Communicating the (in)visibility of motherhood: Family talk and the ties to motherhood with/in the workplace

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Abstract. This article investigates women's experiences regarding the intersection of motherhood and organizational participation. Gendered practices governing parenting and career responsibilities, discriminatory organizational practices, and pervasive assumptions that working mothers are less reliable, less committed, or less professional than their childless colleagues contribute to subordination in work and family domains. Critical and feminist perspectives on organizational communication highlight systems of control and resistance and suggest approaches for exposing discriminatory practices.

Methods emphasizing feminist principals and affirming women's voices were employed. First, depth interviews with seventeen women representing a spectrum of "standpoints" were conducted. Transcripts were subjected to textual analysis. Next, in order to obtain interpretive validity, five of the women participated in a focus group discussion regarding initial findings. Field notes on process and relational concerns were also analyzed.

Three central themes will be explicated here. "Children in the Workplace" relates to participants' experiences with "bringing" children into the workplace - physically, electronically, and symbolically. "Speaking of Motherhood" concerns "family talk" and the conversations serving as primary vehicles for bringing children to work. "Supervising Motherhood" concerns supervisory patterns and interactions women use in interpreting whether or not to edit ties to motherhood. Discussion of findings focuses on the fluidity of working mothers' "public" and "private" experiences, identity expressions in the workplace, self-surveillance and control, and implications for further inquiry.

Dora 107 Yeah, we do, we talk. Not a lot and not to certain people because you don't want your family to become an issue if they're considering you for a position. If you talk too much about your family they unobviously will overlook you. . . .

Limited career opportunities, discriminatory recruitment procedures, pay and promotion inequities, sexual harassment, and a gendered clustering into low paying, low status jobs constitute the landscape for many women in U.S. organizations (Landes, Foster, & Cessna, 1994; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Ries & Stone, 1993; Stewart & Clarke-Kudless, 1993). Legal imperatives and organizationally initiated pro-equity measures, while positive steps forward, have not alleviated inhospitable conditions. Indeed, such efforts often dampen obvious indications of discrimination, while simultaneously leaving women subject to other, less detectable, forms of subordination (Cockburn, 1991; Martin, 1992). Hence, the "glass ceiling," the "chilling effect," and other manifestations of the "mobilization of the masculine bias" (Burton, 1992) can be anticipated, even in organizations with established equity policies. The picture is even bleaker for women who must surpass the "triple oppression" of gender, race, and class (Calás, 1992; hooks, 1981, 1984).

Roots of women's subordination are linked to their biological capacity for childbirth and, more specifically, to pervasive, taken-for-granted assumptions and discursive practices governing motherhood in relation to organizational participation (Burton, 1992; Chira, 1998; Martin, 1992; Spiller, 1993). As Cockburn (1991)
Assumptions about women's actual and potential roles as mothers continue to be used as rationales for discrimination in the workplace (Acker, 1992; Chira, 1998; Cockburn, 1991; Franck & Brownstone, 1993; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Sheppard, 1992).

Motherhood and labor force participation are not mutually exclusive terms. Throughout history, mothers worked for wages outside the home (Barber, 1994). Mothers with preschool children are the fastest growing segment of the labor force; over 60% of mothers with children under age six are employed an average of 35 hours per week (US Census Bureau, 1999). About 75% of women in the workforce will be pregnant at some point during their careers (Casey, 1995b; US Census Bureau, 1999). Pregnant women are also more visible in organizations, as women are working longer into pregnancies and taking maternity leaves of only three months (Casey, 1995b; US Census Bureau, 1999). Women also perform the majority of home and child care tasks—even in couples with both employed full-time (Chira, 1998; Ferber, O'Farrell, & Allen, 1991; Franck & Brownstone, 1993; Hochschild, 1997; Landes, et al., 1994). Domestic labor increases for mothers without parenting partners and for those without paid assistance. "Gender asymmetries" in family work affects women's and men's organizational experiences differently (Diamond, 1987; Sheppard, 1992; Valdez & Gutek, 1987).

Although reproduction and childcare can constitute significant aspects of people's lives, these realities remain submerged within organizational analyses (Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Spade, 1989; Sheppard, 1992). Motherhood is often treated as a taboo topic within organizational investigations. This silence is linked to vestiges of the public/private divide, which rhetorically constructs sexuality, reproduction, and family as "private" functions existing beyond the purview of "public" organizational responsibility (Acker, 1992; Deetz, 1992b; Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Martin, 1992; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Saxonhouse, 1992). Another reason for this silence is that women's capacity for motherhood serves as moral and legal justification for women's differential (subordinated) treatment in the workplace (Backhi, 1991; MacKinnon, 1993; Spiller, 1993). Further, those ostensibly controlling organizational resources and decision-making can resist attempts to increase gender equity for fear of losing favored status (Ferguson, 1984; Gould, 1992; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Walby, 1986).

Political and emotional turbulence surrounding the treatment of "working mothers" points to the need for critical exploration. This investigation seeks to interrupt the "spiral of silence" (Kramarae, 1981) by privileging women's experiences and communication regarding the intersection of motherhood and workforce participation. Core areas of inquiry include organizational practices concerning motherhood in the workplace and women's communication relative to their identities as workers and mothers. Of particular interest are self-perpetuating processes of control. To this end, literature on Critical and feminist approaches to organizational communication will be reviewed. Since inequities within one subsystem of society mirror inequities within the system as a whole, investigations regarding gender and work must confront the intersection of "public" and "private" labor (Chira, 1998; Cockburn, 1991; Ferguson, 1984; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Sheppard, 1992). Recurrent tendencies to treat women as "variables," rather than as central participants in the construction of organizational communication, also point to the need to formulate more creative modes of inquiry (Ashcraft & Pacanowski, 1996; Bullis, 1993; Marshall, 1993; Mumby, 1993b; Oleson, 1994).

