

Contemporary Motherhood:
An Intimate Look at Mothers in the 21st Century

by

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A Thesis Project
Submitted to the
Art Education Program
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Art Education
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Kendall College of Art and Design
Grand Rapids, MI
December 2013

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Chapter 1
Introduction
The Paradigm Shift Within Motherhood

Motherhood is an amazing time in a woman's life and is also filled with anxiety, depression, humility, laughter, and love. There is not one single "right" way to describe or depict what motherhood means to each person. In the last 20 years there have been monumental changes in the way we view the role of motherhood. Our idea of what constitutes a mother is growing more broad and beginning to include several different categories within the term "mother". According to the U.S. Census Bureau, out of 12.2 million single parent families in 2012, more than 80% were headed by single mothers. 4% of all adopted children in the U.S. are being raised by gay or lesbian parents (Gates et al. 2007). In 2010, 16.4 million children, or 22.0 percent, were below the poverty line, and "Four million children and adolescents in this country suffer from a *serious* mental disorder that causes significant functional impairments at home, at school and with peers." (NAMI) "Nearly one-in-five American women ends her childbearing years without having borne a child, compared with one-in-ten in the 1970s" (Livingston, Cohn, 1) and most children under the age of one are minorities (U.S. Census Bureau). Based on these statistics, there is little doubt we are moving away from a strictly patriarchal society and toward a family system with more openness to unique roles and diversity for women.

Chapter 2
The Theme of Motherhood in the Visual Arts Throughout History

Depictions of the role of mother in visual art have radically altered from their historical beginnings. The artists highlighted in this chapter have made an effort to connect the physical, emotional, and psychological experiences that go along with being maternal. Expressing these ideas through art allows the viewer to connect to what the artist is saying on a higher level. From

the Paleolithic *Woman From Willendorf*, to the numerous depictions of Madonna and Child during the Renaissance, to contemporary works, artists have looked to the connection between mother and child for inspiration. Art imitates life and vice versa, by studying art centered around motherhood, we can analyze how traditional roles of motherhood have changed and evolved throughout history.

One of the earliest known works of art possibly depicting the mother role is *The Woman From Willendorf* (fig.1). Art historians and archaeologists originally thought of this Paleolithic sculpture as a fertility goddess, however, a more recent analysis of the sculpture suggests that it may have been used as an early form of communication between clans. As explained in the fourth edition of *Art History* by Marilyn Stokstad and Michael W. Cothren, “According to archaeologist Clive Gamble, these little sculptures were subtle forms of nonverbal communication among small isolated groups of Paleolithic people spread out across vast regions” (Stokstad, Cothren, 6-7). Gamble describes how these statues may have signaled to Paleolithic groups whether or not a clan was friendly, acceptable for interaction, and possibly for mating purposes. Art historian, Leroy McDermott has another possible explanation for the sculptures. McDermott suggests that the figures were carved from the perspective of a pregnant woman looking down at herself. “McDermott’s theory that the figures were sculpted by pregnant women and were depictions of their own bodies offers an intriguing vision of women as artists, in control of how they were represented” (Stokstad, Cothren, 7). Most imagery in succeeding works of art portraying women in the role of mother are created and controlled by men. Images of motherhood painted by male artists often give a false sense of how women are expected to act and feel in their role as mother.



Figure 1: Woman From Willendorf, from Austria. c. 24,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4 3/8” (11cm). Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Works created during the Renaissance by Raphael depict idealized images of Madonna and Child which are both religious in nature and communicate an idea of the serene mother-child relationship, one in which the child sits contently in the mother’s loving embrace. These paintings are beautiful and play an important role within art history; however, they fail to depict

the whole story of motherhood. For example, Raphael's *The Small Cowper Madonna* (fig. 3) depicts a peaceful Madonna embracing her beloved child (Christ) while sitting in a field with the church of San Bernardino in the distance. While this is a beautiful scene, because of its religious context it is an idealized portrayal of the mother-child relationship.



Figure 2: Raphael, The Small Cowper Madonna, c. 1505. Oil on wood panel, 23 3/8 x 17 3/8 (59.5 x 44.1 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Widener Collection (1942.9.57)

There is no denying how technically flawless and aesthetically pleasing paintings like Raphael's are, but they are almost always created by men who do not share the same connection, and at times, burden of childrearing as women, especially during the Renaissance and prior to the women's movement in the 1900s and 1970s. It wasn't until the first wave of feminism and women's suffrage that led artists such as Alice Neel, Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn-Becker to explore a more realistic narrative of motherhood in the early twentieth century.

Two of the first artists to break away from traditional Madonna and child portrayals of motherhood were Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn-Becker. Paula Modersohn-Becker's *Reclining Mother and Child* (fig.3), and Käthe Kollwitz's *Woman with Dead Child* (fig.4) are

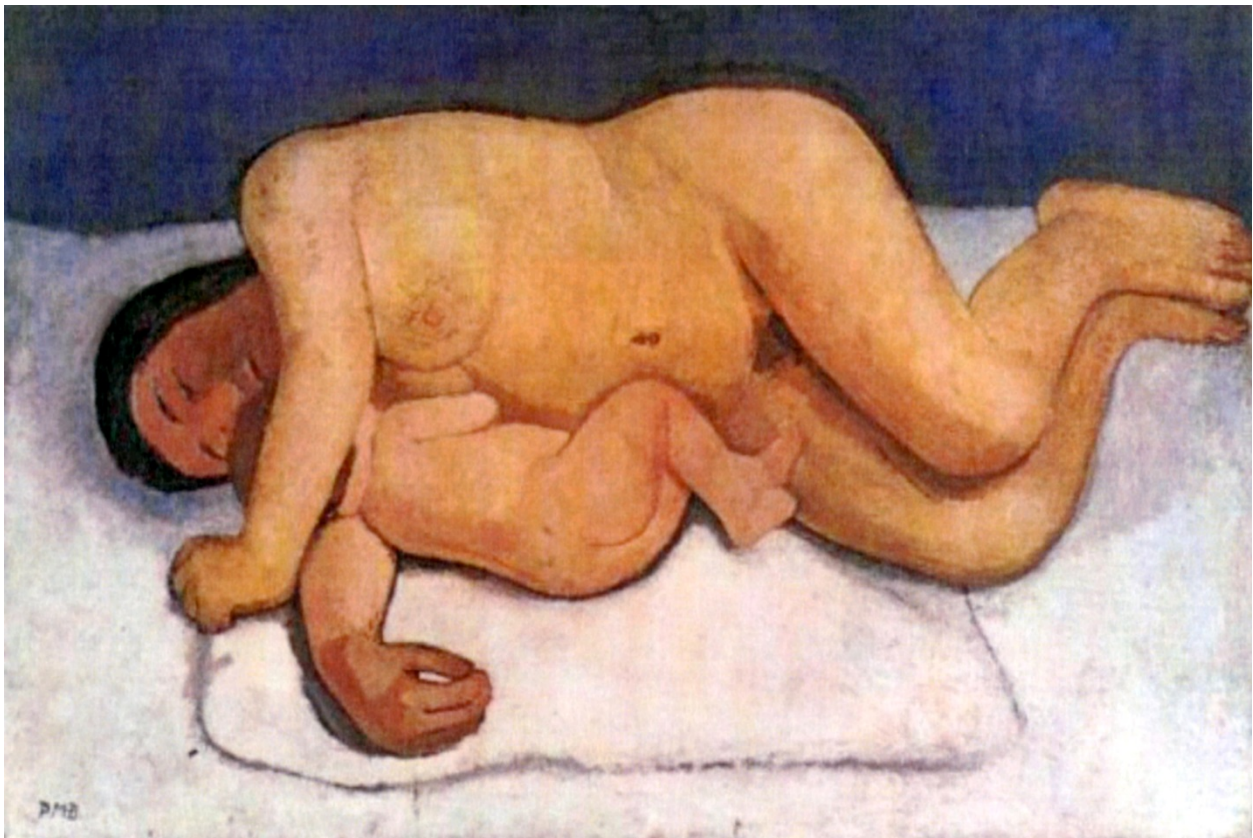


Figure 3: Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Reclining Mother and Child*, 1906, oil on canvas 124.7cm x 82cm.



*Figure 4: Kathe Kollwitz, *Woman with Dead Child*, 1903, etching with engraving overprinted with a gold tone plate, 47.6cm x 41.9cm.*

striking in their representation of motherhood. They depict the maternal state as one of physical absorption and psychic possession in a way that disturbs our preconceptions [...] Both images stand outside the western cultural tradition of spiritual and dematerialized motherhood symbolized by the immaculate conception and virgin birth” (Betterton, 20). While Modersohn-Becker’s maternal imagery is interpreted as exhibiting a more spiritual and ambiguous outlook on motherhood, Kollwitz’s maternal work is thought to be more political and slightly more

controversial. During the early nineteenth century, the nude figure was a sign of artistic prestige, a true measure of the artist's ability and one in which women were prohibited. Many of the first women artists (including Kollwitz and Modersohn-Becker) used their own bodies in order to paint the nude figure. As explained in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* by Rosemary Betterton, paintings of the female nude created by men were used to promote the idea of the "containment and regulation of the female sexual body[...] the maternal body points to the impossibility of closure, to a liminal state where the boundaries of the body are fluid. In the act of giving birth, as well as during pregnancy and breastfeeding, the body of the mother is the subject of a constant exchange with that of the child" (Betterton, 33). Kollwitz and Modersohn-Becker helped set a new precedent for women artists and how female nude and maternal nature were portrayed.

Alice Neel began reinterpreting the role of mother from a very personal standpoint during the 1920s and 1930s and continued throughout the remainder of her career. In her article "Alice Neel's Portraits of Mother Work" Denise Bauer writes that "Mothers and children were a major motif throughout Neel's career, no doubt stemming from her own often tormented experiences as a young mother, her early ambivalence about having children, her difficult experiences as a single mother, and, in later years, her view of the changing roles of mothers in society, mainly as observed through her daughters-in-law and grandchildren" (Bauer, 105). Neel was one of the first women to paint the raw emotions and anxieties that come with being a mother. In her painting *Degenerate Madonna*, 1930, Neel depicts a disfigured woman sitting bare-breasted with her deformed child on her lap. Bauer explains in her article this dysfunctional representation of the mother-child bond may have stemmed from Neel's own struggles with losing her first two children, one to death, and the other raised by her ex-husband's relatives. While Neel's earlier

paintings dealing with the subject of motherhood are often macabre and satirical, her work begins to shift with the birth of her two sons. Bauer writes “by the early 1940s, Neel begins to develop a more sympathetic and intimate view of mothers and children in which she expresses a much more tender feeling of mother for child” (Bauer, 110). In one of her later portraits of her daughter-in-law, *Mother and Child* (Nancy and Olivia), (fig. 5), Neel depicts the struggles that



Figure 5: Alice Neel, *Mother and Child* (Nancy and Olivia), 1967. Oil on Canvas, 42 x 34 inches. Estate of Alice Neel. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.

can arise from becoming a new mother. Bauer describes “Young and wide-eyed, Nancy’s face speaks of the fear, fatigue, and perplexity that come with the often-shocking transformation into ‘mother’” (Bauer, 115). Prior to Alice Neel, artists didn’t illustrate the realities of motherhood. Neel had the ability and gumption to shed light on the true experiences that go along with becoming a mother, both the tender sweet moments as well as the anxieties and frustrations.

