The Evolution of 'The Mother' on Television: From the Kitchen to the Boardroom

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Abstract

This project will look at the evolution of “the mother” and motherhood on TV from the 1950s-Present Day. The research began by casting a wide net in order to find a wide variety of sources highlighting concepts relating to how the views of motherhood has shifted over time and how the shift has been seen on television. Through the entirety of this project, I was able to yield two primary data sets data sets: first off being focus group sessions with mothers to gain their view on the subject and which TV mothers they identify/ied with, and secondly my own rhetorical/narrative analysis of the characters and shows they highlight. Ultimately, the research discovered that despite the amount of progress that has been made in improving the way mothers are represented on popular television series, many of the modern day portrayals continue to cling to a gender binary and restrictive gender norms which place the mother at the beck and call of her husband and children.

Keywords: Motherhood, Female representation, Television, Gender

Rationale/Introduction

In this research project, I explored the way that mothers are represented in media, specifically on television as well as how they are viewed in society. By focusing on key aspects of motherhood and the process of raising children/taking care of a family, I explored the role of mothers in American families from the 1950s to present day. In order to highlight examples of different representations of motherhood, I performed a narrative analysis of themes occurring in several television series from these decades including *I Love Lucy, Leave it to Beaver, Roseanne, Malcolm in the Middle, Desperate Housewives,* and *Odd Mom Out*. The motivation to initially begin this research was my own friendship with my mother and appreciation for honest and truthful representations of women in the media. Growing up, my mother and I's relationship was not always perfect and we often fought, however as I grew older and realized how alike we truly were, she became one of my biggest supporters and I could not imagine where I would be without her. I was motivated to research this topic also because I am grateful that my mother accepted me and continued to love and support me after I came out as gay, something I do not take for granted as many young people in our society are often shunned by their families after coming out. I completed this research in honor of my mother and women everywhere who continue to love their children no matter what and show them undying devotion in everything that they do.

In addition to consulting the research already published in the communication field, I conducted my own research on the subject by conducting two focus groups with real mothers to gather reliable interviews and first-hand accounts of motherhood. After showing them clips from these different shows, we were able to discuss how they felt mothers were represented and what was accurate or inaccurate about the character(s). In order to gather participants for the focus groups, I enlisted the help of a Ramapo College professor who lives locally and has connections with moms in the area. With her help, I was able to gather eight women ranging from late 30s-70s who were willing to donate their time, stories, and expertise as mothers to help aid in supporting my research. As issues of gender inequality regarding income, workplace treatment, and the way young women grow up to view themselves become topics of important discussion around the world, research looking at how different women are represented and the corresponding messages that are subliminally shown to society through the media is more important now than ever.

Literature Review

INTRO

The topic of female representation in popular culture has been a discussion point in communications research and discourse for many years. Issues surrounding the way women are represented as combatting or accepting the patriarchal system around them have been linked to the way our society views, treats, and interacts with women on a day-to-day basis. With so much discussion in our society surrounding the rights of women, gender equality, and women in the workplace, it is important to continue analyzing how women are being represented both in film and on TV. While mother characters have been a staple of popular television series since the 1950s, the way that the mother is represented has largely shifted over time due to sociopolitical trends and shifts of opinion regarding a woman's "place." Despite the sizeable shift in the way that mothers are represented on popular television series, current representations remain flawed and continue to negatively impact the way that our society views and treats mothers.

SOCIETAL VIEWS OF MOTHERS

Discussing the many double standards that exist in our society for women and specifically mothers, Akass (2012) states:

> …as a society, we view childrearing as one of the most important jobs a woman can do. Everyone has an opinion. For example, mothers should not work, as children of working women are more likely to be overweight and less educationally able. Mothers that do stay-at-home should not over-protect their children for fear of tying them to their apron strings. Women should have their children early, in case their eggs become stale, but women should not have their children too early, as the state cannot afford to support teenage mothers. And single motherhood should be avoided at all costs, because everybody knows that single mothers are a sure fire route to juvenile delinquency. (p. 137)

Based off of what Akass outlines, it would seem that in our society today, mothers cannot succeed no matter what they do. According to societal views, women experience a double bind because if a mother chooses to work, she puts the welfare and health of her child at risk, but if she chooses to stay at home with the children our society has strict guidelines for how she should parent and raise her children. Despite the large amount of progress that has been made in terms of more positive female representation and more equality given towards women, our society

continues to hold on to dated ideals of motherhood and femininity which are closely tied to images of the white middle-class suburban housewife perpetuated by characters like June Cleaver from the sitcom *Leave it to Beaver*. As far as our society has come in terms of gender equality and recognition of women's achievements, we largely continue to want our women to have children, raise them to be productive members of society, and to support their husbands no matter what. When children are seen as misbehaving, the first question that anyone asks is "where is their mother?" or "I wonder what sort of mother they had?" The sole blame for inadequately developed children or children with a behavioral issue is placed on the mother and the father is given a pseudo get-out-of-jail-free card. Despite the advances that have been made in the acceptance of same-sex parenting, single-parenting, and unwed parenting, our society continues to hold a heterosexual couple where the women does most of the child rearing and the man provides for his family as the ideal and what every couple should be constantly working towards.

Akass (2013) continues to address the changing ideal of family from one decade to the next when she states:

> The way parenting has been reported in the media has had a long and turbulent history with notions of the "ideal" family changing from one era to the next. We are familiar with the concept of the "traditional" family,—a stay at-home mother supported by a male breadwinner—but where does this notion of the family actually come from?" (p. 49)

What Akass describes as the "traditional" family where the women stays at home and is supported by her husband is a stereotypical ideal that can be traced throughout time and is seen across many different societies and cultures around the world. As much as the United States has modernized itself and advanced ahead of more traditional societies, the "ideal" family is still closely tied to this historical concept of the "traditional" family. When looking at how family has been represented on television in the United States over the past 50-60 years, other than the occasional outlier, the representation has been predominantly tied to the traditional concept. Over time, representations of family have grown to include same-sex couples, as seen in the ABC series *Modern Family*, however in this case the two men are strictly categorized within the traditional notion of family, with one staying at home to care for their adopted daughter and the other going out to provide for them. Even in cases where the couple on the series is heterosexual, if the women chooses to go out and get a career, she is often times noted as making considerably

less than her husband, who remains the primary breadwinner and the wife's job is reduced and portrayed as a hobby or something she could easily give up while still being able to take care of her family on her husband's income. Many women continue to take offense with the way that mothers are represented on television, because even when they are given a glimpse of power or equal treatment to their husband, they are once again limited by the inherent patriarchy that exists within the current television landscape. One theme that emerges when looking at the way that women and mothers have been represented over time is the women's choice between either staying at home and having children, or remaining loyal to her career and succeeding professionally. While many shows such as *Desperate Housewives* have worked to portray a woman who tries to have both a family and her career, they largely fall victim to the idea that one ultimately suffers in the end and send the false message to audiences that ultimately women must choose between being a great mother or having a career and that she cannot succeed at both simultaneously.