**Critical and Feminist Approaches to Organizational Communication**

Critical scholarship is declaredly emancipatory in nature (Farrell & Aune, 1979), and as such is best equipped to examine potential sources of institutional change. Implicitly, critical approaches incorporate opportunities for increasing people's awareness as to the very nature of these social arrangements. Critical approaches to organizational communication recognize that organizational life can best be investigated via the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Mumby, 1993b), which questions the natural attitude and examines discursive practices which present and re-present systems of domination and control (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Mumby, 1993a, 1993c). Thus, critical organizational studies target institutionalized forms of oppression and aim at un-covering both obtrusive and unobtrusive practices controlling people in the workplace (Alvesson, 1993; Deetz, 1992b; Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Mumby, 1993a, 1993c; Thompson & McHugh, 1990). Formalized rules, procedures, and work standards, along with supervisory authority and obtrusive forms of surveillance, provide the backbone of this control (Morgan, 1986). However, disciplinary apparatus are not always as concrete as rules, employee manuals, or the presence of managers (Alvesson, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Foucault, 1977; Mumby & Stohl, 1991; Thompson & McHugh, 1990). Of particular interest are unobtrusive control processes arising out of sets of routines and taken for granted schemes that become part of the natural attitude, or "ideological closure" (Hall, 1985;
At the core of organizational control are mechanisms which escape employees' detection. Control apparatus are infused throughout meaning systems, including narratives and discourse, and contribute to the more "hidden" forms of conflict in organizations (Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Martin, 1992; Mumby, 1993c). Especially potent forms of control are found in rationalization processes, with resultant effects of replacing supervisory control with mechanized control and self-pacing. Power and control then move from individuals known as management, and are distributed throughout organizations' work processes, tools and technologies, and ideologies (Deetz, 1992b). Impersonal strategies and administrative rules transform into self-adopted "standards" driving employees' efforts towards efficiency (Barker & Cheney, 1994; Morgan, 1986). Foucault (1977) provides one schema for viewing institutionalized mechanisms which perpetuate control. The panoptic architectural design, as evidenced in penal institutions' guard towers, allows for maximum control by those in power. However, power relations transcend physical structures and furnishings constraining bodily activity. Perpetual surveillance by those in control often results in the "internalization" of external modes of surveillance. Just as prisoners become so accustomed to continual, watchful gazes of wardens that they monitor their own behavior to avoid punishment, members of organizations become accustomed to watchful gazes of supervisors and to rules and procedures governing their actions, that even in their absence they feel their effects and engage in self-surveillance. Perceptions of being watched influence thinking and action and induce "willful obedience" (Barker & Cheney, 1994).

Gendered organizational practices and structures, particularly those which reflect and sustain discrimination and inequity, are guided by pervasive social norms and assumptions regarding men and women in and out of the workplace (Acker, 1992; Ashcraft & Pacanowski, 1996; Burrell, 1992a, 1992b; Cockburn, 1991; Ferguson, 1984; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Sheppard, 1992). The most salient among these taken-for-granted assumptions are "woman equals mother" and the "public/private divide."

"Woman Equals Mother."

Although it is physically possible for men to rear children, women almost always assume the role of primary child rearers (Chira, 1998; Chodorow, 1978). Motherhood can be seen as an institution which prescribes and conditions the circumstances of women's lives so they are locked into a limited number of choices (Rich, 1986/1976). Motherhood has been culturally-laden as women's responsibility such that women's worth is often judged first and foremost according to their roles as mothers. In sum, "At the same time that society writes women off as mothers, it also requires them to be mothers" (Eisenstein, 1986, p. 15, italics in original). Even women who are not mothers are constrained by cultural and sex-role expectations governing their identities as potential mothers (Acker, 1992; Afek, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Landa, 1990; Sheppard, 1992).

Despite women's increasing workforce participation, traditional ideologies regarding "proper" roles of men and women in relation to career and family persist (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Chira, 1998; Orthner, Bowen, & Beare, 1990; Spade, 1989). Pleck (1977) coined the term "asymmetrical impermeable boundaries" to denote differential career/family expectations for women and men. Men were assumed to be career-primary and responsible for the majority, if not totality, of their family's wages. Men's work was expected to pre-empt (if not exempt them from) family and home-related responsibilities. Conversely, women were assumed to be supported by men's wages, and to be solely responsible for bearing and rearing children, home care, and supporting men's careers. Women were seen mostly as casual workers, entering job markets as marital and childrearing responsibilities permitted, to take jobs that required little training and afforded few advancement opportunities. Hence, women did not have "real careers," but worked merely to earn "pin money" to supplement husbands' incomes (Bailyn, 1978; Gutek & Larwood, 1987; Rubin, 1976). These "asymmetrical impermeable boundaries" continue to operate, so that men are expected to use family time to meet work responsibilities, while women are expected to adjust work time to meet family responsibilities (Burley, 1991; Chira, 1998). "Mother at home" ideologies are supported within academic and mainstream research, which tends to focus on presumably negative effects of women's work on children, marital relationships, and home-related tasks (Chira, 1998; Garfinkel, 1986; Lerner & Galambos, 1991; Moen, 1992; O'Connell, 1987; Spade, 1989; Sugar, 1994). Widespread ideologies of "career-primary men" and "family-primary women" undergird organizational policies and programs (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Deetz, 1992a; Kanter, 1984; Landes, et al., 1994; Orthner, et al., 1990; Sheppard, 1992; Schwartz, 1992).

The Public/Private Divide

Another significant conceptual anchor for explaining social practices governing gender and power relations is the "public/private divide" (Chira, 1998; Eisenstein, 1986; Hearn & Parkin, 1992; Martin, 1992; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Sheppard, 1992; Walby, 1986). Within this conceptual framework, the public domain, including political and organizational activity, is seen as dominated by men, and thus assumes a "male" character. The private domain, including childrearing, familial relations, and
home maintenance, is dominated by women, and thus is ascribed a "female" character. Due to their
differential relations to modes of production, capital, and the acquisition of resources, men and public
activity are more highly valued than women and their activities.

The public/private divide is deeply rooted within organizational practices and processes. Weber's ideal
bureaucratic formula sought to suppress all vestiges of private functions, particularly emotionality and
sexuality, from organizational quests for rationality and impersonality (Burrell, 1992a, 1992b; Mummy &
Putnam, 1992; Thompson & McHugh, 1990; Walden, 1994). Within organizations, people were expected
to leave personal, non-work related issues at home. Although it is a myth, the public/private divide
influences organizational participants in many ways. First of all, organizational members can behave as if
separation were possible, or that the "private" is incongruous with organizational functioning Kanter,
1989). Among the greatest consequences of the public/private divide are organizational attempts to
desexualize labor. Burrell (1992), echoing Foucault (1977), sees the containment and suppression of
sexuality as one of the first tasks of bureaucratic organizations. Secondly, the myth has been "normalized"
such that organizational commitment over and above family and community commitments are seen as
necessary and normal (Acker, 1992; Calas & Smirich, 1992; Deetz, 1992a; Kanter, 1989).

Keeping Women in Their Place?

Analytical distinctions between work and family as two spheres maintain women's invisibility and
contribute to differential evaluations of men's and women's experiences (Sheppard, 1992). The
public/private divide is a fundamental ideology reinforcing women's subordination as "domestic" entities
(Acker, 1992; Cockburn, 1991; Eisenstein, 1986; Ferguson, 1984; Hearne & Parkin, 1992; Martin, 1992;
Ramazanoglu, 1989). Women's assumed identity as mothers, the myth of separate worlds, as well as
workplace desexualization, constitute powerful forms of (potential) ideological control.

Hidden within the concept of a job are assumptions about separations between the
public and private spheres and the gendered organization of reproduction and
production. Reproduction itself, procreation, sexuality, and caring for children, the ill, and
the aged, unless transferred to the public sphere, are outside job and organizational
boundaries. Too much involvement in such activities makes a person unsuitable for the
organization. Women do not fit the assumptions about the abstract worker. Thus they
are less than the ideal organizational participants, best placed in particular jobs that
separate them from the "real" workers. (Acker, 1992, p. 257)

In sum, discursive bifurcation of work/family hinders gender equity.

