

A QUIVER FULL OF MOMMY BLOGS:  
IDEOLOGICAL SUBVERSION AND REINFORCEMENT OF MOTHERING  
MODELS ONLINE

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**DEDICATION**

To my mom and dad, for raising three strong women.

And to my beloved Carter, for marrying one.

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**ABSTRACT**

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In this study, ideological criticism combined with use of muted group theory are employed to analyze four Quiverfull mothering blogs in order to unveil the models of mothering and maternal messages that emerge from the discourse. The Quiverfull, comprised of fundamentalist Christians who advocate prolific birth rates and strict traditional gender norms, propose a very narrowly defined view of motherhood. Therefore, the goal of this study is to analyze how Quiverfull mothers choose to construct and maintain their own rhetorical vision of motherhood through mommy blogs, in an effort to understand if Quiverfull mothers also struggle to “get it right” like so many other contemporary mothers, faced with cultural contradictions.

The findings unveil that Quiverfull mothers struggle with many of the same ideological pressures that mainstream mothers endure such as being almost entirely responsible for childrearing, wanting to find time for themselves amidst society’s demands that children become a mother’s “everything,” and negotiating their role as mothers in the public sphere. However, Quiverfull mothers’ primary difference from mainstream mothers is through their relationship with God. They relinquish all control to God’s will, challenging the notion that good mothers must always be in control.

Additionally, Quiverfull mothers distance themselves from feminist ideology by promulgating the need for male authority and criticizing all pro-choice sentiment.

Moreover, through the exploration of these online artifacts, this study acknowledges the ideological differences between mothering groups, yet exposes that both mainstream and Quiverfull mothers find success as a mother almost unattainable. As a result, this study proposes that mommy blogs have the rhetorical ability to challenge mothering models that destine many mothers to “fail,” imbue value into motherhood, and unite women of competing and polarized ideologies as a way to question the “timeless truth” of what constitutes good mothering.

Catherine A. Dobris, Ph.D., Chair

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Motherhood “Norms”*

Winston Churchill once wrote that his nanny, not his mother, had been the “dearest and most intimate friend during the whole of the twenty years” that she cared for him. He remembered that “it was to her that I poured out all my many troubles” because she “looked after me and tended all my wants” (Churchill Centre, 2010). His memory supports the romanticized Victorian construction of the English nanny, who largely replaced upper middle class biological mothers, a trend that did not often spread beyond England’s borders (Thurer, 1994, p. 219). Historical and geographical context is essential to understanding childrearing “norms” because good mothering is not some absolute “timeless truth,” but is instead a reflection of a specific cultural model that was socially constructed (Hays, 1996, p. 52). Churchill’s mothering experience would most likely be challenged in contemporary Western society, due to the prevalence of today’s mothering models that advocate, among other things, the need for mothers (not nannies) to be the primary caretakers (not friends) of their children.

#### *New Momism and Intensive Mothering*

Communication and Philosophy scholars Douglas and Michaels (2004) define one of these contemporary models as “new momism,” when a good mother is expected to devote her “entire being” to her children, a standard that is impossible to meet (2004, p. 4). This is a sizeable request placed on today’s mother, since motherhood is often a job that is largely undervalued, unquantifiable and in some cases invisible.

Sharon Hays, in her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996), argues that most mothers follow these contemporary models, such as “new momism” and the “intensive mothering” model, simply because mothers are often unaware of them and perceive the expectations for motherhood as “natural and necessary” (p. 4). Hays’ (1996) exploration of the socially constructed “intensive mothering” model, which prevails as the Western ideal for mothers, unveils many of the contradictions posed by societal mothering expectations that often limit mothers’ ability to achieve “success” in childrearing.

Hays’ interviews with U.S. mothers with various backgrounds combined with a textual analysis of best selling childrearing manuals, reinforces the ubiquity of mothering expectations that adhere to many of the unattainable tenets of intensive mothering. According to Hays, the five basic tenets of this model include: the mother is the primary caretaker, the mother takes a child-centered approach to childrearing, the primary caretakers view raising children as “emotionally absorbing” and “labor intensive” (p. 8), the primary caretakers understand childrearing as expensive, and primary caretakers consult expert guided opinions on childrearing. Hays (1996) claims this model places unrealistic expectations on mothers and “serves the interest not only of men but also of capitalism, the state, the middle class, and whites” (p. xiii) because the absence of empowering messages to mothers encourages consumerism and leaves patriarchy intact (Johnston & Swanson, 2003b, p. 260). Hays’ intensive mothering model provides a framework for understanding how contemporary Western trends in childrearing practices impact and influence mothering ideologies and how these ideologies disseminate.

*Motherhood Goes Rhetorical*

Public discourse and childrearing manuals have reflected the experiences and expectations of men, which often renders women's perspectives underrepresented (Thurer, 1994). Women and mothers have shared knowledge among themselves in several ways throughout history; however, many argue (Lopez, 2008; Lamp & Howard, 1999; Powell, 2010) that the most efficient and common way to disseminate and obtain mothering information, in particular, is now through the internet. Powell (2010) notes that the internet has provided a public venue for mothers to instantly become connected with one another, creating and disseminating their personal vision of motherhood, and most significantly, providing an online outlet for their voice as a "muted group" (Ardener, 1975; Kramarae, 1981; Littlejohn, 1999). Powell (2010) suggests that "in mommy blogging, motherhood goes public; motherhood goes rhetorical" (p. 37), showing the ability of this medium to perpetuate or subvert contemporary mothering trends.

"Mommy blogs" make up over a third of all online blogging sites; the more popular mothering sites can garner up to 50,000 hits per day (Sifry, 2008). While much of this discourse acts as a way to foster community among parents, it is also a platform to construct and maintain competing motherhood ideologies. One of the ideologies that have grown in the last decade, due in part to mommy blogs, is the Christian fundamentalist Quiverfull approach to childrearing.

Fundamentalist Christianity advocates reading the bible as a literal manual for life. Therefore, this "grass roots" conservative Christian movement founded in the late 1980s, known as the Quiverfull Movement, takes its motivations directly from biblical

scripture (Joyce, 2006; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). The Quiverfull place a strong emphasis on a woman's duty as wife and mother leading to the revival of "an old ideal of Christian womanhood" (Joyce, 2009, p. ix). Therefore, for example, a woman who follows the Quiverfull ideology wears modest, feminine dress and does not speak in church, to demonstrate her respect for male authority. She works inside the home, where she is its tireless center: homeschooling her children, keeping house, cooking bulk meals, and helping her husband run a home business or ministry (Joyce, 2009). This ideal embodies what Quiverfull refer to as "biblical womanhood," a role that also includes upholding one's "job" to be sexually available to her husband and to refuse any form of birth control as a way to ensure that marital relations result in as many children as God is willing to grant her (Joyce, 2009, p. ix).

This specific role as prolific mother is relatively specific to the Quiverfull, since it is expressed as their top priority. As fundamentalist Christians, the Quiverfull found this cause written within the bible, justifying their beliefs as simply following God's plans. Quiverfull is a term taken from Psalm 127: 3-5, in which bearing children is celebrated as a militaristic feat:

Lo, children *are* an [sic] heritage of the LORD:  
*and* the fruit of the womb is *his* reward.  
 As arrows *are* in the hand of a mighty man;  
 so *are* children of the youth.  
 Happy *is* the man that hath his quiver full of them:  
 they shall not be ashamed,  
 but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate  
 (King James Bible, 2000).

This specific group has a very narrowly defined model of childrearing allowing for an analysis of their rhetorical vision of motherhood by not only examining visions expressed online through ministry websites but through Quiverfull mommy blogs. Although the

Quiverfull place a strong emphasis on traditional roles for women in the private sphere, several Quiverfull mothers are disseminating their personal experience on the internet. Therefore, in this study, I employ the ideological critical method with a feminist lens to Quiverfull mothering blogs in order to analyze the models of mothering and maternal messages that emerge from the discourse.

### *Overview of Chapters*

In my thesis, I provide a literature review of pertinent research. I briefly discuss significant 20<sup>th</sup> century historical shifts in childrearing that impacted motherhood norms, ideals and the lives of women. I then explore literature on contemporary mothering models as constructions reflecting contemporary cultural norms and the tensions that these perspectives may incite among women. Next, I explain blogs' history and the role that gender and motherhood plays within this online subculture through "mommy blogs." I discuss the Quiverfull Movement, its strict gender norms, childrearing ideology, and its presence in the blogosphere. I then develop a rationale for this study and provide an explanation of my chosen artifacts: four Quiverfull mothering blogs. Finally, I present my methodology of ideological criticism infused with feminist muted group theory as a way to unveil and process ideological competition in the blogosphere among "muted groups" through the bolstering or challenging of patriarchal thoughts on motherhood.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Medicalization and Western Motherhood*

Everyone has a mother. Although everyone has, in some sense, a mother, history reveals that the responsibilities of this figure and how we choose to talk about her have changed throughout time and context. Many agree that the industrial shift in the beginning of the 20th century in Western culture greatly impacted motherhood, due to its influence on the home. Many men moved away from agrarian lifestyles to commute to workplaces in the city and became even more distant from the private sphere (Thurer, 1994; Glenn, 1994). This cultural shift encouraged women to become the primary caregivers to children and the domestic fixture in the home. The “privacy” of a mother’s work masked her economic significance and rendered her contributions invisible, forcing her dependence on her husband’s earnings for survival (Thurer, 1994, p. 187). While industrialization impacted private and public life, it also had a role in Western culture’s paradigm shift from idealizing the natural to the scientific.

Publications by male intellectuals of this period reflect a shift (Hall, 1904; Holt, 1894; Watson, 1928), which implied that maternal affection alone was not sufficient to raise children, but that women had to be educated for motherhood by means of referencing expert texts on childrearing (Hays, 1996, p. 40). Texts suggested that women were irrational and overindulgent and reinforced the notion that untrained mothers were over permissive and incompetent caretakers. Mothers were encouraged to harness the child’s impulses through strict behavioral training, often resulting in meticulous

bookkeeping and firm feeding schedules. This scientific and stringent model proposed that “there is a sensible way of treating children...Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit on your lap...Shake hands with them in the morning” (Holt, 1894). This demonstrates the unemotional, unnatural and businesslike relationship that was at one time encouraged by experts, showing the ephemeral nature of some motherhood models. By the 1940s, however, a new class of mothering experts, led by Dr. Benjamin Spock, characterized this view as preposterous. But these early texts in effect deflated mothers’ confidence, encouraging their complicity within the “scientific” shift in the mothering paradigm of this era, which offered male doctors control over the “natural” female domain of childrearing.

In her historical and critical look at the evolution of motherhood models entitled *Myths of Motherhood* (1994), Shari Thurer agrees that the mother’s “fall from grace” was a consequence of the rise of science. She claims that it was during the early decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when both a mother’s “hair and her skirts got clipped, but so did her Angel’s wings,” (p. 225) signaling the end of the romanticized Victorian mother construction featuring unadulterated morals and pure domesticity. Instead, mothers became secondary figures in both childrearing and even childbirth. Male doctors had displaced midwives, with the allure of heightened “scientific” male credibility. The demise of midwife assisted births in the home turned what had previously been constructed as a natural event into a medical “procedure” enacted in hospitals.

Kimberly Kline’s 2007 article “Midwife Attended Births in Prime-Time Television: Crazy, Controlling Bitches and Ultimate Capitulation” speaks to this shift to the scientific that is evident in today’s media portrayal of midwife-attended birth as the



“irrational choice” that ultimately reaffirms the “need for the dominant medical model,” (p. 22), in which a physician is the “hero” (Rooks, 1997). She analyzes three contemporary primetime television shows that depict home births: *Gilmore Girls*, *Dharma & Greg*, and *Girlfriends*. Kline (2007) finds that the televised discussions on midwifery practices are not only seen as unusual but “silly and gross,” further privileging the physician attended hospital birth (p. 22). Additionally, Kline notes that these television episodes consistently depicted the midwife as a “snide,” “controlling” “bitch,” which she argues undermines women in this authoritative medical role.

Medicalized models and “science” are not only projected as rational in the act of childbirth but also in cases of twentieth century childcare. Following the shift to medicalized authority, a mother concerned about her children would look to a scientifically and medically informed expert, most often a male physician (Apple, 2006), rather than seeking advice from a fellow mother, which was historically a source of support and knowledge (Thurer, 1994). This again demonstrates that motherhood was no longer constructed as natural in the early 20th century. Motherhood now relied on the credibility and perceived progress of science, marginalizing women from the birthing process and in effect undermining their capacity to be active participants in this “procedure,” which has arguably produced residual effects on today’s mothers. Emphasis on a doctor’s authority is rarely challenged even in today’s culture and is often reinforced through contemporary childcare manuals.

### *Mothering Discourse*

Dobris and White-Mills (2004) discuss the patriarchal vision of motherhood in their article “Rhetorical Visions of Motherhood: A Feminist Analysis of the *What to*

*Expect Series.*” They suggest that although women give birth to children, they are “systematically excluded from the discourse on childbearing” since childcare manuals were historically written by men for men or in recent years, by men for women (Dobris & White-Mills p. 26). One could argue that women are historically rendered a “muted group” (Kramarae, 1981; Ardener, 1975) among childrearing discourse with the widespread popularity of texts written by Spock and Brazelton that propose intensive mothering in which mothers are primary, fulltime caregivers and entirely responsible for childcare (Hays, 1994).

Even though childcare manuals are now being regularly written by women for women, assumptions about traditional maternal expectations are still evident. Dobris and White-Mills (2004) argue that the contemporary vision proposed in recent childcare manuals, such as the *What to Expect* series idealize middle-class, educated, heterosexual, highly insured, relatively young mothers; therefore, “women who do not fit this mold are routinely excluded from the discourse” (p. 27). But embodying this ideal does not mean the mother is entirely competent. Dobris and White-Mills (2004) point out that while these contemporary mothering manuals encourage mothers to follow their maternal instincts, they must consult a doctor or nurse to be entirely certain of a decision. This perpetuates the contradictory pressure on mothers to embody their “natural” role as mother, but under the “science” of a doctor’s orders, exposing why many mothers can never seem to “get it right.”

#### *Contemporary Models of Motherhood*

As previously introduced, these contradictory messages are explored in sociologist Sharon Hays’ 1994 book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Using

quantitative and qualitative methods, Hays discusses contemporary motherhood ideology through analysis of bestselling childrearing books as well as interviews and surveys with a diverse mix of mothers. From her analysis, she illuminated five tenets of intensive mothering that place an unrealistic reliance on mothers to be completely devoted to all aspects of motherhood, yet are expected to be financially invested in the child's upbringing. Many mothers detail that working is essential to provide the lifestyles they want for their children; however, they often feel that the social expectations placed on them to be available, nurturing mothers and workers is often unrealistically demanding. Even though motherhood can be perceived as "sacred" (Boris, 1985), natural and commonsensical for women, Hays' intensive mothering framework provides a tool to systematically "unpack" and explore this constructed mothering ideology distinct to Western society that supports the status quo.