When discussing this issues of a woman's choice between raising children or working in her career field, arguments about the definition of feminism come up a great deal. Some women shame those who choose to give up their jobs and stay at home to raise children, claiming that they are not reaching their full potential and are turning their backs on feminism and all of the progress that women have made before them. During the third wave of the feminist movement, another complex layer was added to women's debate and acceptance of feminism when intersectionality came into play. During this time, the feminist movement began to welcome and consider the experiences and thoughts of all women from different races, cultures, socioeconomic background, and sexualities and no longer tied itself so closely with the experience of the white heteronormative middle/upper class woman. This is where the concept of "mommy wars" comes into play, where society has pitted stay at home and working moms against one another. While those who choose to stay at home are sometimes viewed as giving up on themselves and their potential, those who choose to go back to work and excel in their careers are viewed as selfish and putting their own wants and desires above that of their children. Akass (2013) addresses the evolving definition of feminism when she writes, "…what is repeatedly emphasised in these articles is how women are turning their backs on feminism as they eagerly choose childcare over a career, as if feminism ever told women that looking after children was not part of the deal" (p. 63). In this example, Akass is choosing the post-feminist definition of the

movement, where feminism can mean different things according to each individual. So, if one women chooses to give up her career and stay at home to raise her three children, she can continue to identify as and call herself a feminist because she actively chooses to be the best mother that she can. On the other hand, if a woman chooses to go right back to work after having children, she should not feel guilty from societal pressure and can continue to call herself a feminist because she is working to inspire her children as she continues to advance in her career. Ultimately, these “mommy wars” that are perpetuated by the media and pervade society reinforce the negative stereotype of women that they are always trying to one up each other and engage in ‘cat fights.’ Instead of recognizing the complexities and nuances in the interactions between a community of mothers, society chooses to pit women against one another and continues the cycle of dominance over women.

The representation of mothers on television also plays into the concept of the “mommy wars” because more often than not, mothers are being shown as the one who stays at home and cares for the children, which sends the message to American audiences that this is the ideal role for a women, and that they should not be going back to work after having children. In the cases where the mothers are being shown as going back to work after having children, the character often experiences a backlash from their children, disapproval from family members, and even experiences marital troubles, giving the audience a cautionary tale of what lies ahead should they choose to put their career over their children. These flawed representations of the working mother are what scares many women into being complacent and passively choosing to give up their careers to be the stereotypical homemaker. While there have been many shows that explore the trials and tribulations of a working mother, the area that has been largely unexplored until vey recently on television is the intimate and often times treacherous landscape in which the suburban mother operates.

While the working mother is allowed to miss out on PTA meetings, class trips, and girl scout meetings because she has work obligations, the stay at home mom must not only take care of what goes on inside her home, but begins a new full-time job of keeping up appearances within the school community and all of their children’s extra curricular activities. While society does place a large amount of pressure on mothers as to how they should act and raise their children, it would seem that the most intense pressure comes from the other moms within a woman’s surrounding community. Mothers often times want to present the best “face” that they

can when around other moms, showing the group that their lives are perfect, with the ideal family, the most well-behaved children, and the most delicious meals on the table each night. This concept was explored in the show *Desperate Housewives* during the 2000s where the premise of the series was not knowing what goes on behind the closed doors of neighbors who live seemingly perfect lives. Heisler & Ellis (2008) explored this concept of how a mother's identity is influenced by her community and write, "A woman's identity as mother is shaped through experiences, interactions with, and messages from others…As a result, individuals may be protective and hesitant to share this 'real me' with others" (p. 449). Based off of this, if a women considers herself as a bad mother because she does not live up to the societal standard or does not have well behaved children like the other moms in her community, she may work to hide what is really going on and act as if she does have the perfect life when interacting with these other women. This concept can be identified as "saving face" and can be seen throughout many iterations of the popular reality television series *The Real Housewives…*, where women would interact with one another and brag about how well their children are doing and how happy they are when in reality one of their children may have been shipped off to rehab for drug addiction, they recently discovered their husband was cheating on them, or they were hiding the fact that their husband beat them and they were afraid to seek help. While the series has been dismissed as being a vapid and meaningless depiction of the wealthy elite in the United States, it can be studied as an intimate portrayal of how women and mothers interact with one another, provide a safe space for discussion of what is going on in their lives, and how they band together in support of what one another are going through personally.

MOTHERS ON TELEVISION

As long as television has been around, the family has been a staple of American series followed by millions each week. When the medium first became popular for storytelling, the stereotypical "ideal" family was abundantly seen with June Cleaver leading the charge for all American mothers to dote on their husbands, raise their sons to be gentleman, and have dinner waiting on the table when the man came home after a long day at the office. These representations are responsible for creating an entire generation of Americans who hold very traditional values when it comes to family and the role of women, believing that the wife should take care of the home and wait on their husband hand and foot. It was not until later on in the 1970s and 80s that this image began to be shed and made way for portrayals of single mothers,

divorced mothers, and other representations that pushed the norm for what a mother should look like or how she should act. However, even as these stereotypical stepford-like moms began to appear less and less, there were still many problems with the way women were being characterized. Rabinovitz (1989) discusses this when writing, "The independent-mother sitcoms of the 1970s perpetuated the same parameters of a nuclear family structure by incorporating the male friends or relatives as symbolic patriarchs" (p. 8). While the sitcoms of the 1970s were progressive at the time for portraying a single mother or a divorced mother, the shows ultimately conceded to the patriarchal system by incorporating a father figure anyways. While the woman could have been divorced, widowed, or never married at all, society was not ready to accept a child growing up without a father figure, so a male character was added in order to play that role. So, despite the effort being made to portray women as powerful and equal to men, the effort at this time was defeated by the fact that society was not ready to accept an independent mother.

