

A Report Commissioned by the Mothers' Council
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The Motherhood Study

Fresh Insights on Mothers' Attitudes
and Concerns



**University of Minnesota
University of Connecticut
Institute for American Values**

This report is based on original research, including a nationally representative survey of mothers, designed and conducted by a 12-member team of scholars convened by the Motherhood Project and Mothers' Council of the Institute for American Values.

The Motherhood Study research team is led by Martha Farrell Erickson of the Children, Youth, and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota, who is the study's principal investigator. The project director for *The Motherhood Study* is Enola G. Aird, Director of the Motherhood Project, Institute for American Values. The national survey was directed by Christopher Barnes and conducted by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis of the University of Connecticut.

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The Motherhood Study is available online at www.motherhoodproject.org. The "Focus Group Guide," the "Pre-survey Individual Interview Guide," the "Survey Questionnaire," the "Annotated Questionnaire," and the "Follow-up Interview Guide" are also available online.

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Executive Summary

MOTHERS, MOTHERHOOD, AND MOTHERING long have been the subjects of academic and popular writing and discussion, but the voices of mothers from different walks of life have been noticeably missing from the national conversation. *The Motherhood Study* aimed to change that by going directly to mothers across the United States and hearing what they had to say about their attitudes, values, concerns, and needs.

A rigorous large-scale investigation led by a team of social science researchers, *The Motherhood Study* featured a survey of more than 2,000 mothers, a nationally representative sample reflecting the demographics of the total U.S. population of mothers 18 and older with at least one child under the age of 18. That quantitative analysis was complemented by in-depth interviews and focus groups to provide more detail about the experiences of mothers.

The study was designed to enrich the public dialogue by creating a vehicle for mothers of diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds — and varied life circumstances regarding family structure and employment — to express their beliefs and concerns about mothering and their thoughts about social change. What emerged was a complex and often surprising picture of mothers and mothering in the United States five years into the twenty-first century.

The findings of this study paint a picture in sharp contrast to the portrait of U.S. mothers in much of the public dialogue today — and point to elements of a mothers' agenda for social change.

Three issues identified in the key findings seem to be particularly salient for mothers — and ripe for immediate action:

1. The majority of mothers in the study place a high priority on reducing family violence and promoting healthy marriages;
2. They would like more attention paid to the matter of financial security for mothers; and
3. They want to be employed, but in positions that demand less of their time. They want more time to spend with their children and on personal and family relationships.

Mothers also assigned high priority to improving parenting skills, improving the quality and affordability of childcare, enabling fathers to spend more time with their children, making the media more appropriate for children and families, creating more connected neighborhoods for children, and enabling more mothers to breast-feed their children.

Key Findings

What Mothers Say about their Lives

- **Whatever their backgrounds, wherever they live, whatever their life circumstances, mothers today have much in common.** Regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, geography, or employment status, mothers agree to a very large extent in their perceptions of the importance of mothering, the satisfactions they derive from their lives as mothers, their concerns about the negative forces that threaten their children, and their wishes for a culture that would make the work of mothering less challenging. There was no significant evidence in this study to support what media sometimes refer to as the “mommy wars,” supposed tensions between mothers who are employed in the workforce and those who are not.
- **In contrast to much of the popular discourse that typically emphasizes the stress and strain of motherhood, mothers reported strikingly high levels of satisfaction with their lives as mothers.** This was true when we asked about overall satisfaction with life as a mother, with nearly 81% of respondents agreeing that they are “very” satisfied and 16% saying they are “somewhat” satisfied. And it was true when we asked mothers about their satisfaction with specific aspects of their lives, including the degree of responsibility they have for children, the emotional support they receive from others, and their childcare arrangements (for those whose children are in childcare). Although levels of satisfaction appear to increase with income and education — and to be higher for married mothers and those with high levels of religious involvement — satisfaction was generally high for mothers across the entire sample. Certainly mothers also expressed many concerns for themselves and for their children. Their lives are not without stress, and they see serious problems with the culture in which their children are growing up. However, these concerns are not mothers’ primary focus when they are asked about their satisfaction with their lives as mothers. In qualitative interviews, women nearly always tied their satisfaction with life as a mother to the unique satisfactions of *being* a mother and to how their children are doing.
- **Mothers’ passion is strong for their children and for mothering — a job most mothers see as unique and extraordinarily important.** At the core of mothers’ powerful feelings appears to be a new and intense kind of love women experience when they become mothers. More than 93% of mothers responding to our survey said the love they feel for their children is unlike any other love they have experienced. Nearly 93% agreed that a mother’s contribution to the care of her children is so unique that no one else can replace it. And nearly 81% of mothers said mothering is the most important thing they do. Mothers’ sense of responsibility for the

well-being of children in general also seems strong. More than 92% of the mothers we surveyed agreed with the statement, “After becoming a mother, I found myself caring more about the well-being of all children, not just my own.” And 79% said that mothers are more responsible than other adults for children in general. Almost 88% of mothers surveyed said they believe society expects more from mothers than anyone else, and they see both good and bad in that expectation.

- **Most mothers surveyed have primary responsibility for the day-to-day upbringing of children.** Nearly 44% said they alone have primary responsibility for their children’s day-to-day upbringing, while about 49% share responsibility with their spouse or partner. Of those who share responsibility with someone (not necessarily their spouse or partner), about 66% reported that they provide more than 50% of the daily care.
- **Marriage is associated with a range of positive findings for the mothers surveyed, including economic status and satisfaction with life as a mother.** For example, about 16% of married mothers reported annual family incomes less than \$40,000, compared to 35% of mothers living with a partner and 73% of mothers who were unmarried and not living with a partner. Eighty-eight percent of married mothers said they were “very” satisfied with their lives as mothers, compared to 80% of cohabiting mothers and 62% of single mothers. The study also showed that 81% of married mothers said they are “very” satisfied with their relationships with their spouses, compared to 69% of mothers who were unmarried but living with a partner.
- **Mothers most often named their spouse or partner as their primary source of emotional support (48%).** Among married mothers that figure was 68%; among mothers living with a partner it was 52%; and among mothers who were unmarried and not living with a partner it was nine percent. Among the total sample, 20% named their own mother as their primary source of support, while 10% identified friends. For the sample as a whole, most mothers (83%) expressed satisfaction with the emotional support they receive, with 48% saying they are “very” satisfied.

What Mothers Would Change in their Personal Lives

- **Although nearly all mothers express satisfaction with their lives as mothers, fewer said they receive external validation as mothers.** Fewer than half of the mothers (48%) reported feeling appreciated most of the time and nearly one in five (19%) said they have felt less valued by society since becoming mothers. In qualitative interviews and focus groups, mothers called for greater appreciation

and recognition of the importance of caregiving — within families, communities, and the society as a whole.

- **Mothers want more time to spend on personal and family relationships, with almost 61% “strongly” agreeing and 22% “somewhat” agreeing with that statement.** Mothers who are neither married nor living with a partner are even more likely to express that wish (79% “strongly” agreeing, compared with 55% of married and 60% of mothers living with a partner). This is not surprising given that single mothers carry more responsibility for childrearing and financial support of the family and, in general, are more strapped for time.
- **Mothers are nearly evenly split as to whether they want the father of their children more actively involved in their upbringing.** Mothers with lower incomes and fewer years of education are more likely to say they want greater father involvement. They also are less likely to be married, and they bear much more responsibility for both the day-to-day care of the children and the financial support of the family, so it is not surprising they would call for more father involvement.
- **There is a striking gap between mothers’ current work status and their ideal work arrangement.** Currently more than 41% of the mothers we studied work full-time. However, only about 16% of mothers across the entire sample said they would prefer full-time work if they could choose their ideal work situation. One in three mothers said they would prefer to work part-time and about 30% said they would prefer to work for pay from home. Overall, a majority of mothers would prefer to be employed — but in positions that do not demand so much of their time.

What Mothers Would Change about Society

- **More than half of the mothers surveyed think that society as a whole is not doing a good job of meeting the needs of mothers, children, and families.**
- **Mothers seem to hold values that differ in significant ways from those of the larger culture.** Ninety-five percent agree that they wish American culture made it easier to instill positive values in children. Most mothers (87%) expressed concern about the influence of advertisements on children and, more generally, the influence of media (88%). Eighty-eight percent of mothers agree with the statement “money has too much control over our lives” and 86% agree that childhood should be a time when children are protected from large parts of the adult world.

- **Given an open-ended question that asked mothers to name their single biggest concern for their children, mothers most often cited education (general concerns about the quality of their child’s education or specific concerns, such as getting into college) or safety and security.** Each of these concerns was named by 22% of mothers surveyed. Education was more likely to be named as the number one concern for children among African-American and mothers of Hispanic origin, unmarried mothers, and those with lower incomes and fewer years of education. After education and safety and security, the next most often named concern for children was drugs and drinking, with 11% of mothers naming that as their biggest concern.
- **When asked about their single biggest concern for themselves, mothers most often named finances (25%), healthcare (11%), or safety (11%).** Mothers with lower incomes, unmarried mothers, and African-American mothers were more likely than other mothers in our sample to cite financial issues as their top concern for themselves.
- **Presented with a list of possible changes to make life better for mothers and children, mothers most often indicated as high priorities: 1) reducing all forms of family violence (94%); 2) enabling mothers to spend more time with their children (86%); and 3) promoting healthy marriages (86%).**
- **Seventy-two percent of mothers agreed that more mothers in positions of power in American society would make life better for mothers and children.**
- **Mothers strongly endorsed the idea of parents uniting to reduce the negative influences on children.** Nearly 99% of respondents agreed (more than 88% “strongly” and a little over 10% “somewhat”) they would like to see more mothers and fathers working together to reduce the negative influences on children in American society. Nearly one in three mothers (30%) indicated they already are involved in groups working to improve the lives of mothers, children, and families.

W **E INVITE MOTHERS** to add their voices and views to those of the representative group of mothers whose voices are heard in this report. We urge mothers to use the “Starting Points” discussion guide (on pages 45-49) to consider the questions posed in the survey and reflect together on their own experiences and concerns as mothers. And we urge everyone who cares about the health and well-being of mothers, children, families, and society, to reflect on the findings of the study and listen to what mothers are saying in this report and in the many conversations we hope will flow from it. ■

Introduction

Pressing Questions

How do mothers in the United States today feel about being mothers? What are their understandings of the work of mothers and the part mothers play in children's lives and in the larger society? What are mothers' most pressing concerns and priorities for change?

This report explores these and related questions to help deepen our national understanding of what mothers are feeling and thinking about motherhood, mothering, and the challenges of raising children in the twenty-first century. It contains the findings of *The Motherhood Study*, an academically rigorous national investigation of mothers' attitudes, values, concerns, and needs.

The Motherhood Study was designed to create a vehicle for listening to the voices of mothers across the United States and bringing their views about motherhood and mothering into the national discussion — a discussion in which the voices of mothers from many different walks of life have been noticeably missing.

The goals of *The Motherhood Study* were:

1. To expand and advance the public conversation about mothers and mothering by taking a fresh look at the diversity among mothers as well as what unites them;
2. To help identify mothers' priorities for change to create a more supportive culture for all mothers; and
3. To provide a springboard for further reflection, discussion, and action among mothers and other people who care about mothers, children, and families.

A Desire to Hear Mothers' Voices

Mothers, motherhood, and mothering long have been the subject of academic research, conceptual writing, and public discussion and debate. In recent years, popular books on motherhood have proliferated (see, for example, Berry, 2004; Crittenden, 2001; de Marneffe, 2004; Douglas and Michaels, 2004; and Warner, 2005). Although some academic studies have examined the experiences and feelings of certain groups of mothers — and popular books sometimes have conveyed the views of a few mothers — the range and diversity of mothers in the United States generally have not been reflected in either the academic or popular literature on motherhood.

In a comprehensive decade review of academic research and conceptual writing on mothering, Terry Arendell (2000) noted that “for all of the contributions to our

understanding of mothering and mothers' lives ... we are left with major gaps" (p.1201). She called for "attention to and respect for the enormous multiplicity of mothering circumstances" and consideration of "what mothers hold in common" (p. 1201).

In that review, Arendell went on to raise a number of questions yet to be explored: "How do various women feel about being mothers? What meanings do they ascribe to mothering? What is the full sweep of mothers' emotions and attitudes?" She called for "attention to the lives of particular mothers — to mothers' own voices," to the "lives and voices of diverse groups of mothers" and "theory building grounded in mothers' experiences" (p.1201–1202).

THE MOTHERHOOD STUDY was designed to help fill those gaps in our knowledge about mothers and their real life experiences. We wanted to hear from mothers of diverse backgrounds and circumstances to learn about their differences and commonalities. To do this, the research team designed a large-scale national study to gather quantitative data on mothers' attitudes and opinions.

The Motherhood Study was crafted to enable us to listen to mothers from as many different walks of life as possible through a telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 mothers. The study also was designed to enable us to hear the views of particular mothers in more extended conversations — through focus groups and individual interviews conducted both before and after the fielding of the national survey.

In academic research, there is often a substantial lag between the time of the collection of data and the publication of findings. In this case, we have chosen to release the key findings of *The Motherhood Study* while they are fresh and to pose questions that invite others to explore — along with us — the meaning and implications of these findings for their own lives and the lives of mothers, children, and families everywhere.

Members of the research team will continue to analyze the data and bring our perspectives to these findings, addressing specific questions that arise in our ongoing examination and discussions of the data. We invite questions and reactions from readers to guide our additional analyses, and we will make the results of our further thinking available through the Motherhood Project website, www.motherhoodproject.org.

We have learned from our conversations with mothers that they are eager to engage with one another on the subjects of motherhood and mothering. To help build momentum for mothers to continue to make their voices heard and thus move the public conversation forward, we have developed "Starting Points for Further Reflection, Discussion, and Action" (included in this report on pages 45-49). We invite mothers to use "Starting Points" to consider questions posed in the survey and reflect together on their own experiences, needs, and concerns as mothers. We invite

mothers to add their voices and views to those of the group of mothers whose voices are heard in this report. And we urge everyone who cares about the health and well-being of mothers, children, families, and society, to reflect on the findings of the study and listen to what mothers are saying in this report and in the many conversations we hope will flow from it.