During the 1970s feminist movement, women artists began to explore the topic of femininity on a whole new level. In the book *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s History and Impact*, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard make an effort to document the beginning of the second wave of the feminist movement from the 1970s and highlight the art that was created during that time. This was the first opportunity women had to explore their sexuality and challenge traditional gender roles. Many of the 1970s feminists drew attention to the stereotype of women being confined to the home and raising children while men were able to participate in the workforce. *Womanhouse* (fig.6, 7), was a collaborative installation organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro who co-founded the California Institute of the Arts Feminist Art Program in 1972. Chicago and Schapiro encouraged the participating artists involved with *Womanhouse* to explore topics of feminism through consciousness-raising sessions and expression of their own experiences as women. While many facets of femininity were explored during the 1970s feminist movement, the topic of motherhood was often not addressed. In Joanna Frueh’s section entitled “The Body Through Women’s Eyes” Frueh states: “Women artists avoided the subjects of pregnancy and motherhood. Due to the ‘demonic myth,’ being a mother and being an artist were incompatible in the art world, and to a great extent, still are[...] Feminist artists’ avoidance of pregnancy and motherhood as subjects should not be seen as anti-pregnancy or anti-motherhood, but rather as a sad professional necessity rooted in fear”



Figure 6: Sandy Orgel, Linen Closet. Mixed media site installation at Womanhouse, 1972. Orgel wrote: "As one-woman visitor to my room commented, 'This is exactly where women have always been in between the sheets and on the shelf.' It is time now to come out of the closet."

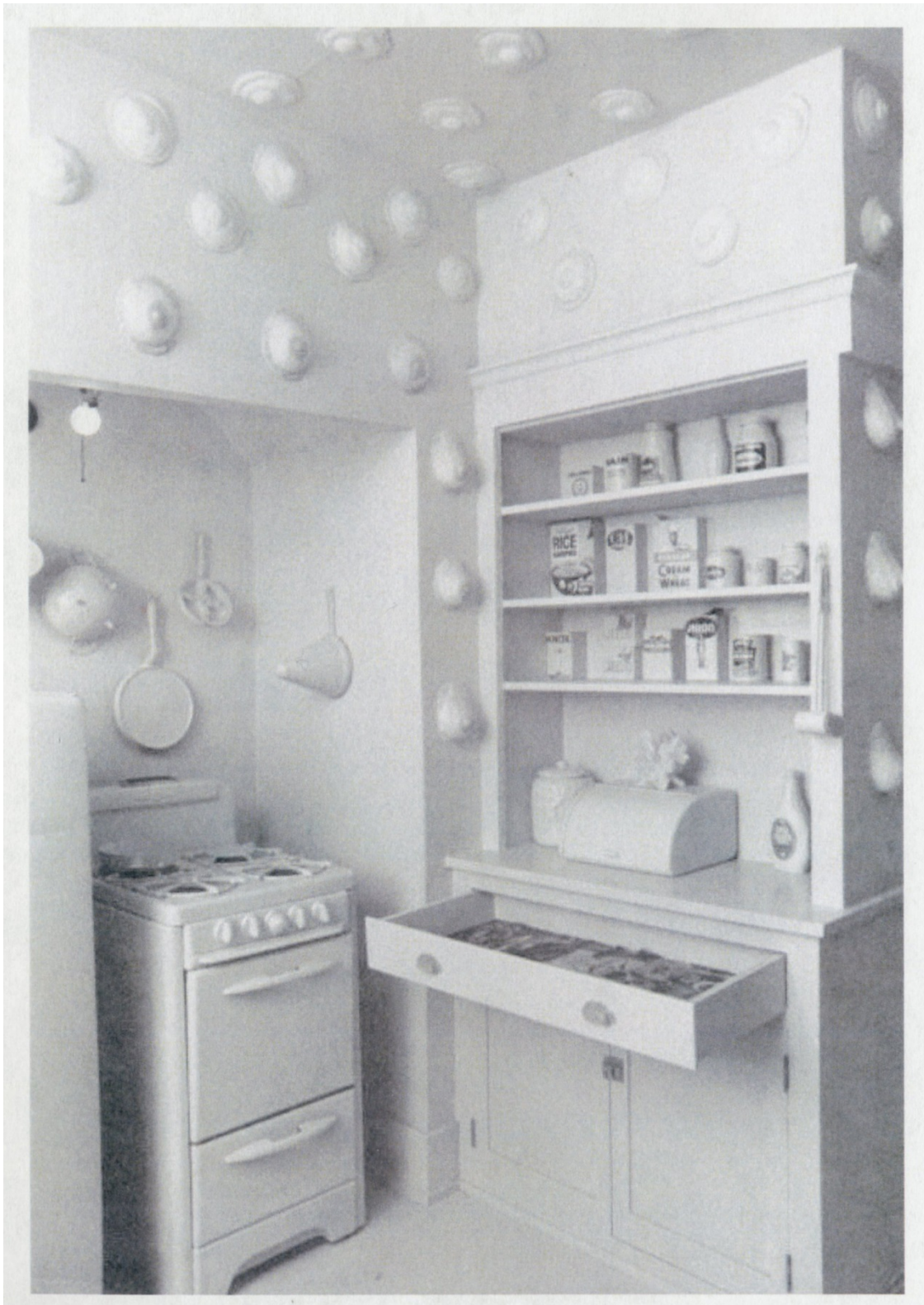


Figure 7: Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, Robin Weltsch. Nurturant Kitchen (detail). Mixed media site installation at Womanhouse, 1972.

(Broude, 195). Feminists during the 1970s may not have had the option to be both mother and artist, but they did raise awareness on the topic of chauvinistic ideals of femininity and allowed women who followed in their footsteps the option to do both.

Mary Kelly is an artist who, in the 1970s, began depicting motherhood in a new light. Kelly has spent almost her entire career as an artist analyzing the mother-child relationship, beginning with *Antepartum*, 1973, which is a series of black and white close-up photos of her full term pregnant belly, followed by the *Post-Partum Document*, and later *Mea Culpa*, 1999, which examines incidents involving women and their children that were reported to the War Crimes Tribunal. Kelly is most known for *Post-Partum Document* (fig.8), which is a six-year exploration and documentation of the mother-child bond. Kelly's work was, and is, a controversial look into the first years of life and how, from the mother's perspective, it affects the female (maternal) roles of sexuality, identity, and psychology. *Post-Partum Document* not only examines the maternal, but as Mary Kelly explained in an interview with Margaret Morgan, it's also about analyzing and addressing these issues through language. This work consists of over 130 "units" that document the evolution of her son's use of language and her own feelings of separation anxiety and guilt associated with different aspects of motherhood. "In the *Post-Partum Document*, I am trying to show the reciprocity of the process of socialization in the first few years of life. It is not only the infant whose future personality is formed at this crucial moment, but also the mother whose 'feminine psychology' is sealed by the sexual division of labor in childcare" (Kelly 1983, 1). There are no photographs or figural representations of the mother and child. Kelly explains "it seemed crucial, not in the sense of a moral imperative, but as a historical strategy, to avoid the literal figuration of mother and child, to avoid any means of representation which risked recuperation as 'a slice of life.' To use the body of the woman, her

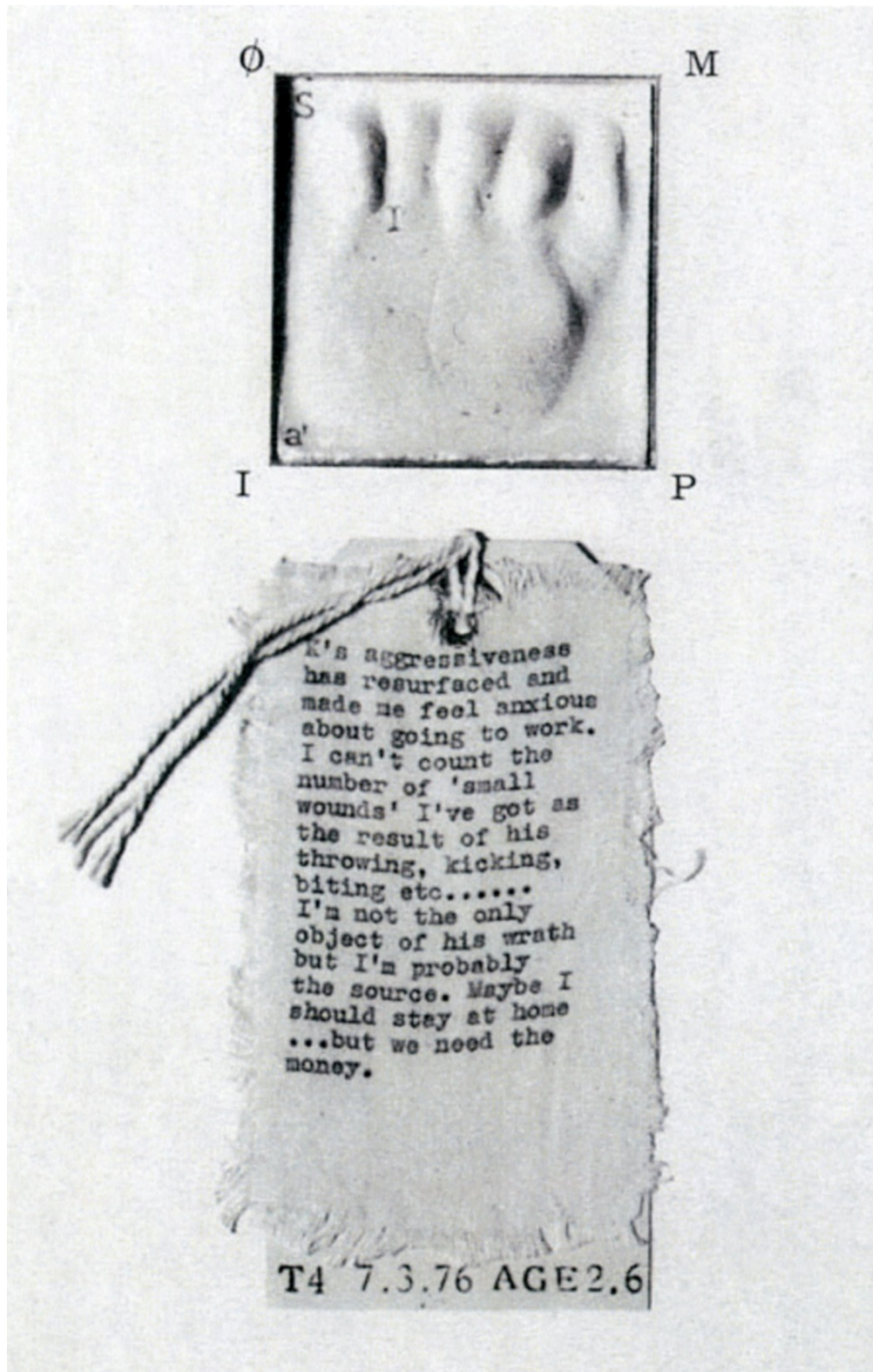


Figure 8: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation IV: Transmittional Objects, Diary and Diagram*, mixed media, 1976.