Discussing the evolution of the mother on television after the 1970s, Hill (2010) writes, "Continuing to situate the woman in the home, television used a variety of domestic comedies to explore the role of the suburban housewife…the housewife had transformed from the responsible, middle-class…to the working-class Peg Bundy in *Married…with Children* (1987-97) and the ironically self-proclaimed 'domestic goddess' Roseanne Conner in *Roseanne* (1988-97)" (p. 163). It is interesting to note that even though women were becoming more relatable and easy to identify with for the common American woman, they were still only seen as occupying positions of power within the home. Neither Peg Bundy nor Roseanne Conner were breadwinners for their family, and if they did work it was a measly job that did not contribute much to the overall income of the household, further perpetuating the message that wives must rely on their husbands for financial support. However, these working-class mothers were not all bad for the overall representation of mothers on television. These two characters in particular represent an interesting shift in the way mothers, and women in general, were seen on television because their respective series' finally addressed the not so perfect parts of being a wife and mother. While many women work to present the image of their lives as being perfect and their families being the ideal, these shows highlighted the fact that sometimes kids do not turn out to be upstanding citizens, that sometimes spouses argue, and that mothers are not always delighted to cook dinner for the family and clean up the entire house with little help from anyone else. Roseanne Conner in particular is a standout character who cannot go unmentioned when

studying the representation of mothers on television as she remains one of the most honest and realistically flawed mother characters that has ever graced the small screen.

While Roseanne did not occupy a high-paying job or work in an environment where she could get ahead and lift her family out of the working class, there was no doubt that she was in charge of her household. Despite her husband providing much of the income for the family, Roseanne represented a woman who, realizing that her home was one of the only places she held power, demanded to rule over her domain, with real-life Roseanne Barr claiming the character as the "domestic goddess." Ghanoui (2013) discusses this by stating, "…Instead of addressing inequality in the workforce, Roseanne did it at home. She did not have the luxury of expressing her independence by getting ahead in her job so, through her demeanor and opinions, she expressed whatever was on her mind and made it clear that she ruled the house" (p. 10). Before Roseanne Conner came around, mothers on television were viewed as being more refined and demure, two qualities that Roseanne rarely exemplified. Instead, Roseanne was loud, boasting, in-your-face, and did not care who she offended as long as there was an easy meal on the table and her kids were not in jail. Were Roseanne's kids going to end up becoming doctors, lawyers, or winning Nobel Prizes? No, and she openly accepted that. Ghanoui (2013) continues her discussion of the character, writing, "…the difference is that the show *Roseanne* recognized that motherhood can be, and for some women is, exhausting, complicated, messy and, at times, annoying" (p. 12). *Roseanne* was one of the first series that depicted the downsides to having children and the fact that mothers often struggled with raising a family and staying sane at the same time. While past television mothers like June Cleaver and Carol Brady were seen as constantly smiling no matter what troubles they were encountering, Roseanne regularly grew tired of her children, yelled, screamed, and got into fights with her husband on screen. The late 1980s-90s saw a sizeable shift in the way mothers were represented on television and paved the way for more realistic, honest, and relatable characters to be created. No longer were women going to be shamed for not living up to the characters they saw on screen, but they would turn on the television and see their own struggles with motherhood being played out before them.

Another popular series that is worth noting in the study of mothers on television is the 2000s drama *Desperate Housewives*. This show would not have been possible without the work that Roseanne Conner did a mere ten years earlier, and told the story of a suburban neighborhood where a group of friends all represented the different types of mothers that exist in suburbia

today. Within the friend group, there was the trophy wife who did not embrace motherhood immediately as it ruined her figure, the stepford wife who was a master at baking and whose sweaters were always wrinkle free, and the mom who regretted putting her career on hold in order to raise her family. Hill (2010) describes how food was often used in the show to exemplify each woman's mothering personality when she writes, "…Lynette Scavo's takeaway chicken highlights her hectic lifestyle, Gabrielle Solis' spicy paella connotes exoticism and overt sexuality, and Bree Van De Kamp's color-coded baskets of muffins display her proficiency and attention to detail, whereas Susan Mayer's inedible macaroni and cheese signifies her domestic deficiency" (p. 168). While society believes that a mother should be able to cook properly and provide a healthy and delicious meal for her family each night, this example showed how the women's personalities could be viewed through their cooking choices and ability. In the case of Lynette, her takeaway chicken dish that was easy to throw together signified how she was not always able to devote herself to preparing delicious and healthy meals because she was taking care of her five kids while her husband was away at work. Lynette's character showcases what many mothers deal with on a daily basis, and the critique from society that while they are fulfilling their role as a mother in staying home with the children, they are not doing enough to ensure that the family is happy with the food being delivered. According to many traditional views within society, women and mothers are not only expected to stay home with the children and raise them to be productive members of society, but to also maintain a pristine home while staying up to date on the latest cooking, nutrition, and health trends for the betterment of their family. It is almost as if women are expected to maintain two full time jobs while being at home with the children, one being the primary caregiver, and the other running the household for the entire family, leaving little to no time for her own hobbies or downtime.

Press (2009) also discusses *Desperate Housewives* as a turning point in the representation of mothers on television, highlighting Lynette as a stand-out character by stating:

> A key break-through image on this show is on-again, off-again working mother Lynette, who left a successful advertising career to become full-time stay-at-home mother…Unlike the television of an earlier era, motherhood in this instance is not idealized, as Lynette is shown having many regrets about her choice, and then trying to go back to her career and realizing the difficulties involved in this choice as well. (p. 147)

The author highlights the fact that Lynette distances herself from mothers of the past on television because her storylines showcase her regrets in placing the needs of her family and her children over her own desire to excel in her career. While past TV mothers like June Cleaver never even had a career to choose to give up when becoming pregnant and starting a family, and later mothers often made the choice seemingly with a smile on their face and wanting nothing more than to sacrifice their professional lives for the betterment of their families, Lynette recognizes that it is not always such an easy or happily made decision. While she makes the tough choice and ultimately does put the needs of her family before her own, she regularly vents to her husband, friends, and even lashes out at her children when they are being difficult that she could just as easily have been the CEO of her company and had an extremely successful professional career instead of cleaning up diapers, vacuuming the house, and shuffling a van full of children to and from soccer practice every day. Out of all of the mothers represented on the series, Lynette is often argued as the most relatable for many real mothers, giving the show much of its success, because other than Roseanne Conner there have not been many mother characters who openly discuss the challenges, upsets, and downsides to having children and being responsible for taking care of the family.