These ideologies are not only reinforced through childhood manuals as Dobris and White-Mills (2004) and Hays (1994) propose, they are promulgated in media at large. For example, Douglas and Michaels' 2004 book, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* discusses the role that popular culture has played in the unattainable standards set for contemporary mothers. They define "new momism" as the rise in media that insists that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has children, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children and that in order to be a good mother, a woman must devote her entire being to caring for her children (p. 4). They see "new momism" as a highly romanticized construction of motherhood that is also exhausting. One example these authors reference is the "attack of the celebrity mom," who touts motherhood as sexy and

endlessly rewarding (p. 110). Therefore, contradictory messages evident in contemporary models like “new momism” and patriarchal childrearing discourse, limit the description of what a “good mother” can be. This is partially a result of media’s portrayal of “maternal delinquents” (p. 140).

Douglas and Michaels (2004) detail the trend in the 1980s and 1990s that highlighted mothers as “freaks of maternal nature, their actions utterly incomprehensible” as a way to understand the pervasive influence of “new momism” (p. 141). They argue that these stories highlighted the “epidemic” of crack mothers, abusive mothers, neglectful mothers, and murdering mothers. While many of these stories reflect real incidents, Douglas and Michaels ask the question as to why so many of these stories were sensationalized and thus changed the climate among mothers. They found that these stories, like that of mother Susan Smith who let her car roll into a lake as her toddler sons sat strapped in their car seats, acted as warnings about what could happen if a mother were to “break the rules” of “new momism” ideology.

Dramatic portrayals of maternal delinquents in media also prevailed in soap operas (*Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, and *Dynasty*), during which the “viewing public” became judge and jury (pp. 142-143). Mothers became exposed for society’s inspection during which audiences cringed as mother’s failed at their “natural” role. This incited a tone that reminded mothers that they must “police thyselves” (p. 141). Essentially, these warnings served to ensure that mothers avoided 1940’s “momism” in which mothers “ruined their children by coddling and overprotecting them” and contemporary damnation as a “maternal delinquent” who neglected her offspring (pp.

141-142). Moreover, all mothers seemingly were “damned if they do; damned if they don’t.”

*Motherhood as a Double Bind*

In their article “Undermining Mothers: A Content Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Magazines” (2003b), Johnston and Swanson comment on the prevalence of four “maternal contradictions” that they define as double binds. Double binds have the effect of deflating confidence and engendering feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Bateson, 1972; Watzlawick et al., 1967). They argue that double binds arise when expectations and condemnation are linked in a way that in order to achieve the expectations is to invite the condemnation; essentially, one is “damned if they do, and damned if they don’t” (Shaw & Lee, 2009). In the case of motherhood, Johnston and Swanson highlight that “mother roles are contested and, as a result, mothers are inundated with contradictory messages that affirm a particular mother role and simultaneously condemn a mother for achieving it.” For example, a mother is encouraged that her role should be in the home with her children’s care as her sole priority; however, she is then perceived by society as a smothering, powerless domestic fixture who lacks ambition and must answer to her children. This reinforces Dobris and White-Mills’ point that women are often unable to “get it right” as mothers.

The four double binds that Johnston and Swanson (2003b) uncover in contemporary magazine content are a) mothers are selfish/selfless; b) mothers should foster independence/dependence in children; c) mothers who succeed/fail in the private sphere, fail/succeed in the public sphere; and d) mothers are natural/unnatural at mothering (p. 245). They argue that in order to be a “good mother” one undoubtedly fails

in the public realm and to have a public identity as a professional outside of one's identity as a mother, mothers have failed to fulfill their domestic role. Essentially, Johnston and Swanson conclude that contemporary mothers are only lacking one thing: confidence (Kedgley, 1996). Additionally, Foucault (1978) explains that hegemonic power is maintained when only the dominant group can fulfill its constructed ideals and the subordinate groups routinely fail. In other words, due to maternal double binds, mothers are destined to "fail," further undermining maternal confidence amidst patriarchal constraints and expectations.

Feeling powerless and unconfident, mothers may struggle to be taken seriously in contemporary Western society. Ann Crittenden's 2001 book *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job is the Least Valued* explores the devaluing of motherhood as a concept as "insubstantial as clouds of angel dust" (p. 2). Like Douglas and Michaels (2004), who address the stereotypical construction of welfare mothers as overweight, not white, lazy, and promiscuous, Crittenden addresses stigmas attached to motherhood ideologies such as employed mothers as frazzled and selfish, showing that negative connotations are connected to almost all motherhood constructions, including stay-at-home mothers as Johnston and Swanson (2003) discussed. Most significantly, Crittenden presents motherhood as a career that should not only be culturally valued, but fiscally appreciated, since mothers are raising the next top producers in the economy. However, since women feel they "must" be intensive mothers, they often feel they have only two choices: the "traditional mother" who stays at home and devotes her energy to her family by cooking, cleaning and being endlessly available or "supermom" who effortlessly juggles home and work while maintaining an impeccable presentation and a strong spirit

(Hays, 1996, pp. 131-132). These two choices can lead to tensions among mothers who advocate their position. These tensions have been labeled “mommy wars” (Steiner, 2006).

### *Mommy Wars*

Leslie Morgan Steiner, *Washington Post* executive and working mother, writes about the “face off” between stay-at-home and career mothers in her popular 2006 anthology *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families*. Steiner explores this polarized view of motherhood as a way to have a deeper understanding of the tensions that add to this maternal “cat fight” (p. xxi). She argues that although mothers should unite in their quest to stay sane to defend against the “overly aggressive, overly logical male half of the species” (p. xxi), many women still choose to participate in competitive dialogue. Through this text, Steiner offers an eclectic mix of narratives from both working and stay-at-home mothers to encourage a deeper understanding of disparate perspectives on motherhood as a way to assuage tension to those mothers who internalize “war rhetoric.”

But as Johnston and Swanson (2004) found, the mother war rhetoric impacts stay-at-home mothers the most. In their article “Moms Hating Moms: The Internalization of Mother War Rhetoric” (2004), Johnston and Swanson explore the polarized construction of at-home and employed mothers in the media and the tension this creates among women. They found that the traditional motherhood ideology is proposed in media in the depictions of mothers as white women in the home, yard or car (p. 498). They note that employed mothers are largely absent in women’s magazines in particular, showing that perhaps the everyday challenges faced by women who must balance work and family are

seen as a “non-issue” (p. 498). Johnston and Swanson (2004) conducted interviews with 98 married women with preschool aged children to understand how at-home, part-time, and full-time employed mothers viewed each other. Their findings support the existence of the “mother wars.”

At-home mothers routinely described the employed mother based on dehumanizing stereotypical images as a “frazzled,” “machine,” “yearning to be a stay-at-home mom” (p. 501) rather than a caring, human being. Employed mothers, on the other hand, described at-home mothers as people with feelings and desires. This proposes that perhaps at-home mothers are more affected and likely to internalize mother wars rhetoric, because they struggle to establish an identity outside of motherhood; therefore, they are defensive towards mothers who have done this through employment in the public sphere. But of the 98 women interviewed, Johnston and Swanson explain that almost 20% felt culture does not support mothers in general, demonstrating that no matter what choice mothers make or mothering ideology they practice, it is not valued (p. 503).

While many theorists argue that only two dominant choices exist for mothering (employed and at-home), Johnston and Swanson’s (2003a) posit that these choices can exist within four different ideologies. In the article “Invisible Mothers: A Content Analysis of Motherhood Ideologies and Myths in Magazines,” Johnston and Swanson look at parenting magazines’ portrayals to unveil four mothering ideologies: the traditional mother paradigm, the feminist model of motherhood, the neo-traditionalist ideology and economic nurturing ideology. Traditional mothers are characterized by hierarchical control and maternal sacrifice. Childcare and domestic tasks are the responsibility of the mother. The traditional mother is white, educated, married, middle-



class, and does not work outside the home (Hays, 1996; Keller, 1994). According to Johnston and Swanson (2003a), this ideology supports Lakeoff's (1996) "Strict Father Model" that encourages children to develop strong moral character through self-discipline, self-restraint and self-control in order to combat the evils of the world.

The feminist model promotes parent-shared child and domestic responsibilities, rewarding employment and empowering roles within the family (Ehrensaft, 1983; Held, 1983). The feminist model assumes public sphere involvement in the process of raising children rather than the traditional model, which relegates mothers to the private sphere for childrearing. This way, the feminist model promotes a culture in which both children and motherhood are valued (Kittay, 1983), allowing mothers to pursue personal interests with the accessibility of quality childcare options.

Johnston and Swanson's third ideology is that of the neo-traditionalists who leave the workforce to return to the "hearth." These mothers claim feminist values as a justification for their return to the private sphere. They maintain that their choice is exercising and reinforcing personal fulfillment and empowerment. This model promotes child-centered care known as "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996). This ideology deeply relies on the latest childrearing books, magazines and websites as a source of knowledge, showing that these mothers often reflect current mothering trends (p. 24).

Economic nurturing ideology demonstrates motherly love through a mother's ability to provide additional goods and services to her children (Keller, 1994). Because of this drive to provide more and better things for children, mothers are able to justify their working in the public sphere as a way to meet the economic demands of this ideology that encourage mothers to "buy experiences for their children" (Johnston &

Swanson, 2003a, p. 24). The economic nurturing ideology demonstrates the role that consumerism plays in “good” mothering. Later in this literature review, I will discuss how advertisers capitalize on this recent trend.

Even though Johnston and Swanson (2003a) propose four mothering ideologies, their analysis of magazines shows that only two polarized themes are presented in mainstream media: traditional and nontraditional roles. They argue that this explains what they call the “mother war” between “superwoman,” who efficiently manages her household and children with the drive and savvy she employs in the business world, versus the “Earth mother,” who, with bare feet and a warm smile, feeds her children homegrown, organic foods. However, where these four ideologies fit into these dichotomous stereotypical characterizations is not entirely clear, showing why their analysis of parenting magazines can help sort out the subversion or reinforcement of ideologies. Johnston and Swanson’s (2003a) findings were interesting, because the depictions in magazines challenge traditional stereotypes of stay-at-home and working mothers, respectively.

They found that stay-at-home moms were depicted in popular, contemporary parenting magazines as unhappy, not proud, and confused, which contradicts the myth of the blissful home experience of mothers (p. 30). Additionally contradictory, working mothers were constructed as happy, busy and proud, not the myths commonly associated with employed mothers as exhausted, guilty and disconnected (p. 27, 30). One myth that was upheld by their analysis, however, was the frequent visual depiction of “mother” as a white, at-home mother who seldom ventures outside the domestic sphere (p. 29). This reinforces that those who do not fit this mold (e.g. mothers of color who may or may not

work outside the home) are excluded, bolstering the construction that only white women value mothering and thus, white children have more value since they require a full time stay-at-home mother (p. 29). White children have historically been constructed as more valuable, since women of color may leave their own children to care for white children as a nanny or housekeeper. The concept of race and mothering models may prove to be a telling component of my later analysis, since women of color are not only less likely to utilize blogs and other online resources, but are unrepresented within the Quiverfull movement, furthering the proposal of white mothers as ubiquitous in media in effect universalizing white women's mothering experience as the dominant maternal narrative. This trend of the universal mothering experience as that of white, married women is reinforced through a variety of publication types but most recently reinforced online through weblogs.

One feminist blogger, author of "Raising My Boychick: Parenting, privilege, and rethinking the norm," criticizes the "misogynist" *New York Times* article entitled "Honey, Don't Bother Mommy. I'm Too Busy Building My Brand" that highlighted only the experiences of white, straight, married middle class mommy bloggers (Mendelsohn, 2010) as a vehicle for the "kyriarchy." She claims that the *New York Times* story reinforces the perceived ubiquity of the white, straight, middle class mother's experience as the norm in mommy blogs and in society. This mommy blogger details that kyriarchy defines the structure of privilege beyond the limits of patriarchy. She argues that society not only privileges the masculine over feminine, but rich over poor and thin over fat, for example (Raising My Boychick, 2010) and that this structure is blatant within the "mamasphere." Elita @ Blacktating responded to the "Raising my Boychick" criticism

of the *New York Times*' example of kyriarchy by writing that she wanted to comment without sounding like the "angry black chick" because she demands to know "where are all the moms of color? Where are the lesbians? The single moms? The moms who aren't married?" in the blogosphere? By looking at the history of blogs and the kyriarchy that has developed, perhaps many bloggers can better understand why their narratives are muted.

### *Blog History*

The first blogs were started in the early 1990s, and with the advent of easy-to-use weblog software, the number of blogs has risen to an estimated 133 million - a number that doubles every 200 days (Sifry, 2008), meaning that the number of blogs in 2011 could reach numbers over 400 million. Developed from the term web logs, weblogs became known by the contemporary term "blogs" in 1999 when Peter Merholz split the word into the phrase "we blog," resulting in the terms and concepts we now know as "blogs" and "blogging" (Tobias, 2005). These online forums that log comments by the author in reverse chronological order have been in existence since the 1990s; however, many argue it was the 2004 Presidential election that catapulted blogs from a "hot trend" to a vital part of an "internet Revolution" that transformed online communication (Tobias, 2005).

The terms "weblog, weblogging, and weblogger" were added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003, solidifying the role of this internet communication dialogue as more than a passing trend, but a new substantiated form of communication. Vicki Tobias (2005) argues that however mundane, absurd, controversial or pedantic blog themes may be, these online, time-stamped logs are "modern manifestations of our First

Amendment rights, providing both voice and audience for anyone with an opinion” (p. 11), showing that this media outlet can feasibly be a way for all citizens with education and internet access to have a voice.

*Women in the Blogosphere*

According to a 2009 study by BlogHer, iVillage and Compass Partners, 23 million women read, write or comment on blogs weekly (Mendelsohn, 2010), yet many argue that women’s growing voices within the blogosphere are not readily “heard.” Trish Wilson, in her 2005 article “Women in the Blogosphere,” suggests that women’s voices have lacked exposure in the blogosphere. She claims that male bloggers often ask “where are all the women bloggers?” but they really should be asking “why have I not noticed all the fine women bloggers out there?” She argues that despite nearly half of all bloggers being women, most A-list bloggers who are cited and lauded by media and audiences are men who pay little attention to women bloggers (p. 11). However, Gregg (2006) argues that perhaps women can answer this question in a subversive way in an attempt to draw attention to gender politics within and outside of the blogosphere.

In her 2006 book chapter “Posting with Passion: Blogs and the Politics of Gender,” Melissa Gregg offers a poignant retort to the question “where are all the women bloggers?” She notes that it is no coincidence that perhaps women are perceived as less involved in the blogosphere because “women simply have less time to blog because of the unequal distribution of labour between genders. If anything, gender inequality in blogging demonstrates the reality of the second shift” (Gregg, 2006, p. 153; Hochschild, 1989). In other words, because many women are saddled with work outside and inside the home, they have less time than men to blog. Gregg also works to dispel the myth that

women are “invisible” online simply because they only write about trivial topics like their “pets, hobbies and other domestic concerns” (p. 153); but rather, women may often be too consumed with their public and private responsibilities to be more readily visible online. Additionally, Gregg points out that by restating repeatedly that women do not participate in the blogosphere, perhaps men are preserving their territory. She highlights that when a technology is used mostly by women (e.g. the telephone, typewriter or the washing machine, for instance) its value within society tends to lessen (Spender, 1995). Therefore, the gendered blogosphere that renders women “unheard” and even “invisible” is perhaps a way to preserve its (masculine) value as a technologically elite medium.