image or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism” (Kelly 1983, xxi). As a whole, this collection of almost scientific material and data have had a profound impact on how the topic of motherhood is addressed in art and society.

There are several contemporary women in art who address the issue of motherhood from a political and social standpoint. Artist Myrel Chernick curated a show in 2004 entitled *Maternal Metaphors I*. When describing her process for selecting the artists and work for the show, Chernick states; “I sought out work that criticized our cultural and social institutions rather than depicted the traditional mother/child dyad, and did not compromise my standards of quality, but encompassed what Susan Suleiman has called a ‘double allegiance,’ an allegiance to the contemporary and traditionally male avant-gardes, as well as a critique of dominant sexual ideologies” (Chernick, 93). The exhibition contains art created by several women including: Myrel Chernick, Ellen McMahon, Monica Bock, Renee Cox, Judy Gelles, Gail Rebhan, Marion Wilson, Aura Rosenberg, and Judy Glantzman. Each artist is questioning and confronting both personal and social ideas of what motherhood is and should be. Ellen McMahon (participating artist in *Maternal Metaphors I*) comments on her series entitled *Suckled* (fig. 9), “This body of work, made while my children were young, is about the politics of intimacy and the tension between the desire to merge and the struggle to separate, which has always been central to my experience as a mother and a daughter” (Chernick, 99).

Renee Cox is another artist featured in *Maternal Metaphors I* who questions societies preconceived notions of what motherhood should look like. Cox created a series entitled *Yo Mama* (fig.10) in which she portrays herself in Renaissance like poses in order to confront and “criticize a society she often views as racist and sexist” (Chernick, 106). The women in this exhibition depict motherhood in a very different way than the Renaissance Madonna and child

paintings. Contemporary women artists are able to express and control their own imagery in a way some of the pioneering women were unable to. Looking at these images it is clear to see there are still feminist issues within motherhood that need to be addressed.



Figure 9: Ellen McMahon, *Suckled II*, 1996-present. Charcoal on Rives BFK, 20 inches x 13 inches each.



Figure 10: Renee Cox, Yo Mama, 1993. Gelatin silver print, 80 x 49 inches.

There is a strong connection between the work of women artists such as Ellen McMahan, Mary Kelly, and Alice Neel. These women have all questioned the pressures and expectations projected onto women by society not only to become mothers but how to go about raising their children when/if they do. Analyzing works of art throughout history which center around

motherhood, we can see the amazing shift in the maternal role, and how that shift affects both women and their children. Women artists have come a long way since the creation of the Paleolithic *Woman From Willendorf*. There have been many social battles that have been fought to afford women the right to speak their mind and express their feelings through visual outlets.

Chapter 3

The Golden Age of Motherhood

“Today’s mothers, despite all of the pressures on them and the difficulties of maintaining a work-life balance, recognize that they are probably better off than their own mothers were at their stage of life and that being a mother today is certainly preferable to being one in the 1950s or before” (“The Changing Face of Motherhood”). There are many mothers out there who had amazing maternal role models and are trying to raise their children exactly the way they were raised while other women are doing everything in their power to rear children opposite from the childhood they experienced. In both circumstances, the way we are raised by our mothers greatly influences the way we raise our children. The article “The Changing Face of Motherhood” discusses how the expectations of the role mothers play has changed over the years. With this being considered the “golden age” of motherhood, what are some of the other factors that influence this primal instinct we have to mother? In a study conducted by the Social Issues Research Center in 2011 entitled “The Changing Face of Motherhood”, it is stated; the way mothers bring up their own children is strongly influenced by their own childhood experiences and, in particular, by the role played by their mothers (“The Changing Face of Motherhood”).

Chapter 4

Feminism and Motherhood

Amber E. Kinser, PhD examines the effects feminism has had on motherhood over time and vice versa. Kinser points out “...feminists have argued, expectations for “good” mothering are grounded in the interests of male dominance, capitalism, religious power, homophobia, and racism.” Over time (beginning with women’s suffrage in the early 1900s) women have fought for equality and their right to control their reproductive health, financial independence, and choice whether or not to become a mother. Throughout the past 100 years the way motherhood is viewed by society has shifted in several ways. Prior to 1960 it was considered the woman’s sole purpose and responsibility to stay home and raise her children. During the feminist movements of the 1960s, 70s and 80s many women saw the role of mother as detrimental to the progress of women’s rights and as a role that undermined women all together. During the 1990s and early 2000s there was another shift back to the idea of the woman’s role as mother. While many women chose to work as well as mother their children, there was a social push for more women to “go back” to staying at home. Though there have been many variables for what motherhood should and should not be; it’s also a topic that is continuously evolving.

The role of motherhood has also changed due to higher levels of connectedness we have gained from the use of technology. Kinser believes the network of support for women has shifted from medical experts to Internet correspondence. There are several ways in which “mothers have used technology to support and grow women’s power in mothering knowledge” (Kinser, 24). With today’s technology and resources, many women are finding more support from one another. There is now a tremendous sense of camaraderie amongst 21st century moms and the idea that it’s advantageous to build each other up and offer words of advice and encouragement than to judge each other’s choices and tear each other down. Judgmental, over opinionated moms

still exist but they are now given less merit than in the past. This new ideal of openly sharing struggles and stories of real moms, versus the unattainable idea of the “perfect mother” is helping to liberate mothers. With so many various shades of motherhood in our society, it’s important to look at the issues and obstacles facing women today. Many women who see themselves as “alternative” mothers (ex. single mothers, lesbian mothers, poor mothers, disabled mothers, young mothers, old mothers, mothers struggling with addiction, etc.) are able to find communities where they can obtain advice and knowledge about how to celebrate, overcome, or live with their particular situation. Kinser states “In connecting with other hip mamas (referring to an online community), these parents can spend less time defending who they are and more time exploring their identities and embracing the ways in which mothering is a kind of political experience” (Kinser, 309). One can surmise from reading Kinser’s book there is definitely a new wave of feminism. One where women are actively pursuing their interests, hobbies, careers, and they are consciously making an effort to learn from one another’s experiences. I personally feel there is more of a sense of sisterhood amongst my fellow mothers than there was for my mother and grandmother.

Chapter 5 Motherhood and Minorities

Because we live in such a diverse global community it comes as no surprise that every woman approaches motherhood a little differently. There are however, common threads and traditions within certain groups. Andrea O’Reilly highlights some of these common threads in her book *Twenty-First-Century Motherhood*. “Mothers are responsible for overseeing their children’s growth and development: as minorities, this often requires their defusing negative racial messages and replacing them with affirmation” (O’Reilly, 88). Many mothers who fall into

the “minority” category find themselves with a whole new set of challenges when it comes to raising their children. Whether it is having to shield their little ones from racial stereotypes or having to explain the complex ideas of race relations and social justice these moms have added pressure on them to protect their children from the outside world. In one study conducted by the Pew Research Center, “non-Hispanic whites are projected to become a minority of the population (47%) by 2050, according to Pew Research Center population projections. (Census Bureau projections say the change will occur in 2042). Hispanics, already the nation’s largest minority group, are projected to continue to account for most population growth by that year” (Passel, Livingston, Cohn). If these projections are accurate, in the not so distant future we will live in a world where the current majority will become the minority. With this paradigm shift, will the mothers of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds still need to combat racial stereotypes, or will we live in a more accepting society? It will be interesting to see how today’s experiences influence our future generations of mothers.

Chapter 6 **Motherhood and Sexual Orientation**

Another contemporary shift in motherhood is that of the growing number of lesbian mothers raising both biological and adoptive children. While being gay is not necessarily a new phenomenon, it is becoming more accepted and commonplace to see families headed by gay and lesbian parents. Lesbian mothers face many legal challenges compared to heterosexual mothers. The act of becoming a legal guardian itself poses a challenge to some lesbian mothers. Up until recently in our own state of Michigan it was not legal for two unmarried people to file for joint adoption. While it is now legal for second parent adoptions by same-sex couples there are still many social issues for lesbian parents to overcome. “Our children continue to feel the social

stigma attached to our sexualities. They suffer because of the ways our identities have been squashed, shamed, and de legitimized” (O’Reilly, 302). In addition to legalities lesbian parents often find themselves defending their identities as well as their right to have and raise children.

Chapter 7

How Personal Experiences Affect Motherhood

Today’s mothers have more choice in how they will raise their families. Some women stay home, some continue with their careers, while others merely try to get by and provide for their family the best they know how. The way we as mothers choose to raise our families depends a great deal on where we come from. “Mothers use their own experience as fodder for the transfer of knowledge and ideologies to their children” (O’Reilly, 89). Whether or not we approach motherhood feeling anxious, excited, trapped, depressed, or scared may derive from the privileges and opportunities we are presented with early on. There are many different factors that influence the way we perceive motherhood. A woman’s race, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and marital status can impact the way society views her maternal responsibilities and how mothers view each other. “The first decade of the new century has seen an explosion of mother communities, both live and online, that stand on the premise that mothers’ lives are worth celebrating, learning from, and improving, not simply because of what that does for children, but because of what it does for women themselves” (Kinsler, 274).