Women can be subjected to a variety of communicative phenomenon which excludes, subordinates, or
harasses them into questioning their identities as employees and as mothers (Cockburn, 1991; Martin,
1992; Rubin, 1976; Sheppard, 1992). For example, so called "mommy bashing" typically targets mothers
employed outside of the home, and particularly those utilizing child-care services (Chira, 1998; Faludi,
1991; Hochschild, 1997; Peters, 1997). Such messages are also intertwined among official organizational
speeches and documents and newcomers' job orientations (Landes, et al., 1994; Martin, 1992), or located
within casual organizational narratives (Clegg, 1993; Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Mummy, 1987; 1993c).
Added to this are the myriad combinations of verbal and nonverbal forms of harassment found in everyday
communication, including teasing and joking, put-downs, and sexual innuendoes which serve to influence
behavior and keep people "in their place" (Alberts, 1992; DiTomasso, 1989; Kolb & Putnam, 1992;

When taken together, varying attempts to control women, sexuality, and expressions of "private" or
emotional experiences can lead to self-surveillance. That is, even in the absence of tangible,
institutionalized control mechanisms, women monitor their own actions in order to avoid negative
sanctions. Accounts of women "de-feminizing" themselves and minimizing behaviors which could be
construed as "motherly" or "wifely" in order to fit in and advance in male-dominated cultures are prevalent
Even women with no "family ties" reportedly engage in guessing games regarding if, and when, coworkers
will ascribe "maternal instincts" to them, thereby diminishing career opportunities (Acker, 1992). In
addition, considerable risks are involved in mobilizing support (Goldsmith & Parks, 1990). Women can
fear being perceived as unable to cope, thereby jeopardizing career prospects. Fear of recrimination can
further contribute to women's "muting" and self-surveillance.

Control and resistance are inseparable, such that where there is power there is necessarily resistance
(Foucault, 1977). Processes of organizational control and resistance are dialectical, in that organizational
members, acting as individuals, actively or inactively resist others' attempts to dominate, control, and/or
discipline them. Resistance can be manifested in a variety of forms, including outright disregard/ignoring
of the rules and policies in question, covert or overt attacks on policy creators, and/or the creation and
enforcement of a wide array of disciplinary practices which allow for control in those areas which
previously were left unattended (Alvesson, 1993; Burawoy, 1979; Burrell, 1992b; Foucault, 1977).
In this study, we explore women's experiences of motherhood in the workplace. We focus on understanding how women navigate jobs and family responsibilities, and the impact of institutional and organizational factors on their experiences. This study is guided by the literature on women's experiences of motherhood and workplace participation, and employs feminist standpoint theory as a methodological framework.

**Method**

This study is based on qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups with women in various occupations and industries. The data collection involved open-ended questions about women's experiences of motherhood and work, and their perceptions of workplace culture. The analysis involved thematic coding and interpretation of the participants' narratives, with a focus on highlighting key concepts and metaphors that emerged from the data.

Participants were selected to represent a variety of perspectives with respect to: occupation, industry and type of employing organization, age, ethnicity, position and tenure with employing organizations, family responsibilities, and economic status. The data analysis revealed several themes, including the influence of organizational cultures on women's experiences, the importance of support networks, and the role of personal and societal values in shaping women's identities.

**Results**

The findings suggest that women's experiences of motherhood in the workplace are complex and vary significantly based on their personal and social circumstances. Organizational cultures and policies play a significant role in shaping women's experiences, and the support of peers and family can be crucial in navigating these challenges. The study also highlights the need for further research on the intersection of gender, race, and class in shaping women's experiences of motherhood in the workplace.

**Conclusion**

This study provides a deeper understanding of women's experiences of motherhood in the workplace, and highlights the importance of supporting women in balancing work and family responsibilities. The findings have implications for organizational policies and practices, and for the development of support networks for working mothers.

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**References**

Tape-recorded interview proceedings were transcribed verbatim to allow for textual analysis. Raw transcripts were edited and prepared according to Poland's (1995) suggestions for improving the quality of interview transcripts. A uniform transcription coding scheme, which identifies exchange numbers, statements made by the interviewer, and participants' statements by pseudonyms, was used (See Note 2). Transcripts ranged from 16 to 36 single-spaced pages of text. The seventeen interview transcripts totaled 378 pages of text.

An inductive analysis, informed by existing research, yet based upon participants' emergent frameworks was employed (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Nelson, 1989; Reinharz, 1992). Initial thematization focused on constraining and maintaining identities and women's communication with co-workers and superiors. Themes across questions, and general themes within participants' narratives were analyzed. Audio-tapes were audited twice. The first audit, while in a reflective mode, focused on general content and flow. The second audit assumed a more critical stance and noted any gaps, inconsistencies, and internal patterns. Texts were audited for accuracy, then read several times. During the first few readings, no notations were made. In successive readings, marginal notations were made regarding key concepts, terms, metaphors, emotionality and so on. Internal themes and patterns for each participant were also noted. Next, texts were viewed in light of other transcripts' topical content, and similarities and differences were noted. Finally, defining characteristics and topical summaries were written on 5” x 8” “Post-it” notes and attached to each transcript's cover page. Transcripts were then arranged so each note was clearly visible. Then, themes were tentatively labeled, and grouped according to exchange numbers corresponding to quotes comprising each theme.

Detailed written field notes were taken regarding the time, location, environment, and interactions associated with the interview process (Adler & Adler, 1994). Field notes were consulted to add depth to the description and analysis phase. Attention to recorded observations also enhances the “admissibility of evidence” gained via qualitative methods (Fitch, 1994).

A focus group discussion, centered upon the researcher's preliminary findings, was conducted with five participants (Byers & Wilcox, 1990; Morgan, 1988; 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). This “internal audit” (Manning, 1995) accomplished many goals, including: assessing accuracy and validity with members of the interpretive community (Geertz, 1983; Van Manen, 1990), allowing the emergence of more relevant information, facilitating interaction and resource sharing among women with similar concerns (Reinharz, 1992; Swenson, Griswold, & Klieber, 1992), and enhancing research authenticity (Fitch, 1994; Lincoln, 1995; Manning, 1995). The focus group interview, lasting one and one-half hours, was audio and video-taped for subsequent transcription.

Introducing Seventeen Women

In order to avoid reducing participants to mere demographic characteristics, self-descriptors for each participant will be provided. All names and organizational referents have been altered to provide anonymity and confidentiality for participants, as well as for their families, organizations, and co-workers. Most participants chose their own pseudonyms. Self-identified ethnicity and other labels are contained in quotes to reflect their words.

Amy 33 year old “White Christian;” Part-time Retail Cashier Trainer. PTA Treasurer, Sunday School teacher, Soccer Coach. 9 year old daughter and 6 year old son. Married 11 years.

Ann 45 year old "White;" Full-time High School Teacher and Part-time University Instructor. 14 year old son. Married 18 years. Three step-children, aged 34, 30, and 28; one grandchild.

Dora 36 year old ”Educated Black.” Full-time Productivity/Procedures Administrator for large utilities company. Two sons, aged 5 and 10. Married 12 years.