With the rise in popularity of reality television post 2000, mothers are not only being seen in fictional narratives, but society is also gaining a window into how real mothers are working to raise their children and take care of their families through a variety of different programming. For a while, there were shows like *Nanny 911* that showed mothers who had trouble keeping their children well behaved, *Wife Swap* that took two moms from different families and sent them to live with the other in order to experience a different kind of motherhood, and more recently, the popular *Real Housewives* franchise which shows how rich and famous women, many of them mothers, deal with raising children and keeping their families afloat. While these women certainly do not represent the average mother due to the amount of money that they and/or their spouse makes which allows them to afford extensive childcare, private schooling, and other luxuries not available to the average mother, they too experience many of the difficulties that an everyday mother does in raising her children. Despite the fact that these women have money, they often times are seen dealing with absent husbands who work long hours and do not seem to want to be involved with raising the children, husbands who engage in physical, emotional, and mental abuse, and critiques from their surrounding societies that they

are not raising their children correctly. Lee & Moscowitz (2013) address the role of parenting in the series by stating, "The housewives are convicted for failing to live up to the June Cleaver image of mom…Moreover, parental mistakes on the show are consistently framed as maternal mistakes… strong fatherly figures are noticeably absent, but only mothers, not fathers, are persecuted for their absence" (p. 79). While these women are often times dismissed as being vapid and self-obsessed for their luxurious lifestyles, the show serves to illuminate the fact that a parenting bias against mothers exists up and down the entire socioeconomic scale. Whether someone is poor and living off of government assistance, or they own multiple homes and a private jet, if their kids are misbehaving or turn out to have problems, it is somehow always blamed on the mother and never on the father.

REPRESENTATION REFLECTING/REJECTING

By doing a simple analysis of popular television series since the 1950s, it is clear that for a long a time, mothers on television did not accurately depict what real mothers experienced in their own homes. I would argue that even today, shows that have prominent mother figures are not doing a perfect job at representing what actual mothers are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. However, there have been several characters, like Roseanne and Lynette amongst others, who break down the mold and connect with women on a real basis for how their character deals with being a mom. Ghanoui (2013) writes about how Roseanne connects with real women by writing:

> The most prominent aspect of the character Roseanne, I argue, and what made the show so successful, was that she was not what a wife was supposed to be, she was not what a mother was supposed to be, and she was not what the ideal woman was supposed to be. She portrayed what some women in her social status often had to go through. They did not have nannies to watch their children, they did not have time to exercise, they did not fully depend on their husbands for everything but rather the two adults formed a team, and they did not think a woman should be devalued simply because she was a wife and mother. (p. 6).

While Roseanne certainly did not represent what all women and mothers were going through, she served as an accurate representation of what a working class mother had to deal with when her husband was off at the factory, her kids were all fighting, and laundry was piling up in the

back room. If we have any hope in changing how our society views and treats women and mothers, we need to have more accurate representations of motherhood across all socioeconomic and cultural understandings. Mothers of all different races, religions, and incomes must have the ability to turn on the television and find a mom who looks or sounds like her dealing with the same things that she is dealing with. It is not until the extremely diverse and complicated world that we live in is completely and accurately reflected in popular culture that our society will be able to fairly and appropriately approach and solve issues impacting mothers and their children. As Walters & Harrison (2014) write, "…we are in dire need of some tough, messy, non-normative renegades to blast a few more holes in the maternal shrouds we've been wearing for far too long" (p. 51).

Methods

In order to investigate the opinions and reactions of real women about the representation of mothers on television, I conducted two separate focus groups to gather first-hand information from actual mothers. In order to gather the most reliable data possible, I believed that focus groups with mothers would provide me with the insight I needed to explore the research questions I had put forth. Before participating in my focus group, I required each woman to read and sign the informed consent form, which detailed their involvement with the study and ensured that their responses would remain confidential. At the start of the focus group, I had the women introduce themselves to one another in order to establish a friendly and open forum where they felt comfortable to engage in discussion and converse with one another. Additionally, at the start of the focus group I described the purpose of my research project and the sequence of events for the remainder of the session. After posing several questions to the group regarding these women's experience with motherhood and their opinions on the representation of mothers on television I made sure that each woman had equal opportunity to share their opinions before moving on to the next section. Next, I introduced the participants to several excerpts/clips from television series with a mother character in order to facilitate more discussion regarding the representation of mothers on television. In order to identify which clips to play for the women, I singled out moments from several popular series that served as a turning point or shift away from the popular/stereotypical portrayal of mothers. These clips showed wives speaking out against their husbands, standing up for themselves, wishing they had never had children, and ultimately

served to highlight the harsh realities of motherhood that many representations shy away from or overlook.

In gathering the participants for my focus group, I enlisted the help of a professor on campus who is a mother of three and has connections with other moms in the surrounding area. The women that were chosen for the focus group expressed interest in participating in a study looking at the representation of mothers on television and wished to share their experiences as mothers. At first, I believed that only having women in the focus group who consume a great deal of television would have been beneficial, however I realized that by showing clips/excerpts during the focus group I could control which series we were looking at and could make up for the fact that some women do not regularly watch TV. Additionally, this professor’s mother lives in the surrounding area and participated in the focus group along with some of her friends, which allowed me to get a multi-generational view on the topic. I appreciated the fact that all of these women felt comfortable sharing their experiences as mothers and I was able to establish an open forum where my questions initiated thoughtful conversations. However, I found that the women took it upon themselves to lead the discussion of this topic in a manner that flowed naturally from their experiences as mothers. The only criteria that was a requirement for participation in the focus group was that the women all have children and have experienced motherhood, because without that knowledge it would have been hard for them to comment on the issues and their responses would not be relevant to the research questions I was exploring.

I hoped that the responses I got from the focus group would be helpful in illuminating the research questions I had set forth as well as looking at the concepts that were revealed in my review of the research that has already been done on this subject. Although I was only able to conduct two small focus groups with a total of 8 women, this proved to be the easiest way to gather firsthand accounts of motherhood on a large scale while still obtaining specific and in-depth responses. I believed it would be more helpful to have the women in discussion with one another regarding their responses than to perform several in-depth individual interviews because I wanted to observe how the women engage in conversation with one another about their experiences in being a mom. By only allowing women with at least a minimal knowledge of what it is to be a mother to participate, I avoided the risk of having unrelated and falsified responses. After viewing the clips as a group, I opened the floor up for discussion and allowed the participants to freely speak their minds in order for me to capture their honest

opinions/reactions to what they viewed. After a bit of back and forth with an open discussion, I had a set of questions outlined on the Interview Protocol, which I used to facilitate our discussion of the shows and the topic. However, most of the time the women had a great deal to say and there was no need for me to interject and lead the conversation in a certain way. These group questions were mostly centered on the concepts outlined in the research questions and from the information I gathered in the literature review.