Is motherhood a privilege? Depending on whom you ask, you may get very different responses to this question. A lesbian mother may tell you that being a mother is a privilege, one that she may never legally know. A single mother on food stamps and struggling to support her children may tell you while she loves her children, it is a daily burden to try to provide for them. A happily married Caucasian mother of two healthy children would tell you it is a privilege to be

a mother. While most women struggle with “mommy guilt,” wondering if they are living up to the ideals of what a perfect mother looks like according to societal standards, many mothers would tell you they want the best for their children. Before examining the lives and emotions of mothers from assorted backgrounds with varying degrees of privilege, we need to define what we are referring to when using the word privilege. The actual definition of the word privilege is: a right that may be extended to a group or a number of people. I will present “privilege” through several perspectives considering socioeconomic status, sexuality, health, ethnicity, and environment. These factors are strong determinants in a woman’s ability and desire to mother.

Chapter 8 Motherhood; A First Hand Account

With so many factors influencing the way we mother, one very common thread holds true, most mothers love their children unconditionally. Even when certain groups of mothers disagree with how another group chooses to raise their children, there is still a certain bond between women that have become mothers. Until you become a mother it is impossible to understand this bond and feeling of camaraderie and solidarity.

I have expanded my research to include contemporary mothers who are also artists. These mothers are from different backgrounds, have different circumstances and are allotted a diverse set of life situations. It is important to better understand how other women feel about their roles as mothers and examine the pressures they feel in our society. Each artist/mother brings a different aesthetic and viewpoint to the subject. As artists, these women have a unique ability to express their inner feelings and emotions as they pertain to motherhood through their art.

During the interview process there was one common theme amongst everyone: we do the best we can with what we are given. This pertains to our life circumstances and how we were

mothered growing up. Some of the women interviewed have made a conscious effort to approach motherhood in a very different way from how they were mothered while others strive to replicate their mothers. One difference between contemporary mothers and their own mothers was the freedom to be more emotionally open and expressive. Many felt their own mothers had more pressure to keep their personal affairs closed off and secretive. “I think in [my mother’s] case she was almost like a prisoner of war, because she never had an education past high school, and her mother never had an education past third grade. With each generation there was more education, more affluence and there was more freedom and more independence” (Gretchen Deems). Gypsy Schindler shared similar sentiments about her own mother: “I think that we are different in that I know I’m more willing to work on my emotional issues than what my mom is. I think that’s a generational thing, she thinks therapy is brainwashing and I have had a therapist for ten years! I think that has to do with her upbringing” (Gypsy Schindler).

The way motherhood has influenced each artist’s work was also a common topic of conversation. “I think that art has been a way for me to release some of the harder things that I have experienced as a mother. Without having the art as a way to express those things, I would probably be a lot less happy” (Gretchen Deems).

Chapter 9

Art from the Exhibition

The following imagery and statements are part of the Contemporary Motherhood thesis exhibition. Each piece was created by the women who were interviewed.

Mary Lamson-Burke Statement

Visible Construction of Impressions
2014

Marks Made
Soft. Bold. Strong. Short. Lengthy. Scattered. Intentional. Loving.
Marks Made

Invisible impressions left. A guide. A parent. A Resource.

Marks Made
To build them up. To find strength within themselves.
To see the beautiful being they are.

Marks Made
Joy is found within: Their growth. Their understanding. Their independence.
Marks Made

The invisible network continues to grow tendrils. To layer upon itself weaving a tapestry not just from one but many.

Marks Made.
Left to make more.

Gypsy Schindler
Family Portrait
2013

My personal definition of family is what society has labeled as “alternative”. I have been in a same sex relationship with my partner for fourteen years. Three years ago we decided to adopt a dog from an animal shelter. Next we added a cat, and as anyone who loves their animals knows, they become members of the “family”. I am very aware that this description does not fit the traditional definition of family, however the inclusion of the animals brings up the question of what kind of dignity, respect and flexibility we grant another living being depending on how we categorize them. I hope the connection can then be made to the conversation happening currently about the societal inequalities applied to same sex partnerships or any other “alternative” family structures.

The portraits are executed in the traditional time honored mediums of oil. They are presented inside the illusion of decorative charcoal rendered frames. The presentation is intended to elevate this particular definition of family through the complex, political history of fine art portraiture. At the same time, the political palette is tempered by the tongue and cheek status of family portraiture.



Linda Talbot Rizzolo
Crow's Nest
Created in 2014

“Mother Hen” is a title often given to a mother with lots of chicks. For myself, I prefer “Mother Crow” because both the crow and I like sparkly things. After marrying young and as a mother of 4 “fledglings,” I spent 10 years of my adult life pregnant and/or nursing. With my second husband, Lou Rizzolo, the “pod” was increased to include three stepchildren. All children are now grown and parents to 13 grandchildren.

Our house has always been filled with art materials and creative things to do. Messes from creative activities were allowed as it is nearly impossible to create without messes. When the “fledglings” were young, I “drop kicked” the TV so for 10 years we had no television! Mad at first by this....the kids benefitted in the long run as they are all very creative thinking people.

I did very little serious art until the “fledglings” all went to school, but I was doing lots of sewing and crafts and thinking about art creation in the interim. After completion of the master’s degree in watercolor from WMU and with the kids all grown, my husband/partner Lou Rizzolo (also an artist) and I are very involved in making art. As two artists we often collaborate on large projects with Lou doing the inner structure and me doing the outside and surface embellishments.

One little granddaughter exclaimed when arriving at our house, “Every time we come here there is some new exciting thing.” Another creative generation is launched, as I let them use my studio (the grandchildren call it my “art room”) and have endless supplies for creativity and exploration.

The Crow’s Nest contains one hand felted, and surface embellished egg representing each adult child, one for each of their spouses and one for each grandchild (a total of 26). I feel that

my biggest creative act has been to nurture 4 children and 3 stepchildren as they have grown into responsible, loving, creative adults.



Gretchen Pflerhaar Deems
A Wing & A Prayer II
2014



“One of the toughest challenges that I have had to learn as a mother (and continue to re-learn) is that of “letting go”...of control, worry, fear and guilt. This need not be the sole real estate of a mother, however having four adult children and watching them make choices that may bring their safety and/or well-being into question, can be difficult at best. The shape of this piece suggests a sacred space from which a prayer evolves in tandem with acceptance, trust, and the hope that the lessons learned and the foundations laid in their formative years will give them the tools necessary to survive and ultimately thrive in their adult world” (Gretchen Deems).

Women who don't have biological children have also reflected on how their art is affected by their family dynamic or experiences with mentoring students and family members. “I remember my dad saying to me that the way children see the world is so different, they'll be mesmerized by the way light reflects on the floor or something like that. I think especially as artists, we're always trying to see the world differently or with a more observational lens and I think children can help you with that perspective” (Emily Derusha).

Emily Derusha
Too Beautiful To Be Scared Of
2014

I began conceptualizing this artwork motherhood was a prospect that seemed familiar in so many ways, and yet strangely out of reach. I thought about my own mother and my own experiences of childhood, but when I tried to consider what motherhood would be like from the perspective of a mother I was largely at a loss. There was no child's face I could conjure up, nor could I imagine in an authentic way what being a mother would truly mean. Contemplating what I would want to pass on to my future child, I was quickly drawn to memories of small moments with my own mother, admiring the newly opened face of a pansy or listening to the ever-present call of chickadees. Spiders in particular held a special place of reverence. These often phobia-causing creatures were not a source of fear, but amazement. Their impossibly intricate webs glistening with dew in the morning never ceased to delight. As a mother daughter duo, a moment to soak up, to appreciate, and to bring joy was never something we had to seek, but instead we found all around us. This I thought, is something I will pass on. While in the midst of creating this piece these notions of motherhood took on a whole new—and very real—layer of meaning when I learned that I was pregnant. Although motherhood remains unfamiliar, I suddenly have been faced with the questioning and anxiety that I suspect all mothers feel. Instead of letting these fears rule my experience, I instead choose to take a lesson from all those spider-filled moments.

Motherhood has been an integral part of my artwork. The act of being pregnant and having another human being inside your body, then giving birth and continuing to share your body, life, and soul with that newborn is such an incredible experience. There are no words that

can come close to describing the impact having a child has on a person's life. In my own work, I have attempted to express these emotions visually.



Lindsay Moynihan
Maternal Fortitude
2014

Maternal Fortitude is a ten-foot-tall tree-like sculpture with a trunk that takes the form of a pregnant figure. The trunk was created using a combination of wet and needle felting techniques. I chose the wet felting technique because it is a labor intensive process which is very symbolic of the maternal. At one point the wool is shocked in hot and cold water which causes the fibers to expand and contract. Once the fibers are fused together it is an incredibly strong material but still remains soft to the touch. Created from silk, the branches transform into ethereal ribbons, which sway with even the slightest breeze. This subtle movement alludes to the gentle act of nurturing. The concept behind the sculpture first came to me while I was pregnant with my second child. It was such a unique and primal experience to carry another human within my body and I wanted to capture the feeling. The very act of bringing another life into this world is an extraordinarily powerful experience and is represented through the scale and position of the tree. My goal is to create a balance between strength and delicacy throughout the sculpture. During my process I came across a poem by Marie Howe entitled: "My Mother's Body" from *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*. This poem embodies what my sculpture is trying to portray visually and was a source of inspiration throughout its creation. It reads:

Bless my mother's body, the first song of her beating
heart and her breathing, her voice, which I could dimly hear,

grew louder. From inside her body I heard almost every word she said.
Within that girl I drove to the store and back, her feet pressing

pedals of the blue car, her voice, first gate to the cold sunny mornings,
rain, moonlight, snowfall, dogs...

Her kidneys failed, the womb where I once lived is gone.
Her young astonished body pushed me down that long corridor,

and my body hurt her, I know that—24 years old. I'm old enough
to be that girl's mother, to smooth her hair, to look into her exultant frightened
eyes,

her bedsheets stained with chocolate, her heart in constant failure.
It's a girl, someone must have said. She must have kissed me

with her mouth, first grief, first air,
and soon I was drinking her, first food, I was eating my mother

slumped in her wheelchair, one of my brothers pushing it,
across the snowy lawn, her eyes fixed, her face averted.

Bless this body she made, my long legs, her long arms and fingers,
our voice in my throat speaking to you know.

My hope is that *Maternal Fortitude* will lead viewers to contemplate what it truly means
to be maternal; to nurture and be nurtured; to invite but also exude strength.