What We Did

THE MOTHERHOOD STUDY combined two different, but complementary, research approaches — a quantitative approach that surveyed a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 mothers of children under the age of 18 and a qualitative approach in which researchers explored the beliefs and concerns of individual mothers in focus groups and in-depth interviews. In October 2003, the research team began the process of listening to mothers' stories by engaging diverse mothers from around the country in extended, open-ended conversations through focus groups and individual interviews, some in person and some by phone. (The “Focus Group Guide” and the “Pre-survey Individual Interview Guide” are available online at www.motherhoodproject.org.)

What we heard from mothers shaped themes and specific questions as we moved to the quantitative approach. Next, the research team used the information and insights garnered from focus groups and interviews to design a 20-minute structured telephone survey (“Survey Questionnaire,” available online at www.motherhoodproject.org). This instrument then was used by the staff of the Center for Survey Research and Analysis of the University of Connecticut to complete a total of 2,009 telephone interviews with women age 18 and older who were mothers of at least one child under the age of 18. The sample of mothers was representative of the diverse population of adult mothers across the United States in terms of income, education, age, race, ethnicity, employment, and marital status.

The telephone survey was conducted from January 12, 2005 to February 20, 2005. For the total U.S. population of adult mothers, the margin of error for this survey is +/-2.2% at the 95% level of confidence. This means that there is less than one chance in twenty that the results of a survey of this size would differ by more than 2.2% in either direction from the results that would be obtained if all mothers in the United States had been interviewed. The margin of error may be greater for smaller subgroups. (For additional information on methodology, see “More on Methodology” available online at www.motherhoodproject.org. Refer to the “Annotated Questionnaire,” also online, for more details of the sample and responses to the survey questions.)

After the survey was completed, we conducted follow-up interviews with some participants to gather additional information to help us clarify and understand some of the survey findings. (The “Follow-up Interview Guide” is available online at

www.motherhoodproject.org.) Throughout this report we include the words of mothers who participated in focus groups and both pre-survey and follow-up interviews as a way to illuminate the story told by the quantitative data, and to give voice to the views and concerns of the mothers with whom we spoke. These mothers are of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. They live in urban, suburban, and rural environments. They have different levels of education and financial resources.

Any survey or interview has the potential for socially desirable responses. This study is no exception, and in some places in this report we raise the possibility that social desirability may have been a factor influencing particular answers to the survey questions. But, at the same time, we believed it was important to trust mothers to answer honestly about their own experiences and feelings, particularly in anonymous telephone interviews. Furthermore, we built into the survey a variety of questions that tapped similar concepts in different ways, allowing us to consider patterns of response. The deeper individual interviews and focus group discussions allowed us to clarify and explore more fully some of the findings that initially seemed puzzling or surprising in the quantitative analysis. Our approach throughout this study has been to trust that mothers know their own minds and will tell us what they think.

What Mothers Told Us

WHATEVER THEIR BACKGROUNDS, wherever they live, whatever their life circumstances, mothers today have much in common. We were struck by the extent to which mothers from all walks of life — regardless of age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, geography, or employment status — agreed in their perceptions of the importance of mothering, the satisfaction they derive from their lives as mothers, their concerns about the negative forces that threaten their children, and their wishes for a culture that would make the work of mothering less challenging.

The differences among mothers tell an interesting story as well — how mothers live and work, who shares responsibility for their children, and who provides emotional support for mothers themselves. Not surprisingly, some differences among mothers — such as income, marital status, and level of education — are associated with significant differences in their overall sense of well-being and satisfaction, as well as their specific desires regarding such aspects of their lives as employment or fathers' involvement in their children's upbringing. Socio-economic status and other life circumstances also underlie striking differences in what mothers named as their greatest concerns for themselves and their children.

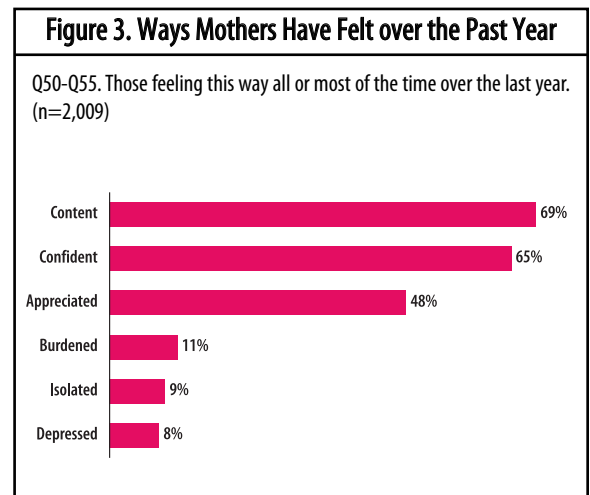
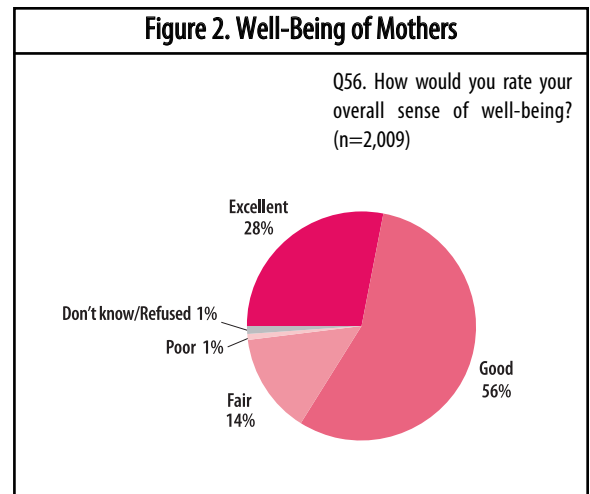
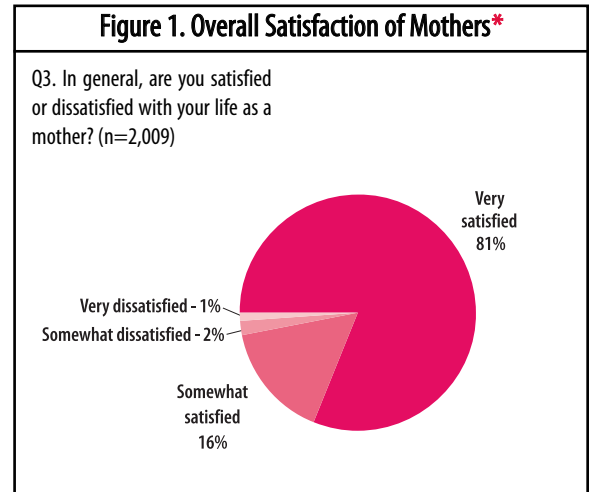
Even in the face of these differences, mothers across the board expressed a strong desire for mothers and fathers to come together to make life better for mothers, children, and families. They expressed some strong views about how to do that. Here is what mothers told us:

Satisfaction with Life as Mother

In many ways, the women we surveyed reported strikingly high levels of satisfaction with their lives as mothers. This was true when we asked about overall satisfaction with life as a mother, with nearly 81% of respondents agreeing that they are “very” satisfied and 16% saying they are “somewhat” satisfied. And, as discussed later in this report, it was true when we asked mothers about their satisfaction with specific aspects of their lives, including the degree of responsibility they have for children, the emotional support they receive from others, and their childcare arrangements (for those whose children are in childcare).

Similarly, most mothers (slightly more than 84%) reported a “good” (56%) or “excellent” (28%) sense of well-being. Although levels of satisfaction and well-being appear to increase with income and education — and to be higher for married mothers and those with high levels of religious involvement — both satisfaction and well-being are generally high for mothers across the entire sample.

Also revealing a relatively positive picture are the women’s responses to questions about specific emotions they experience as mothers. A majority of mothers acknowledged feeling isolated, burdened or depressed at times over the last year. However, an even larger majority said they felt confident and content, with the most



*Numbers on graphs, charts, and tables are rounded to the nearest whole number.

common response being that they had those positive feelings most of the time.

Despite these high levels of satisfaction and well-being, women did not necessarily feel appreciated as mothers. Fewer than half of the mothers surveyed (48%) said they feel appreciated most or all of the time. Responses from women in focus groups and individual interviews presented a similarly mixed picture of the extent to which mothers feel appreciated. (See box “Who Appreciates Mothers and How Do They Show It?” for a sample of those responses.)

Our findings of high levels of satisfaction among mothers are consistent with other research, including, for example, a survey of 1,100 American women (including 457 mothers of children 18 and under) conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (1997). However, the findings stand in contrast against much of the current popular discourse on motherhood, which often emphasizes the pressure and stress mothers experience (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Warner, 2005).

Certainly the mothers in our study also expressed many concerns for themselves and their children (discussed in subsequent sections of this report). Their lives are not without stress. And, as mentioned above, they told us of the range of feelings, both positive and negative, they experience in their lives as mothers. But mothers’ self-reports of satisfaction stand out and, we believe, warrant further exploration.

Were mothers responding in the way they deemed socially desirable? Are they being stoic about thriving even in the face of the responsibilities and challenges they face? Or are they truly finding great satisfaction in their lives as mothers even as they recognize both the good and bad inherent in mothering? These questions suggest directions for future research and ongoing discussion.

For now, the words of mothers who participated in focus groups or individual interviews in the course of this study provide some insight into the meaning of the reported high levels of satisfaction. Many of

Who Appreciates Mothers and How Do They Show It?

In follow-up interviews we asked some mothers who had participated in the survey to talk about who shows appreciation for them and how they show that appreciation. Several mothers said their children express appreciation for them.

Comments included, “They behave well” and “They make things for me at school saying I’m best in the world” and “My five-year-old thanks me for everything I do for him.” Some mothers also said their husbands show appreciation, in the words of one mother, “by pitching in and doing his part to raise the kids.” However, several mothers we interviewed said they often feel taken advantage of by their children and the fathers of their children. In one mother’s words, “I’m like, ‘Did you notice I did that today?’ And he is like, ‘Yeah, but isn’t that what you’re supposed to do?’”

Another mother did not feel appreciated, although she nonetheless had expressed a high level of satisfaction with her life as a mother. She declared, “No one [shows appreciation for me]! Oh, I guess I got flowers once for a birthday or something.”

these mothers described motherhood as “challenging but incredibly rewarding” or “the most demanding but also the best thing in the world.” In talking about the challenges, mothers often mentioned how tired they get from the relentlessness of mothering and all that it entails — from sleepless nights with a newborn to helping with homework to seeking the best treatment for a depressed teen. But nearly all mothers — even those who described serious challenges in the lives of their families — emphasized that the rewards of motherhood far outweigh the challenges.

In one mother’s words, motherhood is “the most precious job in the world. Sometimes it’s overwhelming, but the joy is incredible when you see what you have done or somebody says what a great job you have done with that young man.” Several mothers talked about mothering as a gift. In the words of one mother, “We have been given a gift, and this gift — we can choose to look at it one way or another. We can choose what to do with it. It’s all in our hands and that is pretty awesome.” Yet another mother talked about the respect she gets from people “because I’m doing a job that needs to be done with a good kid who is going to be raised to be a productive adult.”

Women nearly always tied their satisfaction with their lives as mothers to how their children are doing. They often pointed out that their “kids are good kids, doing positive things” and were clear that they derive great satisfaction from the fact that they have played a powerful role in making that happen. One hardworking, single mother said, “Of course I’m satisfied. My kids are healthy — they have good mental health.” A married, stay-at-home mother from the South attributed her satisfaction to the fact that she is giving her kids the basics — morals, responsibility, self-esteem. And a single mother from a Northeastern city expressed pride and satisfaction that her teenagers don’t use drugs even though most other children in their housing project do.

One of the relatively few mothers we interviewed who expressed some serious dissatisfaction with her life as a mother was a Southeast Asian immigrant woman in a Midwestern city whose teenage children had become very rebellious and disrespectful. Feeling her children slipping away into the worst of the peer culture in the urban neighborhood where she lived, that concerned mother told us, “When I young I don’t have kids. I didn’t have a thing to worry. I sleep good. I eat good. Now being a mother sometimes you cannot eat and you cannot sleep. Sometimes the kids don’t listen much, you cry the whole night.”

This same mother saw her role in her children’s lives as enormously important and took great satisfaction in the times when her children still turned to her for comfort and guidance. But her ambivalence was clear, reminiscent of what Arendell (2000) found in her review of motherhood scholarship: “Maternal ambivalence is grounded in the paradoxical character of the mothering experience. The uncertainty of children’s long-term outcomes intensifies maternal ambivalence (p. 1197).”

One successful businesswoman who participated in the national survey, the mother of a 12-year-old son, was asked in a follow-up interview why she thought

we found such high levels of satisfaction among mothers. She responded with intensity, “That’s like asking about infinity! It’s just the satisfaction of being involved in everything that’s most important in life — loving, caring, family.” When pressed to say what is not so satisfying about being a mother, she talked about all the constant little things that she and other mothers do to care for their children and keep the household running smoothly — and “even if you were the Vice President of General Motors, you’d probably still be responsible for all that stuff.” But she concluded, “If you just focus on the work of mothering instead of the meaning of it, too bad for you!” That sentiment was shared by many of the mothers from whom we heard.

Powerful Feelings, Unique and Important Work

Closely tied to mothers’ sense of overall satisfaction is the passion they feel for their children and for mothering, a job most mothers see as unique and extraordinarily important. At the core of those strong feelings seems to be a new and intense kind of love women experience when they become mothers. More than 93% of mothers responding to our survey said the love they feel for their children is unlike any other love they have experienced.

Mothers Learn from their Children

Beyond the satisfaction that comes from watching children grow up well, mothers also talked about the specific satisfactions of learning from and with their children. In the words of one mother who had left a law practice to raise her two children, “[Motherhood] is all-encompassing, fulfilling, an opportunity for ongoing education. You’re constantly learning new things. Continuous improvement. And it’s just an opportunity to be a child all over again and do all the things that you did before that were fun and exciting.... It’s a very creative thing.” She went on to describe that, now that her children are in their teens, she is learning about “a whole world of new things” through her children’s interests in music, math, science, and engineering.