Other than the data I collect from my focus group interviews, I also conducted a textual analysis of several episodes of the different television series we looked at during the focus group including *I Love Lucy, Roseanne, Malcolm in the Middle,* and *Desperate Housewives.* Additionally, I performed an analysis of episodes of relatively new series *One Day at a Time,* and *Odd Mom Out* to get an idea of where the representation of mothers is headed in the future. In analyzing these shows, I hoped to explore the progression in the way mothers have been represented on television from the 1950s to today. By looking at different series across decades from the mid-20th century until as recent as 2017, I was able to identify some common themes in the way motherhood was represented during each decade and then compared/contrasted to how mothers are represented today. I was able to note how the representation has changed, and what elements continue to remain the same despite the progress that is consistently claimed on the subject.

In doing this research for my project, there were some challenges and risks involved due to the fact that I do not have firsthand experience being a mother, which is why I relied on the information gathered during my focus groups to support my assertions on the topic. Since the women that I interviewed all reside in the same area and are from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, the data I collected is not be able to be used to speak for the experiences and opinions of all mothers in our society. Since there is such a large amount of time in history that I looked at, it was interesting to see where I could possibly take this research and expand upon it in the future. If given the chance to expand on this research, I would wish to interview mothers from different religious backgrounds, as well as socioeconomic backgrounds in order to see if their responses reflect or reject those of the women in my initial focus groups. While I was able to gather some information from mothers of different generations, it would be interesting to see how these women relate to one another and if their opinions differ based on their age and the time in which they grew up and raised their children. In order to further explore this sensation,

the researcher would want to interview/survey people from all generations in order to gauge the overall opinion of women in our society. In order to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all the participants and of the final research product, the Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) will review this study.

Analysis and Discussion

Establishing 'The Mother': 1950s/60s

The 1950s are commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Television, as it was the first time that televisions were available on a large-scale basis and for the first time, a majority of Americans had a television set in their homes. During this time, many of the most popular series on TV revolved around middle/upper class white American families, as the ideals of a heteronormative suburban life and the nuclear family were widespread within society. One of the most iconic television series of this time that continues to remain a placeholder in American popular culture is *I Love Lucy*, and while it was certainly ahead of its time in terms of representing a powerful female character, much of Lucy's narrative remained held down by the patriarchal chains in place at the time. One of the most popular episodes of the series is "Job Switching" which shows Lucy and Ethel switching places with their husbands for a week in order to show them that women are capable of providing for the family just as well as men are. In response to Lucy and Ethel's suggested plan, Ricky responds ""Holding down a job is a lot more difficult than lying around the house all day," to which Lucy responds "Is that all you think we do? Who do you think does the housework? And who do you think cooks all the meals?" (Carroll, 1952). This conversation is indicative of popular family structure and ideals at the time, where men were automatically designated the breadwinner for the family while women were responsible for caring for the children and keeping the home in order. While the women in the focus group were nostalgic viewing the show as it holds a special place in many people's hearts, it was interesting to note the difference in response according to generation. After watching *I Love Lucy*, one of the older women noted, "I don't want to be treated like a man…equal rights are overblown sometimes…I could never understand why a mother would want to work and raise a family at the same time, it just seemed so difficult and complicated." This quote showed that perhaps women in the older generation were happy accepting their place as either a stay-at-home mom, or a single woman who worked, whereas the younger generation had trouble fathoming that idea. The younger generation seemed to desire a life where mothers

could both raise their children and work to help support the family at the same time, identifying that the two were not mutually exclusive.

One element noted in the episode "Job Switching" was the implicit male dominance that was present in the husband/wife relationship of Lucy and Ricky. As the episode begins, Ricky walks through the front door of the apartment after a long day's work and is greeted by Lucy who states, "Oh gee I'm glad you're home!" (Carroll, 1952). This immediately stuck out to me because it sends a message to the audience that a stay at home mom is doing nothing all-day but sitting around and waiting for her husband to return to her and the kids. Throughout the series, Lucy is represented as independent, strong-willed, and as a woman who does not allow men to walk all over her, however this episode highlights the subtle patriarchy that was present in many family structures and households during the 1950s. This stereotypical image of a woman greeting her husband at the door when he arrives home after a long day with a cocktail, the kids bathed and in pajamas, with a lovely meal on the table is what made shows like *Lucy* and *Leave it to Beaver* so successful at the time, because that is the image of family that many Americans were trying to achieve. Another way that the implicit patriarchy was present in this episode of the series was through Lucy's interactions with her husband when she would state, "No sir" and "Yes sir" which highlighted the male dominance that was present in their household. (Carroll, 1952).

Not only was Lucy submissive to her husband in the way she interacted with him personally, but also through the fact that she was tied to him financially which limited her options as a woman. Lucy relied on her husband's employment and him giving her an allowance of spending money each week in order to take care of the home and provide for herself and her son. Even if Lucy had been unhappy in the marriage, she would not have had the option of leaving Ricky and taking their son with her, as she would have no means of supporting herself and the child. While the episode ultimately ends typically with the men going back to being the breadwinners and the women gladly accepting their role as keepers of the domestic home-front, it taught audiences an important lesson regarding just how much work a mother does at home all day. Before the episode ends, Ricky states, ""I never realized how tough it was to run a house before" combating the myth that woman sat at home all day waiting for their husbands to return (Carroll, 1952). While *I Love Lucy* fluctuated between pushing the boundaries of popular notions of motherhood and falling victim to patriarchal stereotypes, it ultimately portrayed an extremely

upper-class image of family which was not the reality for many Americans at the time. One thing that the focus group participants noted in their response to viewing *I Love Lucy* was that while they appreciated her candidness in speaking out against her husbands misogyny, they did not think that the show accurately portrayed what the average American mother was experiencing at the time. In highlighting the fact that Lucy had a nanny to help her with the daily care of the child, along with the beautiful clothing that she was always dressed in, the women in the focus group believed the show "glamorized" motherhood and represented motherhood from an upper-class perspective.

Another popular television series from the same time period, *Leave it to Beaver*, ran from 1957-1963 and told the story of an everyday "average" American family (the Cleavers) and has been hailed by many television critics as an iconic program that stood out to symbolize the idealized image of suburbia during the mid-20th century. The mother on the series, June Cleaver, is one of the most popular television mothers of all time and is continually referenced as the stereotypical 50s/60s housewife as she constantly looked and acted as if she had the perfect life and family. June can be viewed in stark contrast to Lucy on *I Love Lucy* because she rarely acted out against her husband and seemingly accepted her role as leader of the domestic domain without much grievance. June stands out amongst the other television mothers of her time as being placed on a pedestal, with women of her time working to emulate her way of living, and modern day women tending to compare themselves to the "perfect" mother that she represented. Amongst the women in the two focus groups, *Leave it to Beaver* elicited interesting responses from the mothers as they remembered watching the show as children or, in the case of the older women, as they were beginning to start their own families.