Chapter 10

Conclusion

The role of motherhood has shifted drastically throughout history. In the last two decades we have not only expanded the elucidation of motherhood to be one that is more inclusive in its title, we have also monumentally changed the way we view that role. During my research it became clear that we are still working towards a “golden age” of mothering. So many twenty first century women feel pressures from society to be a kind of “supermom;” one who cooks, cleans, creates “do it yourself” crafts, and makes her own organic baby food while holding down a career and raising happy children. For most women, these expectations are unobtainable. Especially if any kind of adversity is encountered or there is a lack of opportunity normally afforded to women with privileged backgrounds. Contemporary mothers do have benefits to living in a world where they have a wealth of information at their fingertips, and can find niche groups who are willing to accept them for who they are. In conclusion, while the role of motherhood is a constantly evolving practice, twenty first century mothers have more choice in how and when they will raise their families than any other previous generation.

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Appendix
**Interviews with Gretchen Deems, Emily Derusha, Gypsy Schindler, Mary Lamson-Burk,
and Linda Talbot Rizzolo**

Interview with Gretchen Deems:

Lindsay Moynihan: How are you and your mother similar and different?

Gretchen Deems: Similarities would be in our creativity, because she was an artist, a much more frustrated artist than I was, but an artist. She gave very creative birthday parties and Halloween parties and she always loved to play dress-up so, in that regard with creativity and worry we are similar. I think our differences are even greater mainly because of our backgrounds and where we were at the time we were mothers with young kids. I think in her case she was almost like a prisoner of war, because she never had an education past high school, and her mother never had an education past third grade. With each generation there was more education, more affluence and there was more freedom and more independence. I was able to get a master's degree and hire babysitters so I think I did not feel like a prisoner of war like she did. She felt almost imprisoned by her motherhood where she didn't have enough outlets to be independent or to find her identity. That's where we are very different, I was much happier as a mother and she was much more frustrated.

LM: What have you learned from being a mother?

GD: Well, this is the big one! It really is because it is such a grand experience. A grand expansive experience, I learned how expansive my heart could be number one, and I also learned how broken it can be. Things are going to happen and it happens to all mothers I know, they fill you up and they break your heart sometimes. It's an unconditional love, you let it go, things heal over. Those two extremes just with your heart, the emotions. I've learned how to honor myself and set boundaries. The biggest lesson, the biggest real lesson I've learned as a mother is when and how to let go and to know that I've done all that I could do and all that I should do, and then how to let them go, let them fall down let them make some mistakes, let them learn and sometimes it breaks your heart to see those things happen. That to me, is the biggy. I've had some experiences, I've had one son that's been very challenging and he's taught me a lot of lessons, but mostly how to let go. All of these lessons, you know, how big your heart can get, how broken it can be, and how to be flexible, how to set boundaries, all of those things to me are huge life lessons and they don't just apply to motherhood, but motherhood is certainly a facilitator. I think when you are starting out, you've got an infant and you give everything you can to that infant and that just carries through, but there has to come a point when you cannot be there all the time, and you've got to just let them be, and let them go and God! It's hard!

LM: It is hard! I always thought I would never say this, because before I had kids I used to hate it when people would say it to me, but until you're a mother and you have kids, you don't understand what it's truly like. People can fantasize but you truly have no clue until you've lived through being a mother. I used to hate it when people said that to me!

GD: That in itself is a lesson! You can't walk in someone else's shoes. You won't know it until you're doing it. You know, it's a black and white world when you're from the outside looking in, but when you're in it it's not a black and white world, there's a whole lot of gray.

LM: What do you think your children would say is your greatest attribute as a mother? What was your greatest challenge?

GD: I know what they'd say is my attribute, they'd say it's my creativity and my playfulness, because to me motherhood was a great excuse to be a kid again. I thoroughly loved it. A

lot of what we did together were adventures, I made them adventures and I was living in that fantasy right along with them. As far as my greatest challenge, I'm not so sure, because their perceptions are all different. Everyone can witness the same event at the same time but everyone will have a different take on it. I know one of my kids will probably never forgive me for tripping over the dog and yelling at the dog. It was not a big deal but to her, at that stage, how could you do that? I heard about that for so many years.

LM: What do you personally feel was your greatest challenge?

GD: Each kid is so completely different, and I have four of them so to give equal time to each kid because some just demanded a lot more time than others. It was the ones that were not the squeaky wheels who I felt were always in the background and I think that the challenge was trying to be equal with all of them. That was tough because you only have so much energy and you know, one kid can just suck you dry, so that was my greatest challenge

LM: Did you always know that your life would include having children?

GD: No, no, no, no, I was not going to be a mother. Because when I was growing up I was the eldest girl and I took care of my two younger brothers while my mother worked and I had enough of it, and I didn't want to take care of anybody else. But guess what, mother nature had another idea. I really wrestled with whether or not to keep my Brooke, she knows this now. I wrestled with it for some time, you know, I believe in the right to choose but it came down to me and I thought I just can't do it. And then, oh that birth was just like holy shit! This is so incredible! She was so beautiful, I was just completely smitten and mesmerized with her. Then I was like "oh my god this is incredible. Now I want more," how ironic right. But in the beginning I did not want to have any kids. It was really interesting to be on the other side of that fence when I did. Then I went through two miscarriages and went overboard! I had four!

LM: What did you think motherhood would be like?

GD: I grew up in the 50s. I was a child of the 50s so guess what was my concept? *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, you know, those were the sweet close knit families where things are resolved efficiently. So I had more of a concept of the family not necessarily motherhood per say. I wanted this warm cozy and lovie family life. That's sort of what I had in my brain, and I

remember one Mother's Day when I was listening to kids fighting, and this and that going on and thinking "oh my god, how can there be world peace when I can't even have peace in my own home!" My kids are hitting each other, there's violence, they're screaming at each other, and I'm going "the world doesn't have a chance!" Motherhood, whatever it is it's real. That vision you had in your head, that's not real.

LM: Does society play a role, the societal expectations of what a "good mom" is, did that play a role in the way you raise your children or have an effect or an impact on you?

GD: Yes, I definitely think it does, or at least it did in my case. Once the kids were older, women's lib was big, and the equal toys, get them the same toys even though they're boys and girls. They would have the exact same toys, like blocks and soldiers, and the boys would be taking the blocks, stacking them then blowing things up, crashing them, and it would be very physical. Holly, in the middle between the two boys, would be taking the guys and laying them out on the blocks, covering them up with a blanket and she'd say "night, night, guys". They did play with the same toys but did completely different things with them. So I think the political situation with women's lib at the time and not programming them to play with this girl thing or this boy thing, so it definitely plays into it.

LM: Throughout my research I came across an article where the author was calling this the "golden age" of mothering. One reason was because of the internet and how easy it is to be connected through blogs, and other various social media. Even if you're a "fringe" mother, or you have an "alternative" mothering style, you can find a group who will accept you. I also saw arguments where people were saying this was the "golden age" to a fault where now, we do sort of have the choice to become mothers but if we do choose to be mothers we are also expected to have a career, be creative and crafty, our house should look like a Pinterest post, we should be doing it all. We are expected to be the perfect mom, the perfect career woman, and so the internet had done us a disservice as well. I'm kind of in debate on whether or not this is a "golden age" of motherhood, but do you think it is?

GD: Well, one of my little sayings is, every great truth has the opposite as also being a great truth. I think it's true, and I think the opposite is also true. I think you can let all of the "thou shalt's" get to you too much and make you crazy and so you've just got to do what's right for you. I do think the golden age of motherhood applies to people that are educated and affluent, or have a certain amount of affluence and income that allows them to be in that golden age because I know that in the poverty levels, there is no golden age of motherhood. That definitely translates, I think the class issue, the poverty issue is a huge determinant of whether or not you can even be in a golden age of motherhood. You know, where you have equal partnership with your husband and an income you can live with and so on and so forth. For me the golden age of motherhood is being a grandmother!

LM: Do you think that women are still pressured by society to become mothers today?

GD: I did not feel pressured. I think it depends on your family, and I think it depends on your friends. If your friends are popping out kids, maybe they're asking you why you're not but I never felt a pressure to do or not do either one.

LM: There was another article that I read where there was a woman who said she didn't necessarily feel pressured but just that it was never a question. For instance, when her mom would talk to her about having children it would be when you have kids, not if.

GD: Oh yeah, I never felt that. Either that or I just chose not to absorb it. If it was intended, I didn't get the message. I knew what I wanted, I knew I had taken care of my brothers and I didn't want to have kids. So now I have four kids, I love it!

LM: I know some of my thirty-two-year-old friends have felt a little pressure. I have one friend who joined the Peace Corps and has lived the most amazing life, she's traveled all over the world, and has done some amazing things and she gets asked all the time, why don't you have kids? She doesn't feel pressured to have kids but when she tells people she's thirty-two, unmarried (happily), doesn't know if she even wants to get married, people just look at her like "what's wrong, why wouldn't you want that?"

GD: Yeah, I think during my mother's age there was a lot more pressure. Even for me being a fifties kid, I didn't feel the pressure so much. I didn't care if my friends were having kids, that was not for me! I was married early; I was only twenty when I got married but I just did not want that to be part of my life. So, I was happy and I guess when I'm happy I don't really care what anybody else thinks! I'm sure things were maybe said but I just ignored them. So now, what are you finding out about the art and motherhood because to me this is a really interesting point. Because first of all you have to be in a really privileged place so you can be both a mother and an artist as well. That is a true privilege.

LM: It's so hard to do that as well. It really is.

GD: But there may come a point where you need to get that stuff out. It's like therapy. I think that art has been a way for me to release some of the harder things that I have experienced as a mother. Without having the art as a way to express those things, I would probably be a lot less happy.

LM: Oh absolutely! I've discovered that more through this program. I the beginning of my teaching career, most of my art would consist of the examples I was making for the kids. In the beginning you're flying by the seat of your pants and trying to stay one step ahead of the kids. Most of "my art" was art for the classroom, and then when I started this master's program that's kind of when it kicked me into gear which was amazing. I found out I was six weeks pregnant with my daughter the day I had my first master's class. So I didn't know going into it that this was even going to be my concentration, the two kind of coincide and that's just where I'm at in my life. I also am starting to finally feel like a true artist. For the first time ever I'm really proud of the work I'm creating and I'm really growing as an artist.