Similarly, another mother already was discovering that her 18-month-old son “teaches me as much as I teach him.” Somewhat serious and reserved herself, she talked specifically about her son’s outgoing personality and how “he is developing relationships with people that I might not even be facilitating. So that is partly what I learn from him too.” Another mother described the satisfaction that comes from “seeing the world through new eyes,” the eyes of her child.

It's almost as if your children are your heart beating outside of your body and walking around.

—Mother whose 19-year-old son recently left for college

I want to say this without tearing up — my kids are my life. They are my angels. I wouldn't change whatever I have to go through with them (ob, I can't do it without crying) for nothing in this world.

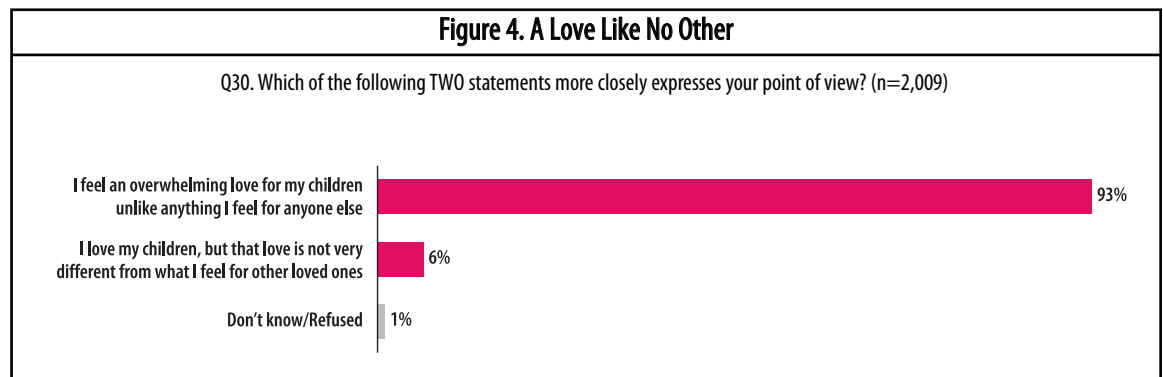
—Married mother of three

The theme of a love like no other came through repeatedly in spontaneous comments and stories from mothers in focus groups and individual interviews. Many mothers described their amazement at how overwhelming their love was for their children and how new and surprising was the certain knowledge that they would “die for this child” or “take a bullet for him” or “walk through fire for her,” in the words of some of the mothers we heard.

One mother laughingly described the strong and particularly “love-dovey” relationship she has with her husband — a relationship their friends often tease them about. She went on to describe how surprised she was by the difference between that love and the love she now feels for her daughter. In her words, “I knew I would love a child, but I didn’t know I would LOVE a child [emphasis hers].... She wasn’t even a year old and finally I looked at [my husband] and I said, ‘I really love her’.... This is real different from even what we had.”

Of course not all mothers feel that overwhelming love immediately. One mother described a terribly complicated, life-threatening pregnancy followed by a postnatal period characterized by further painful medical problems and surgery. In her words, “I didn’t feel attached to my baby when he was born. I was too sick to feel anything but pain and anxiety at the time. And it took about five or six months. That was very difficult for me not to feel that.” She goes on to describe how the love and attachment gradually developed “in spite of all the things we were going through and because of all the things we were going through.” By the time she was well enough to return to her job at a local university, she says leaving her son “was like leaving a part of my body at home. I couldn’t do it. I mean I did it, but it was very, very painful.”

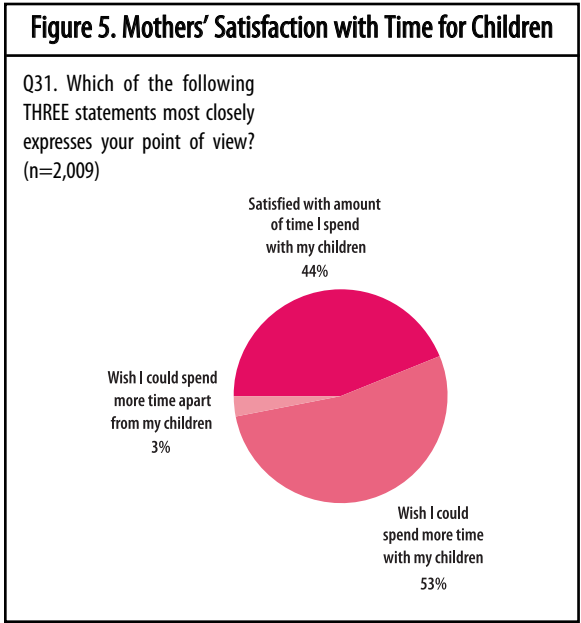
That mother’s longing for her child was echoed by many mothers we listened to — a theme that also is central to the stories that shaped Daphne de Marneffe’s 2004 book, *Maternal Desire*. Many women we interviewed spoke of being surprised by the joy of motherhood — the joy of being the mother of this child, the joy of being with this child — even as they attested to the daily hassles and frustrations of mothering. Acknowledging both the pain and joy of motherhood, one mother said,



“I just didn’t know ... that the spectrum was going to widen and there was going to be so much responsibility with so much joy at the same time.”

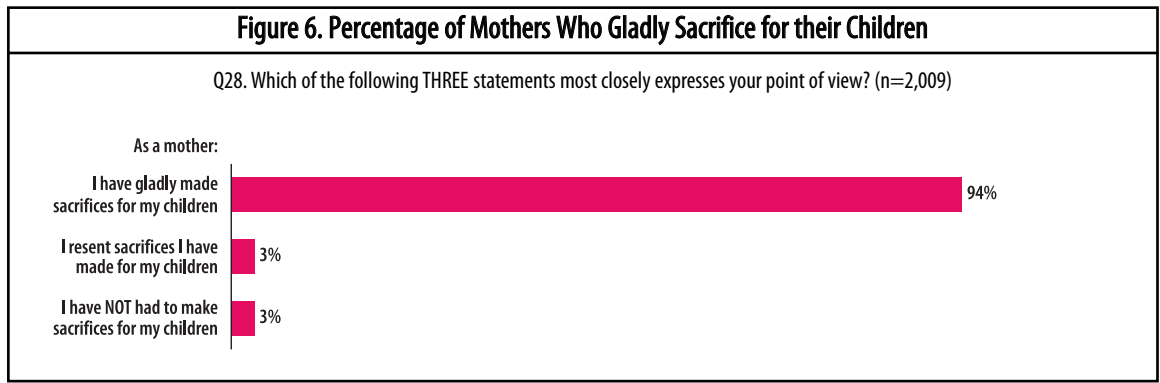
Many researchers and authors have written about the desire of both mothers and fathers to have more time with their children (e.g. Galinsky and Lapinski, 2004; Moen, 2003; Radcliffe Public Policy Center, 2000). Indeed, about 53% of mothers we surveyed said they want more time with their children. (This response was most common among mothers who work outside the home, as discussed in a later section of this report.) Another 44% of the mothers we surveyed said they are satisfied with the amount of time they spend with their children, while only three percent said they wish for more time apart from their children. Those findings were much the same across mothers of all socioeconomic levels.

In addition to describing powerful feelings of love, joy, and longing for their children, mothers in our study also acknowledged that mothering requires sacrifices — such things as time alone, time with friends, and that precious commodity of sleep, for example, as many mothers told us in focus groups and individual interviews. Of course some mothers also described making sacrifices in their careers so that they could devote more time and energy to their children, either stepping off the career path altogether or passing up opportunities for advancement so they could have greater flexibility. Nearly 94% of mothers responding to our survey said they have gladly sacrificed for their children.



I don't think there is any way to really anticipate how much joy you're going to gain from the experience. I really entered it, to be honest, a little ambivalent.... But now I just wonder how I even managed before. It's just such a wonderful experience.

— Mother who had first child at 38 after building a successful career



When we are a mother, we go someplace and we worry about back home. I have to go home and clean and take care of the kids. Even when we have money, we have to spend some and save some for kids or family. And when you think something [is] important like this, you think YOU are important.

—Hmong mother of seven who came to the United States from Laos in her teens

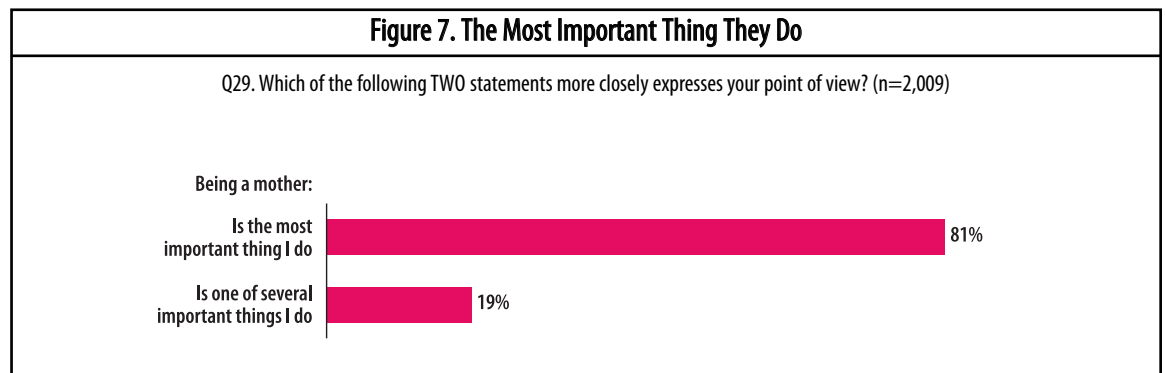
Such a strong finding calls for some caution in interpretation; many mothers might be reluctant to admit that they resent the sacrifices they make for their children. Nonetheless, this finding converges with what others have found when listening to mothers speak about their experience and their maternal identity. For example, based on in-depth interviews with a much smaller sample of mothers across varying life circumstances, Hays (1996, 2003) likewise found that mothers willingly sacrificed for their children and, by and large, found this rewarding rather than oppressive. Mothers we interviewed communicated a feeling of acceptance that sacrifice comes with the territory.

Mothers from all walks of life clearly see the work of mothering — with all its demands and rewards — as very important. Nearly 81% of mothers responding to our survey said mothering is the most important thing they do. Other respondents identified mothering as one of several important things they do, with mothers in families with incomes above \$80,000 being somewhat more likely to give that response (25% of the wealthiest mothers, compared with 16-18% of mothers in lower income brackets).

Mothers' views on the importance of mothering came through clearly when they talked about the powerful influence of mothers in children's lives. Many women talked about mothers as the foundation of a child's sense of security and trust. In one mother's words, "My goal is to provide that stability for my son that he knows I'm there. That's how they learn to trust, and that is really important for their growing up.... You teach them how to love."

Another frequent theme was the role of mothers in promoting the emotional health and social competence of children — through nurturing, teaching, and example. As one mother said, children "are like little sponges with everything you do. So it becomes all important to try to be the best example you can, which is very humbling." Another mother spoke with pride about how her child is learning to get along with peers and be a contributing member of organizations he has joined: "You see it all happening and go 'Holy mackerel, where did all that come from?' Then you have to sit back and go, 'Guess what? You did it. It came from here [pointing to self] and you did something pretty special.'"

Figure 7. The Most Important Thing They Do



One mother expressed a sense of awe when talking about the extent of a mother’s influence, especially in the early years of a child’s life: “It’s all so overwhelming how much power you have, at least when they are little. The power that you have over them ... I don’t remember what it was, and I just looked at [my daughter] and she just went into tears. And I thought, ‘Oh my God, the power that I have!’ It’s a scary thing when you realize how much power you have.”

Mothers see their contribution to the care of their children not only as extremely important, but also so unique that no one else can replace it. Nearly 93% of our respondents agreed with that statement, with nearly 83% saying they “strongly” agree.

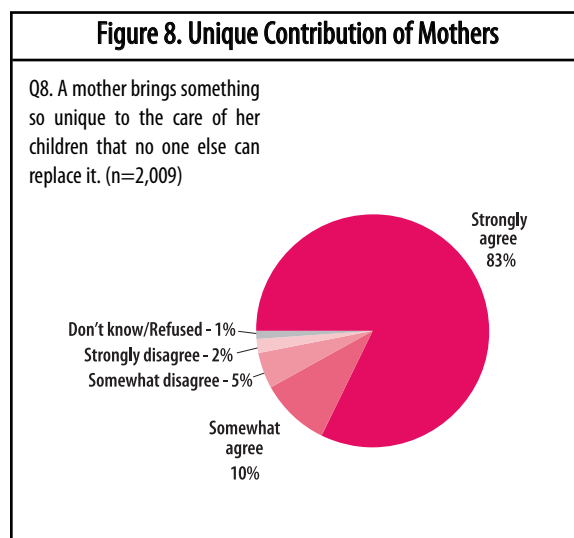
The Hmong woman mentioned earlier in this report drew on both her own childhood memories and her parenting experience when describing a mother’s unique role as a child’s preferred place of refuge at times of distress. Reflecting on her childhood in her homeland, she told of her mother being gone for many months at a time, leaving her at home with an aunt, uncle, grandma, and other relatives. Although other adults could tend to her needs, she longed for her mother, especially at times of illness: “Sometimes you are so ill and they are not your mother. They didn’t come to ask, ‘What do you need? Do you need drink or food?’”

Most mothers we interviewed raised this notion of mother as the primary source of comfort for children. Related to that was the often-stated belief that mothers are more naturally attuned to children’s emotional needs than other caregivers, including fathers.

When we asked the mothers we surveyed specifically about mothers vis-à-vis fathers, nearly 87% of mothers agreed that mothers and fathers care for children in different ways. Comments from participants in focus groups and individual interviews shed light on the specific ways mothers think they are different from fathers. When asked specifically to compare and contrast mothers and fathers, participants nearly always began with some variation on the theme of mothers as more natural nurturers. For example, one mother commented on a mother’s empathy and intuition, claiming “women are more concerned about people’s emotions and feelings, you know.” She added, “Not that a man can’t do those things, but ...” Similarly, another mother said, “I know a lot of men that have that motherly instinct in there also, but I think the majority of men don’t have

There is something unique about mothers. [My child] has two mothers. So we actually talk about this a lot ... We shared being up at night — very egalitarian. But there is definitely something specific about being [the] birth parent that both of us [mothers] recognize.... There is a connection that is much more intense — just really different. I think that my sense of responsibility is much greater because of being the birth parent. I would guess that if we were in a heterosexual relationship that would be true of the mom more than the dad, but I don’t know.... There is a connection that is that much more intense — just really different.