One interesting response that was put forth by both of the older women after viewing and discussing the series was that they both agreed that the show was not an accurate portrayal of what life was like at the time as young wives who were beginning their families. Both of the older women stated that life at the time was much more hectic and that she show portrayed a more idyllic vision of family life, where everything seemingly fell into place perfectly. Both women told stories of their children running rampant around the house, laundry piling up, and how they often struggled to maintain a balance between giving themselves time to relax and providing everything that their families needed. It was interesting to see the connection between the older and younger women's responses to *Leave it to Beaver* because even the younger

women seemed to think that June Cleaver was an exaggerated and false representation of what motherhood was like back then. After viewing a clip where June presents a wonderfully prepared meal for her family when her husband comes home from work, one of the women stated, "Sometimes when I come home after a long day and see the laundry piling up, I make the executive decision that it's simple PB & J for dinner." Many of the women noted that while the Cleavers had the economic advantage to allow for the wife to stay home all day and keep the home clean and prepare lovely meals, the reality was/is that many women could not/cannot afford to do so.

Food seemed to be a common theme in our discussion of motherhood on *Leave it to Beaver* as one of the clips that was shown showed June handling all of the inside meal prep while her husband took care of the grilling of the meat outside. In the clip, her husband explains to his son that women are more adept to cooking in the kitchen because they require all of the modern conveniences in order to get the job done while men can handle the rustic style of cooking on a grill outdoors. While all of the women in both focus groups found this clip offensive and demeaning to women, one noted that, " "In my house, cooking is very much the same today where I'll handle everything inside but my husband always takes care of grilling…I wonder why that is?" This woman's response to the clip brought up an interesting conversation amongst the women who began to question if they were feeding in to the implicit patriarchy by following this gendered breakdown of cooking responsibilities. The women also wondered, as all of them work at least part-time, if not full-time jobs, why dinner and clean up responsibility always fell on them when both they and their husbands had been hard at work all day.

Based off of this discussion of food and meal preparation for the family, the women began to realize that even though progress has been made in terms of gender equality within the family structure, there are still remnants of the June Cleaver type mom that are present today. Highlighting this idea, one of the younger women noted, "I'm wondering if we really have come that far since this show? I mean we tell ourselves we have, but I'm starting to think quite the opposite." Despite airing fifty years ago, the stereotypical image of motherhood that was conveyed through *Leave it to Beaver* has been replaced by a more empowered female character, yet some elements continue to be inherently passed down from one generation to the next. Despite all of the criticism that the focus group participants had for the series, they all agreed that June Cleaver's options were limited at the time and appreciated that today woman have the

ability to choose for themselves if they want to stay at home and be the perfect housewife or if they want to work and have a fulfilling career.

The Mother Who Changed It All

Fast-forward a mere thirty years after June Cleaver was the epitome of motherhood on American television, and audiences were being treated to an entirely different mom: *Roseanne*. This series, which ran from 1988-1997, sought to reclaim the identity of mothers on television and portray it in a more positive and realistic manner. The character Roseanne was the matriarch of a working class family in Middle America, and did not shy away from highlighting the frustration that comes with being a working mother and taking care of running the household. Roseanne could regularly be seen/heard swearing, wishing she did not have kids, and shirking her parental responsibilities, thoughts that run through every parents mind at some point or another yet had not been fully explored on television before. After viewing clips from the show during the focus group, one commonality between all of the women's responses was that they appreciated how the show did not shy away from the problems and difficulties in raising kids and running a home. A lot of the women noted that its easy for them to turn on the TV and see a mother who is dressed perfectly and who has everything under control, and that it was nice to have a character like Roseanne who actively acknowledged that being a mom is tough work. While everyday mothers across America welcomed Roseanne into their homes and appreciated being able to see their own stories accurately reflected on television, the series was not without its critics and many did not welcome the character into the cult of television mothers.

In one episode of the series, Roseanne is confronted by TV moms of the past about how she is representing mothers on television to the American people, and the mothers of the past are not happy with the messages that she is conveying to the audience. This group of famous TV moms, including June Cleaver, calls themselves "The Sitcom Mom Welcome Wagon," and wants to sit Roseanne down in order to talk with her about how she is representing motherhood. It is ironic that the entire encounter between Roseanne and the other women takes place in a kitchen, because it shows that even though years have passed since the stereotypical image of the 50s housewife, mothers are still relegated to cooking and cleaning in their domestic prison. As the conversation unfolds, one of the mothers says to Roseanne, "You see Roseanne, we've all worked very hard to promote the image of motherhood and if what we've heard about your show is true, and well we're about as mad as H-E-double hockey sticks! Oh excuse my French" (Ulin,

1995). This is indicative of the time period in which her show was created and aired, during which it would have been unsavory for a woman, especially a mother, to curse on television. All of these mothers of television past represent the wholesome image of motherhood that was instilled unto America during the Golden Age of Television in the 50s/60s, while Roseanne and her show chose to deconstruct that image and represent what actual mothers were going through on a day-to-day basis. Roseanne responds to these women by stating, "Well I'm afraid whatever you heard is a hell of a damn lie" (Ulin, 1995). With the use of the single word "hell," Roseanne is able to tear down the stereotypical and patriarchal image of motherhood that the rest of these TV mothers were stuck in by showing that a real woman can be a good parent and wife while also speaking her mind and using the occasional bad word. While the Sitcom Mom Welcome Wagon was certainly not happy with Roseanne's language and dismissal of their claims, their shock with her behavior and the show as a whole did not end there.