GD: I think as you grow as an artist you'll grow as a teacher as well. I also use my art so much as therapy, when I feel like I just have to get something out. I make the best art when I'm in the deepest emotional places. I could be euphoric, or angst but it allows for the best art. So I do have work that relates directly to motherhood and to certain challenges I faced with certain children. The art has been a lifeline back to myself. We are lucky as mothers to have that creativity.

LM: Oh, I am so thankful! I would not want to be in any other career field. I even look at my friends who don't have these opportunities for creative expression and although they don't express that they're lacking in any way I kind of feel like I'm the lucky one.

GD: I used to think of my art as my children before I had kids. I would go through this creative process, and then the labor of creating this piece and actually birthing it and not being able to part with it initially. It was like a new kid I had just created and I couldn't let it go right away because I was so emotionally invested. But then, good god, once you've created the piece, the piece is done! But guess what, motherhood is never done and that's a good thing but sometimes it can be a challenging thing. The bottom line is; it is a much more rich experience to be a mother. Motherhood is just so much richer and deeper; it just goes so deep.

LM: It's so interesting too because throughout my research on this topic I've seen over and over again how women connect with each other through motherhood. Even if certain women have different mothering philosophies, you have this solidarity amongst women who are mothers. Throughout my thesis whenever I've told people what I'm doing, if I'm talking to a fellow mother there has always been an outpouring of stories and shared experiences. It's so fascinating to hear how other women experience motherhood.

GD: I can see how that would resonate. I know it sparked something in me as well, there was this tidal wave of emotions that came pouring over me when I reflected back on my experiences.

Interview with Emily Derusha:

LM: How are you and your mother similar and how are you different?

ED: Well, we look very similar, I look just like her. We both really enjoy the simple pleasures in life like having a cup of tea, or enjoying a sunset, walks. We are really content with small simple pleasures. At the same time her and I both tend to worry about things we both know we shouldn't worry about but we can't help but worry about them. I think we're different, my mom is a bit more reserved than I am, I am more bold. I am more willing to try adventurous things than her like skydiving, snowboarding, and that kind of thing. At times I've had her tell me she wishes she could be more able to do those kinds of things.

LM: What have you learned, or what do you hope to learn from motherhood?

ED: I think that I hope to see the world through fresh eyes. I remember my dad saying that to me. That the way children see the world is so different, they'll be mesmerized by the way light

reflects on the floor or something like that. I think especially as artists, we're always trying to see the world differently or with a more observational lens and I think children can help you with that perspective. So I hope for that, and I hope some of those anxieties that I mentioned, like how I tend to worry about things I know I shouldn't, I hope I can let go of some of those worries. I'm sure it brings on different new worries. But hopefully it will grant me some perspective.

LM: It definitely does that as well. We will approach this next question as a teacher-mother.

ED: Yes, I'm going to talk about when I most felt like a good "mother" from a teacher experience. I think of being a teacher in many ways as being similar to mothering. Perhaps this isn't specific enough but I know the moments when I feel like a successful teacher, and I'm sure this translates to being a mother, but often when a student is comfortable enough to come to me with a problem or something they don't understand. They're either seeking your extra attention or they're willing to admit their shortcoming, and they're willing to come to you and talk to you about it and seek your guidance in working through it. I think that would be wonderful as a mother, that your child would feel that they could come to you and you will empathize with them, and you as a mother will show them grace. They know you'll be there for them and help them work through their problems. I think that would be a successful moment. I'll feel like a good mother when I actually birth a child. I suspect I would like to include that moment.

LM: Oh yes, as you should! What do you hope your greatest attribute as a mother will be?

ED: Patience and grace, can I have two? I can imagine, and I guess I'm thinking about teaching a lot with these questions, but so often patience and grace and accepting when things go wrong and not holding it against them. Patience constantly, patience with their moods and with their needs. Also, unconditional love. Now I'm adding a third, unconditional love.

LM: What do you project that your greatest challenge might be?

ED: I think initially I'll be kind of a nut thinking that something is wrong, even when it isn't. I'm sure parents of children will cringe at this comment but I remember when we first got our dog, and I always thought that something was wrong. Nothing was wrong but I couldn't help it.

LM: Yes, it is that but times one hundred! I was insane in the beginning. I remember our first trip to the grocery store when Aislynn was only two weeks old. I would not let go of the cart. If I went to look at something and had to let go with my hands, I would put my foot on

the cart. It was a couple of weeks later, Brian was with me and he was pushing the cart. He all of a sudden stepped a couple of feet away from the cart and I flipped out!

ED: That's my fear, I'm sure I will often be like that and I hope I can manage those potential anxieties but not have that happen. I don't want to pass on those worries to my children. I want them to live full and happy lives, whether there's something special or something routine, I want them to be comfortable with who they are.

LM: Yeah, that's definitely one of my goals as well. It's funny because throughout this process I've shared my shopping cart story with several other mothers and just about every one of them had a similar experience early on. It's like this primal thing that takes over you.

ED: Oh I'm sure, I even remember my mom saying that with my brother, he's older, so it was with him that she was so worried and so anxious all the time and then with me she was so much more relaxed.

LM: Did you know that your life would always include being a mother and when do you think that identification occurred?

ED: That's a really good question. I feel like I always assumed, I mean I know this sounds like a very standard little girl but I guess I just always liked baby dolls and it never really crossed my mind that you would make that decision.

LM: Do you feel like it's your choice?

ED: Yes, I do. I feel like that was one thing Brandon and I talked about before we got married. We very intentionally talked about our desire to have children. I think that would've been a non-negotiable. I've always loved kids. I remember in fifth grade I took a babysitting class, and babysat all the time, and loved kids. I guess too, I don't know how much this plays into it, I know in a way it's separate, but since Brandon and I were together for so long, we talked about it really early on. It's just always been in our perceived future, so it's always been on my radar.

LM: What do you expect motherhood to be like?

ED: I think it will be awesome! I really feel like I will just love it. I know there will be hard days, and heaven forbid I have a child that doesn't sleep through the night. Crossing my fingers! Have I told you this, that I slept through the night starting in the hospital first night home. Hopefully my child will inherit that!

LM: It is so much more rewarding than it is challenging. Does society play any kind of role in the way you think you'll raise your children?

ED: I'm sure it will to some extent just because I don't know how it couldn't. But I remember from years ago, way before kids were even in my near future, maybe even before I was married, I remember my mom was saying that you need to make the choices for your children. She said to some extent she wouldn't even read the books that were available because of the fact that everyone has an opinion. One will say one thing and another will have a completely different message. She said, as a mother, you will know what's best for them. I'm going to try to keep that in mind. I'm sure I'll take my mom's opinion over reading blogs, and that kind of thing.

LM: I think the biggest debate, at least between my friends, is the working mom versus the stay at home mom. I know some of my stay at home friends look at me like, how could you leave your children? Some of them look at me, and have told me, they're kind of jealous. I have one friend in Chicago, her husband is the vice president of a company and they can't afford the cost of daycare in that city. She tells me that at times she wishes she had a part time something just to get away for a little while. So I feel like right now that's the big debate.

ED: I know for Brandon and I that's one of our biggest question marks, one of our biggest gray areas. When we do have kids, what am I going to do? Obviously you're a teacher, and so many teachers do it wonderfully, but I can't even imagine the emotional, mental, and physical demands from teaching the little ones all day, then going home and having more to give to my own children. Obviously that's who I'll want to give the most to, so that's a really big question. Part time, or stay home a while then go back to work, or work full time through it. I feel like I can't make that decision until I have kids because I don't know what I can do or what I will feel good about. I do feel like that's a big pressure and that people will judge regardless. As my mom said, I have to go with what I think and what Brandon and I think is best for our kids.

LM: Do you think this is a "golden age" of motherhood?

ED: I'm sure that in many ways it is a golden age. When I first read the question, I thought of the fact that we're at a point where we are more free to choose. Part of me wonders though if we actually are in a golden age or if there is just the perception that we're in a golden age in the sense that yes we can choose to have kids, or work, or stay at home, but then in a way is it more pressure? Now we face the idea that yes, you should have kids, and you should be able to work, and be an amazing mother, wife, and employee. Is it enough now to just stay at home You can be a mother and choose to stay home and that is an amazing choice too. So sometimes I think maybe it's just a perception. In terms of the blogs, I'm sure there's a complete positive side and a negative side as well.

LM: I feel like we're living more in a "supermom" age rather than a "golden age."

ED: I totally agree with that. Sometimes I think about that too and how I would balance everything. I know we've talked about this before too, overachiever to overachiever, but I think I might drive myself completely insane trying to work while raising my kids because I'm not the personality type to let things go. I would really struggle with the thought of not giving my all in one aspect or another. I hear that from a lot of other moms and friends that I know who work full time. What do you let go of? Do you let your teaching go and not do something you would normally do for your students? Do you let go of one more night at home with your kids so you don't get to tuck them in at night? How do you make that choice? You can't put one hundred percent of your time into your career and one hundred percent into your kids, that's just impossible. I think part time sounds perfect too. Even if it's me working on art while the kids are at daycare one or two days a week. I think I'll need some outlet so I don't go stir crazy.

Interview with Gypsy Schindler:

LM: How are you and your mother similar and different?

GS: Oh goodness, um I think that's a long list. The older I get the more I realize those two things. I think that we are similar in we are both pretty physically resilient, and maybe not so emotionally resilient. She and I deal with stress in a similar way. We both have similar patterns of reserving emotion and not expressing ourselves when we actually should. We are similar in that when I smile people tell me I look like my mom; I'm also going to have her crow's feet. I think that we are different in that I know I'm more willing to work on my emotional issues than what my mom is. I think that's a generational thing, she thinks therapy is brainwashing and I have had a therapist for ten years! I think that has to do with her upbringing. She grew up really poor and she was the oldest so she took care of her older brothers and sisters. We're also different in our values. She lives completely off the grid in the middle of the woods and I live in the city. I am gay and she's not. I hope that I'm becoming more of an optimist and she is very pragmatic, which I value. My partner would say I'm very pragmatic also but I hope that I have a little more of the idealism.

LM: What have you learned from being a mother? This can either refer to your school children or projecting into the future, what do you hope to learn?

GS: I'll answer both ways. From a teaching perspective, not that I'm their mother and I tell them that on a regular basis but sometimes I end up being one anyway. I think you have to listen; you have to learn to really listen to your students. I think in the beginning I was too preoccupied by coming up with a solution to the problem but if you just shut up and listen to what they have to say, often times they'll solve their own problems when they hear themselves talking. So that was really pivotal to learn. Also tough love is important. You have to stick to your rules or they will run right over ya!

LM: Yes, and that's not easy to do a lot of the time. I know I have a hard time with that.