— Mother of 2-year-old son, in committed relationship with partner



the instinct that a mother has for raising children.” Yet another said, “Women have the nurturing gene. You know by the look in your child’s eyes when they’re sick. I can sit there and go, ‘I think she’s sick.’”

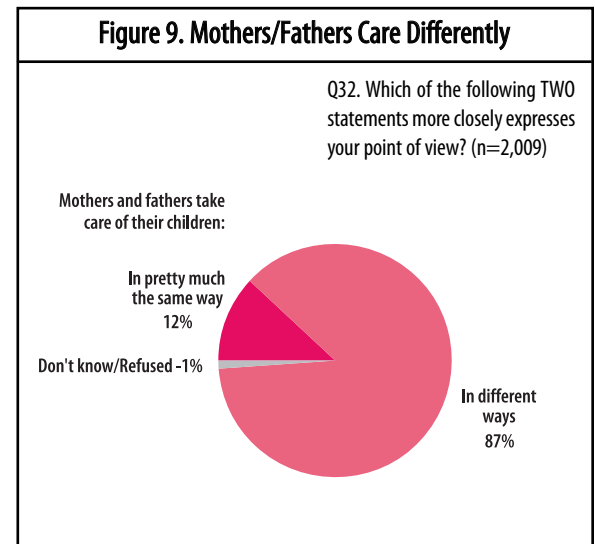
Mothers went on to describe how those differences play out in day-to-day interactions between parents and children. For example, one mother observed, “Dads do rough and tumble play, but moms are more tender. Dads push kids to try new things, to be strong, while moms focus on keeping them safe.”

Commenting on how this happens in her own family, she said, “There’s a big difference between what I WILL allow and what he WANTS to allow.” This mother was quick to add that both of these roles — that of mother and father — contribute to the good development of children.

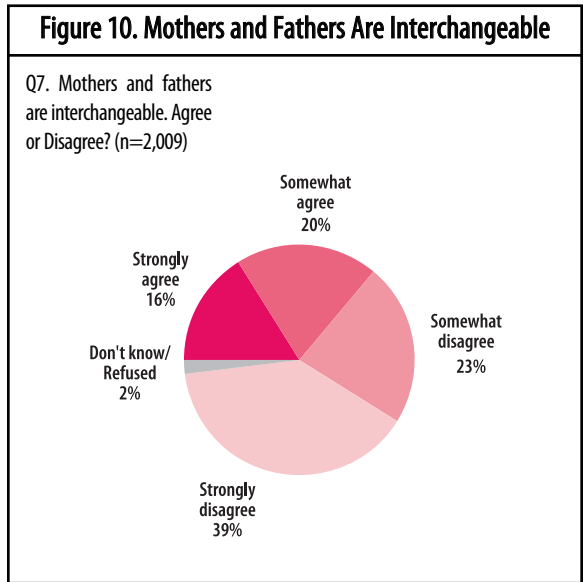
Mothers also talked often about the constancy with which they hold children in their minds — from taking responsibility for seeing that children do their homework to remembering to ask how a child resolved a conflict with a classmate. Consistent with what many mothers described, one full-time employed mother from a Southern city said, “Mothers worry, protect, deal with the heart of the matter.... I identify the problems, the issues and invite my husband to help me address them. He doesn’t notice the problems. I can ask him to take our son to the doctor or to a special event, but he would never think to schedule an annual appointment.” Going on to describe many examples of the “mental responsibility” mothers take for making sure their children’s needs are met, she concludes, “A mother is a mother.”

It is important to note though that, even as mothers talked about their unique contributions to their children’s lives, they seemed to leave open the possibility that fathers could do the same things. Mothers often followed their descriptions of the differences between mothers and fathers with such statements as, “not that a father couldn’t do those things, but ...”

This view may, in part, explain why when we asked in the survey specifically about the interchangeability of mothers and fathers, about 62% disagreed (39% “strongly”) with the statement that mothers and fathers are interchangeable. But more than a third (36%) agreed (16% “strongly”) that mothers and fathers are interchangeable, with mothers with lower incomes and less education most likely to agree with that statement.



This finding is intriguing in light of respondents’ strong endorsement of the uniqueness of mothers’ contributions and also their relatively consistent statements about the different ways mothers and fathers care for children. Further research is needed to sort out more specifically what mothers today believe about what they contribute to their children’s upbringing as compared to what fathers and other caregivers bring. It also would be fruitful to learn more about fathers’ beliefs about their own contributions and those of mothers.



Mothers in their Families

We asked mothers in our study a variety of questions about life within their families — about the division of responsibilities, satisfaction with the relationships with their partners, and the emotional support they receive for themselves. And, in analyzing data throughout the study, we explored the ways family variables, such as marital status or age of children relate to other variables describing mothers’ experiences and well-being.

For these mothers, being married is associated with higher income and greater satisfaction with life as a mother. For example, about 16% of married mothers reported annual family incomes less than \$40,000, compared to 35% of mothers living with a partner and 73% of mothers who were unmarried and not living with a partner. Compared to women living with a partner but not married, married mothers are somewhat more likely to be “very” satisfied with their lives as mothers (88% as compared to 80%). However, both of these groups are significantly more likely to be “very” satisfied

Table 1. Satisfaction with Life as Mother by Marital Status*

Q3. In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your life as a mother?

	Total n=2005	Married n=1486	Living as married n=109	Not married and not living as married n=407
Very satisfied	81%	88%	80%	62%
Somewhat satisfied	16	10	16	31
Somewhat dissatisfied	2	1	0	3
Very dissatisfied	1	1	3	3

**Note: For all tables, any discrepancy between total n and the sum of the subgroups is due to missing data for respondents who refused or answered “don’t know.”*

with their lives than mothers who are neither married nor living with a partner (62%).

Married mothers reported a high level of satisfaction with their relationships with their spouses, with 81% saying they are “very” satisfied and almost 14% saying they are “somewhat” satisfied. A strong majority of mothers living with partners but not married also were satisfied with their relationships, but were less likely than married mothers to say they are “very” satisfied (69% “very” satisfied, 22% “somewhat” satisfied). It is important to remember, however, that relationships with high levels of dissatisfaction were likely to have ended — attrition, so to speak — through divorce or separation. These satisfaction findings were only for those mothers whose relationships had endured. (For our sample as a whole, a little more than nine percent of mothers classified their current status as “divorced,” more than five percent as “separated,” and more than 10 percent as “never married.”)

Marital status figures prominently in many questions addressed in this study. Particularly when we examine subgroup differences (such as comparisons by income level or race), it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which observed differences are attributable to those factors or to marital status, which is strongly related to those factors. But the findings here are consistent with other studies showing that married mothers have higher levels of maternal satisfaction and well-being (e.g. Aronson & Huston, 2004).

Within their families, mothers on the whole reported carrying a great deal of responsibility for childrearing. Nearly 44% said they alone have primary responsibility for their children’s day-to-day upbringing, while about 49% share responsibility with their spouse or partner. Of those who share responsibility with someone (not necessarily their spouse or partner), about 66% reported that they provide more than 50% of the daily care.

Figure 11. Married Mothers’ Satisfaction with Relationship

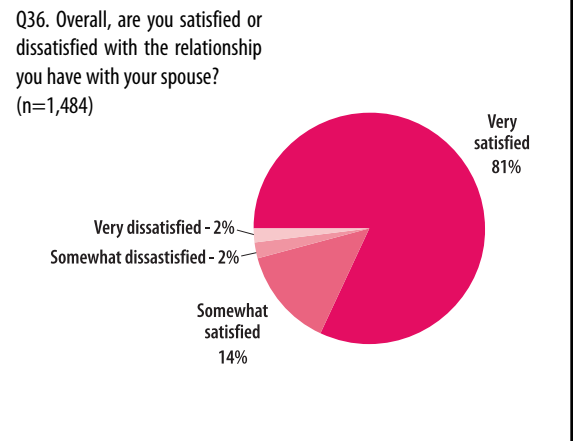
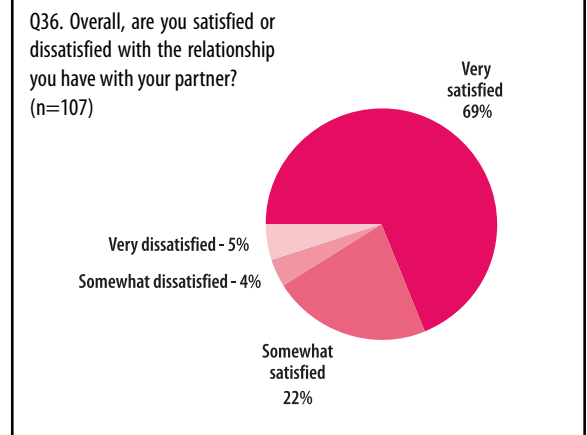


Figure 12. Cohabiting Mothers’ Satisfaction with Relationship



When asked about their satisfaction with how much responsibility they carry, about 81% of all mothers surveyed said they were “somewhat” or “very” satisfied, as shown in Figure 14. We also asked about responsibility for the financial support of the family. About 24% of the mothers surveyed said they have sole responsibility for the financial support of their family, while 38% reported that their spouse alone has that responsibility. Among both African-American mothers and mothers of Hispanic origin, the percent reporting that they have sole financial responsibility was much higher (47% for each of those groups, compared to only 17% of white mothers).

Just over 36% of all mothers surveyed said they share financial responsibility with their spouse. Not surprisingly, mothers with a child under the age of six were more likely to report that their spouse or partner has sole responsibility for the financial support of the family (44% as compared to 32% for mothers who do not have a child under the age of six).

Of mothers who share financial responsibility with someone (not necessarily their spouse or partner), over 42% say they carry 50% of the financial responsibility (the most common response to that question) and about another 17% say they carry more than half of the responsibility. (Note that the question asked about “financial support,” which may have been construed more broadly than

Figure 13. Responsibility for Daily Upbringing

Q58. Who is primarily responsible for the day-to-day upbringing of your children? (n=2,009)

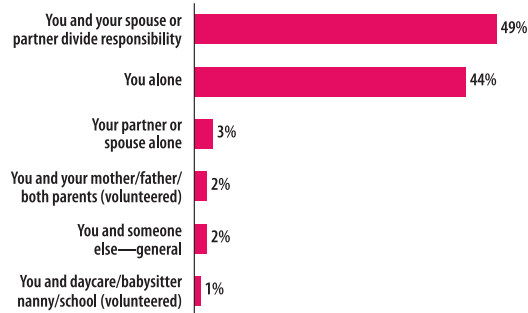


Figure 14. Satisfaction with Responsibility for Daily Upbringing

Q60. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with this arrangement? (Follow-up to Figure 13) (n=2,009)

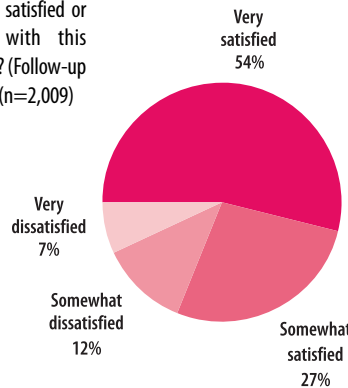
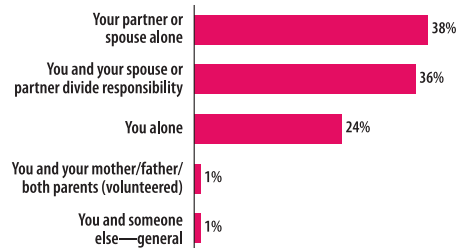


Figure 15. Responsibility for Financial Support of Family

Q61. Who is primarily responsible for providing the day-to-day financial support of your family? (n=2,009)



Q58. Who is primarily responsible for the upbringing of your children?	Total n=1955	Married n=1466	Living as married n=105	Not married and not living as married n=383
You alone	45%	32%	44%	83%
Your partner or spouse alone	3	3	9	1
You and your spouse or partner divide responsibility	50	65	45	12
You and someone else (specify who)	2	1	2	4

Q61. Who is primarily responsible for the day-to-day financial support of your family?	Total n=1993	Married n=1486	Living as married n=109	Not married and not living as married n=396
You alone	24%	5%	20%	77%
Your partner or spouse alone	38	50	45	4
You and your spouse or partner divide responsibility	37	45	33	16
You and someone else (specify who)	1	0	2	4

income. It is unlikely that such a large percentage of mothers contribute 50% or more of the family's earned income.)

Of course mothers who are neither married nor living with a partner have even greater responsibility, both for childrearing and financial support of the family. For example, 83% of them reported having sole responsibility for the day-to-day upbringing of their children, compared to 32% of married mothers and 44% of those living with a partner. Nonetheless, 71% of the single mothers still reported being "somewhat" or "very" satisfied with those arrangements. Regarding financial support of the family, 77% of single mothers said they alone are financially responsible, compared with five percent of married mothers and 20% of mothers living with a partner.

The level of childrearing responsibility carried by African-American mothers stands out when we look at subgroups by race. However, differences appear to be

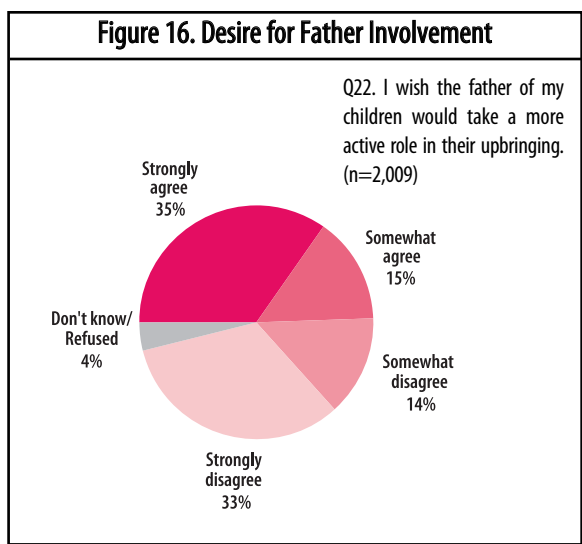
explained largely by marital status, with only 34% of African-American mothers married, as compared to 77% of white mothers and 71% of “other” mothers.