Jan 26 year old "Half Jewish and Half Italian." Part-time Beautician. La Leche League participant and Community radio station host. 11 month old daughter. Married 4 years.

Jeni 34 year old “Jewish.” Full-time Legal Council for non-profit health organization. Two year old son and expecting her second child in two weeks. Married 5 years.

Kay 38 year old “Black West Indian.” Part-time Kindergarten Aide, Part-time Avon Sales. Home School...
Discussion of Main Themes

Children In The Workplace

Showing children off. Children often physically enter the workplace, thereby cementing women's identities as "working MOTHERS." One common practice was introducing or "showing off" infants and toddlers during social visits with coworkers. Older children make occasional visits to the workplace, as in the "quick stop by" for money, documents, or lunch appointments. The second means by which children entered the workplace was during "emergency" child-care predicaments, such as child-care mix-ups and "snow days." Children also occasionally attended work-related functions and union meetings and were physically introduced during organizational social events, including fund-raisers or "family" cultural events.

Some children enter the workplace more than periodically. Mad selected a job primarily because her five-year-old son could go to work with her, thereby simplifying child care. Tara's three-year-old daughter, Kiki, is physically and symbolically integrated into her mother's (elementary school) workplace.

Tara 67 Oh, they definitely know her, they ask about her; they involve her; if we are at a, like the Halloween party, the Christmas with Santa, breakfast, they always involve her. Even though she does not attend this school she can always go with the younger group and play. She knows everybody.

On a few occasions, Kiki sat in on class. Kiki's art work is proudly displayed in the classroom and students often hear "Kiki stories" and ask about her doings. For Kay, there is no need to bring her two youngest
children to work because they attend the school where she is a Kindergarten Teacher's Aide. The only exception for children physically entering the workplace was with Sue's position as an Emergency Room X-Ray Technician. In addition to being an inhospitable environment for children, there is little room for distraction among the personnel. Most importantly, Sue's supervisor explicitly stated that "no children are allowed."

**Staying connected.** Children also enter the workplace through electronic means. Telephone calls, beepers, and e-mail were mentioned as highly valued means for staying connected with children throughout work shifts.

Mia 9 It's likely anytime in the week that she could call me and say "I forgot my lunch, I forgot my, whatever, my flute, I forgot something," and because I now work in (a Southwest City) and live in (the same Southwest City) it's kind of easy to just hop on over to the school and do whatever I need to do. I'm pretty involved in their lives. They always know where I am and I always know where they are. They can reach me at anytime. I have a pager and a cellular phone so I'm accessible all the time.

As many participants commented, school officials typically call mothers at work regarding academic issues or medical emergencies. Indeed, during Jeni's interview, a day care center representative telephoned to request that she pick up her feverish son. Electronic contact also appears to alleviate worry many participants associated with leaving children home alone.

Sue 109 But I'm still nervous, . . . you're always wondering well what happens if this happens, what happens if that happens. Ah, you know I got a beeper and I have them beep me. I have a code, you know what I mean.

In addition, electronic contact helps maintain mother-child relationships.

Mia 12 Nina and I are very good friends so she'll call and she'll say, "I have this problem right now mom. I need your advice. I need your help." And I'll be in the middle of something and I'll say, 'Nina, I really have to call you back.' And that angers her to no end and she says, "This is important." And what's important is she's going through this emotional thing with her friends. So, that's really difficult for me this year. . . . It's a very tough age. It's very tough. And she just became a lady and she's going through that. This emotional roller coaster is just really live for her right now. So that's a hard thing to have to call her back an hour later. . .

Women also connect with husbands and other family members, often regarding child-related issues. "Reminder calls" of special events, like plays, recitals, and sports events were common. Some couples developed rituals around child-care information. Jeni and her husband have a daily ritual whereby they e-mail around noon to verify who will pick their son up from the day care center. For Dora and her husband, a daily phone call informs him when to bring the car up from the parking garage so they can start their commute home and pick up their sons.

"Personal calls." Although several women equated permitting child-related telephone calls at work with organizational "support" for employees' family responsibilities, coworkers and supervisors do not always welcome electronic contact with families. Several narratives focused on describing the "rolling of eyes" or voices marked with impatience when "personal calls" were received at the workplace.

Mad 33 Her approach was, was, um, she didn't feel they should affect the job at all. If you had a problem at home, it stayed at home. Um, she did realize that sometimes, once in a while, you needed to make a phone call, but, I mean, for as far as the kids calling in, um, there was one girl that really, she ended up firing cause the kids called her everyday.

Similarly, Mia recounted an episode regarding an employee who filed a discrimination complaint stemming from the surveillance of her telephone calls, her actions, and her interactions:

Mia 20 . . . With her, because she was a single parent, the department assistants felt that she was spending too much time on what they would call personal phone calls. And really what she was doing was checking up on her kids. And so what they decided to do, because they felt she was making too many personal phone calls, and that she was spending too much time away from her work area, they decided to keep a log of every time she was away from her desk. Now they weren't doing this for anybody else, but they were doing it with her. . . . And so they would keep a log on her. Everywhere she went and every time she walked away from her desk, she would write it down.
Apparently, even women with private offices and separate telephone lines can receive negative sanctions for allowing "family intrusions" to interrupt the workplace.

Symbolic entries. Other symbolic connections bind women in the workplace to their children. Family photographs, gifts, and children's art work grace the work spaces of most women. Even women in positions with little chance of personalized work spaces, including Amy as a Cashier Trainer, Trudy as a Cashier, and Sue as an X-Ray Technician, bring symbolic connections with them to work. Wallet-sized photographs and personalized key-chains or jewelry remind women (and coworkers) of their ties to their children. Finally, all women referred to an emotional connection with children that lasts throughout their at-work hours. Worry, concern, guilt, and missed interaction were commonly mentioned, as was the fear associated with leaving children home alone in potentially hazardous conditions.

Speaking of Motherhood

The most prevalent means by which children entered the workplace was through women's talk with coworkers. Several themes clustered around the issue of "family talk" at work. Although family is talked about quite often, many issues arose regarding how, with whom, and when and when not to communicate. Each theme will now be explored.

"The Club." Motherhood is seen as a shared experience akin to entering a "new club." Although some women included fathers, and even step-parents, in "the club," a mother's entry was almost automatic. As Jeni explains, this "new club" creates a "bond."

Jeni 33 Ben kind of phrases it in terms of you're in a new club when you're a parent. It's almost like when you get married, um, and you relate to your old single friends differently. . . . Um, so you feel a connection with other parents, especially parents with young children. Um, and, you can relate to them in a different way than, um, other people that you know who haven't ever been parents or caretakers. . . . I'm not a particularly outgoing extroverted kind of person, but I'm much more likely now to start up a conversation with a mother of a young child. And say, "How old is your boy? Oh, mine is..." Yeah, it's a nice thing.