GS: Oh yeah, I do too! I lay my rules out really strictly but then depending on what's happening with the person, I'm like "alright, you can have an extra day on that!" You have to remove yourself from your own emotions because if it's really something that you need to discipline them on, you just have to do it! I like to take a more matter of fact approach, this is the way it is. You don't like it, I don't like it, but too bad. I would imagine that's kind of the way it is when you're a mom too. There's stuff you can't control. So I think there's a good segue, when I am a mother I hope to learn to be more vulnerable. It probably forces you to be vulnerable. I'm sure it makes you more patient as well. I'm a patient person but probably not as patient as I could be.

LM: I worked at an inner city preschool for five years before my teaching career began. I would encounter some really sad, tough situations with those little preschoolers, and I thought I was a patient person. I had to be to handle some of those little ones. Then I had kids! I have to tell myself sometimes, just walk away!

GS: That's the next thing I was going to say, I'll probably learn very quickly where my line is!

LM: When was the first time you felt like a good mother, and why did you choose that moment? Again, you could talk about teaching experience.

GS: I'm thinking of a time recently, around Christmas time when my sister was down here with Lou, her son, and my partner and I ended up babysitting. It was about an hour after they left when he started to kind of freak out a little bit because mom and dad are gone. My partner is an excellent mother, she just has a way with kids, they love her. She also has a toughness to her too, she's just going to be a great mom. When he panicked, I started to panic, and she just said "calm down, be firm with him but gentle and wait it out," and that's what I did. I followed instructions really well and it worked. I was amazed, he calmed down and then was ready for bed and it all worked out.

LM: I think kids like it when there are clearly set rules and expectations. I'm definitely more of the disciplinarian than my husband and my daughter is a total mommy's girl. I'm the one that puts her in time-out more often and draws the line but I think she really likes knowing when the line will be drawn. I think it makes kids feel safe.

GS: Yeah, well safe enough to freak out even. They will throw a fit and they will calm down, and it's not that much different with older kids. They just use bigger words.

LM: What would you say is your greatest attribute as a mother, and what is your greatest challenge?

GS: I think I can answer the same for both. I think my sense of humor and my willingness to laugh at myself and be silly. Even when something is serious, not inappropriately, but I have a really good sense for being sensitive in that way. I think that's one of my greatest attributes, it helps me to communicate better. Greatest challenge umm, what would my therapist say! Probably being vulnerable about more difficult emotions like sadness or anger. Things that are a little less publicly acceptable. That would be my greatest challenge.

LM: Did you always know that your life would include being a mother? When do you think that identification occurred?

GS: That's such an interesting question. I was actually just thinking about that on the way over here. I always knew, and knew this before I was even aware of sexual orientation or that sort of thing, but I always knew I would never have children biologically.

LM: Really, that's really interesting.

GS: Yeah, I don't think I was afraid of it. It used to freak my parents out because when I was sixteen I used to say "I'm never having kids" and what I meant by that was I would never have

biological kids. I don't know if maybe I made that distinction later on. I do have the urge to care for and raise a child. That didn't kick in until I found someone I would want to raise a child with.

LM: What did you expect motherhood to be like, or what do you expect motherhood to be like?

GS: Geez, my partner and I talk a lot about all of the things we would want to show a kid, and do with them. I think that makes you more hopeful as a person too. There are so many cool things in the world and to watch someone discover something for the first time, I can only imagine. Just talking with your kid and finding out who they are, whether they're biological or not. I feel like my sister is always talking to me about little things she discovers about Lou. I also expect it to be challenging. We are talking about fostering because there are a lot of kids who need a family, and I know there are a lot of challenges that go along with that. I feel like teaching is training for that, but to understand that parenting is an all-day, twenty-four-seven deal and you can't just leave.

LM: Yes, that will have its own set of challenges. Will society play any kind of role in the way you raise your children?

GS: Oh goodness, in my situation, how can it not? In anybody's situation, how can it not? I think it has a lot to do with your values. How do you pass down your values to your kids and allow them to have their own? I struggle with that sometimes with my own parents. They are hippies and they are really idealists. It's weird because they live a lifestyle where they have to be really practical but their values and the stuff they talk about, it's very idealistic, overly idealistic, there's a bit of a disconnect. Anyway, I think with my personal experiences it definitely has an impact. I really want my kid to be a little more open to different ways of thinking about things, and feel like I'm supportive if they want to choose something different. I'm more concerned about them being healthy than agreeing with what I think. I think they also have to be prepared too because, depending on where I go, I have no idea what kind of community I could be in or what kind of influence that's going to have. Prejudice still exists, unfortunately, so making sure they're equipped and understand how to deal with that.

LM: Yeah, which to me is sad.

GS: It is sad but it's a truth.

LM: Do you think we're living in a "golden age" of motherhood?

GS: I would have to say not quite. I think maybe we're on our way because there is so much more education too. For example, when my sister tried breastfeeding, she couldn't breastfeed. Her body was just not doing what it was supposed to do and there's the train of thought where some women say that you have to no matter what, and others argue if you can't you can't! It's not the end of the world, there are other ways to connect with your children and other things you can do. Even twenty or thirty years ago, you wouldn't have that second opinion as open and available to you as it is now. I think you can totally find your niche as far as motherhood goes. I

was also reading an article too where they discussed mothering or parenting partnership is not always equal either. There's always one partner who ends up doing way more work than the other one. It could be domestic work, but it's still uneven. I would think that if we were in the "golden age" of mothering it would be a little more evened out.

LM: I lucked out there, I think the scale is tipped more in my favor on that one! Do you think that women are still pressured by society to become mothers?

GS: Oh yeah! Just ask young women about what their mothers and grandmothers and aunts say to them. Especially right after you get married. I asked one of my students today, they were talking about their future and her husband and everything and I asked "well are you going to have kids?" then I thought to myself "what are you doing?" I think also religion is really based on procreation and those family values. I think that's where my work comes into play too. I hope that I'm presenting those questions within that piece. What does a family mean? When my partner and I go to our respective in-laws' houses, we are not yet treated like we are our own family unit. We are given our space to sleep and put our stuff but there are things that are overlooked because we don't have kids. I feel like if we had kids, those things would change immediately. Even with families like my dad's older sister. She grew up as a single parent and her children had two different fathers and they were never around permanently as a family unit. I know she received a lot of flak, even from my dad about whether she was raising her children right because they didn't have two parents. There's so much circumstance that happens, how can you place judgements and impositions on people like that.

Interview with Linda Rizzolo:

LM: How are you and your mother similar and different?

LR: Okay We are different in more ways than similar. We are from very different time periods in history. She survived the great depression and I didn't have to go through anything like that. My mother had to raise children while struggling to make ends meet, we didn't have pretty clothes or new toys growing up. She didn't get to create art even though she was a creative person. I got to do all of that, and I think she was really jealous of me, which is sad. She was also a very closed person and I'm not. In her day everything was a secret, you didn't share your personal life with anyone. Today people are much more open with their struggles and triumphs. My parents wouldn't even go to counseling! Now, everyone goes through counseling at some point. It's almost not normal if you don't have a therapist. As far as similarities, she was smart, talented, beautiful and loved being a mom, as do I. She was so overly protective especially when I was a teenager. In her time, it was all about appearances. During the World War II era you wanted to make sure you fit in with everyone else, if you or your children were seen participating in unsavory activities, it would have been the talk of the neighborhood. You never let anyone know what was really going on in your household. While I was raising my children I had a close-knit group of friends I was able to share everything with.

LM: What have you learned from being a mother?

LR: It's hard work. It's all about them not me, you have to make a lot of sacrifices for your children. I loved being pregnant, it was so amazing. I had four kids, and I was either pregnant or nursing for ten years straight! I love babies and small children, I never wanted my kids to grow past the age of five. Love the cuddling and nursing that goes with raising younger children. I'm not sure I learned much patience because I had four kids under eight and that was difficult to juggle. I was too young when I had my first child, I was only twenty-three and at that age you're still a kid yourself. I had to grow up before I was really ready to.

LM: When was the first time you felt like a good mother, and why did you choose that moment?

LR: That's a hard question. One thing that has happened, my oldest daughter had breast cancer. She lives in Portland and I was able to fly out there to be there for her during chemotherapy. I felt like a good mom because I could be there and help support her during that difficult time. I know that's a more recent example but I really did feel good about that. Also all of the nursing and cuddling when my kids were younger. I always felt like I was doing a good job by mothering them in that way.

LM: What do you think your children would say is your greatest attribute as a mother, and what is your greatest challenge?

LR: They would say I loved them a lot and encouraged their creativity. Discipline was challenging for me; I was really bad at that. There was a lot of yelling which they didn't listen to anyway. Also, my divorce was challenging. When I left my husband and fell in love with Lou, changing dads mid-stream like that wasn't easy on my kids. They really had to adjust to a new family dynamic. While that was a tough situation for my kids, it was also a transition for me. I wish my kids would've been a little older when that took place. I'm realizing more now that what we do as parents is a direct reaction to how our parents raised us. I see that in my kids now too. As we get older I'm understanding we do the best with what we have at the time.

LM: Did you always know that your life would include being a mother?

LR: Absolutely, it was a given. In the 60s it wasn't a choice. It wasn't like today; you have a lot of choices now. We didn't back then, and I was excited for it!

LM: What did you expect motherhood to be like?

LR: I had more of a fairy tale vision than reality. I don't think anyone can really know what it will be like. I knew I wanted to raise my kids differently from the way my mother raised me. I was much more trusting and free with my kids than my parents were with me. I didn't have a great relationship with my mom, and that's something I really wanted with my kids. A lot of parenting is about listening to your kids and not always giving advice.

LM: Do you think society has played any kind of role in the way you've raised your children?

LR: I really think yes, but I kind of picked my own society of young mothers. The world was not into breastfeeding and natural childbirth back then and I was. I surrounded myself with other women who would support me and my parenting style. It was about making your own society, not listening to the rest of the world.

LM: Do you think we're living in a "golden age" of motherhood?

LR: Well, no I don't think so. I don't think being able to connect on the internet is all that great. I had actual groups I would connect with and meeting other moms face to face. I think the internet sucks everything out of my right brain. Also, people are trying to do it all, work, kids, everything. I don't think women are still pressured by society to become mothers, I think women have a lot more options than we did, but they are pressured in many other ways.

Interview with Mary Lamson Burk:

LM: How are you and your mother similar and different?

