or lost. For example, take the term “chauffeur” that the mother used above. By using this term she may have implied that she has some of the luxuries of a chauffeur such as being paid for the work, having a predictable driving schedule, and getting to sit peacefully in the front seat while the remaining occupants mind their own business in the back seat. In reality, her experience of driving with her kids has very little in common with being a chauffeur, and by comparing the two she has possibly underscored one of the most difficult

aspects of being a mother: that fact that her work is rather unpredictable, selfless, and thankless. If the mother had left “chauffeur” in original terms such as “I spend a lot of time driving my kids around to their appointments; sometimes I end up dropping my own appointments because my kids wait until last minute to tell me they need to be driven somewhere.” That description conveys more of the complete message. The frustration, the selflessness, the thanklessness—all of these emotions were lost when the word “chauffeur” was implemented instead. Thus, in an ironic way, when stay-at-home mothers describe their work in terms they believe will be respected by the dominant group, they actually end up understating their work.

However damaging it may be for stay-at-home mothers to translate their experiences, the evidence in this thesis suggests that the translation process does indeed happen. Thus this thesis concludes that Kramarae’s third assumption does apply, answering the third research question that stay-at-home mothers do indeed transform their perceptions into terms of the dominant group.

The results from the narrative standpoint analysis rendered multiple examples to illustrate all three of Kramarae’s (1981) assumptions of a muted group. By illustrating how the assumptions apply to stay-at-home mothers, this thesis has attempted to build a foundation as to why stay-at-home mothers should be considered a muted group.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to examine the narratives of stay-at-home mothers through a standpoint framework, discover emergent themes, and discuss whether the narratives showed stay-at-home mothers to fit the assumptions of a muted group. While the results of the thesis has provided evidence as to how the assumptions apply to stay-at-home mothers, there were limitations to this study that must be considered, and thus will be addressed in this section.

The medium used to obtain narratives for this study offers one possible limitation. To obtain the narratives solely from blogs possibly restricted the demographics represented in this study. For example, it is possible that very similar women, such as white middle-class American women, are dominant in the social media of blogging, and therefore represented a disproportional amount of the data. Because so much information about an author can remain anonymous online, it is impossible to suggest whether these results represent various races, age groups, classes, etc. Thus this research cannot assure that it represented an unbiased sample.

As a researcher it is almost impossible to achieve complete objectivity, and therefore it is possible that I was also a limitation to the study. I fit into a dominant demographic by being a Christian, middle-class white woman, and also have experienced being both a working mother and a stay-at-home mother, but currently do stay at home. While the narratives were viewed through a feminist research lens, my own biases may have, purposefully or non-purposefully, emphasized some results while overlooking others. It is possible that the same narratives, viewed by another person with a differing background, may have produced differing themes. Contrarily, it is also possible that my current status of being a stay-at-home mother may have increased the credibility of the produced standpoints because I share that commonality with the women who wrote the narratives.

Regardless of the potential limitations, this study still adds to the conversation of Muted Group Theory, which in recent years has been dying, and shows that while muted group research has begun to focus increasingly on groups other than women, perhaps issues of mutedness among women deserves further research.

Future Research

In conducting future research, it is recommended that a variety of qualitative and quantitative techniques be used to study the standpoints of stay-at-home mothers to test the results found in this thesis. While this study produced a set list of themes, this list could be further confirmed or further refined by producing research with consistent or contrasting results.

It is further recommended that future research focuses on understanding the standpoints of working women, especially mothers, and their feeling about stay-at-home mothers. While this thesis indicates that stay-at-home mothers do feel muted, even stigmatized by working women, a central tenet of Standpoint Theory is the rejection of universal truth, and that all truth is subjective. In other words, stay-at-home mothers' perceptions are not to be taken as an accurate representation for working mothers perceptions. Thus it would be valuable to research whether working women's perceptions of stay-at-home mothers match how stay-at-home mothers believe they are viewed. Researching working women's perceptions would either further confirm or give reason to reconsider this thesis' conclusion that stay-at-home mothers are marginalized and muted in society.

It is further recommended that future studies focus on the role social media plays in extending Kramarae's (1981) and Hartsock's (1983) research. The research of this thesis was made possible by the use of blogs as a research medium. In years past, in order to research a muted group or a new standpoint, the specialty groups had to be sought out for interviews or focus groups. Now their voices can be found on the internet in public venues such as blogs and Facebook groups. Do social media sites equalize the opportunities for muted groups and new standpoints to be heard? Or does the hierarchal system of society exist online as well, giving white, middle-class male voices more authority? The role social media plays in Kramarae (1981)

and Hartsock's (1983) theories is important to consider if these theories are to extend into a new generation of research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to research stay-at-home mothers as a muted group. Using standpoint theory as a lens to view narratives, and Kramarae's (1981) three assumptions of a muted group as a guideline, the analysis resulted in three identified themes: social stigmas, self-validation, and guilt. These themes and their subthemes successfully illustrated how Kramarae's (1981) three assumptions of a muted group apply to stay-at-home mothers, and thus gave evidence as to why stay-at-home mothers should be considered a muted group.

It would be a disservice, however, to the work of both Kramarae (1981) and Hartsock (1983) to infer that identifying a muted group or realizing a previously overlooked standpoint is an end goal in and of itself in feminist research. Hartsock (1997) asserted that the goal of feminist research was to lead to "more just social practices" (p. 373). In regards to the women of this study, society could definitely reconsider the messages they are sending to stay-at-home mothers. Economists and presidential administrations have called child rearing one of the most important aspects of the country's success (see Burggraf, 1998; Gallagher, 1998; Crittenden, 2010), and yet legislation and social practices are consistently encouraging and enabling mothers to work rather than be with their children (see Gallagher, 1998; "New York Times", 1998; Cohen, 2004; Heymann & Earle, 2009; Crittenden, 2010; Grady, 2010; Carnns, 2011), sending the message to stay-at-home mothers that they are not needed or valued. Thus the ultimate goal of this research is not only to identify stay-at-home mothers as a muted group, but to give society a reason to reconsider the messages that are being sent to stay-at-home mothers, and consider whether social practices and legislation should be revised to enable and validate stay-at-home

mothers as much as they enable and validate working mothers. By considering such a proposition, society would be working towards the “more just social practices” (Hartsock, 1997, p. 373) for which feminist research aims to inspire.

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Appendix A
Results Chart

	Social Stigmas	Self-Validation	Guilt
Feminism	Stay at home mothers are the anti-feminist by staying at home	They do fit into the feminist vision—staying home was a choice	Wonder whether they are neglecting their feminist duty by staying at home
Education	Stay at home mothers are uneducated	They are educated and use their education everyday	Wonder whether they are wasting their education
Economic	Stay at home mothers do nothing all day	They describe their busy days and how hard they work	Feel like their contributions are unappreciated and insignificant
Comparative		Compare their situation to that of working mothers to validate their decision	