For some, shared parental experiences are enough to qualify as "bonding" material. For others, "parenting style" is an important factor when determining interpersonal connections. For example, Jan's strong convictions as a La Leche League supporter lead her to scan mothers for their adherence to "attachment parenting." Similar parenting views and similar aged children increase mother-to-mother connections. Indeed, several participants reported that all mothers share a bond in that a significant portion of their lives are devoted to children and family.

Subtle changes can occur in women's communication practices due to their entry into parenthood. As participants suggested, this may be due, in part, to the identity markers that pregnancy or accompanying children announce to other people. Empathic and supportive comments made in public by "strangers" were commonly mentioned by participants when describing interactions with others. Participants also reported that they are inclined to talk with other parents about their children due to this relational "connection." This "connection" among mothers and parents frequently occurs at the work place. Parenting experiences can provide a somewhat safe topic to discuss during the more sociable moments in the workplace.

Mary 111 Well, it's like anything else, if I were talking on and on about a movie that you hated, I'd probably stop talking about it once I realized you were totally uninterested in it, you know. But if you're saying, oh, yeah, really, what happened next? I probably would go on and give you every detail of the movie. And I think the same thing happens with the conversation about children. If someone says, "Oh, you know, did Christina go here because Johnny did such and such," then I'm going, 'Oh, yeah, she did and did she ever.' And the conversation goes on and both parties are somewhat interested and it's easier to talk. I've even noticed it with my volunteers. Most of my volunteers are probably 60 to 70 or so. And although they're grown and their children aren't at the same level as my kids are, they're very interested and they want to tell me a little bit about Nancy who's either in college or is married with grandchildren.

All participants do not automatically talk about their mothering experiences, even with other mothers. Rather, they carefully choose with whom they will talk about family.

"They are just clueless." The other side of "club" membership is that some are not granted entry. According to most women, non-parents, and particularly unmarried, childless people, have not had experiences which aid in comprehending what working mothers encounter.
Amy 48 I think it's easier to talk with people who have kids mostly because it's such an experience that you really can't describe it. It's not that they don't understand, but it's just that they don't always appreciate it.

Although "lack of parenthood" was not a negative attribute, it did act as an important identifier setting people apart from one another. Because other parents were seen as more empathetic and understanding, it was not uncommon for women to survey coworkers and supervisors in terms of marital and parental status. For instance, when listing people they interacted with on a daily basis at work, most included such unsolicited information as marital status, mates' names, and whether or not they had children. Some women are familiar enough with coworkers' families that they quickly rattled off the number, ages, and names of their children and grandchildren.

Some men are allowed club entry while others are not. Fathers who are active in raising children, and who are particularly empathetic, are granted an almost "honorary membership." Sharing family stories, verbal affirmations of the value of family, and encouragement to take time to care for children's needs earned club status for many male co-workers and supervisors. Typically, however, men are characterized as not understanding the simultaneous demands of pregnancy, raising children, home maintenance, and careers. Dora described her manager as particularly "clueless" because, "He has a family, but you would never know it." For some, the bodily experience of being a woman is a necessary condition to being empathetic to motherhood.

Jan 72 Because they don't have children. They don't have periods. They don't carry a child for nine months. With them everything is like, "Oh she has PMS. She's PMS-ing. She's on the rag," and all those other awful sayings. . . .

Lack of shared experiences as parents can lead women to communicate differently with childless coworkers. For many, like Lian, it is simply a matter of switching to more familiar topics, like pets, spouses, or dating relationships. Most women, though, are willing to talk about families with those who do not have children. However, they do limit conversations.

Lois 42 I'd feel more comfortable talking with people who have children when I'm relaying a story. Especially if it's something that the kids have done that, you know, I think is stupid. We all have those stories. "Can you believe what my kid did?"

An atypical approach is to avoid talking about family issues with "clueless" people altogether. Mad, for instance, chooses not to discuss her family with her coworkers, gutter installers who are all unmarried and childless men in their 20's and early 30's.

Mad 68 No, I wouldn't discuss things with them. I, I think their minds are still too young to even appreciate things, cause they're not parents and they don't understand, um, raising kids. . . . As far as they're concerned with other people's children they see only black and white, there's no shades. And with your own you see a lot of shades. . . . I just don't feel that they're compassionate enough.

Vee's approach sharply contrasts with Mad's. As Vee commented, childless coworkers can benefit from her wealth of information gained through raising eight children:

Vee 131 I share things with people who don't have children, because they . . especially if they plan on having children, too, you know. Because some people plan and maybe they have no idea, to let them know, you know, ahead of time. You have a lot of headaches with children, you know I've had eight so I've had a lot of headaches.....

In summary, participants tended to believe that childless people can talk about children and family issues at work, but only a mother can truly "appreciate" family talk.

"Proud things," Advice, and Venting. Fifteen participants talk about family either "all the time" or "almost all the time." Indeed, children enter the workplace throughout the day via coworkers' discussions. The most commonly discussed child-related topics are "proud things" or "bragging." Mothers of young children, in particular, delighted in sharing photographs to help "show off" children's good looks or growth and intellectual development. Mothers also shared updates about children's awards and accomplishments. Academic and athletic awards, and events showcasing special talents were also common.

Vee 117 My son . . . he's an athlete and he's good in basketball, he's good in track, he's good in football and the colleges are sending for him now, so it makes me feel
"Bragging" was often encased within general information sharing, such as "I am leaving early because . . . ," or "I'm in a good mood because my daughter was accepted to this college . . . ."

Mothers can also provide each other free parenting advice, successful child rearing strategies, and what "works well." They share recommendations for child care providers, potty training, healing diaper rash, and handling curfews, cars, and discipline for older children.

Trudy 138 And then I says, 'She's ready for bed by 7:00.' "Your daughter goes to bed at 7:00?" And I said, 'Yeah.' Because she's got a problem getting her kids to bed. She's still got her, I think her kid is three or four years old and still gets up three or four times a night. I says 'Yeah,' and then I said, 'She usually sleeps till about 7, 7:30, 8:00 in the morning.' And she was just shocked by that. I says, 'When my son was small and didn't know how to tell time, in the middle of winter, I used to tell him at 6:00 in the evening that it was bedtime, and he'd go to bed and sleep.' I said, 'I have no problem getting kids to bed. They may have been up with the sun, maybe 6:00 in the morning, but who cares you tell them go back to bed and leave me alone until 8:00.'

Coworkers also share information about scholastic standards, communicating with teachers at school, and tips on helping children with their homework.

Vee 124 It's the school problems, I feel as if though someone has some good advice, I go to people that I really, you know, I'm kind of led to people that has experience in the areas that I'm being confronted with now. And they say, "Oh yah, you know they did my kid like this." You know. "This happened, that happened." And it helps me through. And it gives me some advice so I'll be ready whenever I have to be.

Parents mutually benefit from scholastic advice because it typically allows for "bragging" and "advising" in one conversation.

"De-stressing" or "venting" was the next major family-related topic discussed among parents in the workplace. According to participants, venting is best accompanied by empathy.