Wilson (2005) agrees, arguing that the blogosphere promotes a myth of “equal turf” in which all can join and participate; however, hierarchical structures infiltrate this virtual sphere. Wilson notes that Christine Cupaiuolo, a blogger for *Ms. Magazine*, proposes that the online world mirrors the real world’s “old boys’ network” in which male bloggers of high regard (who often write on topics such as politics) list other blog links on their pages that happen to be written by men, enacting a web of discourse that promotes similar ideologies. One woman blogger who writes a political blog notes that “I recently found out that a lot of people thought I was a man” due to her “hard-hitting” military analysis. After being referred to as “he,” she asked her audience why they assumed she was a male, and one respondent stated that “you just assume that everyone is a man unless you hear otherwise” demonstrating the hegemonic view that the blogosphere, particularly regarding subjects such as politics, is not “equal turf” at all, but reserved for male discourse.

Many assert that there is a significant place for women's discourse in the blogosphere, but it is not in men's domain in which topics such as politics, sports, finance, and comic books are discussed. Women's blogs are perceived as more "personal" online "diaries" thereby resulting in audiences taking them less seriously, even when their personal perspectives are on subjects such as politics or business (Wilson, 2005, p. 12). This perception alludes to the construction that female discourse is less important, trivial "fluff." The lack of global interest in female blogs can be quantified in a few ways.

In July 2008, for example, the technology website Techcult published a list of the "top 100 web celebrities." Nearly all were bloggers, and only eleven were women, showing that "notable" blog contributors are routinely men. Additionally, the topics for which women bloggers are lauded often fit into the male realm of discourse. In Michael Banks' 2008 book *Blogging Heroes: Interviews with 30 of the World's Top Bloggers*, he selects the top thirty bloggers based on their popularity, style and background. Of the thirty selected, six of the blogs are written by women. The majority of the female bloggers wrote about traditionally male topics such as business, technology, trucking, landscape architecture, and elite luxury items such as real estate. Only one wrote about parenting. An emphasis on "masculine" activities demonstrates that perhaps Banks (2008) has an unknown bias in his selection methods, or perhaps the women who are popular and visible in the blogosphere are notable because of their blog's masculine content. This illuminates that the masculine is recognized and rewarded in both the everyday and online.

Dustin Harp and Mark Tremayne's 2006 article "The Gendered Blogosphere: Examining Inequality Using Network and Feminist Theory" examines this online hegemony by arguing that online space mimics public space and that the "real world will continue in the virtual world" (p. 249), helping to establish a "hyperlink hierarchy" that privileges men's contributions to the blogosphere. Harp and Tremayne (2006) see the dichotomy of public/private associated with male/female as a source of influence that is present in the blogosphere, hindering women's contributions to topics about practices in the public sphere. They claim that since men are considered "best suited and responsible for the public sphere," most topics of the political realm are reserved for male discourse, which helps to reinforce hegemonic perspectives evident in everyday life (p. 249). Through their article, Harp and Tremayne (2006) explore why more women are not more visible in the blogosphere as top bloggers, since only three of the top thirty political bloggers are women and none are within the top ten most popular, and what can be done to make political blogging, in particular, more equitable.

Their findings regarding gender disparity revealed three dominant beliefs and misconceptions among bloggers: women do not blog about politics, women's blogs lack quality and top bloggers do not link to women's sites. However, one blogger, Kevin Drum of the *Washington Monthly*, articulates his justification for women's perceived absence in the political blogosphere by stating "men are more comfortable with the food fight nature of opinion writing - I imagine that the fundamental viciousness and self aggrandizement inherent in opinion writing turns off a lot of women" (Harp & Tremayne, 2006, p. 255). Perhaps it is the aggressive virtual environment that deters women from participating in the blogosphere that pertains to male dominated, public sphere topics.



However, one woman blogger writes “even though you [Kevin Drum] have said you read me every day you don’t have me on your blogroll<sup>1</sup>. It’s things like that that make me tear out my hair when people wonder why women are underrepresented in the top-rated weblogs” (as cited in Harp & Tremayne, 2006, p. 256). This demonstrates the “hyperlink hierarchy,” explaining that women are indeed “out there” in the blogosphere, but are often overlooked due to their blogs perceived lack in quality. Therefore, millions of women have focused their energy to a new genre of blogging outside the typical male dominated topics of politics and business. These blogs share mothers’ firsthand accounts that document the challenges and rewards of contemporary mothering. Known as “mommy blogs,” these online forums often discuss the everyday experiences of mothers, but more significantly, many act as an expressive outlet for support, frustrations and information written by women and for women.

### *Mommy Blogs*

Of the 133 million existing blogs in 2008, 36% of women and 16% of men were focusing on family centered discourse (Sifry, 2008) showing the sizable audience for these topics associated with the private sphere. Of these family blogs, the majority are written by mothers about their mothering experience (Sifry, 2008). These online mothering forums are referred to as “mommy blogs.” The title “mommy blogger” can be “both a source of pride and a source of embarrassment; it can both compliment and demean” (Lopez, 2008, p. 730) demonstrating the highs and lows of being a female blogger who illuminates topics in the private sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> A blogroll is a list of other blogs worth reading, chosen by the blog’s author.

In Lori Kido Lopez's 2008 article "The Radical Act of 'Mommy Blogging': Redefining Motherhood through the Blogosphere," she looks to the annual BlogHer Convention that is comprised of women bloggers who work to "shatter the stigma" that women only write about children in their blogs (p. 730), in order to understand women and mothers' struggle to define their online identity as significant and even "radical." She explores the ways that mommy blogging challenges representations of motherhood as "private" and how this process was interpreted by fellow women bloggers who wrote on "public" topics such as politics. This exploration shows the ideological tensions among female bloggers who struggle to negotiate between what is public and what is private and how mommy bloggers can fit into this virtual world, while being taken seriously.

Lopez (2008) argues that it is no wonder why women have been reluctant to embrace the term "mommy blogger" since the "entire concept of being a mother is overwhelming and imbued with failure" because "once women become mothers, their lives are taken over by society's strict sets of rules and expectations" (p. 732). Lopez's article illuminates how mommy bloggers have replaced the construction of the loving, endlessly patient mother with the realistic frazzled mother who seeks answers online, who suffered from postpartum depression, or who struggled to control her raging hormones. She argues that outsiders (e.g. men, and non mothers) critique and judge these forms of discourse as insignificant; however, these blogs are sustained by the millions of women who experience similar challenges and seek to subvert the myths of motherhood.

Even though mommy blogs have loyal fan bases analogous to popular male political blogs, Lopez notes that mommy blogs are marginalized in the female blogging

community and require defending. Lopez suggests that the role of mother is demarcated further from more celebrated roles of women; therefore, mothers must make particularly convincing arguments as to why their autobiographical writing deserves to exist (Lopez, 2008, p. 735; Siegel, 1999). Lopez notes that this challenge among mothers to be taken seriously became evident at the 2005 BlogHer convention during which non mothers wanted to distance themselves from the stereotype that all women who blogged wrote about their children. One BlogHer attendee simply claimed “we [the female blogging community] are not just mommy bloggers.” Another stated that “She’s a good writer, for a mommy blogger.” One reminded her female audience that if women “stopped writing about themselves, [women bloggers] could change the world” (Lopez, 2008, p. 736, 730), implying that the female narratives lack impact and value.

While many argued that this convention was a success, the role of mommy bloggers at the convention proved to be controversial. In response to this tension, a founder of BlogHer wrote that a clear “distinction” was being drawn between women blogging about “important stuff” like technology and current events and women “‘just’ blogging about their feelings, their families and the joys and struggles of parenting” (Camahort, 2006), showing that even among women, the hyperlink hierarchy remains intact. Furthermore, Lopez (2008) argues that the feud between mothers and non mothers in the blogosphere is still brewing; however, one fact is clear, mommy bloggers are being recognized as an important force among bloggers. And one noteworthy way that mommy bloggers are being taken seriously is due to their commercial viability as consumers and advertisers.

*Mommy Blogs' Economic Value*

Stephanie Thompson's 2007 article "Mommy Blogs: A Marketer's Dream" details the commercial value of this "word-of-mouth network" of blogging mothers who "work cheap and have a direct line to a demographic that spends more than \$2 trillion a year" (p. 6). She explains that online marketers often worry about the quality of the blogs as having a bad design or even worse, bad writing; however, many popular mommy blogs are run by successful agency creative directors, advertising lawyers or major media pros who happen to also be mothers. This demonstrates that many mommy bloggers are not only running impressive blogs for "big-spending modern moms" (p. 6), but are working mothers as well, which dispels the myth that all mommy bloggers are stay-at-home mothers.

Popular mommy bloggers are offering high quality design and writing to their loyal, intimately connected fan base, and these bloggers see their potential by becoming what Thompson refers to as "mompreneurs." Business savvy bloggers join forces with retailers who cater to children's markets. For example, blog "Mommy Track'd" leads its readers to deals and discounts and has an exclusive deal with Gap, Old Navy and the store, Piperlime. Gap, an international retailer, won praise for its innovative marketing that did not utilize stale banner ads but rather would have mommy bloggers wrap Gap's customized messages into their own tips and suggestions. The bloggers' product reviews direct readers to the blogger's favorite choices (Thompson, 2007, p. 7), proving large payouts to mommy bloggers who allow this form of advertising on their site. According to eMarketer, advertising on blogs topped \$746 million by 2010, more than twice the figure in 2007 (Mendelsohn, 2010). Moreover, retailers are finding that "the blog world

is ripe to be targeted” especially among mommy bloggers who provide trustworthy product endorsement to their intimately connected following.

In addition to being paid for their contributions to the blogosphere, mommy bloggers are also becoming visible in the “real world.” Jack Neff (2008) explains Procter & Gamble’s recognition of mommy blogs’ commercial potential in his article “P & G Relies on Power of Mommy Bloggers.” Procter & Gamble’s Pampers<sup>2</sup> invited the top fifteen most popular mommy bloggers to the company’s Cincinnati headquarters in an effort to reach out to their online markets (p. 1); P & G even sent a group to the Beijing Olympics. Procter & Gamble are not the only company to utilize this marketing tactic. Kodak sent top mommy bloggers to the Oscars and General Motors drove a group to Disney World in their newest Chevy model (Mendelsohn, 2010). While these all-expense-paid trips drew some controversy, P & G marketers assert that they are proposing a new industry practice to inform bloggers, rather than buy their loyalty (Neff, 2008). They explain that bloggers, unlike magazine writers for example, are more likely to “remain authentic in their writing” regardless of trips like this one to P & G headquarters, showing that perhaps bloggers provide a more honest dialogue that in turn enhances their impact over their audiences. This reinforces the commercial value of top mommy bloggers as well as their potential to sway readers to adhere to their particular motherhood ideology by establishing an “in group” and “out group.”

### *Christian Mothers in the Blogosphere*

Blogs establish these group boundaries in several ways regarding race, political affiliation, and geography, for example. One significant and telling way to establish

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<sup>2</sup> Pampers are Procter & Gamble’s popular diaper brand that was created in the 1950s by chemical engineer and grandfather, Victor Mills ([www.pampers.com](http://www.pampers.com)).

mothering “in groups” is through religion. Several online networks exist that help connect Christian mothers such as “Moms of Faith: Community of Christian Moms who Love the Lord,” “Christian Mom Bloggers Club,” and “Christian Stay at Home Moms” demonstrating the role religion plays in identification among mothers and the mothering models to which they adhere. However Christianity has additional nuances that encourage additional boundaries between subgroups, unveiling complexities and contradictions that emerge based on religion’s role in ideological identity.

According to Shari Thurer’s book *The Myths of Motherhood* (1994), the Christian mother has had a bumpy history of being both praised and damned. Mothers were practically invisible in art and literature in the Renaissance, except for a few characters in Shakespeare’s works *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, which remind the audience that women are unpredictable and must be controlled (Thurer, 1996, pp. 150-151). However, one mother stands out as a permanent fixture in the arts, the biblical icon the Virgin Mary. This representation of the biblical woman has had lasting impact. But as Karin Sporre argues in her 2003 article “Images of Motherhood: Conflicts and Creative New Thinking within and outside the Christian Tradition,” Mary is perhaps the reason why mothers can never “get it right.”

Sporre (2003) writes that given the paucity of women within the Christian tradition, Mary is a symbol of identification among women (p. 2). The infinitely pure Mary provides a rare contrast to the biblical tone that women are temptresses and accomplices of Satan (p. 7). Mary’s Immaculate Conception not only reinforces God’s role as that of a male, but this event also establishes unrealistic standards for women who struggle to adhere to Christian ideals of purity while being portrayed as unpredictable

entities like Eve. Sporre explains that “to be both a mother and virgin...presents a contradictory image to which it is impossible for women to aspire” (p. 2). This becomes poignantly clear when the Vatican’s Cardinal Ratzinger stated that this virginal icon represents “mature and responsible womanhood;” but to be mature and responsible must a woman aspire to be a virgin mother? This antithetical impossibility sets unrealistic expectations for Christian women; however, Christian women and mothers have done their best to attain piety.

The modern, twentieth century Christian woman, based significantly on the teachings from the pulpit and prayer books, is perceived in a positive light even though she is not akin to the Virgin Mary. This woman is a “good mother, honorably wed and fertile, and above all, *pious, obedient, chaste, and silent*” showing that while she is revered as virtuous, the modern mother was made to serve man (Thurer, 1994, p. 147). This construction of biblical woman/motherhood is still proposed and defended today.

### *Quiverfull Mothering*

In her 2003 book entitled *The Mission of Motherhood: Touching Your Child’s Life for Eternity*, fundamentalist Christian mother and evangelical ministry spokesperson Sally Clarkson reminds her reader that biblical motherhood is often “belittled or subdued by the strong cultural voices that picture feminine success in terms of emotional independence, career accomplishment, and a kind of personal fulfillment that may have little to do with God’s design” (p. 20). By alluding to “strong cultural voices,” one could argue that she is clearly drawing boundaries between her “in group” and “out group,” proposing the existence of ideological tensions that require biblical women to defend

their position as “servant-mothers” (Clarkson, 2003) against feminists who are suspected of seeing motherhood as a “heavy weight and a burden” (Clarkson, 2003, p. 69).

Jerome Himmelstein’s 1986 article “The Social Basis of Antifeminism: Religious Networks and Culture” addresses this polarization between fundamentalist Christian women and feminists. His qualitative and quantitative findings support the notion that these two groups are ideologically opposed. He finds that the fundamentalist Christian women he analyzed largely believe that paternity leave, affirmative action quotas, government support of day-care centers, keeping one’s maiden name, using the appellation “Ms.” and allowing girls on boys’ sports teams are harmful to the coherence of the family (p. 10). This illuminates how these beliefs conflict with feminist notions that advocate equality and choice, while challenging patriarchal status quo.