In the overall sample, mothers are nearly evenly split as to whether they want the father of their children more actively involved in their upbringing. Mothers with less education and lower incomes were more likely to say they want greater father involvement. They also are much less likely to be married and they bear much more responsibility for both the day-to-day care of the children and the financial support of the family, so it is not surprising they would call for more father involvement.

Looking at responses to this question separately by race and ethnicity, we also find significant group differences. Fifty-six percent of African-American mothers and 49% of mothers of Hispanic origin wished for greater father involvement, compared to 28% of white mothers.

As mothers talked to us in focus groups and individual interviews about the fathers of their children, a picture emerged of two very different worlds. On the one hand, many married mothers strongly stated they would not wish for more involvement on the part of their children’s father because he already is as involved in their care as anyone can be. In one mother’s words, her husband “does all the things I do with them.” Another mother described her husband as “very involved, although he does very different things than I do.” She said when it comes to things around the house (e.g. laundry, cooking, knowing where things go), he “doesn’t have a clue.” But she said, “he takes the kids rock-climbing ... and does all kinds of things with them that I don’t do. We both love the kids and we both work to teach them what they need to know.” These and other mothers expressed a deep appreciation for what their spouses bring to their lives and to the lives of their children, and several mothers noted how much more involved these fathers are in the children’s daily lives than the generations of fathers before them.

At the other end of the spectrum, we heard some mothers deride or dismiss their children’s absent fathers. For example, when one mother who indicated her marital status as “separated” was asked if she would like to see the father more actively involved in the upbringing of her children, she answered with a laugh, “You mean let’s pretend they have a father?” The interviewer then said, “Your children don’t have a father?” to which the mother replied, “No. They never have.”

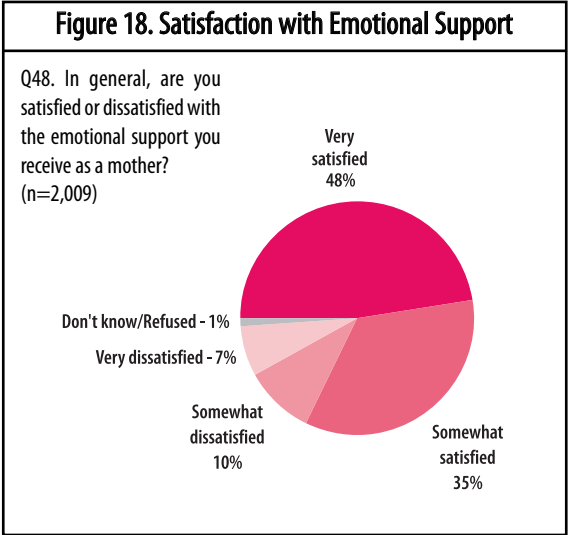
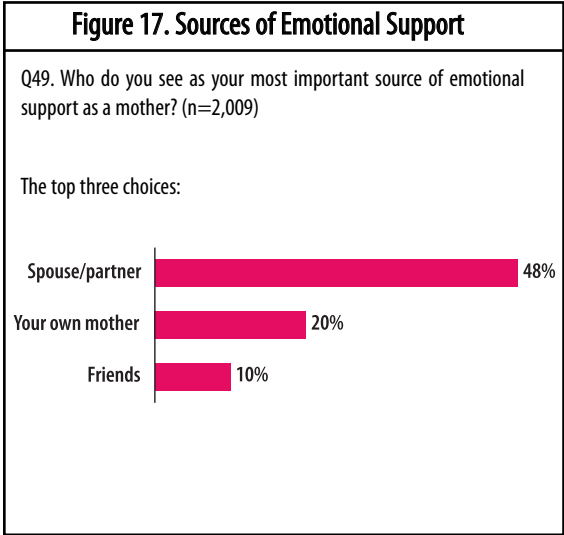


Another mother of four said she certainly would like to see her children’s fathers involved, adding, “All their fathers vanished!” She went on to describe how the father of one child abandoned her and their son to be with another woman and a child he had with her. She bemoaned how many men have one child after another with one woman after another. She then described how the father of her other son almost killed the young child, a crime for which he served time in jail.

Much has been written elsewhere about factors that underlie these dramatic differences in father involvement — including, for example, employment opportunities and economic factors, family of origin influences, and the quality of the relationship between mother and father. Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1996), in a comprehensive review of that research, conclude that a father’s tie to his children is much more vulnerable to external influences than a mother’s. Mothers remain mothers almost no matter what. The range of stories we heard from mothers in our study brings that notion to life.

We also asked mothers about who provides emotional support for them and how satisfied they are with the support they receive. Mothers most often named their spouse as their primary source of emotional support (48%). (Among married mothers that figure was 68%; among mothers living with a partner it was 52%; and, among mothers who were unmarried and not living with a partner, it was nine percent.) For the whole sample, 20% named their own mother, while 10% identified friends as their primary source of support. For the sample as a whole, most mothers (83%) expressed satisfaction with the emotional support they receive, with 48% saying they are “very” satisfied.

Many mothers told us they wish they had more time to spend on personal and family relationships, with nearly 61% “strongly” agreeing and 22% “somewhat” agreeing with that statement. Mothers who were neither married nor living with a



partner were even more likely to express this wish (79% “strongly” agreeing, compared with 55% of married and 60% of mothers living with a partner). This may be because their greater financial and caregiving responsibilities leave them with less time for other pursuits.

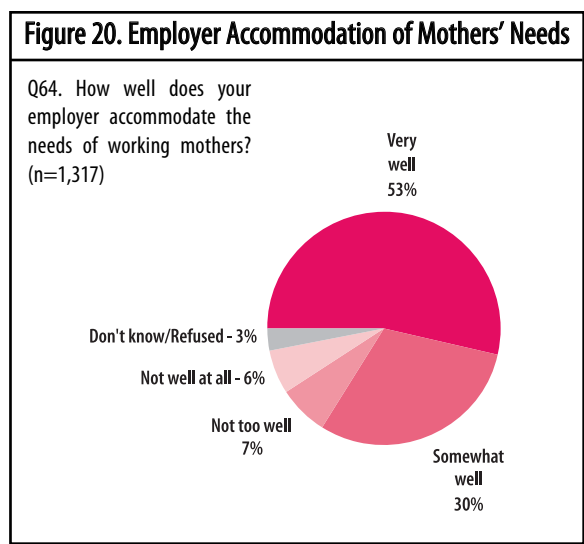
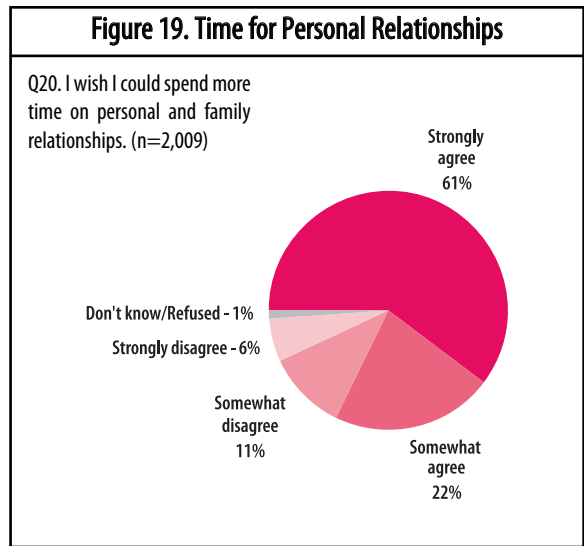
Mothers in the Workplace

We asked mothers several questions related to employment, including their current work status, how well their employer accommodates the needs of mothers in the workplace, and what their ideal work arrangement would be if they had a choice. We also asked about the type of childcare arrangements mothers used and how satisfied they are with those arrangements.

Consistent with the high levels of satisfaction reported in other aspects of their lives, many mothers in our study gave their employers credit for accommodating the needs of working mothers. Among employed mothers more than 83% reported that their employer accommodates their needs as working mothers, and nearly 53% said their employer does so “very well.” This appears to be somewhat more likely among mothers in families with higher incomes, but is generally true for mothers across all income levels.

When we asked mothers in individual interviews about the ways in which their employers accommodate their needs, mothers mentioned such things as allowing them to bring the child to work with them when he or she was sick or school was out of session; letting them take extra time off to care for a child; allowing them to work from home at times; or, generally, being flexible about hours and letting them make up missed work later.

Despite mothers’ recognition of their employers’ efforts to accommodate their needs, we noted a striking gap between mothers’ current work

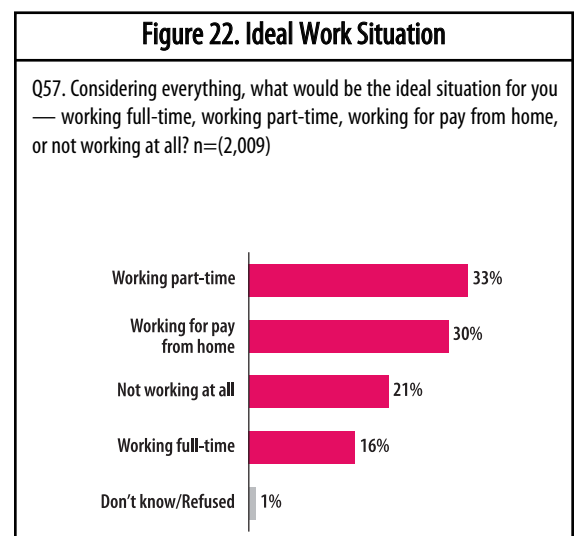
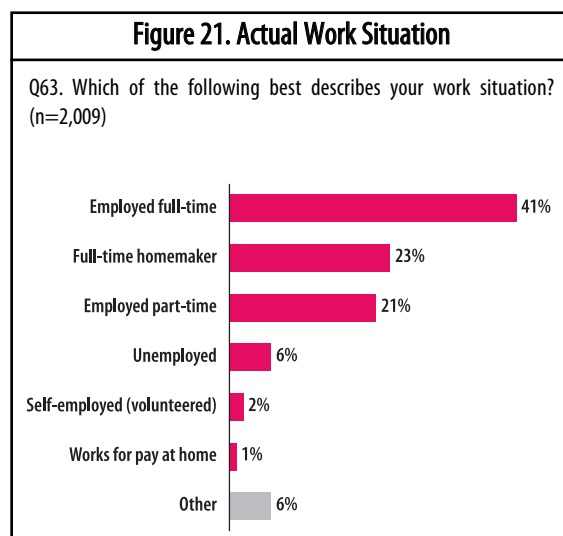


status and their ideal work arrangement. For example, currently more than 41% of the mothers we studied work full-time. (For mothers with a child under six years of age, the figure is 35%, compared to 46% of mothers who do not have a child under six.) However, only about 16% of mothers across the entire sample said they would prefer full-time work if they could choose their ideal work situation. (Interestingly, mothers with no more than a high school education actually were the most likely to express a preference for full-time work — 20% compared with 13% of mothers with some college and 12% of mothers with a bachelor’s degree or more.)

While about 21% of mothers surveyed currently work part-time, almost 33% of all mothers said they would prefer to do so. Just over one percent of mothers in our sample work for pay from home, while nearly 30% said they would prefer to do so. Married mothers were significantly more likely to be in their preferred work situation, although there still was a large gap between reality and their ideal, particularly for mothers whose preference was to work part-time or for pay at home.

One of the few women we interviewed who actually is in her ideal work situation talked emotionally about how her life was transformed when she left a demanding job as a corporate executive when her son was seven years old. Up to that point she typically had put in 12-hour workdays while a nanny cared for her son. But now she works from home as an independent realtor, allowing her and her family to have meals together several nights a week and allowing her to be “room mother” at her son’s school. In her words, “This is as good as it gets.”

Looking at the employment data another way, among mothers who are currently employed (either part- or full-time), 13% say they would rather not be employed at all. In contrast, among mothers who are NOT employed, 62% said they would prefer to work, with 10% stating a preference to work full-time and 52% saying they would



rather work part-time or for pay at home. Overall, a majority of mothers would prefer to be employed but few prefer full-time.

This finding matches other research showing that most women desire to work but would prefer more flexible arrangements — not only flexibility in the ways the mothers mentioned in our interviews, but also flexibility over the course of their development (i.e. career “off- and on-ramps” as other caregiving demands wax and wane). (See, for example, Hewlett & Luce, 2005 and Moen, 2003. And, for a theoretical discussion of these issues, see also Williams, 2000.)

When we asked mothers about their use of childcare, 37% of mothers with a child under six said they have a child in childcare either full-time (22%) or part-time (15%). Of those using childcare, 52% use childcare centers. (The use of center-based care was about the same across all income levels.) For those not using center-based care, mothers in families with lower income levels are more likely to use a friend or relative as a provider.

Across the board, mothers expressed high levels of satisfaction with childcare, with 79% of mothers with a child under six saying they are “very” satisfied and almost 17% “somewhat” satisfied with their current arrangements. Although very few mothers expressed dissatisfaction, mothers in families with lower income levels were more likely to be dissatisfied.