Lee 49 . . . [I]f I had a problem with them or had a bad day and said, if I walked in and said, 'Oh geez, I had a bad day.' . . . I just come in and they look at me and say, "Oh, have a bad day, Lee? Who was it today? What happened?" So, I mean, no, they are very warm. . . . And because I've been there long enough, people know my personality and if I come in a little bit down in the mouth, they're ready to cheer you up.

Since the main requirement for an effective "venting" session is a sympathetic listener, even unmarried, young, and childless coworkers can partake in venting conversations.

"The good news we share, the bad news, we don't." Although some workplaces were described as "anything goes" in terms of what is discussed among coworkers, a few topics tended to be avoided. With only a few exceptions, women declined to talk about their husbands at work. As Sue stated, "Um, we didn't get too much into our husbands, you know, it's basically kids." Sex and intimacy were judged by all women as too "personal" or "private" to discuss at work.

Several women also avoided discussions of family "problems." The reasons for this varied, though. Some wished to present only the positive sides of their children and family life, perhaps in order to preserve their own positive identities.

Mad 63 Um, if I don't feel my kids are doing good, I won't discuss that. Basically, that's about it, . . . if it's not good news I don't want to talk about it.

Lee mentioned that sometimes she avoids discussing the "negative" because it is simply too painful to discuss. Also, work can offer a safe environment for "thinking things through" or "letting things go," so it's better to leave difficulties unaddressed. Other women, like Vee, avoid topics which are "not joyful" or "painful" because they do not want to "burden" their coworkers.

Vee 121 Well . . . so many things, I don't want to discuss because it's not joyful, some of the things. . . . I'll come out with all the good things and the positive things, you know. If anything is negative there, that's between them and I tell them at home that it's between family. . . . I don't believe in putting my burdens off on people. Not my burdens, I mean happy things, that's going to lift them up. I like to do that. My
Work friends and support groups. Discussing family, and particularly positive mothering experiences, can have many positive effects in the workplace. Many women attributed a "great work morale" or "looking forward to going to work" to the empathy and advice received from coworkers. Some women cited examples where coworkers, knowing of colleagues' troubles, alleviated stress that might impede work performance. However, one of the greatest benefits of family talk is supportive relationships built at work.

Due to the demands of caring for families, homes, and careers, women can have difficulty maintaining friendships outside the workplace. Participants told of friendships "strained" when they became mothers, and more typically, of friendships that suffered due to a lack of time for socialization. Some told of "dates" with friends scheduled weeks in advance, only to be canceled due to a family event or "emergency."

Mary 129 I have friends that call me up and say, "What's wrong with you, we used to get together every week?" And you feel guilty about it, they're just like out the window. I've been trying to get together with [my friend] since September, so that should tell you something. Honestly, honestly. We were all set to go out for a drink last night and she had to go to Virginia so......

With less socializing and friendship outside the workplace, women placed higher values on "friends from work," often defining coworkers as their primary social circle. Workplaces become primary sources for encouragement, child rearing advice, and "adult conversation."

Lois 45 When, you know, working with other working moms and being able to discuss our feelings or our kids or how frustrated we are, or just venting. The most supported time that I . . . we would have would be around that lunch table. Not only sharing, you know, silly kid stories, but swapping our frustrations . . . It was almost like a support group. The lunch table discussions were really the biggest support.

Dora 111 . . . And I've found that the more I've opened up sharing information the more I'm not alone. There are people doing the same thing, going through the same issues I am.

Work groups become "just like family," and "lunch breaks" transform into "support groups."

Supervising Motherhood

"Setting the climate." While participants enjoy communicating with co-workers about motherhood, this is not always the case when communicating with superiors. Managers and supervisors are described as "setting the climate" for experiences of motherhood in the workplace. These women observe supervisors' actions surrounding family responsibilities and, based on these observations, choose how to present identities as mothers.

Lian 107 So, this new supervisor I have is a young single woman who, I'm just getting to know her. I've only had her for a couple months as a supervisor so I . . . in fact, when I was leaving work on Friday, you know, I mentioned to her that Jennifer had sprained her ankle and I was concerned and so we did chat a little bit. I'm feeling her out. I guess that's what I'm doing.

Parenthood, especially motherhood, was seen as a prerequisite for being truly "supportive."

Vee 95 When people have children themselves and they know that it's . . . you're as a concerned parent that you have to take time with your children. So they're very supportive because they understand what you're going through with it. You have, if your child is sick or there's trouble in school, whatever.

As participants' commented, other mothers were the best to work for because they empathized with child care dilemmas, scheduling concerns, and "personal phone calls." Several stories were told of gratitude for supervisors who smoothed transitions back into careers, provided the empathy and flexibility needed to breast feed infants, or acted as trusted confidants.

Lois 3 And I was very fortunate in that the person that I was working for was a very dedicated mom and understood that, you know, if I needed to take some time off or whatever I would use my sick time, my vacation time.

While childless supervisors were seen as unable to understand mothers' experiences, those who are mothers, yet are not supportive or flexible, are even more "difficult" to work with. Emotional reports of "deep mistrust" and "betrayal by another mother" imply that they have experienced a violation of
expectations of "bonds" associated with "the club" of motherhood.

"Don't press my parent button." Supervisors set the tone for decisions regarding how, when, and with whom to communicate about family. Some women reported that they do not talk about families with supervisors due to a "lack of a trust," or because they "have nothing in common." For many however, the interpretation of their supervisor's approach to family provides clues on how to display their identities as mothers. Supervisors who convey empathy and respect for family responsibilities, grant earned time off without confrontation, and appear to respond positively to their own family obligations, help create a work environment where women openly discuss motherhood. In the absence of supervisors' positive regard for family, women are likely to "edit" communication with supervisors, and even coworkers.

The most dramatic examples of "editing" were provided by women who sensed that their supervisors held negative biases against working mothers. Communication would be limited to avoid placing themselves in potentially discriminatory circumstances.

Sue 92 Probably my supervisor, at [Major Hospital] . . . where I could see her thinking, "oh she's not gonna give me any hours because, oh well she's got two kids, what's she gonna do with her kids." I don't even want to get involved in that...

Lois 23 A lot of my conversation around my friends and with my friends as well, cuz we talked about our kids. That was kind of like at the lunch table, whatever. That was our venting. And we'd talk about the kids. And, you know, if the upper echelons would happen to come in and be listening in on this, it was like "Don't you have anything else to talk about?" You know, that kind of thing. Or, "You're always talking about your kids." 'Well, I'm sorry. They're not here, they're on our minds.'

Indeed, Lois's principal motivations for leaving a health care position were "snide remarks" and "insinuations" that she was "not a professional woman" due to her family ties. "Pushing the parent button" upset her so much that she quit rather than endure "editing" motherhood.

Typically, women assess supervisors' and coworkers' approaches to family, yet rely heavily on their own comfort levels and other clues regarding representing motherhood at work.