Later on in the conversation between the women, one of the more conservative mothers brings up a point to Roseanne by stating, "You're supposed to teach your children valuable lessons, why don't you have an episode where your son breaks a window with a stray baseball and your husband makes him get a job so that he can pay to fix it?" (Ulin, 1995). This sort of storyline was extremely popular during the Golden Age of Television where families could watch and rest assured that their children were learning positive lessons from these shows. The typical nuclear American family could turn on the television during the 50s/60s and learn lessons about working hard for the things you wanted and about respecting their parents' wishes no matter what. While *Roseanne* did teach lessons to the audience, they were always approached in a more comedic, and some would say, realistic/down-to-earth way. Roseanne replies to the mother's concern by stating, "We did have this one episode about me finding some old reefer down in the basement, so I thought it was David's…you know that's the guy who's sleeping with my daughter…but anyway it turns out that it was my old pot" (Ulin, 1995). Many of the women are shocked and dismayed; not only at the fact that Roseanne would portray herself as a mother and use drugs, but also at the nonchalant way Roseanne addresses her teenage daughter engaging in sexual activity under her roof. Roseanne was the poster-mother for showing real women that it was okay to acknowledge things when they do not go according to plan. Roseanne openly confronted the fact that her children were sexually active as teenagers and that she and her husband were not the perfect parents; sometimes they drank too much, screamed and fought

one another, and sometimes they decided to smoke the mystery pot they found in the basement just for old time's sake. Roseanne describes the ultimately positive outcome of the situation by stating, "Oh come on, we learned our lesson, we got the message across. Drugs are bad…especially really old stuff that's been sittin' there a while." While Roseanne and the show went about portraying the anti-drug message in a different or non-typical way, she highlights the fact that while it was a comedic episode, they ultimately did convey the message to the audience that you should not do drugs…no matter how long or short they have been sitting around.

While on the air, *Roseanne* elicited polarizing responses from audiences, with some people hailing the show as a breath of fresh air for portraying the American family in a realistic manner, and others taking offense for the brash and sometimes offensive way that Roseanne acted. During the focus group proceedings, it was interesting to note this response amongst the women participating because they would often ask, "What show are we looking at next?" When I responded by telling them we were going to take a look at *Roseanne*, I could see one women rolling her eyes and several others let out sighs signaling that they were clearly neither fans of the show nor of its star. After watching clips from the show, I questioned the woman who had rolled her eyes at hearing what we were going to be watching, and her answer surprised me. The woman stated, "I used to hate this show and would always change the channel, but after raising kids it really makes sense. I wanna go back and watch it all." This woman's response both shocked and pleased me because she seemed so against the series at the start, yet realized that after having children she could better relate to the narrative and what the character of Roseanne was going through on the screen before her. This response was echoed by some of the responses from the other women, with one stating "Wow that's how I feel sometimes," after watching Roseanne complain to her husband that he was not helping out enough around the house. Whereas the moms of television past would have kept their mouths shut and never spoken out against their husbands, Roseanne recognized that she needed help and did not hesitate to ask for it. The women in the focus group reacted extremely positively overall to *Roseanne* because the show and its characters are easily approachable and Roseanne did not shy away from portraying motherhood in all of its glory; the good, the bad, and the things that some moms try to hide from their neighbors.

New Millennium? New Housewife.

After the reshaping of motherhood that occurred in the 1990s thanks to characters like Roseanne, the 2000s saw the reclamation of sexuality by mothers on television thanks to popular series like *Desperate Housewives*, which ran from 2004-2012. The show was centered on a seemingly typical suburban neighborhood and a group of neighbors, all of them mothers, who became friends and explored the sometimes sexy, sometimes difficult, and sometimes murder-filled woes of suburbia together. The show was interesting and unique in its exploration of life in suburbia because it differed from past shows set in the idyllic suburban environment by showing the dark and mysterious things that often go on behind closed doors; the things that one would never want their neighbors to know. What was interesting about the series was that it could approach motherhood from several different perspectives thanks to it having several different mother characters. On one hand, the show portrayed a more conservative image of motherhood similar to June Cleaver's with the character Bree who was always baking, throwing perfect dinner parties, and who appeared to be the next Martha Stewart homemaker type. On the other hand, the character Gabrielle represented an image of motherhood where she gave up her beauty and career as a model in order to have children, a decision she struggled with and regretted often on the show. No matter what image of motherhood that the series was portraying at a certain moment, one thing that rang true amongst the mothers in my focus group was their ability to always find something relatable within the narrative.

During one scene that was shown during both focus groups, one of the housewives on the show, Lynette, is explaining to a younger woman who is pregnant for the first time that motherhood is not always going to be happy and that eventually she will begin to miss the life she used to have. Over the course of their interaction, Lynette explains that while her husband is committed and willing to wake up for middle of the night feedings now, come time for kids number two and three…the responsibility is going to fall all on this woman and that her entire life will become centered around what her kids are doing. It was interesting to note the response amongst the mothers in my focus group to this scene, with one of them stating, "Why didn't anyone tell me that being pregnant and giving birth was going to be this bad?" While the woman went on to explain that she obviously loved her children and is so thankful for them, that looking back it would have been nice to have someone be honest with her and tell her that motherhood was not always going to be easy. Another mother within the group responded to her friend by

stating, "Nobody tells you about parenting, you simply find out for yourself," highlighting the individuality in motherhood and the fact that each woman goes through the process differently. Showing *Desperate Housewives* to the group illuminated for me the fact that motherhood is often an experimental process for many women and it's mostly a series of trials and errors. Motherhood is an experience, and until someone has gone through it they cannot understand what a mother is feeling, which is why the women in my group agreed that it was important to surround yourself with a community of people who understand and can help you figure things out.

The mothers in my focus group spoke a lot about creating a supportive community of other moms around them in their lives so that they always had people to rely on who understood the issues that they were dealing with. One mother spoke on the topic stating, "I find its important to have people that can relate to what you're going through when you want to talk about your struggles as a mother." Some of the moms brought up the fact that sometimes it is hard to establish a sense of community amongst other mothers especially if they were working moms or if the other mothers in their circle seemed a bit exclusive and placed pressure on other moms to put off a certain image of perfection when it came to motherhood. In order to establish their community however, the moms noted that it was easy to get involved with school activities or to volunteer to help out and that's how they have actually ended up meeting some of their closest mom friends. While these women sat together in the focus and recounted some of their proudest moments of motherhood, they also felt comfortable enough to share moments with one another that they regretted and wished they could have done differently. One of the most real and honest moments during the focus group echoed the occasional shirking of motherhood responsibility that the group saw on *Desperate Housewives*, when one of the mothers stated, "I've had fantasies about walking out of the house and leaving just to grab a moment of silence and a cup of coffee." Ultimately, the focus group proved to be safe and inviting space for these mothers to share their experiences of motherhood openly amongst one another and they all appreciated having the space and opportunity to do so. Many of them noted that whether it was from other moms in the community or from the media, that there is a pressure that exists which causes moms to feel guilty when they want to complain about their kids or vent about their husband not helping around the house. If this research draws attention to any particular issue, it is the lack of a forum in which mothers have the ability to and feel comfortable discussing

motherhood with one another, which is why it is so essential for television representations of motherhood to be varied, realistic, and remain truthful to the actual plights of different mothers across America.