Table 4. Ideal Work Situation by Current Employment Status

Q57. What would be the ideal situation for you? (n=1,999)

	Total	Currently employed?	
		Employed	Not employed
Working full-time	16%	19%	10%
Working part-time	33	39	23
Working for pay from home	30	30	29
Not working at all	22	13	38

Figure 23. Mothers with Children under Age 6: Type of Childcare

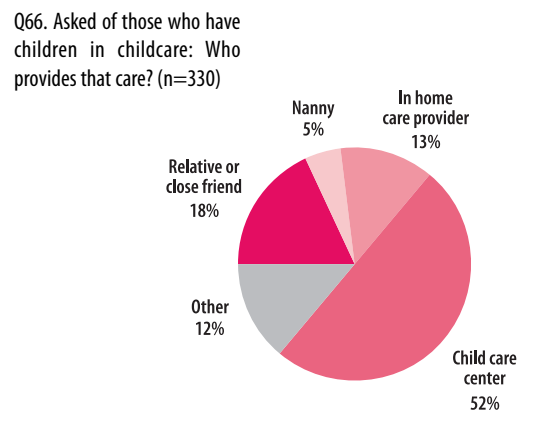
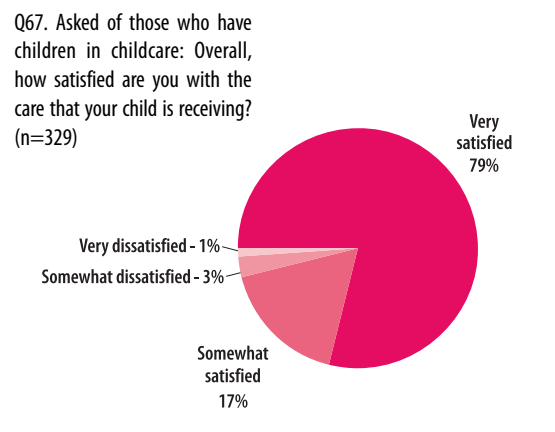


Figure 24. Mothers with Children under Age 6: Satisfaction with Childcare



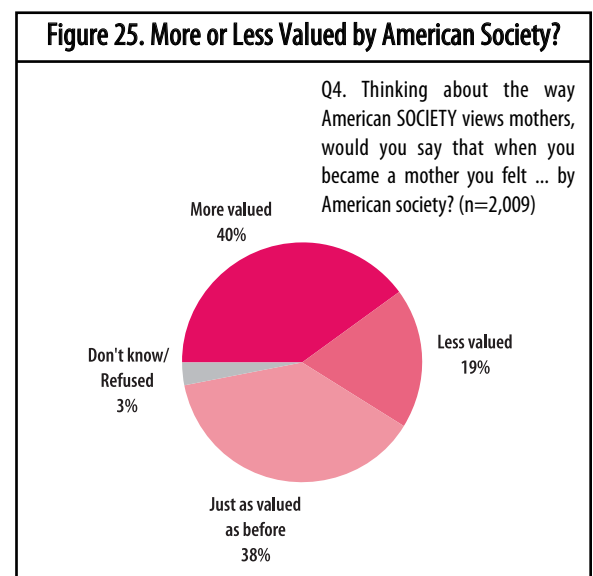
Interestingly, when we compare mothers who are employed outside the home with those who are not, we find almost no significant differences in their responses throughout the survey. The only exceptions are that employed mothers are more likely to wish they could spend more time with their children (63% compared with 33% of non-employed mothers) and on personal and family relationships (89% compared with 74% of non-employed mothers). Beyond that, mothers' attitudes, values, concerns and needs are much the same whether a mother works outside the home or not.

Mothers in Society

Our study also asked mothers to think about the larger society in which they live — in particular, how society values them, how well it meets their needs and those of their children and families, and what it expects of them as mothers. Looking back to when they first became mothers, a majority of the women we surveyed said they felt more or equally valued by society as they had before they became mothers (40% and 38%, respectively, for a total of 78%).

About one in five women (19%) said they felt less valued after becoming mothers. There were significant differences in these responses depending on the level of education the women had attained, with 48% of women with a high school education or less saying they felt more valued after becoming a mother, compared to 35-36% of women who had at least some college experience. One might surmise that women with less education felt less valued by society to begin with and thus had more to gain in the eyes of society when they took on the important role of mother.

Comments of several women in focus groups and individual interviews reflected that sense of new status upon becoming a mother for those women who did not have a strong career identity prior to having children. Other women felt they lost status when they left a good career to stay home full-time. As one mother said, “Now people ask what I do and when they find out I stay home with kids they say, ‘Oh, that’s so easy.’ But it’s really hard!” But some mothers pointed to the high value conferred on a mother who is able to strike a balance between meaningful,



manageable work and being an involved, available mother. In one mother's words, "I felt like I really had made it when I had a career, a husband and a child."

When we asked respondents to judge how well society meets the needs of mothers, children, and families, responses were more variable. But on all three questions a majority (about 54-59%) indicated that society does not do a good job of meeting those needs. Mothers with a higher level of education were most likely to say society does not do a good job. For example, when presented with the statement, "As a society, we are doing a good job of meeting the needs of children," 65% of mothers with a bachelor's degree or more disagreed, compared to 64% of mothers with some college and 52% of mothers with a high school education or less. As shown in Table 5, results were similar when mothers were asked about society's response to the needs of mothers and families.

While many mothers see society as falling short of meeting their needs, even more see society as expecting a great deal from them. Almost 88% of the mothers we surveyed said they believe society expects more from mothers than anyone else when it comes to looking out for children. And most mothers (73%) see both good and bad in that expectation.

Table 5. Society Is Meeting the Needs of ...

Q9-11. As a society, we are doing a good job of meeting the needs of ... (n=1,919 to 1,923)

Mothers' Educational Attainment			
	Less than or equal to high school	Some college	B.A. or above
Mothers	n=507	n=611	n=792
Agree	54%	41%	38%
Disagree	46	59	62
Children	n=508	n=617	n=798
Agree	48%	36%	35%
Disagree	52	64	65
Families	n=507	n=612	n=796
Agree	50%	37%	35%
Disagree	50	63	65

In follow-up interviews asking mothers to elaborate on what constitutes the good and the bad in those high expectations, mothers talked about the downside in terms of the pressure they feel to do so much and to do it so well. Similarly, in pre-survey interviews and focus groups, mothers talked at length about challenges of dealing with society's expectations as well as their own. One mother put it this way: "I just think that sometimes we put all the burden on ourselves. We have to slap ourselves sometimes because we don't allow the man ... don't allow the father to take some of the responsibilities."

Another mother said, "I just feel like there is not really an even playing field for women. [Men] put in so many more hours, so much travel, so much more into their career experiences than I'm willing or prepared to do. So certainly there is going to be an inequity.... And I hope there comes a day where it's not really a gender issue, it's a family issue ... that there is more balance between work and family as a whole."

But even as they acknowledged the pressure they feel, mothers were adamant that society should expect a lot from mothers. They noted that children absolutely need a mother who is there, who meets their needs and "keeps things running smoothly." Some mothers observed that the high expectations show that society recognizes that what mothers do really matters. In the words of one mother, "Of course the expectations are high — and should be high. We're mothers, for God's sake!"

Regardless of whether mothers see society's expectations of them as good, bad or some of both, to a very large extent mothers seem to want to live up to those expectations. For example, more than 92% of the women we surveyed agreed (78% "strongly," 14% "somewhat") with the statement, "After becoming a mother, I found myself caring more about the well-being of all children, not just my own."

Also, 79% said that mothers are more responsible than other adults for children in general. The responsibility mothers have for their own children's upbringing, as discussed in the earlier section on "Mothers in their Families," reinforces this picture as well. Overall, our findings suggest that mothers feel society's high expectations and have high expectations for themselves — and they strive to meet them.

Mothers' Views of the Culture

To find out more about mothers' concerns and needs, we began our survey by asking open-ended questions to see what mothers would name spontaneously as the most pressing concerns for themselves and their children. Then, throughout the survey, we presented statements based on issues that had been raised by mothers in the focus groups and in-depth individual interviews prior to the development of the survey. We wanted to see how widespread the concerns raised by those small groups of mothers were among a large sample of mothers from different walks of life. Similarly, we presented a list of possible changes that might be brought about in our society and asked mothers to indicate how high a priority they thought each of those

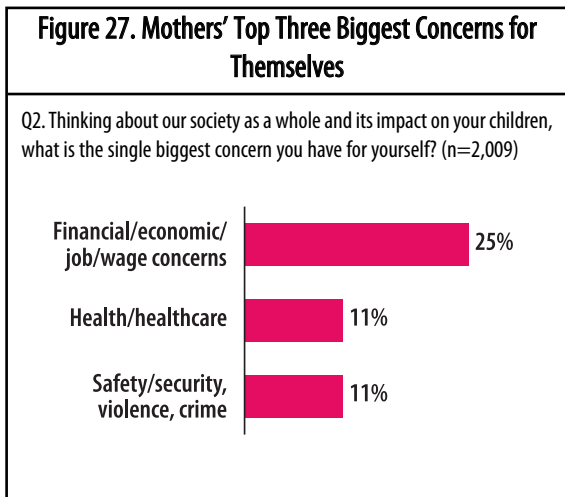
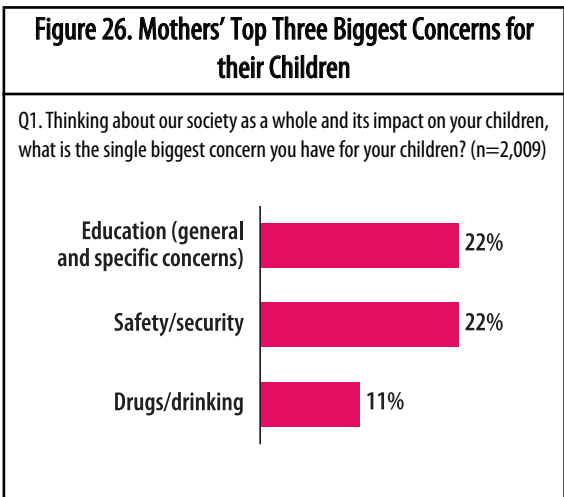
changes should be in order to make the world a better place for mothers, children, and families. We also asked mothers about their interest in seeing more mothers and fathers join forces to address concerns, and we asked whether mothers currently were involved in groups working to improve things for themselves and their children.

When asked to name their single biggest concern for their children, mothers most often cited education (i.e. general concerns about the quality of their child’s education or specific concerns, such as getting into college) or safety and security. Each of those concerns was named by 22% of mothers surveyed. Education was more likely to be named as the number one concern for children among African-American and mothers of Hispanic origin, unmarried mothers, and those with lower incomes and fewer years of education. After education and safety and security, the next most often named concern for children was drugs and drinking, with 11% of mothers naming that as their biggest concern.

In response to an open-ended question about their single biggest concern for themselves, mothers most often named finances (25%), healthcare (11%), or safety (11%). Mothers with lower incomes, unmarried mothers, and African-American mothers were more likely than other mothers in our sample to cite financial issues as their top concern for themselves. This is not surprising given the level of responsibility these mothers bear for both the daily upbringing of their children and financial support of their families, as discussed earlier in this report.

The identification of finances as mothers’ top concern is further underscored by the second and fifth most common categories of concern named by mothers in our sample: healthcare and retirement/social security/aging/preparing for the future. These findings suggest a feeling of financial vulnerability among mothers, an issue explored in depth by Ann Crittenden in *The Price of Motherhood* (2001).

As one young single mother said, “Right now [I’m trying to] find a place to live and a good job that I won’t have to worry about paying my bills the next month



ahead. But I know I need education before I can get that kind of job.... That's what I need to move on and move up with my life so that my son sees that. He sees mom trying her hardest to take care of him and take care of herself."

In the words of another mother, "I wish our cost of living and our cost of educating our children wasn't so burdensome so that families didn't have to just work so hard, which pulls them away from time with their children. It's the cost of healthcare. It's the cost of education. It's just the cost of daily life. I wish it was a little less burdensome."

Interestingly, when we asked mothers in focus groups and individual interviews to talk separately about concerns for themselves and concerns for their children, nearly all mothers struggled to separate the two. Their first response was to talk about their children. When pushed to talk about her own needs, one mother said, "What's good for the children is good for the mothers," a sentiment that seemed to be widespread among the mothers from whom we heard.

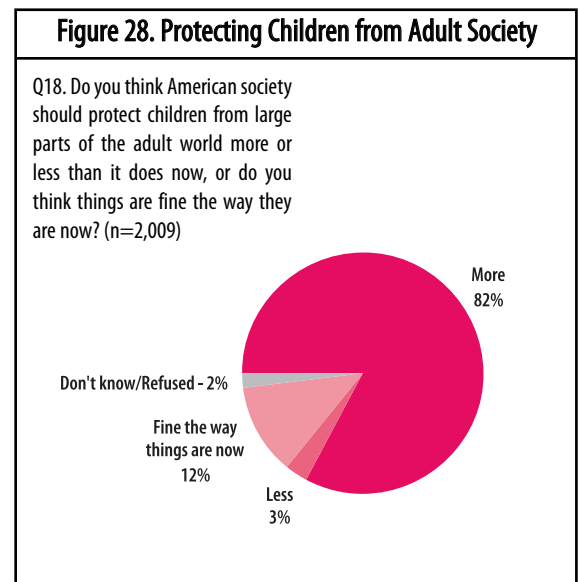
Beyond the concerns mothers named in response to open-ended questions, mothers we surveyed also identified many other concerns in response to agree/disagree statements and/or multiple choice items on the questionnaire. As shown in Figure 28 and Table 6, nearly 9 in 10 mothers (88%) agreed with the statement, "money has too much control over our lives." Eighty-six percent agreed (64% "strongly") that childhood should be a time when children are protected from large parts of the adult world, and 82% said American society should protect children from large parts of the adult world more than it does now.

Most mothers (87%) are concerned about the influence of advertisements on their children and, similarly, the influence of media more generally (88%). Ninety-five percent of mothers agreed they wish American culture made it easier to instill

Table 6. Mothers' Concerns

Q5, Q17, Q23, Q24, Q19, Q25 (n=2,009)

	Percent of all mothers agreeing
I wish American culture made it easier to instill positive values in children	95%
Money has too much control over our lives	88
I am concerned about the influence of the media on my children	88
I am concerned about the influence of advertisements on my children	87
Childhood should be a time when children are protected from large parts of the adult world	86
I worry about my children not being able to find spouses or partners who share their moral values	62

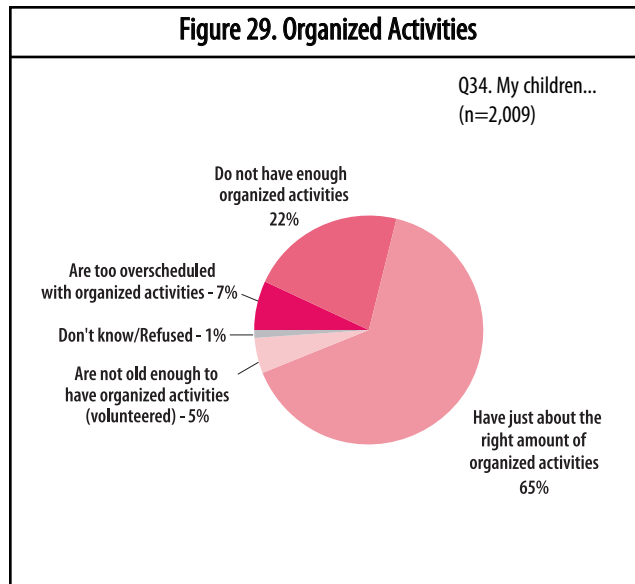


positive values in children. Looking to the future, 62% of mothers said they worry about their children being able to find spouses or partners who share their moral values. (This is somewhat less of a worry for mothers who are married, have a higher level of family income, and have more years of education.)