Mary 104 I try not to [talk with my coworkers about my family] now because of the few comments I've heard. But I still do it a little, you know, I'll always, if something good's going on and we're talking socially, my daughter just went to a prom and we spent the weekend in New York looking for a dress, you know. So of course I came in all excited and saying oh, we went here, we went there, we found this dress, she looks beautiful, blah, blah, blah. So it doesn't stop me but I don't think I do as much as I would probably with another family oriented person where you're more inclined to discuss it. . . .Uh, what really got me once, I can't remember which one of the kids said it, but they said, did you not tell the people at work that you have children? Almost as if I wouldn't, hiding them. Of course, well I didn't tell them the truth of the matter was I didn't because no one asked so therefore I didn't make it an issue and this was when I first, first got hired and of course in the interview process it just, I didn't want it to come up and it didn't come up so I did not offer it.

Many participants limited family-related communication with superiors to avoid drawing attention to bias-provoking issues. However, in order to attenuate "guilt" about verbally "hiding" motherhood, symbolic ties were enacted. Participants occupying positions higher up in the organizational hierarchy have more freedom to make motherhood visible. For example, as Legal Council to a nonprofit organization, Jeni enjoys bringing her toddler son to work.

Jeni 42 The only time that I felt a little awkward doing it was when I had a board committee meeting. I had to ask one of the support staff to stay after hours in order to be able to accommodate this meeting, which she was willing to do. But it was more concern about, as these board people came through, our officers, and they saw this young child, what their reaction would be.

Further, employees do not always follow managers' or supervisors' leads. Instances surfaced of women doing the opposite of what the supervisor's behavior suggested.

Trudy 111 The manager, store manager's wife, just had a baby about a month ago. He didn't even take the time off. He didn't even take the day it was born off.

Trudy 112 . . . See the head cashier used to take no time off whatsoever, for anything. If she had a wedding to go to, she'd go to work. Forget the wedding. Kid's birthday, she'd go to work, forget the birthdays, you know, they don't do anything.
Thus, women can resist supervisory pressures not to allow families into the workplace.  

"She's strictly management." Organizational size, industry, and women's position within organizational hierarchies impact experiences of supervision and their identities as mothers. Organizational practices and relational issues with supervisors were made clear by at least six participants. For example, Mad attributes positive experiences to the fact that she is the Office Manager in a small organization owned by a family-oriented man who encourages flexibility. Other participants, like Jan and Lee, saw smaller organizations as more amenable to flexibility, scheduling freedom, and bringing children to work. Lack of formalized policies can work in favor of women's needs as employees and mothers. Larger organizations were characterized as having more formalized policies with little room for mothering to enter the workplace.  

Sue 76 They treat everybody basically the same. . . . Our supervisor. . . she don't pull no punches. She does her job, and she's strictly management, strictly hospital, and that's probably what got her where she is today.  

However, even in large, highly bureaucratized organizations, like a "High Tech Aerospace Company" or a "Dinosaur Utility Company," policies are not always strictly adhered to.  

Dora 111 I had a secretary that had to leave at 2:30 in the afternoon each day. She took lunch at 2:30 so that she could go pick up her child and come back. But she snuck to do it. She would sneak out to do it so I kind of cover her during that time. She wouldn't take lunch but she didn't want to make it obvious that was what she was doing because then if someone said she couldn't do it she would have a problem.  

An interesting contrast was provided by Tara, whose teaching supervisor effectively makes a policy tougher for parents by enforcing an unofficial stance of "no time off for any reason." Supervisors can distort organizational policies to the benefit or detriment of working mothers.  

**Summary and Implications**  
The purpose of this investigation was to uncover standpoints on motherhood and organizational participation, with particular attention to self-perpetuating communicative patterns. Participants' communication in this study supports a model of "navigating" or "traveling" among experiences without much regard for "boundaries" arbitrarily defined as public and private. In contrast to "the myth of separate worlds" (Kanter, 1977) or "boundary management" (Nippert-Eng, 1995), for these women, family is experientially intertwined with workplace experiences. Children physically and symbolically enter the workplace "all the time," and "personal" calls keep mothers in contact with children. Other expressions of fluid boundaries can be seen in participants' resistance to organizational attempts to expel family from the workplace. Communicative ties to motherhood are made visible or invisible according to these women's own desires to express or repress their identities as mothers.  

Although organizational leaders purportedly attempt to limit conversation related to families, this research indicates that such exchanges can be a highly valued aspect of organizational membership. Participants' more vivid moments in the workplace concerned empathic, supportive, and advice-laden conversations with other mothers. Women working part-time and shift work mentioned that one positive aspect of work was "getting away from the house" to socialize and have "adult conversation." Ironically, these discussions were held with other mothers and often centered on children and home-related topics. Support networks built on sharing family advice are powerful morale enhancers, particularly for women with limited friendship ties outside of work. These support networks can enhance women's organizational loyalty and serve as a benefit for returning to, or remaining in, the workforce.  

Participants' emergent definitions of "supportive communication" contribute to understanding mundane organizational communication practices. Supportive relationships for these mothers were marked by sharing "proud" stories, venting frustrations, and trading parenting advice. Encouraging communication was especially valued by participants with few friendship networks outside the workplace. "Supportive supervisors" understand the fluidity of work-family boundaries and permit family-related talk as well as occasional visits from children, either physically, symbolically, or electronically. They confirm women's identities as mothers by allowing motherhood to enter the organization, while still recognizing competence and professionalism. Other working mothers, and members of "the club," are expected to be particularly supportive due to their ability to empathize. These qualitative descriptions highlight the importance of workplace support (Brand & Hirsch, 1990; Burleson, 1990).  

Managers and supervisors impact employees' family-related communication. Their approach serves as one important "clue" in assessing prevalent attitudes in the workplace concerning family responsibilities. Expressed "values" or attitudes toward parenting can impact relationships at work such that motherhood is either made more visible or more invisible in the workplace. Most important, though, is the widespread
assumption among participants that women's professionalism is negatively linked to motherhood. Participants often expressed the belief that, in order to present a professional self, motherhood should be made less visible, particularly to those people in charge of performance evaluation or scheduling. Moreover, supervisors act as interpreters of organizational policies and can thus affect women's experiences of motherhood in the workplace by adhering to policies, by "bending" policies, or by making the policies appear stricter. Given the central role of supervisors and managers, any formalized work/family organizational initiative must consider the relational currents which could effectively nullify positive moves for working mothers.

Self-surveillance has been described as one of the most potent forms of ideological control in that disciplinary apparatus become self-regulating and unquestioned (Alvesson, 1993; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Deetz, 1982, 1992b; Foucault, 1977). Participants described conditions where self-surveillance is operational. Women are especially likely to edit communicative ties to motherhood when expectations of subtle or overt discrimination have been enacted in the workplace. Most participants cited constraints placed upon them by supervisors and coworkers, as well as organizational characteristics and sanctions as "setting the tone" in the workplace. Even women who reported that they are "up front" about their ties to mothering, expressed doubts about whether talking about children and establishing a verbal linkage to motherhood was a "good idea." These women monitor their own actions in light of standards for "good mothers" and "good employees," are mindful of mothers who "complain too much" or "abuse the system," and are careful not to replicate those behaviors for fear of recrimination, or worse yet, of "ruining it" for other mothers. They also monitor their communication and are careful not to present parts of their identities which might be judged undesirable by organizational members, especially supervisors who are not "family-oriented." All participants edit talk about mates, intimacy, and sex. Thus, in addition to desexualizing the workplace (Burrell, 1992a, 1992b), these women contribute "asexuality" to the list of requisite characteristics of "good mothers." Apparently, repressing sexuality complements expressing motherhood. It is also noteworthy that these women's self-surveillance efforts included editing out information concerning children's behavior which could be judged as undesirable. Women were more guarded in sharing stories about children with non-parents as they were seen as less accepting of the "stupid mistakes kids make." Even accounts of children's misbehavior can be "edited" in order to present a more positive "working mother" persona.