Andrea Dworkin’s 1983 book *Right-Wing Women* helps to explain antifeminist sentiment by noting that these women often live in male-dominated worlds, in which their only protection is the family. Therefore, any relationships, beliefs, or practices that seem to challenge family are seen as hurtful to women. The Equal Rights Amendment, for example, seemingly threatens women because it denies women the special right to be supported by men. Dworkin (1983) argues that abortion rights seemingly threatens these women’s limited power because abortion helps to sever the tie between sexuality and reproduction and thus gives women fewer legitimate claims on men. Both seem to weaken the unique privileges available to women and the private sphere, within which these privileges reside (Himmelstein, p. 10). Furthermore, Himmelstein (1986) argues that immersion in religious networks, rather than political ones, “sustains an antifeminist culture” (p. 12).



This supports the rhetorical vision of the Quiverfull Movement, which was mobilized in 1987 as “Christian antifeminist activism” (Joyce, 2009, p. 13; Deering, 2011). Antifeminist activist Mary Pride explains in her book *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (1985) that she hopes that the Quiverfull Movement has the ability to “turn back the tide on a society gone wrong” due to the moral decay of feminism, “by populating the world with right-thinking Christians” (as cited in Joyce, 2009, p. 136). This clearly reinforces the ideological opposition between fundamentalist Christians of the Quiverfull Movement and feminism, supporting what Van Dijk (2006) calls “ingroup - outgroup polarization of ideologies” when “*our* good things and *their* bad things will tend to be emphasized” (p. 124) in order to create “mental models” of ideological bias promoted in the discourse (p. 121).

While a clear polarizing effect is constructed between the Quiverfull and feminists, many of the pressures that mothers feel transcend faith and are culturally pervasive regardless of your “in group” or “out group” status. Clarkson (2003) writes that “choosing to be a servant-mother means willingly giving up myself, my expectations, and my time to the task of mothering - and choosing to believe that doing so is the best use of my time” (p. 66). Hays (1994) would argue that this expectation is not that distant from the intensive mothering model, which advocates that mothers joyfully and selfishly give of their time, money and love (p. 97) with the understanding that “the requirements of appropriate child rearing are self-evident, sacred, and untouchable” (p. 1). This reveals that seemingly disparate Western ideals of motherhood perhaps share some ideological objectives.

But one strong differentiating factor distances intensive mothers from biblical servant-mothers is their relationship to God. Clarkson rationalizes her decision to be a servant-mother by claiming that “I have already made a decision to make myself available...because I believe it is God’s will for me to serve my family” (p. 67). This is a common ideological impetus behind many biblical womanhood perspectives regarding the role of a mother. However, this willingness to follow God’s will is demonstrated on a more devout level among the Quiverfull. Maternal expectations are arguably the most narrowly defined and strictly enforced among this Christian fundamentalist group as demonstrated through various texts and ethnographic work by journalist and religious scholar Kathryn Joyce.

Kathryn Joyce’s 2009 book *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement* takes an ethnographic approach to unveiling the motives and rhetorical tactics of this fundamentalist Christian movement, which advocates traditional patriarchy, deems family planning immoral, and most significantly, encourages mothers to have as many children as God will grant her. The Quiverfull Movement hopes to promote its image to the masses in order to grow; therefore, Quiverfull leaders devise that “the appearance of secure, settled marriages would draw people to the faith” (Joyce, 2009, p. 15) and restore the fantasies associated with the American family (Deering, 2011).

Joyce (2009) argues that “across the country, an old ideal of Christian womanhood is being revived” (p. ix) that is known as “biblical womanhood.” This woman wears modest, feminine clothing, while rarely cutting her waist long hair. She homeschools her children, tends to all domestic tasks, and is sexually available to her husband, which will hopefully result in numerous “unqualified blessings” from God.

This is a prevalent movement among the booming homeschooling community<sup>3</sup>; however, the number of Quiverfull is debatable. There are no exact figures for the size of the movement. Joyce (2009) posits that families that identify as Quiverfull is likely in the low ten thousands, but many more families follow the Quiverfull convictions without labeling themselves as such, like the most famous Quiverfull family, the Duggars.

Quiverfull ideologies are becoming more recognizable in popular culture, with the rise of the now famous Duggar family, of the TLC reality hit “19 Kids and Counting,” who proudly display Psalm 127 on their family’s website, advocate biblical womanhood, dismiss all forms of birth control to allow God’s blessings, and are currently raising 19 children on television to promulgate the value of traditional Christian home life (Deering, 2011). Moreover, Joyce (2009) argues that this self-proclaimed patriarchy movement advances the female standard of “biblical womanhood,” which she clearly states is not a “throwback to the fifties” but is a “return to something far older” (p. ix).

The Quiverfull share their rhetorical construction of motherhood through many means such as ministry websites, books, homeschooling literature and church sermons. However, all of these means are largely created and maintained by male rhetors and authoritative figures, rendering authentic women’s experiences muted among Quiverfull discourse. By looking at the rich and firsthand accounts of Quiverfull mothers through mommy blogs, I can begin to explore the ideologies and themes present in these mothers’ perspective on mothering models. Additionally, this population has strictly defined, seemingly clear mothering objectives that are reinforced through several rhetorical outlets

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<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Department of Education speculates that two to three million school age children are currently homeschooled (as cited in Joyce, 2009); the majority of this group does so based on their belief that the home is where learning naturally evolves and that schools stunt children’s growth and aptitude (Holt, 1964, 2003).

as mentioned above. Therefore, the goal of this study is to analyze how Quiverfull mothers choose to construct and maintain their own rhetorical vision of motherhood through mommy blogs, in an effort to understand if Quiverfull mothers also struggle to “get it right” like so many other contemporary mothers, faced with cultural contradictions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Rationale*

According to numerous research studies, people who experience difficult times seek support from those experiencing similar difficulties. For example, people experiencing job stress seek support from other people at work (Albrecht, 1982); widowers seek out those who are also widows or widowers for support (Morgan, Carder, & Neal, 1997); and nurses at risk for burnout seek the understanding of those who are also burned out nurses (Anderson & Gray-Toft, 1982). Therefore, mothers are most likely to seek support from fellow parents, such as spouses. However, research suggests that women desire higher levels of support from their spouses than what they receive (Johnston & Swanson, 2003) and this support is linked to marital satisfaction (Xu & Burleson, 2001). Lack of social support is linked to exhaustion and burnout (Moracco & McFadden, 1982), which can negatively impact children. Therefore, it is imperative for mothers, in particular, to find an outlet of support consisting of fellow parents and mothers, specifically. Mommy blogs arguable fulfill this exigence and provide needed support for mothers.

Based on the review of literature, cultural motherhood construction has spurred immense scholarly contribution (Glenn, 1994; Thurer, 1994; Hays, 1996; Trebilcot, 1984; among others); however, few scholars appear to have addressed the burgeoning communication of online discourse between mothers. More specifically, it appears few scholars have analyzed a mommy blog group such as the Quiverfull in order to

understand the rhetorical ideological constructions present within these online artifacts and their link to the reinforcement or subversion of contemporary mothering models.

Lopez (2008) argues that “mommy bloggers are developing their own voice for discussing motherhood and it is uniquely different from the glowing image of the ‘good mother’ that has dominated our media” (p. 743). She posits that her study of a small sample of homogenous mommy bloggers indicates that more discussion about who is participating in the blogosphere is essential to understand this conversation that has been “given new power” since it is available to the public sphere (p. 744). Her research shows that while mommy blogs are detested by some and disregarded by others, it is a discourse that has the potential to subvert the impossible demands on mothers by “transforming personal narratives of struggle and challenge into interactive conversations with other mothers...to expand our notion of motherhood” in contemporary Western society (p. 744). Informed by Lopez (2008), this study works to highlight the specific mommy blog population of Quiverfull mothers, in order to unveil and discuss the competing ideologies that are present, which adhere to not one traditional mothering model, but take pieces from several, possibly showing the ascent of a new model for biblical women. In order to explore the ideological constructions that are present in my artifact, I will rely on two research questions:

*Research Question 1: What motherhood ideologies are promoted in Quiverfull mommy blogs? What dominant mothering ideologies permeate the discourse?*

*Research Question 2: How are maternal myths constructed and maintained? To what extent, if any, are maternal myths challenged by the discourse?*

To answer and explore these research questions, I analyze my chosen artifacts using ideological criticism and the framing of muted group theory to address the subversive potential of blogs at the disposal of a muted group.

*Ideological Criticism as Theoretical Framework*

The ideological method of criticism is used to “discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact as well as the ideologies being muted in it” (Foss, 2004, p. 243). Rhetorical scholar Sonja Foss (2004) defines ideology as a pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspects of the world (p. 239). Van Dijk (2006) defines ideologies as “foundational beliefs that underlie the shared social representation of specific kinds of social groups” (p. 120) that lead to discourse and other social practices in a variety of settings both formal and informal. However, it is the more privileged ideologies that become more dominant “habits of thought” (Shuger, 1997). Alternative ideologies are sometimes repressed allowing the development of a hegemonic ideology (Foss, 2004, p. 242).

Hegemonic framework “bounds and narrows the range of actual and potential contending world views. Hegemony is a historical process in which one picture of the world is systematically preferred over others” (Consalvo, 1998, p. 2) establishing a dominant view of reality that is often perceived as normal. Male dominance is arguably the most recognizable hegemonic ideology, and feminism, while rather prevalent, is “alternative” and thus, repressed. Marx suggests that an ideology determines “mass belief” and therefore restricts the emergence of opinion. By this logic, the “‘freest’ members of a community are those who belong to the ‘power’ elite” (Burghardt, 2005, p. 454). Marx is supporting the concept that there are certain privileged ideologies that

are more routinely accepted and thus powerful, forming hegemony. He also sees hegemonic framework as problematic for the “alternative” ideology that becomes stifled or as Foss (2004) refers to as “muted.” These privileged and repressed ideologies in the “real world” are visible online (Harp & Tremayne, 2006), showing that dominant groups, such as male blog discourse, are routinely privileged over female blog discourse, and thus, women become a muted group in both the public and virtual sphere.

### *Muted Group Theory*

Shirley and Edwin Ardener’s 1975 book *Perceiving Women* first introduced women’s role as “muted” among cultural discourse. This provided the groundwork for later contribution from feminist scholar Cheri Kramarae (1981, 2005) in which she discusses that 1) often times women are more constrained than men in what they can say, when, and with what outcome and 2) that accepted language practices have been constructed primarily by men in order to express their experiences, meaning that women are constrained and thus, muted (2005, p. 55). Muted group theory also suggests that people in subordinate groups may have significant things to say in order to contribute to public discourse; however, they hold little power and are often disrespected by those in dominant positions. This leads to these groups being marginalized in decision-making processes, their experiences being interpreted for them by others (Kramarae, 2005, p. 55). Edwin Ardener (1975) suggests that this marginalization forces women to express their collective ideas through nontraditional forms of discourse outside direct expository speech (p. ix), exposing that perhaps mommy blogs are in fact an example of this alternate form of discourse.



Through the use of this theoretical framework of muted group in conjunction with ideological criticism, I argue that mothers have been a muted group in contemporary childrearing discourse, demonstrated by the medicalization and in turn male dominance in childbirth and childcare. Further, Quiverfull women are seen as subordinate to male authority, hindering women's ability to be heard. In addition, within the blogosphere, mommy bloggers are alienated and devalued by both non mothers and men, rendering this discourse "muted." Through my analysis of Quiverfull mothering blogs in particular, I illuminate the ideologies present that may go overlooked due to the muted nature of this online population. Lastly, I explore how mommy blogs in general are working to challenge the "muted" status of mothers by means of disseminating mothering ideology online that may challenge existing ones.

In *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Teun A. Van Dijk (1998) notes that discourse creates ideology but that discourse is also the only way to *change* ideology. He writes that "ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members, and more particularly acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse" (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 191). He emphasizes that it is only through discourse that ideologies are formulated and transmitted (p. 130), showing why mommy blogs are a rich artifact for the construction and maintenance of certain ideological perspectives because of their ability to propose immediate, authentic perspectives. He defines an ideology as the basis of a social group's self-image that helps to shape identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources as well as its relation to other social groups (p. 189). By looking at the "muted group" of Quiverfull mothers and the

mothering ideologies that they promote, I will explore the complexities of ideologies and how they sustain group norms as a muted group.

Ideological criticism and muted group theoretical analysis are complimentary methods to analyze Quiverfull mommy blogs. Muted group theory will assist in my exploration of language and experience as well some framing from bell hooks that will address mommy blogs' ability to enact "confession" (1989) and their role in reinforcing white women's experience in "women's liberation" (2000). Van Dijk's 2006 article "Ideology and Discourse Analysis" will provide the methodology to understand the "ideological polarization between in groups and out groups," a prominent feature of ideologies that are systematically implemented in order to distance oneself from competing ideologies, while enhancing one's own perspective. This will aid in my exploration of the possible tensions among competing mothering groups (e.g. Quiverfull and feminists; working and stay-at-home mothers) and how this conflict may preserve mommy bloggers' status as a "muted group" within the blogosphere.

### *Blogs as Artifacts*

Because blogging is a "public act of writing for an implicit audience," participant consent is not necessary (Hookway, 2008, p. 105). Although not all researchers agree with this and find some blogs to be intended for a more private sharing of information, this thesis relies on the notion that blogs are public discourse, similar to speeches, television shows or films, available for full analysis to any interested scholar. Hookway (2008) offers various tactics for qualitative and critical researchers who seek to find a particular kind of blog amidst the often overwhelming labyrinth of blogs. Hookway notes that "trawling" is a sufficient introductory practice, during which the researcher

browses the seemingly endless web of blogs. However, he argues that this is time consuming, tedious and may be unfruitful. Instead, he encourages researchers to avoid reading blogs, but rather to “learn how to look at blogs” (p. 101).

Hookway (2008) writes that one of the most striking things about blogs is the use of diverse, complex visual designs (p. 101), demonstrating that blogs are simultaneously visual *and* textual documents (Scheidt & Wright, 2004). This complexity requires that the audience become accustomed to this new technological medium, since there was “no established framework for interpreting the visual layout of blogs” (Hookway, 2008, p. 101). Badger (2004), however, argues that audiences have now adopted the skill of “scanning,” a style of looking at blogs that emphasizes viewing them, not reading them. Moreover, scanning is a more efficient way of viewing a blog for its overall message that closely reflects its author like a “tailored garment” (Badger, 2004, p. 1).

### *Choosing the Artifacts*

Borrowing from Hookway’s 2008 article “‘Entering the Blogosphere’: Some Strategies for Using Blogs in Social Research,” I narrowed down relevant artifacts through online searches. I first searched “Quiverfull Blogs” in the Google search engine [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), in order to get an idea of the number of blogs that use “Quiverfull” in their title. From here, I “trawled” (Hookway, 2008) through the first ten to fifteen listed to find that many were written by mothers adhering to the “mommy blog” genre. I narrowed my Google search to now “Quiverfull Mommy Blogs,” and even more websites appeared, demonstrating that multiple Quiverfull blogs are indeed written as “mommy blogs.”