When asked how they feel about the number of organized activities their children have, almost two-thirds (65%) of mothers said they think their children have just about the right number.

Only seven percent said they think their children are too overscheduled with organized activities, while 22% said their children do not have enough organized activities. The latter concern was strongest among mothers in low-income families, which could be due to the fact that they have inadequate resources to enroll their children in organized activities — or live in communities where such opportunities are lacking.

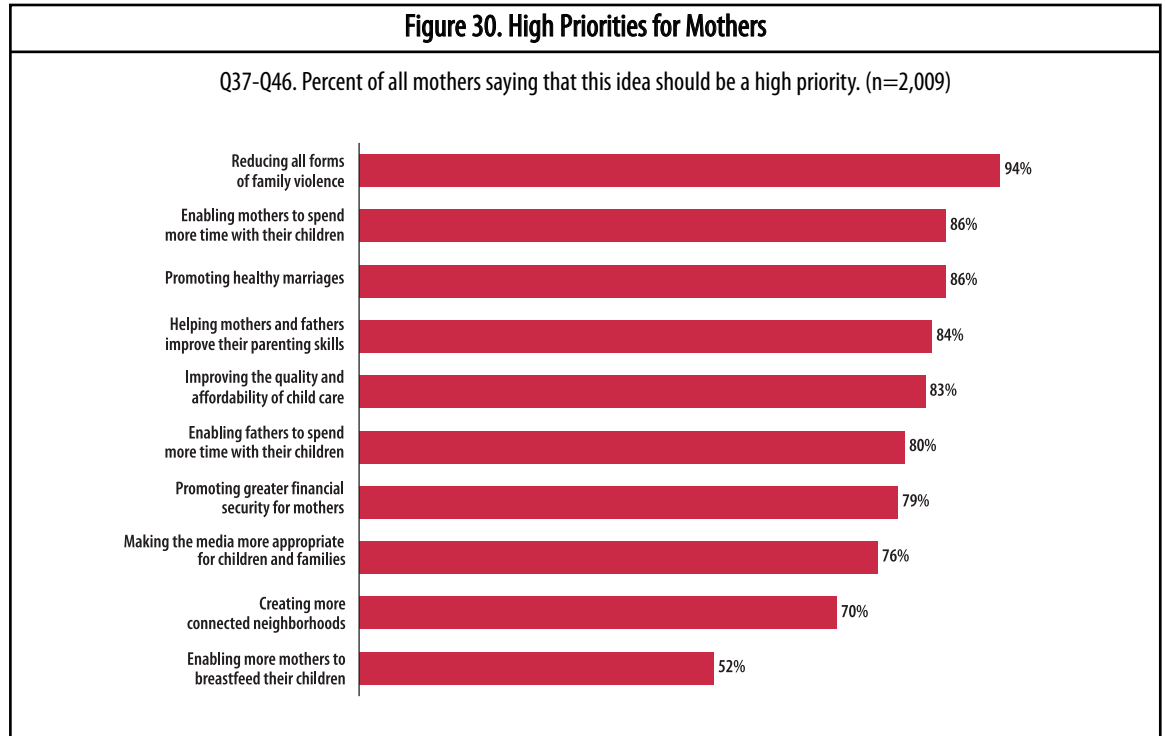
When we presented mothers with a list of possible changes in society, their responses indicated that all of the suggested changes are salient and resonate with them, albeit some more than others. The three items mothers most often indicated should be a high priority were: 1) reducing all forms of family violence (94%); 2) enabling mothers to spend more time with their children (86%); and 3) promoting healthy marriages (86%). (Married mothers were more likely to rate promoting healthy marriages as a high priority — 89% compared to 79% of mothers who are not married.) Mothers also assigned high priority to improving parenting skills, improving the quality and affordability of childcare, enabling fathers to spend more time with their children, making media more appropriate for children and families, creating more connected neighborhoods for children, and enabling more mothers to breastfeed their children. However, given that a strong majority of mothers identified every item as warranting a high priority, these results yield little data on which to prioritize items. (With a telephone survey, it was not feasible to ask respondents to rank order the social change items, which would have required that they have a list in front of them.) Figure 30 (on page 38) shows the percent of mothers who rated as a “high priority” each of the action items presented to them in the survey. In addition to assessing the priority of each item presented to them, nine percent of mothers also volunteered that they would like to see better and more affordable education for children in America.



How can we make wholesome cool?

—Married suburban mother

Figure 30. High Priorities for Mothers



In follow-up interviews we asked mothers why they thought reducing family violence received such a high endorsement from survey respondents. Mothers talked about the “domino effect,” the way children carry that violence into the community and into the next generation. For example, one mother said, “Kids who see violence become violent. It affects everyone.” Another noted, “Violence begets violence. Kids learn violence and pass it on — and that’s a serious problem that affects our whole community.” Some mothers also talked about the emotional pain children suffer when they experience or witness violence in their homes, pain that lasts a lifetime.

We also asked in follow-up interviews why mothers thought promoting healthy marriages was so important. Married or single, mothers emphasized a strong relationship between mother and father as the foundation of a strong family and an important example for children. In one mother’s words, “What kids see is what they do. They need to see respect and communication.” When asked how healthy marriages could be promoted, mothers emphasized communication as key and called for more widespread efforts to teach people how to communicate and to provide counseling for couples who are struggling.

When we asked about the action item of enabling mothers to spend more time with their children, mothers talked about the importance to children of knowing someone is there for them. They talked about the time it takes to instill life’s important lessons of morality, problem-solving, positive behavior — lessons that are taught primarily in the family. But when we asked how mothers could be enabled

to spend more time with their children, respondents generally said mothers just need to choose to do it.

Thinking of ways to address concerns and work toward improvement, 72% of mothers agreed that more mothers in positions of power in American society would make life better for mothers and children. Younger mothers were more likely to agree with this than those who are 45 or older.

Mothers we surveyed strongly endorsed the idea of parents uniting to address concerns. Nearly 99% of respondents agreed they would like to see more mothers and fathers working together to reduce the negative influences on children in American society.

About 30% of mothers surveyed reported that they currently are involved in groups working to improve the lives of mothers, children, or families. Mothers in families with lower income levels are less likely to be involved than mothers in higher income brackets — not a surprising finding considering the responsibilities those mothers carry for their children’s upbringing and their family’s financial support (as discussed in earlier sections of this report).

Mothers reporting higher levels of religious involvement also are much more likely to be involved in social-change groups focused on mothers, children and families (41% of mothers with high levels of religious involvement, compared to 24% of mothers with moderate involvement and 18%

Figure 31. More Mothers in Positions of Power

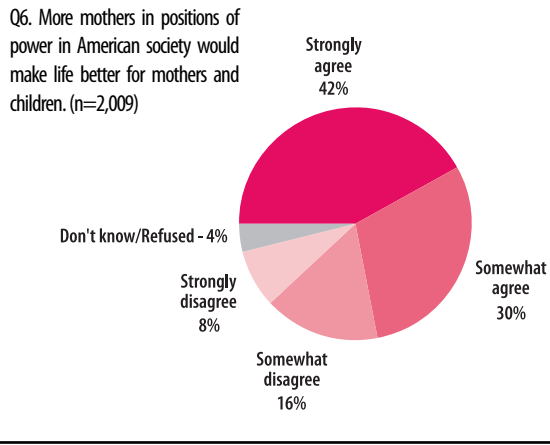


Figure 32. Mothers and Fathers Uniting

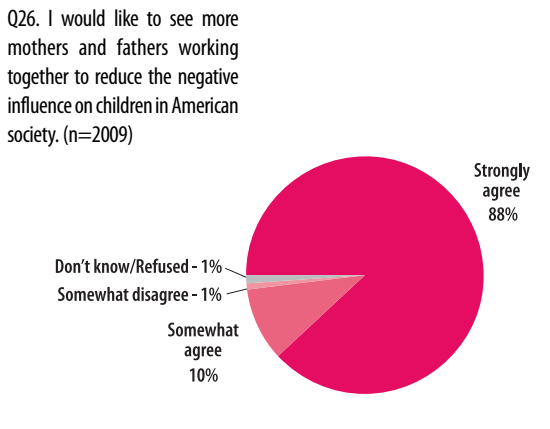
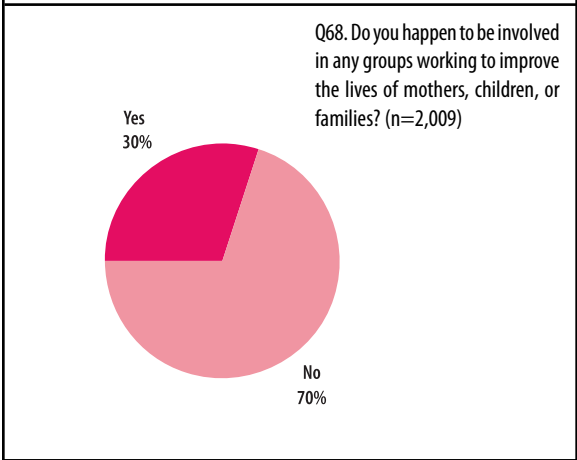


Figure 33. Percent of Mothers Currently Involved in Groups



of mothers with little or no religious involvement). This may be due in part to the fact that many social action groups that engage parents are based in places of worship, as noted by some mothers in our focus groups.

Mothers' responses to questions about the culture strongly suggest that they see themselves as mothering in a relatively hostile environment. As one mother said, "The whole environment is unfriendly." Among concerns mothers

mentioned in focus groups and individual interviews were "sexual encounters going on in elementary schools that parents are not aware of," and "television, the music world ... the vulgarity, the language, the scenes in some of the videos." One mother focused on the fact that "the tolerance level has gotten so high, kids are oblivious, they are way less sensitive, they are desensitized." And yet another mother said, "I think it's up to society to help protect these kids. If they want a civilized society, they should put ... on videos 'For Adults.' I don't know how to correct the situation, but they need to do something to help the parents help themselves."

Interestingly, though, despite strong concern about negative influences on their children and high interest in seeing parents join forces to address those influences, most mothers (nearly 89%) expressed confidence that they can raise their children to be the kind of people they want them to be even in the face of those negative social forces.

This finding is similar to results of two other recent survey studies of Caucasian, African-American and Hispanic families conducted by the Abundant Assets Alliance (2004). Families in those studies were confident they were doing a good job with their children, although they felt constrained by outside forces, such as costly healthcare, limited childcare options, and job loss.

This converges with the picture that emerged from our interviews and focus groups — of mothers working very hard within the "inner circles" of family and local community to protect their children from negative influences

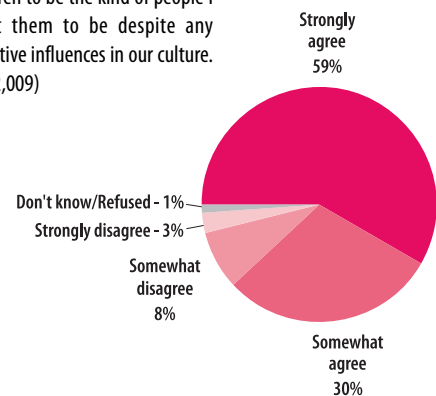
Table 7. Mothers Involved in Groups by Religious Attendance

Q68. Do you happen to be involved with any groups working to improve the lives of mothers, children, or families?

	How often do you attend religious services?		
	Every week or almost every week n=986	Once or twice a month n=275	A few times a year or never n=722
Yes	41%	24%	18%
No	59	76	82

Figure 34. Mothers' Confidence in Raising Children

Q27. I am confident I can raise my children to be the kind of people I want them to be despite any negative influences in our culture. (n=2,009)



and instill positive values even in the face of personal challenges and the larger society's negative characteristics. We heard statements such as, "I'm doing the right things — I'm there for my kids and I teach them to do right." Or, "I'm doing what I need to do, and mothers have a huge influence on how their children turn out." Or, "My husband and I regulate what he's exposed to."

One mother of a pre-adolescent son expressed a sentiment we heard from many mothers when they thought about their children gaining more freedom to be out in the world where parents cannot control things so tightly: "I'm confident I'm doing everything to teach my son what he needs to know. But I'm not really confident when it comes to the years between 13 and 16, when so many other things can influence him no matter what I have taught him. I hope he can 'surf' that dangerous period. I know he'll feel a whole lot of guilt if he does bad things — because of what I've taught him — but he still might do it."

When we listened to mothers talk about the societal forces that can threaten their children's development we were struck by the fact that they had very little sense that they might have the power to change things in the larger society. Nor did they indicate that they saw themselves as part of that larger society (i.e. buying into its values). In their conversations with us and with each other, mothers instead focused primarily on the measures they take to protect their children from outside negative forces by trying to create a safe harbor within the family and neighborhood.

Conclusion

THE MOTHERHOOD STUDY breaks new ground in reaching out to a wide range of mothers from across the United States, bringing them into the public dialogue about mothers, motherhood, and mothering. This large-scale study reveals striking commonalities among mothers, across race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and widely varied life circumstances. The findings offer little fuel for the so-called "mommy wars," the tensions between mothers who are employed outside the home and those who are not. Employed outside the home or not, mothers, to a large extent, express notably similar beliefs, values, and concerns. And, employed outside the home or not, when it comes to work, many mothers long for a middle ground — being employed, but in positions that do not demand so much of their time.