Uneasy tensions between being controlled and being in control, and the dialectics of control-resistance are illuminated when these women's perspectives are considered. While they quickly pointed out constraints to motherhood, including non-supportive relational dynamics and non-family-friendly organizational practices, participants simultaneously described themselves as choosing how they present their identities in the workplace. They carefully assess their work environment and other organizational members' experiences and values in their search for clues in determining how much to "edit" their communication regarding children and visible ties to motherhood. Thus, participants see themselves as controlling communication and responding to relational dynamics. These working mothers discursively positioned themselves as co-creators of work environments in which they choose how they communicate about family and child-related issues. Children visit, support networks form, and rules are "bent" in the interest of confirming "motherhood." While an empowering view of "working mothers," it stands next to the "tightwire walking" reported here.

This investigation surfaced issues faced by seventeen women representing a spectrum of experiences of motherhood in the workplace. Alternative standpoints on parenting in relation to organizational participation should be explored in future research. Certainly, men and women supervisors and managers from a variety of organizational contexts should be consulted to provide their perspectives on the work-family nexus. "Official" organizational policies versus "unofficial" enacted communicative dynamics represent one fruitful approach (Cockburn, 1991). The presence of "supportive men" and "proud fathers" in "The Club," combined with men's increasing demands for father-friendly organizational practices, warrant an investigation of men's perspectives on fatherhood and organizational participation, and particularly of men serving as primary care givers (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997). Single and childless employees can also provide differing viewpoints on family-related organizational programs and on relational dynamics surrounding parenting responsibilities of co-workers. Finally, as implied by these women's experiences, more critical studies of the construction of organizational communities, wherein women create and maintain systems of control and resistance, should be undertaken (Ashcraft & Packanowsky, 1996).

Mia 23 People are afraid to challenge, a lot of times, the policies and procedures that they have within a work area. And so they take it at status quo. You know, it's like okay, this is not going to change. When in reality if enough people yell about it, if enough people scream about it, the things have to change . . .

*Author's Note: This manuscript was based on portions of a doctoral dissertation: "The voice of choice: Communicating and experiencing motherhood with/in the workplace." An earlier draft of this manuscript
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Notes

[1]: Although women's experiences must be viewed from a gestalt, or a combination of factors that lead to a particular lifestyle and viewpoint, for analysis purposes it is important to note that participants' demographics reflect a variety of experiences. Ages ranged from 26 to "forty something something," with most women in their late 30's and early 40's. They also represent diversity in terms of ethnicity, with self-identified ethnicity including: White, Hispanic, Black, Jewish, Christian, and West Indian. Most women were currently married, with marriage length ranging from 1 to 35 years. One was separated from her husband of 20 years. Some had been married previously. Two were divorced and were, at the time of this study, single. One was living with her mate of five years. Participants also differed according to the highest educational level achieved. All participants, except one, were high school graduates. Half achieved college or technical school degrees, and two hold advanced degrees.

Participants' paid work experiences also varied widely. The number of hours worked per week ranged from a low of 20 to a high of "60 plus" hours. Full time and part-time shift work, as well as various professions were represented. Some of the women combined either two part-time jobs or a full-time and a part-time job. Occupations included: Lawyer; Human Resource Director; Program Director; Dental Plan Coordinator; High School Teacher, Middle School Teacher; Kindergarten Aide; X-Ray Technologist; Health Care Consultant; Productivity/Procedures Administrator; Senior Insurance Representative; Head Custodian; Office Manager; Hair Dresser; Telephone Operator; Cashier Trainer; and Cashier. The size of the employing organizations, according to number of employees, ranged from a husband-wife entrepreneurship of 2, to an international corporation employing over 8000 at the location where the participant works. Volunteer activities ended up being quite substantial among this group, including PTA leadership, religious care and instruction, and coaching for cheer leading and sports teams. It is important to note that participants also reflected on previous experiences with other employing organizations, thus enhancing the diversity of work experiences represented.

Finally, participants represented a range of experiences regarding "mothering." The number of children ranged from eight to zero (expecting her first in two weeks). The ages of children ranged from minus two-weeks to 32 years old. Three women had families with significant age differences between children, or what one woman referred to as "two sets of only children" (a six year old and a 17 year old; a 2 year old and a 14 year old; and another woman had an 18 month old, a 17 year old, a 19 year old and grandchildren.) In addition, five women were grandmothers, and two had experiences with step-parenting.

[2] Participants' statements are identified by pseudonyms (Mary). "INT" indicates the interviewer/researcher's questions and comments. The number following names indicates the exchange number within the interview process. In some cases, quotes have been edited to impart some indication of participants' inflection or verbal punctuation. Two dots ( . ) indicate a pause within the conversation. Verbatim responses have been retained except in rare instances. Although all efforts were made to ensure that the participants' full expression is represented, ellipses were applied in order to protect anonymity, to retain the flow or readability of a passage, or to shorten long quotes which were repetitive in nature. Three dots, or ellipses ( . . ), indicate that the researcher has eliminated certain passages of the participant's quotes. Bracketed information [ ] denotes the researcher's insertion of pseudonyms or other information designed to protect participants' identities while maintaining comprehension for the reader.

References


While all family bonds are significant in the novel, the most important family role is that of motherhood. Kingsolver portrays many types of mothers, birth, adoptive and surrogate, as Taylor meets many women who help her raise Turtle as her own daughter. Both Taylor and Lou Ann must come to terms with the intense responsibility of motherhood, eventually finding the joy and fulfillment in a role they initially did not want. As the two women learn to be mothers who unconditionally love their children, the way that Taylor’s own mother loves her, the novel argues that motherhood requires nothing more or less than a willingness to do anything for your child. Yahoo CEO: Work in the office or quit. Replay. More Videos MUST WATCH. Yahoo CEO: Work in the office or quit 02:15. JUST WATCHED. “I’ve been able to balance my career with motherhood so far, despite how difficult it is to communicate with my children," she says. Hide Caption. 3 of 7. Photos: Moms around the world on work-life balance. Cynthia Falar, Florida â€” Cynthia Falar says the most challenging thing about being a working mother is juggling quality time. “If more women lean in, we can change the power structure of our world and expand opportunities,” she wrote. “Shared experience forms the basis of empathy and, in turn, can spark the institutional changes we need. More female leadership will lead to fairer treatment for all women.” Sounds easy enough, right?