Once narrowed down, I chose five blogs that fulfilled my study's criteria of relevance, timeliness, and rhetorical richness. In order to determine "relevance," I identified blogs that were explicitly written by Quiverfull mothers with the intent of being viewed as a "mommy blog" by others, to ensure authenticity and relevance to my study. "Timeliness" refers to how frequently the site is updated and how current the writing is; some blogs can sit dormant for indefinite amounts of time rendering the discourse untimely. "Rhetorical richness" defines how stimulating and complex the site appears. I wanted to analyze blogs that showcased the appeal and stimulation of blogs as "visual and textual documents" (Scheidt & Wright, 2004). Therefore, I looked for blogs that ordered and presented a view of the world through characters, actions and settings (Foss, 2004) that demonstrated the rhetor's public and private identity, personality and relational role with others through the act of storytelling (Richardson, 1990; Lieblich et al., 1998).

Once selected, I began to follow these blogs more closely over the course of several days in the fall of 2010, to understand the particular worldview that was promoted. I then narrowed my selection down to four<sup>4</sup>, only following the blogs that I felt most richly depicted a clear worldview, proposed Quiverfull sentiment, were consistently updated, and adhered to the "mommy blog" genre. The four blogs I selected and followed for several months are entitled "Mama Archer," "Birthing a Quiverfull," "Raising a Quiverfull," and "Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull."

#### *Data Collection Protocol*

Those with non-traditional and ostracized beliefs have gathered online to share similar ideologies (McCabe, 2009) and one of these groups is the Quiverfull. This group

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<sup>4</sup> The deserted blog lacked timeliness and offered little new material.

has expedited a consistent, active and impressive rhetorical image online through its multiple ministries, homeschooling, and commercial sites used for outreach, member resources, and even gender and age appropriate toys and reading materials (e.g. [www.visionforum.com](http://www.visionforum.com); [www.quiverfull.com](http://www.quiverfull.com); [www.inhishands.com](http://www.inhishands.com)). Quiverfull mommy blogs seem to follow in this consistency; however, later in my analysis I will discuss the themed nuances that expose emerging mothering ideologies and their role in the subversion and reinforcement of existing mothering ideologies and the constraints and ambivalence that these proposed ideologies create.

#### *Description of Artifacts*

“Mama Archer” (<http://mamaarcher.com/quiverfull/>) is a blog written by a Quiverfull stay-at-home mother named Christine who refers to herself as “Mama Archer,” a “helpmeet” who assists in “training arrows that will go far,” an allusion to Psalm 127 in which children are described as arrows at men’s disposal. She and her husband, employed by the U.S. Air Force, “hold to the quiverfull conviction” and raise their “ten precious children” in Alaska ([mamaarcher.com](http://mamaarcher.com)). While she offers practical suggestions as a mother, including reviews of cloth diapers and how to answer Christmas questions from children, she also repeatedly conveys the strength of her relationship with the “Almighty God.” In addition, she recently wrote about “Our Quiverfull Journey” in December, 2010 and the rationale that brought her to her current conviction. Her mothering advice and her openness about her “failures,” combined with her religious affliction and patriotic undertones, serve as a rich rhetorical image for a Quiverfull mommy blog.

“Birthing a Quiverfull” (<http://birthingaquiverfull.wordpress.com/>) is written by a Quiverfull mother of five named Jacinda who is far more direct about her feelings on controversial topics such as abortion, women's sexuality, and “natural” mothering in comparison to the other Quiverfull mommy blogs that I have “scanned” (Hookway, 2008). Although the website is not colorful or visually stimulating, it does propose several discussion topics in a clear and logical way that many could argue elicits a sense of credibility and professionalism that may deviate from traditionally bright, illustrative and feminine “mommy blogs.” This provides some contrast to the “mommy blog” genre through the use of direct, opinionated dialogue and austere visual design that some could argue is masculine.

“Raising a Quiverfull” (<http://nobirthcontrol.blogspot.com/>) is a warm and colorful site of gender neutral green colors and pictures of 5 children along the top. The author, Kris, is a stay-at-home Quiverfull mother of five who highlights her love for the Lord and her children, but also details her struggles with miscarriage. She dedicates an entire section of her blog to the challenges and recovery associated with losing an unborn child and what she believes was the necessary submission to God’s control required to heal. She also runs her own homeschool named Spaulding Christian Academy (<http://spauldingchristianacademy.blogspot.com/>) because of her disappointment with public schools. She details public education’s shortfalls in her many posts such as “The Straw that Broke the Public Schooling Momma’s Back” that highlight why homeschooling is such a better option for Christian families who want to “take back” their child’s education.

The final blog I chose to analyze is called “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull” (<http://www.handsheartsquiverfull.com/>), which is a stereotypically feminine and visually stimulating blog that offers many pictures of Jennifer (Jen) Keller’s family and hobbies. After being diagnosed with infertility and having been adopted herself as an infant, this mommy blogger has chosen to adopt six drug endangered children from foster care. Before her marriage, she gave birth to a biological daughter who is now twenty years old. In June 2010, Jennifer gave birth to her daughter, Blakely, who was an “adopted embryo,”<sup>5</sup> which connects her to a large community of mothers who also have children through this method. Her husband is a farmer and military pilot and she is a “SAHM” (stay-at-home-mom). She and her husband enjoy Harley Davidson motorcycles, traveling in their recreational vehicle with their eight children, and she demonstrates a level of commercial femininity unlike her more natural and “modest” Quiverfull mothers (e.g. she enjoys shopping, applying makeup, and wearing “bling” or jewelry).

Jen’s focus on adoption and embryo adoption rather than “traditional” prolific natural birth offers a great contrast to the other rhetors, due to her welcoming of science and technology to aid in one’s pursuits of a large family. Additionally, she has lobbied to make it a crime for mothers to use drugs while pregnant, demonstrating her role in the public sphere as a political participant. I find that all of these artifacts, while seemingly promulgating similar Quiverfull ideological sentiment, all focus on different facets of motherhood proving an interesting population to study.

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<sup>5</sup> Embryo adoption is when a woman or couple’s unused frozen embryo (i.e. a fertilized egg) is left over after in vitro fertilization treatments and is then sold or given to an infertile couple or prospective parent. The new parent(s) then give birth to the child as their own. Embryo adoption also allows for prospective parents to choose embryos that resemble them and their ethnic heritage such as finding an embryo that is “one quarter Asian” (Hands, Hearts, Quiver, 2011).

By analyzing four different representations of Quiverfull mommy blogs, I will explore how they utilize this same medium to share their ideological world view as a muted group as both women and mothers online and what means they use to challenge or reinforce contemporary mothering models.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

In order to understand the nature of the ideology (Foss, 2004) and answer my first research question, I read through several dozen blog posts on each blog site over the course of several months, which unveiled numerous emergent themes in the discourse that help to identify “Quiverfull” mothering ideology. Some of these themes promoted the existing mothering ideologies of “intensive mothering” and “new momism,” while only a few challenged these “mainstream” mothering models. After analysis of the artifacts, I noted what themes were encouraged as “in group” behavior and sentiment, and then what seemed like “out group” behavior. Van Dijk (2006) argues that ideologies are belief systems (p. 116) that are socially shared by the members of the “in group,” explaining why some belief systems such as feminism, single motherhood or the narratives of women of color were almost entirely nonexistent in the Quiverfull mothering blog discourse, signaling these concepts as “out group” beliefs. The first ideological theme that emerged as most prominent among members was the notion of motherhood as a woman’s purpose, duty and goal, which arguably helps draw the “in group” members to one another online, based on this shared belief.

#### *Motherhood as “My Calling”*

Van Dijk writes that ideologies are gradually acquired, so these belief systems need to be stable, causing some ideologies to become so widely shared and reinforced that they morph into “generally accepted attitudes of an entire community” (p. 117). Hays (1996) notes that the ideology of intensive mothering has been largely substantiated as “common sense” because it has gone “wholly unquestioned” for so long (p. 14).

Michael and Douglas (2004), in their “new momism” mothering model, recognize the dominant accepted attitude that no woman is truly “complete” without having children. This “common sense” sentiment is deeply reinforced in Quiverfull mothering blogs, since the majority of the bloggers feel their principal purpose is to be mothers, placing additional emphasis on their ability to fulfill this role.

“Mama Archer” writes that “my calling in this life is to be a wife and mother...this calling in my opinion is one of the greatest in life,” reinforcing tenets of new momism and intensive mothering as natural, necessary and deeply rewarding despite its many challenges. As Kris of “Raising a Quiverfull” shares, waiting for the birth of her next baby makes her feel “like a child at Christmas,” reaffirming her glee as an expectant mother, while dismissing or downplaying any qualms or fears (“Like a Child at Christmas,” Mar. 3, 2011). Aligning with the ideology of new momism and intensive mothering, Quiverfull mothering frames the trials of motherhood as unquestionably “worth it” because any mother who does not love every minute of her mothering identity, must have something wrong with her (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 4), reinforcing a mother’s need to be constantly and cheerfully engaged in her “calling” as a mother.

#### *Motherhood as Reward*

Douglas and Michaels’ explanation of “new momism” highlights many of the ideological impetuses that motivate both Quiverfull mothers and mainstream mothers to tirelessly commit their lives to childrearing. They write that “new momism” proposes the notion that “motherhood is eternally fulfilling and rewarding, it is *always* the best and most important thing you do, that there is only a narrowly prescribed way to do it right, and that if you don’t love each and every second of it there’s something really wrong

with you” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, pp. 3-4). This stereotypical construction of motherhood exposes the cultural and ideological parallels between the Quiverfull and mainstream mothering models that are reinforced in all four artifacts, which adhere to these exceedingly high expectations based on their framing of motherhood.

Since motherhood is considered the ultimate goal of Quiverfull women and their greatest accomplishment, childrearing is taken very seriously. A reason for the commitment to Quiverfull mothering is because of what one blogger refers to as the “eternal consequences” brought about by the birth of children, placing an additional emphasis on the sanctity of childrearing as an impactful process (“Mama Archer,” Jan. 26, 2011). Similarly, Clarkson's 2003 book entitled *The Mission of Motherhood: Touching Your Child's Heart for Eternity* highlights the “eternal” impact of mothering. This “sacred” framing of childrearing places additional pressure on Quiverfull mothers to procreate and “raise god fearing men and women” (Raising a Quiverfull, 2011), and possibly downplay the sheer pain and the many trials associated with delivery and childrearing. It assuages the potentially negative aspects of childcare by simply reinforcing that a baby is God's “reward,” requiring mothers to thank God for the joys and misfortunes of family.

When describing the birth of her fifth child “J” in March of 2011, author Kris of “Raising a Quiverfull” wrote that as the contractions became unbearable she “began to cry and give praise to the Lord for what was about to happen. Giving Him thanks for the pain (it may sound silly, but I did) rejuvenated, encouraged and actually comforted me” (“I'd like you to meet someone special,” Mar. 16, 2011). Mommy blogger “Mama Archer” agrees, confessing that motherhood is an “indescribably rewarding task” because

“in due season we will reap and it will make the difficult days so worth it. Just like in giving birth, the pain seems unbearable but the reward is so worth it! Praise be to God that he allows us mothers to work so hard and to reap even more abundantly” (“Do not grow weary,” Jan. 26, 2011). Jen of “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull” notes that she is “fighting the baby weight” and enduring swelling in her hands and feet that is “brutal;” however, she reminds her audience that “looking at that sweet smile makes it ALL WORTH IT!” reinforcing that the trials of delivery and motherhood will be rewarded (Sept. 14, 2010) with God’s blessing of a child.

By reframing the hardships as means to justify God’s reward of a baby, Quiverfull mothers adhere to the ideology that the reward of a child consistently outweighs any pain or hardship a mother endures. Hays (1996) would argue that Quiverfull mothers, like mainstream “intensive” mothers, may suffer quietly under the assumption that a “priceless” (Zelizer, 1985) child is undoubtedly “worth it” because the “giving freely of one’s love, one’s labor, and one’s resources is the appropriate code of behavior,” reinforcing that this sacrifice must not be questioned (Hays, 1996, p. 64).

While the trials associated with childbirth and childrearing are seen as worth it in terms of the “priceless” reward of a child, this concept is at times challenged by one Quiverfull blogger. Motherhood is portrayed as one’s “calling” that is “indescribably rewarding” (Mama Archer, 2011); however, success as a Quiverfull mother is not a guarantee and many times impossible. While most blog posts analyzed in this study reinforce the rewarding nature of motherhood, one blogger opens up about her recurring feelings of failure.

*Motherhood as Failure*

“Mama Archer” struggles like many mothers with the challenges posed by childrearing, but unlike many Quiverfull and mainstream mothers, she is not afraid to share this perspective. In her posts “Falling Down, Raise Me Up,” “Having a Failure Kind of Day” and “Do Not Grow Weary,” she bleakly describes “those days [in which] I feel [that] if I were to disappear no one would even notice” as a reminder of the often invisible, isolating nature of mothering. Perhaps feeling helpless, she simply writes that “I fail more than I succeed” (Feb. 21, 2011). She asked her audience “Do you ever just feel like a total failure?...often times I only see my failings” signaling that perhaps the pervasive construction of the tireless, joyful Quiverfull mother who finds her many efforts “worth it” is not entirely accurate. Quiverfull mothers often want to promote and maintain the ideological norm of the exuberant mother who “eagerly” receives every child from the Lord; however, “Mama Archer” provides a rare glimpse into what Heisler and Ellis (2008) refer to as the “real me” (p. 449) that is discordant with society’s common expectation of the “good mother.”

Goffman (1967) refers to the adherence to society’s expectations as “face,” or a projected image specifically designed for the interaction with others. Most constructions of the “good mother” in contemporary media mirror “intensive mothering” expectations (Hays, 1996). Quiverfull’s appropriate “face” is even more narrowly defined in mothering discourse. These mothers seemingly relish every moment with their child. They all want to and must stay home to be the primary caregivers to their children. They invest their entire being into their children’s education and upbringing due to this relationship’s “eternal consequences,” while maintaining their femininity and sexual and

spiritual desire to have more children. Therefore, it is particularly significant that “Mama Archer” has abandoned the expected “face” (Goffman, 1967) to reveal an authentic sense of self that belies most traditional mothering ideologies.

Feminist scholar bell hooks notes that confession is a powerful tool that allows one to tell “the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our hearts and with our words” (hooks, 1989, p. 3). It appears as though “Mama Archer” is providing an authentic narrative as she experiences it, by abandoning the “face” society expects from her. Hooks (1989) argues that this form of confession embodies feminist initiative because it assists in “relating one’s experience to a critical framework or using one’s experience strategically” to evoke political change and “transform the world” (hooks, 1989, p. 111). Therefore, by challenging her expected “face” as a mother, “Mama Archer” is proposing a different worldview in which a mother struggles amidst her perceived failure. One could argue that “Mama Archer” would not have had the opportunity to share these feelings of frustration, disappointment and failure if not for her online outlet. Moreover, through her mommy blog, she abandoned her “face” as a muted group and had the means to challenge the construction of the “good mother” through the feminist act of “confession” (hooks, 1989).