Both in response to survey questions and more in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, women in this study characterize their lives as mothers as rich and rewarding in many ways. They convey powerful feelings about their children, the distinctive love they feel for them, and the overall experience of being a mother. They are unequivocal about the importance of mothering and, to a large degree, the unique contributions of mothers to children's lives. Despite challenges in their daily lives and serious concerns about the broad culture in which they are raising

their children, mothers express high levels of satisfaction with their overall lives as mothers and with aspects of life within the “inner circles” in which they live. This message is consistent with other smaller scale studies of mothers (for example, Hays, 1996, and Pew Research Center, 2000), but contrasts sharply with much of the current public dialogue about motherhood.

Not only do mothers have a strong sense of personal passion for their own children and for the work of mothering; they also have a special sense of responsibility for children in general. Mothers seem to be concerned about the “disappearance of childhood” as the late Neil Postman called it, and the negative influences on children in society. They seem to see themselves, in a sense, as what Postman called “overseers” of childhood (1994, p. 151).

One of the areas of most significant difference among mothers in this study concerns the men in their lives, both as spouses or partners and as fathers. For mothers, being married is associated with economic benefits, personal well-being and satisfaction with life as a mother. In the absence of marriage, living with a partner is associated with higher levels of satisfaction than living without a partner. And mothers who live with a partner (married or not) express relatively high levels of satisfaction with those relationships, although satisfaction is significantly greater for those who are married.

There are wide differences in the way women in this study describe the involvement of fathers in their children’s lives and, therefore, there is a distinct split as to whether mothers want fathers to be more actively involved. Two very different portraits of fathers emerge in this study. At one end of the spectrum we find mothers who are embittered by the lack of responsibility of absent fathers. These mothers say they desire greater father involvement, but they express little hope that it will happen. At the other end of the spectrum are mothers who say their children’s fathers are more involved than fathers ever have been — and therefore they are grateful and satisfied that their children’s fathers are doing all they can do. Certainly there are mothers in the middle, both single and married, who are working with the fathers of their children to find a better balance of responsibility and engagement for both parents. However, with respect to father involvement, the stories of families at both ends of the continuum are striking.

When it comes to mothering, mothers seem to hold a value system that differs in significant ways from that of the larger culture. As Hays (1996) suggested, mothering, as many mothers understand it, “holds a fragile but nonetheless powerful cultural position as the last best defense against what many people see as the impoverishment of social ties, communal obligations, and unremunerated commitments” (p. xiii).

Many mothers seem to be struggling to hold on to values that are being undermined by the larger culture, and the findings of *The Motherhood Study* suggest that mothers want social change. They believe that more mothers in positions of power will make life better for children and families. And they see many things they

would like to change about the larger systems and social forces that affect them and their children.

Three issues identified in the key findings seem to have particular salience with mothers in this study — and appear to be ripe for immediate action. First, mothers place a high priority on reducing family violence and promoting healthy marriages. These are complementary goals and could be the basis for building strong coalitions across the political spectrum. Second, mothers want more attention paid to the matter of financial security for mothers. This issue is on the agenda of a number of mothers' organizations. Mothers are clearly saying they want to press on with the search for creative solutions to mothers' financial vulnerabilities. Third, mothers are saying loud and clear that they want to spend more time with their children and on personal and family relationships. This makes it all the more urgent for employers to create more flexible work arrangements and more accessible off- and on-ramps along job and career highways for mothers — and fathers — to enable families to achieve and sustain a much better balance between employment and the relationships that are so essential to strong families.

Certainly this study leaves unanswered questions, particularly about mothers' beliefs regarding viable ways to bring about the social change they so desire — and their willingness and availability to participate in such efforts. But the study does suggest a widespread desire among mothers for parents to come together to tackle larger societal issues.

Within the nationally representative sample of mothers we studied, 30% of mothers are already involved with groups working to address matters affecting mothers, children, and families. This study did not systematically examine the nature and intent of those groups, but mothers in focus groups and individual interviews primarily described groups tied to schools or places of worship. These existing groups, coupled with mothers' organizations around the country, would seem to offer a solid base for further action. (See, for example, the *Mothering Magazine* Resource Directory at www.mothering.com.)

In the focus groups and in-depth interviews that provided the qualitative information for *The Motherhood Study*, mothers often expressed gratitude that somebody wanted to know what they thought. They were grateful for space and time to share their perspectives and, in some cases, discover more about their own views. In the words of one mother, “I feel I have a better understanding of where I stand on motherhood.” Mothers also wanted to keep talking. One group of mothers in Minnesota lingered for a long time after their focus group adjourned — in the parking lot in the midst of a snowstorm!

We hope that this report will be a catalyst for many more conversations in which mothers and those concerned about the well-being of mothers can express and explore their views and discover ways of working together to address shared concerns. In the pages that follow, we offer starting points for these vital conversations. ■

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Starting Points for Further Reflection, Discussion, and Action on *The Motherhood Study*

Moving the Conversation Forward

An Invitation

We hope *The Motherhood Study* will spark lively conversations in families, neighborhoods, houses of worship, workplaces, mothers' groups, community organizations, and the halls of government — and lead to action for the benefit of mothers.

We invite mothers to explore for themselves the questions posed in *The Motherhood Study* and to use this report as a tool to reflect on their own views and concerns. And we invite all people who care about mothers, children, and families to consider the implications of *The Motherhood Study* for their lives and for the work they do. We offer the suggestions below to get you started. If you would like us to send you periodic “Mothers’ Action Alerts,” please sign on at www.motherhoodproject.org.

A Request

As you continue your discussions, please send us your feedback by visiting our web site at www.motherhoodproject.org and filling out “*The Motherhood Study* Feedback Questionnaire.”

Suggestions for Mothers and Mothers’ Groups

The Motherhood Study raises a host of questions that provide plenty of food for thought and conversation, and we are sure that mothers will generate lots of questions of their own. The following are a few suggestions to help groups of mothers begin their discussions. Many of these suggestions can also be used by mothers for journaling in private.

How would you answer the survey questions?

1. Answer the questions on the survey for yourself. Download the survey from www.motherhoodproject.org, make copies for the mothers in your group, and have everyone take the survey.
2. Each mother in the group can then share her answers to the questions.
3. What questions should the survey have asked that it did not ask?

How do you react to the findings of *The Motherhood Study*?

1. Looking at the “Executive Summary” (pp.5-9) and the “Annotated Questionnaire” (available online at www.motherhoodproject.org), consider the findings of the report. What surprises you most about what mothers in the survey said?
2. What rings most true for you?
3. What does not make sense to you?

What are your biggest concerns?

1. What are your major concerns for yourself as a mother?
2. What are your major concerns for your children?
3. Mothers in the survey named as their biggest concerns for themselves: 1) finances; 2) healthcare; and 3) safety and security. What do you think? How do those concerns compare or contrast with your biggest concerns?
4. Mothers in the survey named as their biggest concerns for their children: 1) education; 2) safety/security; and 3) drugs and drinking. What do you think? How do those concerns compare or contrast with your biggest concerns?
5. How, if at all, does your community currently address the concerns identified by the mothers in your group?
6. What, if anything, might the mothers in your group do together to address the concerns you identified?
7. What, if any, assets or resources are available to help you address these concerns?
8. From whom might mothers need help or support in order to address these concerns?

How satisfied are you with your life as a mother?

1. Looking specifically at the satisfaction questions in the survey (e.g., Q3, Q31, Q36, Q48, Q60, Q64, Q67 in the “Annotated Questionnaire” available online at www.motherhoodproject.org), what do you think about these findings? How do they compare or contrast with your own experience as a mother?
2. As a mother, how comfortable do you feel talking candidly about both the satisfactions and dissatisfactions in your life as a mother? In what situations do you feel most comfortable talking openly? In what situations do you feel you need to say what is expected of you as opposed to saying what you really feel?
3. What, if any, changes would help you feel more satisfied with your life as a mother?

What does being a mother mean to you?

1. What is your answer to the question, “Do you think that you bring something so unique to the care of your child that no one else could replace you?”

2. How would you describe what you bring to your children?
3. How does what you bring compare to what their father brings to their lives?
4. A majority of the mothers surveyed said they believe that when it comes to children society expects more from mothers than anyone else. Mothers said that was both good and bad. What do you think?
5. Some mothers say that mothers have a special responsibility to ensure the well-being of all children, not only their own. What do you think?
6. Fewer than half of the mothers in *The Motherhood Study* national survey said they feel appreciated most or all of the time. How do you feel? Who shows appreciation for you and how do they show it?

What do you think about fathers?

1. What is your ideal of what a father should be?
2. What is your ideal of what a father should do?
3. What are some of the things that support or prevent fathers in your community from being the best they can be?

What is your ideal employment arrangement?

1. Would you like to be employed full-time, part-time, employed but work from home, not be employed at all, or would you prefer some other arrangement?
2. What, if any, changes would you like to see employers make to help mothers and fathers who want to spend more time on their family lives?

To what extent do you think mothers are treated fairly or unfairly?

A mother interviewed for *The Motherhood Study* said, “I just feel like there is not really an even playing field for women. [Men] put in so many more hours, so much travel, so much more into their career experiences than I’m willing or prepared to do. So certainly there’s going to be an inequity ... and I hope there comes a day where it’s not really a gender issue, it’s a family issue ... that there is more balance between work and family as a whole.”

1. What might it look like if caregiving were less a gender issue (a mother’s issue) and more a family issue? How would you like that?
2. What might it look like if taking care of children were no longer primarily mothers’ work? How would you like that?
3. Some mothers say that by assuming primary responsibility for children and their care, mothers let fathers and other adults off the hook and make it difficult for women to achieve full equality. What do you think?

4. What might it look like if there were better balance between work and family?
How would you like that?

What do you think about our culture?

When mothers were asked, “Do you think American society should protect children from large parts of the adult world more or less than it does now, or do you think that things are fine the way they are now,” 86% of mothers responded that children should be more protected than they are now. A majority expressed concern about the influence of media and advertising on their children. A majority of mothers were concerned that their children might not be able to find spouses or partners who share their values.

1. What do you think of these findings?
2. From what, if anything, do you think children need protection?
3. What are the barriers to offering children more protection?
4. What values do you want your children to have?
5. What would make it easier for your children to learn these values?
6. How do you protect your children from the aspects of the culture that you find most dangerous?
7. What, if any, changes would you like to see in American popular culture?
8. What are your thoughts about how those changes might be brought about?
9. What might it look like if our culture were transformed to better meet the needs of mothers?
10. What might it look like if our culture were transformed to better meet the needs of children?

What changes would you like to see?

1. What are the three most important things you would like to see changed in our society to make life better for mothers?
2. What are the three most important things you would like to see changed in our society to make life better for children?
3. The largest majorities of mothers in the survey assigned a high priority to the following social changes: reducing family violence; enabling mothers to spend more time with their children; and promoting healthy marriages. What do you think? How do these priorities compare or contrast with your own priorities for change?
4. What, if anything, might you be able to do along with other mothers or parents to promote the changes you identified?
5. What, if anything, might be done in your family? neighborhood? place of worship? community groups? mothers' groups? workplace? by government?

6. What, if any, assets or resources are available to you in your community that might help you bring about the changes you want to see?
7. A number of mothers' groups across the country have been talking recently about the prospect of a mothers' movement — a movement that would try to bring mothers together to make life better for mothers. What do you think of the idea? What do you see as possible pitfalls to building a mothers' movement?
9. What do you see as possible benefits? If you find the idea interesting, what do you think the priorities of a mothers' movement should be?

Suggestions for People Who Care about Mothers, Children, and Families

1. Looking at the findings in the “Executive Summary” (pp.5-9) and the “Annotated Questionnaire” (available online at www.motherhoodproject.org), how do you think they bear on your personal life?
2. How, if at all, do you think the findings bear on your professional life?
3. How, if at all, do you think the findings bear on your volunteer activities?
4. In light of the findings, how, if at all, might you do things differently in your personal life in terms of your relationships with the mothers in your life?
5. In light of the findings, how, if at all, might you do things differently in your professional life?
6. What do you think of the priorities for change identified by mothers in the survey?
7. What do you think of the major concerns raised by the mothers in the survey?
8. Some mothers say that by assuming primary responsibility for children and their care, mothers let fathers and other adults off the hook and make it difficult for women to achieve full equality. What do you think?
9. What might it look like if there were more balance between work and family? How would you like that?
10. What might it look like if our culture were transformed to better meet the needs of mothers?
11. What might it look like if our culture were transformed to better meet the needs of children?
12. How might the changes you envision be brought about? What can you do in your personal life and in your professional life to help bring about those changes?

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About the Motherhood Project and the Mothers' Council

The Motherhood Project seeks to contribute to a mothers' renaissance. It examines matters affecting mothers and provides intellectual resources to promote vigorous "mother informed" national conversations. The Mothers' Council, a group of mothers of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and political affiliations, was convened by the Motherhood Project and has set as its mission to galvanize the collective wisdom, courage, and passion of mothers to create and sustain a world in which all children flourish.

About the Institute for American Values

The Institute for American Values is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to strengthening families and civil society in the U.S. and the world. The Institute brings together approximately 100 leading scholars — from across the human sciences and across the political spectrum — for interdisciplinary deliberation, collaborative research, and joint public statements on the challenges facing families and civil society. In all of its work, the Institute seeks to bring fresh analyses and new research to the attention of policy makers in government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

About the University of Minnesota's Children, Youth and Family Consortium

Established in 1991, the Children, Youth and Family Consortium links research, practice, and policy to promote the well-being of children and families. Through cross-disciplinary research and education and sustained partnerships with local and national organizations, CYCF promotes thoughtful discourse, best practices, and informed policy-making across a wide range of issues facing America's families.

About the University of Connecticut's Department of Public Policy and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis

The Center for Survey Research and Analysis is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research facility within the Department of Public Policy at the University of Connecticut. CSRA has led groundbreaking surveys in the areas of education, philanthropy and the First Amendment. CSRA is affiliated with the Roper Center, the largest archive of public opinion data in the world and the University of Connecticut's Masters in Survey Research program.

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