What Will Motherhood Look Like Tomorrow?

Moving away from the 2000s, the 2010s have seen even more progression in the positive representation of motherhood on television. With more and more cable networks developing original scripted programming and the advent of online streaming platforms like Netflix, there are now more pipelines than ever before for these honest portrayals of mom to be delivered to audiences. Two prime examples of series that have blossomed from this shift in television production are Bravo's *Odd Mom Out* (2015) and the recent Netflix revival *One Day at a Time* (2017). On *Odd Mom Out*, the main character Jill is a punk-rock Manhattan mom who does not fit in with the other moms in her community who are beauty obsessed and always trying to one up another in order to climb the social ladder. Jill can regularly be seen complaining about her kids, and in one episode rejoices and celebrates when her kids are finally all in full-day school because she can finally have her life back. June Cleaver would never have celebrated the absence of children in her home, and I would imagine June struggled once her kids grew up, no longer knowing what to do with herself all day. Jill on the other hand, does not have that problem and finds time to get back into her career and hangout with friends once more. Jill serves as an inspiration to a new generation of mothers that their entire lives do not need to revolve around their children and the family. Jill highlights the fact that it is okay to have a life outside of the domestic and that it is almost quite necessary in order to keep from going insane.

On *One Day at a Time*, Penelope is a maternal force to be reckoned with. Not only is the character a divorcee and therefore raising her two kids as a single parent, but also she is an Iraq War veteran and suffers from PTSD. Whereas Jill on *Odd Mom Out* serves to inspire mothers to hold onto their lives outside of their husband and children, Penelope's narrative centers around caring for her children yet shows that mother characters can have depth and are not always the Stepford-like image set forth by characters like June Cleaver. Back in the Golden Age of Television, a single mother raising her children alone would never have been portrayed on television, but as the women in my focus group noted, "The way of doing motherhood has really changed." Penelope's narrative can be appreciated by mothers in terms of accepting LGBT children and running a single-parent household which requires her to both go out and make a

living to support her kids while still taking care of the home and taking an active role in supporting the children in their after-school activities. Ultimately, these two shows highlight the conclusion that the women in my focus group arrived at: "There are truly so many different ways to raise children." If these shows are any indication of where the representation of motherhood is headed in the future, I think mothers can rest assured that it will continue to move in a positive direction. In a time where women's rights and gender equality are under scrutiny and at the center of many political and social debates, it is more important than ever for our society to look at the messages that we are sending audiences about mothers, families, and most importantly about women.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the participants chosen as part of the focus group were all actual mothers themselves and therefore had more knowledge of motherhood-related issues far exceeding that of the average person. Although this fact lent itself to producing an open and accepting forum for discussion within the focus group, the opinions of these women cannot be taken as the opinions of society at large, due to their advanced knowledge and personal connection to the topic. If given more time to continue this research, I would have liked to have shown the focus group even more examples of television mothers and watched entire episodes rather than short clips so that they are able to see more of the progression in representation over time. If given the opportunity to hold more focus groups with a wider range of participants, I believe more pertinent data could be collected to further research the way that motherhood is discussed and viewed in society. Additional research could be done going more in-depth with each decade of television and working to identify which socio-political forces within society could have responsible for noticeable shifts in the way mothers were portrayed on TV. It would be interesting to note the difference in opinions across generations of women, but also including men in the research as well. This could possibly yield interesting results showing how inferential patriarchy can be traced through the time periods that people were raised in. As television continues to remain a looming presence in American homes and the way in which it is consumed continues to expand, stories of families and the mothers who work to keep them up and running will remain on the forefront of narrative discussion.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Ramapo College of New Jersey

Title of the Project: Evolution of 'The Mother' on Television: From the Kitchen to the Boardroom (Working Title)
Principle Investigator: Matthew Searfoss

Purpose: You are one of a group of participants being asked to participate in a study that investigates the changing role of mothers over a period of time in the past few decades. The study will evaluate the societal shift in perception and expectation of mothers and their role both within and separate from their families. Additionally, the study will look at the representation of mothers on television and evaluate if these characters reflect or reject the views/feelings of actual mothers.

Procedure: If you agree to participate, you will complete a focus group interview regarding your television viewing habits, and how you feel the role of mothers has been portrayed on TV and viewed in society. Additionally, you will be asked to provide information regarding your behavior as a mother as well as that of your own mother in order for the researcher to be able to compare data across generations. The focus group interview will take approximately 1.5-2 hours to complete and during the session, you are free to stop your participation at any time.

Confidentiality: Your response in this study will be anonymous. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be used in any written document. No one, not even the researcher, will be able to match your responses with your identity. Only the researcher and the faculty sponsor for this senior honors project will have access to the data from your responses.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks and/or penalties associated with this study.

Voluntary Participation: You participation in this project is voluntary. You may withdraw at anytime and you can decline to answer specific questions. There is no compensation offered for participation.

Further information regarding the research project: You have the right to ask any question regarding the research project and receive a response.

I have read the above statement, and I agree to participate.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant/ Date

_____ _____
Investigator's Signature Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Issues Facing Mothers Today

1. Since the 1950s, do you believe that being a mother and raising children has become more or less easy? Why/why not?
2. Have you ever experienced mom-shaming? (Explain concept if they do not understand/know what it is) Describe the experience/how did it make you feel?
3. Have you ever been the perpetrator of mom-shaming? What led you to do so?
4. Do you feel pressure from society and/or the media to be the perfect mom? If so, explain.
5. Who or what do you envision to be the typical mom in today's world? The perfect mom?
6. Do you view yourself as fitting into that mold of the typical mom?
7. Do you view a woman who puts her career on hold to stay at home and raise her children as any less of a woman than one who goes right back to work?
8. Do you believe there is a conflict between working mothers and stay at home moms? If so, where does it come from? Why does it exist?
9.

Motherhood on TV

10. How do you think the portrayal of mothers/motherhood on TV has shifted or changed over time since the 1950s? Why do you think this is?
11. What stereotypes do you see when mothers are portrayed in television series?
12. What would an honest/realistic representation of motherhood on television look like to you?
13. How, if at all, is this different from what you currently see?
14. Do you identify with any mother characters from a television series? If so, why?
15. How would you describe the way mothers/motherhood was represented on TV in the past? (i.e. 1950s, 1980s, 1990s)
16. How is this different or the same as the way they are represented today?
17. In your opinion, how can the representation of mothers on television be improved upon for the future?