#### *Motherhood as God’s Plan*

Quiverfull bloggers who maintain the “face” of the expected Quiverfull mother and behave as the “in group” suggest that in times of struggle one must simply “surrender” one’s life to the Lord and not try to control it. As blogger Jacinda of “Birthing a Quiverfull” warns, “when we try to control our fertility we get into trouble” reinforcing the Quiverfull ideology that God is the only true birth controller (“I

Wonder...,” Nov. 2, 2010). She adds in the section “Our QF Story” that “finally, we gave up trying to control things” and once they surrendered their fate to the Lord, no longer using barrier method birth control, “then and only then did the Lord make the way for our move to our first home. We then conceived our second daughter 5 months after our move. And this only happened because we listened to our hearts and the Lord not our emotions and circumstances” (“Our QF Story,” n.d.). By abandoning her need to control her life based on emotions and circumstances, she draws the boundary between “in group” behavior of relinquishing control to God as the Quiverfull do, and controlling “out group” behavior.

She reinforces her willingness to follow her religious path because “the Lord has been and will continue to be my guide in raising my children. I am glad that I am following his revealed plan” (“Mixed Emotions,” Oct. 26, 2010). Quiverfull activist Mary Pride (1985) agrees. She writes that “instead of the trendy but endlessly confusing fashions in child-rearing, we only have to follow *one* teacher: God” (p. 112), which supports these bloggers’ belief in “God’s plan,” but more significantly, distances Quiverfull and biblical mothering from “trendy” mainstream models. Quiverfull mothers are encouraged from many rhetorical outlets to resign all control to the Lord, particularly their reproduction and circumstances, reinforcing the ideological belief that they have little control in life and must submit their authority to God.

By referring to God as their “guide” and ultimate controller of their plans, Quiverfull mothers largely deemphasize the need to follow contemporary experts’ opinions, manuals’ instructions and even fellow mothers’ ideas. Hays (1996) and Douglas and Michaels (2004) would argue that this challenges intensive mothering as

well as new momism. Douglas and Michaels (2004) remind us that childcare author Dr. Spock “was telling women that if they didn’t march to the tune of even more intensive mothering than that of the 1950s, their kids would end up like crazed monkeys” (p. 69) showing the pressure to adhere to expert opinion and cultural “norms.” Hays (1996) notes that pediatricians and childrearing authors Brazelton and Spock “assume that the reader wants to be told precisely what to do” (p. 53), echoing the stance that expert guided opinions and manuals are a source of information and authority. Neither model accounts for religious belief nor how this might impact a mother’s model of childrearing.

Explaining her journey to submitting to God’s plan, “Mama Archer” writes that “we have experienced trials along the way...but isn’t that a part of the surrendered life?” (“Our Quiverfull Journey,” Dec. 29, 2010) as a rhetorical question to her followers who seemingly feel the same way. One reader commented at the bottom of her post by reaffirming this sentiment. Blogger “Becca” writes in excitement that:

It’s always amazing to me to see so many similarities in QF stories. Your story [could] almost be written by me! It just confirms to me that it is GOD who is doing the moving, rather than human will. LOVE it! I think the hardest part of the journey for all of us is accepting God’s will for when we’re done [with childrearing]. That will be a hard day when I realize that God has closed my womb. I will be 40 this year and wonder if it’s not too far off, and then I remember Doug Phillips<sup>6</sup> saying that his mother had a baby at 48! How kewl [sic] is that? Love, Becca (Jan. 13, 2008).

“Becca’s” comment not only demonstrates the shared ideological perspective of the Quiverfull, but the enthusiasm and commitment with which they support each other and their impetuses to be mothers. Shared support is evident among Quiverfull mommy bloggers, in particular, since the internet has provided a medium that allows these groups

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<sup>6</sup> Quiverfull activist Doug Phillips is the President of Vision Forum Ministries, which advocates Biblical patriarchy, Calvinism, and homeschooling. He is also the father of eight children as well as the author of several books promoting biblical lessons on patriarchy (Joyce, 2009; Campbell, 2003).



to communicate and reinforce existing ideologies on mothering and religion.

Furthermore, Quiverfull mommy blogs make online relationships easier among members of a muted group.

Jen Keller, the author of “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull,” writes in her post “Saved!! 2 More for His Kingdom!” that her two adopted daughters, nicknamed “MyMy” and “AwBell,” asked her to “help them ask Jesus into their hearts” for their salvation (Mar. 18, 2011). In this process, the girls are dedicating their lives to Jesus. Keller notes that she is “so thankful that god chose ME to be their mother and allowed me to help both...Giving HIM ALL THE GLORY TODAY! AMEN!” signifying that God is the ultimate controller of not only her role as mother to adopted children born addicted to methamphetamines, but the choices and outcome of her parenting methods that has led her children to Jesus. She concludes that:

[O]ur story is a true miracle and just shows you how much God can do in a persons [sic] life, if not for Him none of this would be! ...GOD IS GOOD and He knows MUCH MORE than we do! We give him ALL THE GLORY (“Our MIRACLE Adoption Story,” Sept. 17, 2008; Aug. 2010).

This excerpt reveals that by surrendering one’s control to God and giving one’s heart to Jesus, Christian followers and Quiverfull mothers feel as though they can release their need to control their circumstances and relinquish it to God.

Many could argue that this challenges intensive mothering and new momism models in which a “good mother” is in complete control and well disciplined. Hays (1996) explains this concept of maternal control with her narrative of Rachel, an intensive mother, who explains that she hit her child “once on the butt” when her daughter’s behavior became unbearable. But Rachel, adhering to the intensive mothering strategy

that involves negotiation and explanations to her preschool aged child Kristin, feels she needs to qualify her action by following up with “I know I didn’t hit her hard because I was *so* in control...we talked about it a lot afterwards” about “how mommy lost it, she was stressed. And I’ve never done it since” (p. 7). Therefore, Quiverfull mothers’ emphasis on relinquishing control to God challenges the contemporary need for mothers to be in complete control and apologize to their children and others if they deviate from this appropriate intensive mothering code. Perhaps this release of control allows Quiverfull mothers to feel less harshly judged and thus, more confident mothers because they are following God’s commands.

Releasing all control to God may not only be freeing to Quiverfull mothers who otherwise are encouraged to be “*so* in control” (Hays, 1996, p. 7), but this religious and lifestyle choice also aids in their grieving of a miscarriage. All four rhetors openly express their emotions of loss and disappointment, especially regarding the loss of a child. “Birthing a Quiverfull” entitles her miscarriage section “Ones that have gone on before us” in which she details the loss of two pregnancies. She writes that “experiencing a miscarriage is often a lonely matter...some need to write to express their thoughts and heart. This is good to do!” She also suggests that “never down-play miscarriage” but instead value how much the Lord teaches in his decisions (“Pregnancy Loss: Ones that have gone on before us,” n.d.). She emphasizes that sharing in your loss and grief forces people to “contemplate something profound” because “silence through miscarriage is something that gives abortion the power to continue to increase with every decade!” By sharing her miscarriages on her blog, “Birthing a Quiverfull” rhetor Jacinda is emphasizing her thoughts on the value of unborn life, drawing a distinct boundary

between Quiverfull mothers suffering from miscarriage and those who choose to terminate a pregnancy, which she feels is done in a mindless or casual manner.

*Morality and the Unborn*

Unlike the other three rhetors, Jacinda created a section of her blog labeled “Abortion” in which she details stories of her mother’s abortion when she was eight years old as well as articles about women who are said to be “addicted to abortions.” She writes that her mother had an abortion because she was dating two men at the time and “I don’t think she knew who’s [sic] baby it was.” She explains that of her mother’s two boyfriends, “one fella, a really nice guy, (a sinner but ‘nice’ to me) was a ‘black’ guy - I don’t think she wanted a ‘mixed’ baby. I know my grandmother did not, she made that clear” (“Addicted to Death; Addicted to Life,” n.d.). She goes on to explain that her mother “was never sorry for doing it...She could not muster any emotional opposition to murder...the day she killed the baby” (“Addicted to Death; Addicted to Life,” n.d.).

Jacinda’s framing of this story clearly defines her mother’s “sinful” ways as “out group” behavior. Her reference to not wanting to have a “mixed” baby alludes to the potential tension associated with interracial relationships. By noting her grandmother’s displeasure with the prospect of having a “mixed” grandchild, this mommy blog frames her grandmother as the ideological “villain” who feels that non-white babies are perhaps less valuable. However, as a member of the Quiverfull “in group,” Jacinda is advocating the value of all babies regardless of race in what Van Dijk (2006) calls an “ingroup - outgroup polarization of ideologies” in which “*our* good things and *their* bad things will tend to be emphasized” (p. 124). Through her description of her mother’s, grandmother’s and sister’s behavior, Jacinda is highlighting *their* “out group” behavior in order to

defend and rationalize her thoughts on childbirth and demonstrate why abortion should not be an available option to women of sinful and perhaps racist ideologies.

Jacinda continues to polarize the “in group” and “out group” by writing of her sister’s more recent abortion. Jacinda writes that “I refused to be any part of [the abortion]” and that after the procedure “all they talked about was being hungry! ... I could barely [sic] look at them in the face...A few months later the Lord moved us away from my family to another city” (“Addicted to Death; Addicted to Life,” n.d). By writing of her mother’s “unemotional murder,” her sister as selfish, and one young woman as “addicted to abortion,” she associates all abortions as casual and thus appealing in mainstream, “immoral” culture.

Van Dijk would refer to this generalizing and presumptive action as contextualization. Contextualization is defined in terms of subjective context models of participation (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 129). In other words, contextualization leads to audience members interpreting discourse in a certain way, even when there are barely any markers for such a context. Van Dijk gives the example that if a “recipient, based on previous experiences, defines a speaker as a male chauvinist, then much of what he says will be ‘heard’ as an expression of male chauvinism” regardless if there are cues that warrant such interpretation (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 129). Similarly, “Birthing a Quiverfull” author Jacinda views all who support abortion rights as unappreciative of life and casual about abortions, based on her experiences with her mother and sister who chose to terminate a pregnancy and her grandmother who condoned them. Therefore, her previous experience with these two abortions has led her to interpret all abortions as casual acts of mindless, immoral women. She “hears” all discourse that supports abortion rights as

supportive of casual “murder” of the unborn. This contextualization is also conveyed in her posts about the United States and mainstream culture as a whole.

Jacinda warns that “sadly our nation is following hard after Pagan nations [sic] practices,” when discussing China’s one child policy<sup>7</sup> (“I wonder...,” Nov. 2, 2010). This perhaps explains why Quiverfull mothering blogs place such an explicit emphasis on the grieving and emotional toll that a miscarriage takes on a mother, as a way to ideologically imbue value back into the life of an unborn child and the “sacred,” “miracle of childbirth” (“Ones that have gone on before us,” n.d.) that she feels has been lost in our immoral and mindless contemporary culture. This tactic distances the Quiverfull from the ideology of “Pagan” contemporaries who view the “immoral” act of abortion as acceptable, thus reinforcing Quiverfull morals and the condemnation of the “out group.”

Celeste Condit (1987) explores the controversial role of morality in public discourse in her article “Crafting Virtue: The Rhetorical Construction of Public Morality.” Her perspective helps to process the relationship between rhetoric and public morality proposed in these four blog artifacts. She notes that scholars Fishers, MacIntyre and Farrell argue that public moral code has lost its place in rhetorical discourse but is rather demoted to “privatized models of morality” (Condit, 1987, p. 79), where religion and its ideologies, for example, will not be “imposed” on others (p. 79). Condit posits that this pessimism associated with public morality, such as the moral argument addressing abortion proposed by one mommy blogger above, is the motivation to keep morality private (p. 80). However, building on Condit’s perspective that collective

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<sup>7</sup> “Birthing a Quiverfull” author, Jacinda, is referencing this video clip (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIyenQ-njlQ>) that was posted in her blog, which details the lengths to which some Chinese families will go to have more than one child. The video claims that some Chinese are forced to abort their second child, due to China’s enforcement of population control through the “one child policy.”

discourse is the “source of an active public morality,” I argue that mommy blogs, specifically, provide a medium to share, intensify and encourage private morality that now goes public. Through mommy blogs, these four rhetors are able to draw boundaries between their moral convictions and the immoral “out groups” as means to potentially “persuade third parties - audiences - and create a ‘public consensus’” (Condit, 1987, p. 81). In short, mommy blogs act as a public extension of private morality.

Kris, author of “Raising a Quiverfull,” also shares her perspectives on morality by highlighting the immeasurable value of the unborn. In her “This is me” section, she explains that she is a born-again Christian with “eight blessings so far. My husband and I have three angels in Heaven and five children here,” alluding to her three miscarriages as children who have already “met God.” Most Quiverfull bloggers included in this survey, including Kris, speak of their miscarriages as children, never referring to a miscarriage as a “fetus,” for example. This humanizing choice substantiates the unborn as a person; some even choose to name the child they lost in miscarriage as a way to encourage their ideology to the third party, the blog reader.

Jacinda of “Birthing a Quiverfull” posted a brief blog entitled “Name the Unborn” as way to help mothers who have lost children to miscarriage. She writes that we “were led to name our second miscarried baby and wow that was such a blessing, Philip Jordan was the name we were given for the baby we strongly were impressed was a boy... What comfort!” While some may find this process peculiar since many of the pregnancies ended in the first weeks of gestation, Quiverfull mothers, who believe life starts at conception, take it very seriously.

“Raising a Quiverfull” blogger Kris emphasizes that “it helped me being able to speak to other moms (online) about their loss. Lots of people don’t truly understand unless they have been there themselves” (“Coping with Miscarriage,” Dec. 21, 2009). This quotation highlights that perhaps this is an experience that is in fact very difficult for women and parents, but is perceived as immaterial because women do not always share their feelings of loss in the public sphere, due to their status as a muted group.

Another way that Quiverfull bloggers grieve their miscarriages, which may shock some of their followers, is by actually posting links to pictures of miscarried, underdeveloped pregnancies. Jacinda’s post entitled “Miscarried baby in Photo” provided links to another blog that shows six photos of miscarried fetuses. She confesses that this was “another great resource for expressing [the ideology that] life [begins] at conception” implying that these photos will not only be “beautifully healing” but substantiate Quiverfull ideologies that argue life begins at conception (“Miscarried baby in Photo,” n.d.). These pictures were entitled “Bethany,” “precious infants” and “baby blessings;” one of the miscarried fetuses (“Bethany”) was in the mother’s hand, which explicitly demonstrates these mothers’ commitments to honoring their “underdeveloped children” (Raising a Quiverfull, “Six Years Ago My Baby Met God,” Jan. 22, 2010) while also subtly condemning the lack of value placed on the unborn by immoral “out groups.”