MB: Physically I look a lot like my mother. My mother is very opinionated, not in a negative way but she is a very strong woman and I think I get a lot of my strength from her. She is also creative; she doesn't get to express her creativity like I do but when she was growing up I don't think it was encouraged like it was for me. When I was growing up the women's movement played a large role in encouraging my mother to foster my creativity and independence. My mother can be quite brash at times, she has a bit of an edge to her and I don't always think she realizes it. I try to curve that a little bit within my own nature. I feel like I'm more similar to my mother than dissimilar.

LM: What have you learned from being a mother to your eight hundred children?

MB: I joke with them and say that I'm like the old woman in the shoe except I'm the young vibrant woman in the show! I've learned that it is a lot of work. It is a never ending job. It is always being there. Even though I only see them five days a week during school, they know when I'm off, they know when I'm not present. They can actually sense when something is wrong. It's that balance of being able to keep myself whole and filling up my cup so I'm able to give them what they need. When you do have eight hundred of them, it's a lot of different types of needs.

LM: When was the first time you felt like a good mother, and why did you choose that moment?

MB: Before I started public school teaching, I worked at Grandville Avenue for the Arts and we were working with Southwest community school children. I taught ceramics to these kids, and had them create a project which was auctioned off for a school function. I remember this one little boy was glazing a project, and I complimented him on how well it was turning out. He looked at me and said "Mrs. Burke, I can't even believe it's mine," that comment blew me to the

back of the room. It was one of those moments where the power that you have as a teacher was very evident.

LM: What do you think your children would say is your greatest attribute as a mother, and what is your greatest challenge?

MB: I think they would say that I am always very positive and open to them. I always have a smile on my face, and am always looking for the good in them and trying to steer them towards the good that they have in their life. Because I am so open, they know my life and my personality and know when I am off. When that does happen, I can see them react to me and that's hard for me because I get wrapped up in all of the minutiae that I have to do. I put the blinders on and sometimes forget what the true reason is behind what I do and why I do it.

LM: Did you always know that your life would include being a mother?

MB: I honestly always knew that I wasn't going to have children of my own biologically. My path to being a teacher is interesting too. In high school I remember people always telling me I should be a teacher and I really resisted that. The universe was telling me otherwise. I started to listen to the universe when I was an undergrad. There were opportunities that put me in that teacher leader role, and I remember thinking that was what I was supposed to do. I did not pursue teaching, it pursued me.

LM: What did you expect motherhood to be like?

MB: When I look at biological motherhood, it scares the shit out of me. It looks very daunting and I look at it as being such a huge responsibility. I don't know how that even happens. I have a hard enough time trying to take care of myself. I think when I look at motherhood in this way, it affirms my choice too. The motherhood role that I am in is not incredibly overwhelming or daunting for me.

LM: Do you think society has played any kind of role in the way you've raised your children?

MB: I think society plays a huge part in it. I think that we are losing vision with what our children need. We are getting away from teaching the whole child, and that scares me. As their art teacher, I have the opportunity to actually see them and talk to them. I've had kids tell me "Mrs. Burke, you actually talk to us." Sometimes it's as easy as learning their name and giving them a simple compliment. Just letting them know that you do care and you are thinking about them.

LM: Do you think we're living in a "golden age" of motherhood?

MB: I don't know; doors have opened for women but those doors come with shackles. I think that we put a lot of pressure on ourselves. Society puts pressure on us too but I think we also put

so much pressure on ourselves. I think the internet and technology has connected us but I also think it screws us up. It allows for both inspiration and judgement at the same time. I also think women are pressured by society to become mothers. I think that's one of the core values in our society. If you are a girl, you will grow up, you will marry someone two years older than you and five inches taller than you, and you will have babies. Period, end of sentence. When you do not do that, something is wrong. I would love to say to people that my reproductive choices are none of your business. There is so much of this pressure and you can either feed into it and feel really bad, or you can have the mindset that this is your choice and be okay with that. When people find out I don't have kids and they say to me "oh, that's too bad, you're so nice" I want to tell them to come watch me with my students, and if they don't think I'm impacting a child's life then that's too bad. Many of my students get more love out of me than they do their own mother. I also feel fulfilled, and I am contributing to society. Just because I'm not bringing another human being to this earth doesn't mean I'm not worthy and I'm not fulfilled.

My personal responses to the interview questions:

1. How are you and your mother similar and different?

My mom and I look a lot alike, and we have very similar mannerisms. I've been told by others we even sound the same at times. We also both have very driven personalities. She has a master's degree and works in an upper management position in the corporate world. We are also both pretty crafty, I think my love of art first began with my mom and watching her sew our Halloween costumes. I remember the excitement of going to the fabric store to choose the pattern and fabrics then watch her bring the characters to life week by week before Halloween. That is where our similarities end, and the list of differences is an extensive one. I am definitely more family oriented than she is. My parents were divorced when I was quite young and I remember as I was growing up my mom was constantly moving around chasing the next promotion. Material wealth has always been a big part of how my mom measures success. Growing up we always had the best clothes, toys, and material possessions, but many times were emotionally neglected. My mother also struggles with alcoholism. There were countless incidents when I was left to care for my two younger brothers while our mom went out with an array of different men to the bars. I vowed at a young age I would never do the same to my own children. I have definitely tried to learn from my mother's mistakes and have made every effort to not repeat them. I still love my mother, but as a young mother myself have a hard time understanding why she didn't find as much joy and entertainment in simply being with her children as I do with mine.

2. What have you learned from being a mother?

I have learned a lot! Motherhood has taught me that it's okay to make mistakes, your children will forgive you and they are incredibly resilient. It's also taught me an incredible kind of unconditional love that is impossible to describe or replicate in any other way. They have taught me to slow down and appreciate the little things in life, and they remind me what it's like to view the world with a sense of amazement and curiosity. I have also learned how important

friendships with other women and mothers can be. I truly cherish the times I get to spend with my friends commiserating and supporting one another in this crazy motherhood journey.

3. When was the first time you felt like a good mother, and why did you choose that moment?

This one is tricky. I think there are several small moments, I'm not sure that there's been one single time that I could point to. I think the moments when I feel most successful are the ones when my daughter Aisylynn tells me she loves me for no reason. I cherish those snuggly cuddly times. I also feel like a success at the end of the day when I pick her up from daycare. She always, without fail, runs into my arms gives me a huge hug and kiss and tells me how much she's missed me. Nothing on earth feels like that. I also feel quite successful when my son sits on my lap at night and reads books with me. The fact that a two-year-old boy is willing to sit in quiet stillness and read a book with his mommy is amazing, and makes me feel incredibly successful. I think I chose these moments because they are the little everyday successes that help me to feel that I'm doing a good job as a mother. They are not monumental accomplishments but they are winning moments in my book.

4. What would you say is your greatest attribute as a mother, and what is your greatest challenge?

I think my greatest attribute is my creativity and silliness. I love to create new things, toys, environments, adventures, and I love playing with my kids. Even growing up when I would take care of my brothers I remember doing little art projects with them and using creative play to entertain. One of my favorite things to do right now with my daughter is to pretend we are Elsa and Anna from the movie *Frozen*, oh the drama! I would say my greatest challenge would be having patience. For the most part I'm a very patient person but I find myself losing my cool sometimes with my daughter, and have to remind myself that she's only four and this is normal behavior. Another influential factor in my life has been the mothering of my stepmother. She was incredibly aggressive towards us growing up and could be verbally and physically abusive at times. I remember the fear and sense of helplessness I had, and know that I never want to put my children in that position. I strongly disagree with the sentiment that children should have a "healthy fear" of their parents. I believe children should be able to trust and confide in their parents and instilling a "healthy fear" eradicates that trust. It is a challenge for me to always keep a cool head, but it's a challenge I hope to succeed at.

5. Did you always know that your life would include being a mother? When do you think that identification occurred?

Actually when I was a teenager I constantly said I would never have kids. I'm not sure why, I loved babysitting and being around kids but for some reason I rejected the idea that I would be a mother one day. I think I knew I would be a teacher before I thought about being a mother. It wasn't until later towards the end of college when I was engaged to be married that the idea of motherhood began to appeal to me. Now that I am a mother, I can't imagine life without my kids. It's almost difficult to remember what life was like before they were around, it's really funny how that works.

6. What did you expect motherhood to be like?

I'm not sure what I expected really. I thought about it a lot but I mostly fantasized about what kind of mother I would be. My hope was (like the hope of many other mothers) that I could break the cycle and create a path very different from that of my mother and stepmother.

While their mothering tactics were not all bad, I knew I wanted to strive for keeping the good and avoiding the negative with my own children. I also thought a lot about all of the firsts we would have together. Just before I had Aisylynn I remember talking about how I couldn't wait to cuddle her and see her face. Motherhood is sort of a mysterious land that you can only get a glimpse of when looking around at other mothers and their children. Most of the time that glimpse is of the best moments highlighted by Facebook and mommy blogs, not the real deal.

7. Will society play any kind of role in the way you raise your children?

I think so, at least I think it has. As much as I want to deny it, I do occasionally find myself wondering whether or not other mom's would approve of my parenting. I admittedly turn to Pinterest, Facebook, mommy blogs, and parenting forums at times to consult with other parents, pick their brains, and steal their ideas. There are definitely times when these forums along with other forms of media can influence certain parenting decisions. There will always be new studies proving how something once deemed a parenting "norm" is now considered detrimental to your child's wellbeing. At the end of the day I think it's important to have the ability to sift through all of the unsolicited advice that's out there and decide what's right for you and your family.

8. Do you think women are still pressured by society to become mothers?

Yes, even though I think we are moving in the direction where it's becoming more acceptable to make the choice not to have children, I think overall women who do not have children by choice are still labeled as the odd one out.

9. Do you think we're living in a "golden age" of motherhood?

Yes, and no. While women today definitely have more choice in how they raise their families, what age they will begin having children, and what their family dynamic will be, I think we still have a long way to go before we get to the "golden age." As a young mother, I can attest to the pressures I feel to do everything. I think it's amazing that I am free to have my own career in addition to raising my family, however, I also feel the pressure to do it all perfectly. I think this also stems from a bit of an overachiever personality. I tend to throw myself into whatever project it is that I'm working on whether it be decorations for my kid's birthday parties or planning the ultimate lesson for my classes. I almost feel that if I can't prove myself to be the most creative, organized, artistic, fun, and crafty mom and teacher, then I'm not living up to everyone's expectations. I know that some of this pressure emanates from my own personality traits but I think a large portion also comes from the mothering archetype that has been set forth by the media and society. You can only get a glimpse of when looking around at other mothers and

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