One commenter posted on “Raising a Quiverfull” about her own loss during pregnancy as a way to ideologically connect with its author and distance herself from “out group” members. She writes that:

I too lost a baby due to a ‘missed miscarriage’ and I was saddened when the doctor told me it wasn’t really a baby at all. I remember telling her

that she must not know the God I serve because in his eyes every baby is a child no matter if we are speaking of their life at the moment of conception or at full term (“Missed Miscarriage,” Mar. 31, 2010).

The shared worldview of this Quiverfull mother is reinforced, while also differentiating this worldview from outsiders.

Van Dijk (2006) writes that ideologies explain to its group members their general norms and what is good and bad, just or unjust, and who are the villains and heroes (p. 134). Quiverfull mothers who share similar experiences and beliefs are reading this blog, perhaps causing their worldview to be reaffirmed and strengthened. By referencing that the female doctor “must not know the God I serve,” the rhetor clearly defines how her norms are much different from the doctor and that ultimately, the doctor’s viewpoint is unjust and even bad. By publicly constructing the doctor as different, unchristian or perhaps a feminist, Quiverfull mothers are establishing what Burke (1950) would argue is “identity through antithesis.” Quiverfull mothers’ bond is strengthened in their alliance against this common “enemy,” allowing for their heightened identification to become “compensatory to division” (Burke, 1950; Cheney, 1983). This is a theme that permeates all four blogs, since many reference the occasional and ambiguous “critic,” but rarely convey hostility.

#### *Naysayers of Quiverfull Motherhood*

“Mama Archer” notes that being a Quiverfull is often challenging amidst more mainstream families, in which family planning is normative and strong relationships with Jesus are not a priority. She shares that “the Lord calls us to live in a somewhat extreme way in comparison with the world” because it is our “Christian duty” to lead this lifestyle (“Our Quiverfull Journey,” Dec. 29, 2010). Although acknowledging the “extreme”



lifestyle she lives, Mama Archer defends her choices of having a large family by identifying her critics. She writes that “My husband and I knew we wanted a large family but that meant five or maybe six<sup>8</sup>. We were scoffed at for even wanting that many” because “the ‘acceptable’ *large* family size at the time [we were married] was 3-4 children. The ‘acceptable’ family size is considered much smaller today” (“Our Quiverfull Journey,” Dec. 29, 2010). Many Quiverfull families feel they must defend their decision to have large families amidst contemporary norms of small family size, showing the changing trends in mothering and parenting ideologies that have greatly shifted from the 1950s (Deering, 2011). This pressure to defend their parenting choices does not only affect the Quiverfull community, however.

In a 2009 *New York Times* article entitled “In an Era of Shrinking Broods, Larger Families Can Feel Attacked,” Kate Zernike explored the contemporary state of the large family under the scrutiny of public opinion. She acknowledges that as the family sizes have shrunken, “a vanload of children has taken on more of a freak show factor” (Zernike, 2009) signaling the end of the nostalgic and romanticized large families depicted on television like the Huxtables on *The Cosby Show* in the 1980s and early 1990s, the big screen’s Von Trapps in 1965’s *The Sound of Music* or the real life Kennedys of “Camelot.”

Some offer explanations for society’s judgment and rejection of large families. Founder of *largerfamilies.com* notes that “People feel like they have some say or some ownership over your kids or the way kids are being raised. [As if your family size is] this symbol of who you are and your values” (Zernike, 2009). The Learning Channel’s

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<sup>8</sup> Mama Archer and her husband now have ten children.

(TLC) contemporary reality television shows that depict large families as “spectacle”<sup>9</sup> (McKee, 2005) invite viewers to scrutinize their home lives, which perhaps explains why many people feel welcome to comment on other families’ childrearing choices in everyday life. This popular framing of the large family on television may also explain why this *New York Times* article is listed in the “Fashion & Style” section, encouraging the commodification of large families, during which marketability of discourse supersedes its other values (Shumar, 1997, p. 24).

This process of commodification may strengthen the already existent stereotypes associated with large families. As noted by Zernike (2009), mothers of many children feel the need to combat the stereotypes that they are either polygamists, religious zealots, or a medical anomaly. Mothers argue that these stereotypes impact the way people perceive them as women. Leslie Leyland Fields observes the cultural expectation that “the smart, ambitious, fully realized 21st-century woman chooses career. The ambitionless woman has children” (Zernike, 2009). Fields felt this polarization and contradiction firsthand as a working mother of five. When she told her boss she was pregnant with her fifth child and resigning as a professor, he said “this is what, your 9th or 10th?” reinforcing the notion that having more than three children is outlandish, especially if a mother chooses to maintain her role as worker in the public sphere. Hays (1996) would propose that this sense of cultural condemnation is consistent for both stay-at-home and working mothers who struggle to “get it right.”

This double bind is reinforced by Fields example. The “21st-century woman” who chooses career fails to adhere to “new momism” that claims all women must and should

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<sup>9</sup> *Kate Plus 8, 19 Kids and Counting, Sarah Palin’s Alaska, and Sister Wives* (The Learning Channel, 2011, Retrieved from <http://tlc.discovery.com/tv/tv-shows.html>).

want a family; the stay-at-home mother is derogated as “unambitious” (Douglas & Michaels, 2006; Hays, 1996) devaluing the role of mother. Therefore, one can have a deeper understanding of how blogs provide a valid medium of support among mothers who struggle to defend their lifestyle amidst cultural scrutiny in an era where large families may be seen as “gross” (Zernike, 2009) and mothers feel condemned for their choices. Jen, blogger of “Hands, Heart, Quiverfull,” even mentions that “I don’t like going out [of the house] not wearing some type of ring while I’m pregnant” (“My new bling & other stuff,” Mar. 25, 2010), unveiling her cognizance of the possibility of judging eyes that may mistake her for an unmarried mother with many children.

As one couple following “Raising a Quiverfull” wrote, “thank you for being bold enough to share your faith. See Matt. 5:10. Remember that naysayers cannot understand what it means to know God’s infinite love...Pray for them” (“Randy and Valerie,” Mar. 23, 2010). This blog comment demonstrates the supportive dialogue among large families and Quiverfull mothers, while also acknowledging the role of “naysayers” as discouraging, judgmental outsiders. As Jen of “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull” instructs “go with your gut and your heart, don’t listen to naysayers” (“Our Adoption Story,” Sept. 17, 2008). “Mama Archer” reminds her followers that the blessings of a large family “far exceed the irritation and even persecution of the critics,” allowing her followings to identify the heroes and villains (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 134) of their ideology.

While acknowledging their adversaries through the proposal of heroes and villains, the authors of these blog artifacts do not readily employ “war rhetoric” (Johnston & Swanson, 2004) against critics, fellow women or mothers of other ideologies, showing that perhaps they abstain from participating in the “mommy wars” (Steiner, 2007). Jen,

author of “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull,” is particularly supportive of fellow mothers, even the three drug addicted biological mothers of her seven adopted children. In her post “Our Adoption Story,” she emphasizes that “there are 19 children between the 3 of [the drug addicted birth mothers]. We love them like family, just because they have made mistakes in their lives gives us no reason to judge. They are welcome here as long as they are clean” (Sept. 17, 2008). This reveals the supportive and forgiving nature of this Quiverfull mother who does not chastise “out group” members, but rather empathizes with their common ground as mothers who want to be involved in their children’s lives. This not only challenges the contemporary “mommy wars” but reaffirms the capacity of mothers to not be judgmental to those who have followed a different lifestyle or mothering ideology.

These mommy blogs largely follow in Jen’s style, by not overtly criticizing fellow women in “mommy wars” as some authors claim is a normative behavior among stay-at-home mothers and working mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2004; Steiner, 2007). However, I argue that this lack of animosity evident in these blogs is largely because all Quiverfull mothers are stay-at-home mothers and assume this is the only role for women, allowing for a dominant, unchallenged worldview to be established in their discourse without the differing ideological perspective of working mothers. This assumption largely follows discourse by childcare authors Spock, Brazelton and Leach that assumes that “*mothers* would raise the children” (Hays, 1996, p. 54). It is this worldview that is reinforced in these Quiverfull mothering blogs, leading to a woman’s strictly defined role of wife, mother, homeschool educator, primary caregiver and stay-at-home mother to her many blessings. Essentially, by promoting this unchallenged mothering norm among the

Quiverfull that promotes mothers staying home to raise and school their children, little tension arises among Quiverfull blog followers. Additionally, mothers rarely compete or instruct other mothers in these blogs analyzed because most have resigned their life, circumstances and decisions to the control of God and husband.

*Obedience and Submission to Male Authority*

The final theme that emerged in the discourse was that these rhetors not only sought authority and reassurance through their subordinate relationship to God, but through their subordination to their husbands as well. As Badinter (1981) noted, fathers are seen as shepherds, mothers as sheepdogs, and children as sheep, illustrating the hierarchical chain of command when raising children (Hays, 1996, p. 23). But among Quiverfull, God is leader to all, establishing another level of hierarchy under which a woman exists, reinforcing that she has limited influence and power.

“Birthing a Quiverfull” author Jacinda writes that her role as a Quiverfull has allowed her to “learn more about the area of submission to my husband and his decisions. I also learned more about prayer, submitting to the Lord, and reasoning with my fellow man” (“Our QF Story,” n.d.). This role as male subordinate is reinforced through all four of these blogs, since most women look to God or their husband for answers, comfort and financial sustenance. “Mama Archer” offers an example of her role as a subordinate member of her family. She disagreed with her husband’s decision to have a vasectomy, but never let him know her position. She confesses that:

a month before the [fifth] baby was born my husband had a vasectomy. I tried to convince myself this was a great idea and even signed the papers for the surgery. I seemed pleased on the outside but I was devastated on the inside (“Our Quiverfull Journey,” Dec. 29, 2010).

Mama Archer's perspective unveils that her husband's decision was the only one that truly mattered. She later prayed to God to "change [her] husband's heart" rather than address the issue with him herself.

Cheris Kramarae (1981) claims that based on popular belief the speech of women is weaker and less effective than men's speech; the female form is thought to be "emotional, vague, euphemistic, sweetly proper, mindless, endless, high-pitche[d], and silly" p.(82). Kramarae's perspective helps to explain why "Mama Archer" did not voice her disagreement with her husband, since she possibly sees her perspective as weaker, less convincing and not worth her husband's time. Therefore, she solicits God to "change her husband's heart."<sup>10</sup> She, as a muted group member relegated to using nontraditional, alternative forms of discourse to express herself, utilizes the only tools she seemingly has to impress her thoughts on others: God and her mommy blog.

*Birthing Options and Challenging "Mainstream Thought"*

In Quiverfull mother Jacinda's most recent childbirth, she contests male authority and mainstream thought through her blog and her actions. An advocate of homebirthing, the author of "Birthing a Quiverfull" believes that "getting others' attention on alternatives to hospital education is merited" because "having had more education [on the birthing process] would have saved a lot of pain and problems! ...I wasn't getting my hands on alternatives to mainstream thought," which encourages hospital births as the correct way to deliver babies ("Birthing Options Activism," n.d.). This post highlights

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<sup>10</sup> A year later, her husband contemplated a vasectomy reversal. Through the internet, "Mama Archer" found that she and her husband were not alone. Many couples online had realized their "mistake" and sought vasectomy reversals. They found a ministry that paid for their procedure, and they in turn, had five more "reversal babies."

Quiverfull's emphasis on the home as a "natural" source of schooling and birth, as well as the value of mommy blogs as a medium to enact change.

Through her blog, Jacinda challenges mainstream thoughts that endorse hospital births and thus infringe on a mother's right to choose alternative birthing options. She writes that when she asked if she could give birth in a more comfortable "squatting position I was not allowed to do so. Of course as soon as I had the monitor around my waist and had to lie down I started to feel real pain for the first time" showing that she, the mother, knew her body more intimately than the medical personnel did. Jacinda, when ready to push, wanted to know when the obstetrician was going to arrive. When he did, Jacinda writes that:

He was telling the nurse all about his troubles at the airport during his trip! He told me that I was good to have waited until he returned...I wanted to push...thankfully the LD nurse was a pretty good one and she sensed I was really wanting to get on with it all and told the OB so ("Birthing Stories: Michalina," n.d.).

What Jacinda experienced aligns with mainstream thought in which a mother is reliant on male authority. The doctor becomes the "hero" (Kline, 2007); even though Jacinda felt that she was ready to give birth to her fourth child, she was encouraged to wait for the doctor's instructions. Fortunately, a nurse was able to "sense" what Jacinda wanted and then conveyed those thoughts to the doctor, highlighting that the mother was not an active, vocal participant in her own delivery and was reliant on a female nurse to speak for her. By adhering to "mainstream thought" on birthing, medical personnel first ignored Jacinda's wishes, made her wait for male authority, and lastly, upset her.

She writes that "I did not like having to pull up into a sitting position during pushing...I was not comfortable for so long that I was numb with pain...the oxygen mask

seemed to suffocate me more,” signaling that “mainstream thought” and technological and medicalized assistance in the form of an oxygen mask was not best for her needs (“Birthing Stories: Michalina,” n.d.). After the birth of her child, a new nurse came to assist her. Jacinda notes that the nurse:

...asked did I plan a tubal ligation [to stop future pregnancies] because if I did she wouldn't remove the I.V. yet. I really wish she would have looked on my chart [to see that she did not have one scheduled] before blurting that out because it was a downer after such a special time of birthing. I guess she only had two kids and figured three was unusual and having more would be really unusual (“Birthing Stories: Michalina,” n.d.).

By assuming that Jacinda would want a tubal ligation after the birth of her fourth child, the nurse upset her and also reinforced “mainstream thought” that questions the birth of more than two to three children. Moreover, adhering to medicalized norms, male authority and mainstream thought, Jacinda had an unfavorable experience in her hospital birth, which helps explain her ideological distancing from “mainstream” mothers with few children.

### *Reframing Homebirth*

In order to challenge these mainstream concepts, Jacinda of “Birthing a Quiverfull,” chose to give birth to her next child at home, even though homebirth has been constructed as “silly and gross” (Kline, 2007). Her choice to give birth at home challenges contemporary mothering models that advocate medicalized hospital births. Additionally, with homebirth, she was an active participant and decision maker in her delivery along with her husband who helped her “blow the pain away” and “took great care” of her (“Birthing Stories: Sophia,” n.d.).

Another reason why Jacinda's sharing of her homebirth was so impactful, is because it reframed birth from a “medical procedure” (Trebilcot, 1983) or “inferior



animal activity” (O’Brien, 1981, p. 149) to a natural, beautiful process. O’Brien (1981) argues that others, such as author De Beauvoir, evaluate childbirth as “an inferior animal activity and the biological curse of femininity” perpetuating a low value being ascribed to female reproductive function (p. 149). O’Brien posits that because women’s ability to give birth is devalued by “male supremacist ideology” (p. 149), women have sought liberation by their ability to “evade this function” (p. 149) through means such as education and birth control. However, Jacinda ascribed value and power back into this act by writing that:

I was the one that delivered her [not her obstetrician]. And I had really one of the most rewarding births because I felt I had prayed a lot more and gotten my strength from the Lord. There was little fear involved and the care was more personal and less hurried...I’d once again learned more about my God, myself, and others (“Birthing Stories,” n.d.).

The homebirth provided Jacinda an opportunity to be an active participant in her own delivery that was not hurried or plagued with fear. She frames her homebirth with such peace and positivity that it does not seem like an “inferior animal activity” that should be avoided, but rather a beautiful process of womanhood that she shared with her husband. Through her mommy blog, Jacinda was able to propose her rhetorical vision of birth to clarify the often contradictory ideology of birth that is seen as ambivalently “medical” and “animalistic,” “silly” and “sanctified.”

*“Natural” Motherhood*

Part of the reason Jacinda was able to reclaim her birthing experience from hospital to homebirth is through her emphasis on the natural. As contractions intensified,

Jacinda informed her mommy blog audience that she took arnica 30<sup>11</sup>, ate 5w blend of herbs, shakes and teas to aid in her impending delivery. In her choice to avoid medicine and drugs to help with her delivery and not adversely impact her unborn child, Jacinda is further challenging mainstream thought that associates credibility with medicalization. However, Douglas and Michaels might argue that Jacinda is perhaps unknowingly adhering to the expectations of “new momism.”

Douglas and Michaels (2004) highlight that mothers who adhere to “new momism” no longer see simple products such as Johnson & Johnson lotions as sufficient for their special child. Instead, this contemporary model of mothering demands that “good” mothers only buy “pure, natural, synthetic-free, talc-free, non-animal tested, nut-oil free (?), nonpetroleum, non-mineral oil, artificial fragrance-free products” (p. 303) to ensure their baby’s safety and elevated comfort because “every child needs and deserved the natural touch” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 303). Product line Arizona Babies touts that its all-natural skin-care products provide “the natural way to love your baby” with a lotion called “Tranquil Time,” which claims to help your baby sleep (p. 303). Regardless, Douglas and Michaels reaffirm that a good mother is routinely reminded that she “must” have these natural, superior products, even if their benefits are vague or even invalid.

This intersection between “new momism” and Quiverfull “natural” mothering demonstrates that perhaps these two mothering ideologies share some tenets that advocate utilizing “natural” products and “organic” foods. While seemingly disparate, new momism and Quiverfull mothering both place exceedingly high expectations on

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<sup>11</sup> Arnica 30, made from the plant Arnica Montana, is a product used to treat muscle pain as well as a variety of other ailments. It is not FDA approved; however, it has been used for years in homeopathic medicine (Ladner, 2011).

mothers in similar ways. However, their ideological differences are still evident. “New momism,” while encouraging the “natural,” relies on medical opinions, advocates the value of child to child social interaction, highlights the benefits of traditional education and a family’s need to participate in the public sphere, for example, showcasing the many differences between these ideologies.

### *Gender Identity and Quiverfull Norms*

Like “new momism” and “intensive mothering,” Quiverfull assume that a mother is to be the primary caregiver to children; however, the Quiverfull’s gender norms are far more strict as highlighted by their consistent recognition of male authority and promulgation of “biblical womanhood.” But unlike her fellow Quiverfull bloggers, Jen of “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull” provides a more diversified framing of her husband as an authority figure that is both patriarchal and egalitarian. Jen refers to her husband in her blog as “The Captain,” never by his real name, reinforcing his role as patriarch and decision maker. However, in her post “The Captain SWOOPS in to Save the Day” she writes of his hands-on role as a co-parent. Unlike the other bloggers’ husbands who only work outside the home and are rarely mentioned as participants in the private sphere, “The Captain” shares his time between working outside and within the home. Jen proclaims that when her daughter brought a mouse to her, when she was on bed rest for her high risk pregnancy, “I screamed ‘get that thing out of my house!’”

Jen’s loud and explosive reaction demonstrates that she is actively deviating from the Quiverfull norm of calm submission and feminine cheerfulness known as “biblical womanhood” (Joyce, 2009; Deering, 2011). When contemplating what to do she thinks “CALL THE CAPTAIN!! He was out in the field on the big tractor working ground with

the boys while the girls played outside...He came to the rescue with his gentle hand and spirit” (Apr. 21, 2010). Jen’s quotation demonstrates clearly defined gender roles.

Distinct gendered behavior is evident in this household. The boys work the land with their father; the girls “play,” perhaps indicating the appropriate gendered behavior among Quiverfull households. Also, “The Captain” is framed as a superhero who “saves the day once again, hangs up his cape & climbs back in the tractor,” framing the patriarch as the masculine “hero” in their narrative. Closing her post, Jen writes:

I cry as I write this (I’m an emotional pregnant woman remember?). Yesterday [the Captain] took the 2 boys for a total of 8 shots (normally my job), today he took the girls to the dentist (normally my job) and EVERY DAY [that] he is home from his regular flying job, he farms, mows, bathes children, cooks, cleans, grocery shops, shuttles kids to violin and piano, plays blocks, does laundry - basically EVERYTHING for me & our family. Thank you Lord for my wonderful husband who I love more every second (Apr. 21, 2010).

Jen’s excerpt demonstrates that while she typically fulfills the traditional Quiverfull role of “SAHM” (stay-at-home mom) who cooks, cleans, and homeschools her children, her husband is willing and able to take on her role as a co-parent in her absence.

However, it is important to note that he has taken on this role because his wife is on bed rest for a pregnancy, not because she has a fulltime job in the public sphere, for example. It is likely that his behavior may be different (i.e. less supportive) had she been absent for a paying job outside the home. But by referring to her husband’s “gentle” hand and spirit, perhaps her relationship with “the Captain” challenges the expected Quiverfull norm of patriarchy. Additionally, Jen challenges the role of Quiverfull mother by caring for “the whole ENCHILADA” (i.e. the kids and farm) for two weeks a month while her husband is away at work (“why am i blessed,” March, 25, 2011). But most

significantly, Jen challenges the Quiverfull gender norms by being a political activist in the public sphere.

### *Challenging Gender Identity*

In a video clip by a local news source that chronicles “Hands, Hearts, Quiverfull” author Jen Keller’s role in lobbying for rights for unborn babies exposed to drugs, she is quoted on camera as saying “when the 17th baby was born out of three birth mothers, I was very angry because all the kids were born meth positive and it’s very frustrating for [addicted mothers] to keep having babies, keep having babies, keep having babies” when they are unable to care for their children (“Keller family,” Sept. 18, 2008). Although these mothers are reported to social services by numerous parties (e.g. doctors and neighbors), Jen adds that “there is not a thing that can be done about it. These children are being abused in the womb.” This quotation deviates from her blog’s framing of these mothers who she claims should not be judged for their mistakes, showing that perhaps her blog and public identity are discordant based on the differing “in group” norms of forgiving mommy blogger versus “frustrated” political activist who must negotiate the permeable boundaries of different ideological groups (Putnam & Stohl, 1990).

Jen now speaks as a spokesperson at “Drug Endangered Children” conferences and has worked with Kansas State Representative Sharon Schwartz to make it a crime for mothers to use drugs while pregnant (“Keller Family,” Sept. 18, 2008). This has garnered Jen and Nick Keller national attention. They were nominated for the “Angels in Adoption” by Kansas Congressman Jerry Moran for their “compassion, love, and care.” At the end of the clip Nick Keller, known as “The Captain” in his wife’s mommy blog, mentions that people often say that “you really saved those kids” and he responds that

“no, they saved us” because he and his wife had always wanted a biological family but “there was another plan for us” demonstrating their willingness to challenge contemporary mothering models, as well as Quiverfull models, which rarely account for adoptive parents and assume couples are fertile.

Jen’s passion as an activist in the public sphere not only challenges Quiverfull gender norms, but also challenges the assumptions made about contemporary “mainstream” mothers who are supposedly unwilling to leave the home because of their childrearing responsibilities. Ardener (1975) references what he calls the “hot stove argument,” which acts as a way to substantiate women’s lack of involvement in the public sphere because they are saddled with the realities of childbirth and child-rearing, and therefore, have less time or desire to help impact models of society (p. 3). This biological argument claiming that women are metaphorically chained to their role in the private sphere (i.e. “the hot stove”) and thus cannot partake in valuable public dialogue, adequately reinforces intensive mothering.

As I write this, I remember that when my grandmother wanted to get off the telephone without seeming abrupt, overly assertive or rude, she would simply state “I’ve got to go, I have something on the stove.” This personal anecdote demonstrates Ardener’s concept because no one would argue with my grandmother, since women’s culturally agreed upon status was that of stay-at-home mother, bound to her responsibilities as domestic caretaker. Therefore, Jen’s role in challenging this “biological propensity” (Ardener, 1975) is very significant in the reshaping of “Quiverfull biblical womanhood,” allowing for a more diversified definition of motherhood.

*“Mommy Time”*

Another way a mother is being rhetorically diversified while also being ideologically conflicted, is her acknowledgment and acceptance of what one rhetor calls “mommy time.” In her post entitled “Momma’s Day out,” the author of “Raising a Quiverfull” writes:

I enjoyed a ‘Mamma’s Day Out’ on Wednesday. While I don’t get these often, I feel a little torn when I do have one. On one hand, I think it is good for Mom to have time for herself. It helps you rejuvenate and refocus and I think it can actually help you be a better parent. But on the other hand, I feel like when you have a baby, that child now becomes your life; having no more “Me Time” is all a part of parenting (Apr. 9, 2010).

Unfortunately, this contradictory sentiment seemingly plagues all mothers, not just the Quiverfull. Douglas and Michaels (2004) suggest that “today, the standards of good motherhood are really over the top,” explaining why “me time” is so important to a parent. However, Kris of “Raising a Quiverfull” rationalizes her “mommy time” as merely a way to be a “better parent” and “rejuvenate.” Through her repeated emphasis on this rationale, she is reinforcing that *she* is not benefiting from this time, but that her children will ultimately benefit. This supports Hays’ (1996) argument that Rachel, the intensive mother she chronicles in her book, works tirelessly at her paid job to provide special activities “centered around Kristin [her daughter] and Kristin’s desires” not for herself or her husband. Through Kris and Rachel’s choices, they are rationalizing any time away from their children during a “day out” or at paid work as simply means to be a “better” parent, reinforcing the pressure women feel to meet socially constructed expectations.

To reinforce this point, Kris details her “day out” as a “mommy” not a woman, for example. Kris spent her free morning as a “dumpster diver” as her husband calls it,

but she prefers the term “treasure seeker” since she only takes home “slightly used things beside waste receptacles” for her family (“Momma’s Day out”). She then made a trip to the library, Wal-Mart and ended at the park. She confesses that “this was the first time since I’ve given birth that I’ve ever been to the park childless. It was strange. I felt like everyone was looking at me, asking themselves why I just sat there,” highlighting that perhaps her identity stems only from her role as mother not as a woman or person. So without children, she feels inactive and purposeless. Lastly, Kris got a Swedish massage that her mother bought her as a birthday gift. But Kris notes that “the massage therapist once attended our church” and their children were friends; “the bad part about this was we talked about the kids the entire time and before I knew it the hour was gone.” Children are often seen as becoming a mother’s “world” (Hays, 1996, p. 104; Soliday, 2009, p. 49) so consequentially, “mommy time” may become more time devoted to discourse about children and time to “rejuvenate” for childrearing.

Kris confesses that when she returned home she “actually wanted to turn around and leave” because she could not face the chaos and messy state of the house. She writes that “Bless my husband! When he watches the kids, the state of the house is the farthest thing from his mind. There were *many* dirty dishes scattered around. A wet diaper lay open on the living room floor. The basket of laundry was still sitting on the end table. And it looked like someone had put a stick of dynamite in the bookcase.” This excerpt reinforces the social construction that men are ill equipped to care for a household, are more preoccupied with other (more important) things besides domestic tasks, or are simply overwhelmed at the role of “Mr. Mom” that they cannot uphold motherhood’s unattainable expectations. This causes women to often pick up the neglected household



or “undo” the mess. Kris writes “feeling well rested, I happily [sic] appreciatively cleaned up the mess in the house and thanked my husband for watching the kids for me” demonstrating that perhaps her day off was more stressful and tiresome than if she had simply stayed at her post.

*“Unnatural” Fatherhood*

Perhaps what Kris is struggling with as a Quiverfull is what many working mothers refer to as the “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989), in which a woman must leave her daily paid job to come home and cook, clean and care for children. This demonstrates the parallel between working mothers and Quiverfull mothers who do not expect their husband to partake in domestic roles in a competent manner. In contemporary culture, stay-at-home dads are often constructed in comical framing, such as in films *Mr. Mom* in 1983, the 2003 film *Daddy Day Care*, and 2005’s *The Pacifier*, which chronicle men’s and fathers’ inability to care for children since many feel this role is “unnatural” in comparison to women’s “innate” ability to work in the home, give up their paid jobs, and care for children. These men’s roles are also seen as a demotion compared to their previous positions or careers, further devaluing the importance of childcare. What Kris is experiencing, in comparison, is her willingness to accept her husband’s inability to thrive in his parenting role, placing all responsibilities of domestic tasks on her as wife and mother, a tenet of intensive mothering.

*“Mommy Time” Justified*

Lastly, Kris poses the question to her blog followers: “How do you feel about ‘mommy time’? Do you take time for yourself? Do you constantly think about your children and what they are doing when you take flight? Or are you on the other side of the fence? Do you go and not look back?” Ten comments were posted, showing the

interactive nature of blogging that provides muted groups access to one another online. This also established “mommy time” as acceptable behavior that will benefit you, but also your children. However, many claim it is hard to come by.

One blogger named “Supermanslady” writes “Mommy Time? What’s that?” alluding to the lack of free time she experiences as a mother. Other bloggers, however, placated Kris by supporting her choice to have “mommy time.” Laura writes, “I don’t know if I could go and not look back. But you DO have to take care of yourself. You do deserve a little reading and resting time, I firmly believe. Everyone is better for it, I think.” Blogger “Mrs. Addison” writes “I think we all need a little time now and then to ourselves to kind of ‘recharge’ our batteries. I wouldn’t advocate doing it every day but I don’t think every once in a while is bad. I try to do one day a month or so,” showing that “mommy time” may not happen often enough for some Quiverfull mothers.

Many posters may not get a “momma’s day out” often, but they do have some time each day to relax. Bloggers propose activities that they enjoy doing during “mommy time” that may consist of a few minutes every day. They propose reading, scrapbooking, watching television or resting, indicating what “in group” behaviors are agreed upon as appropriate for “mommy time.” This demonstrates that through the interactive nature of blogs, mommy bloggers can establish “in group” norms that are deemed “appropriate” through the support and praise provided by fellow group members.

Douglas and Michaels (2004) would argue that this ideological behavior is a way for mothers to “police thyselfes” (p. 141) and adhere to the strict norms established for “good” mothers, demonstrating that seemingly disparate ideologies among mothers share in their pursuits to be “good,” appropriate mothers. However, according to several

scholars (Nelson et. al, 1997; Himmelstein, 1986; Chafetz & Dworkin, 1978, Gallagher, 2004) no female group is more ideologically opposed than evangelical, fundamentalist Christian women and feminists, demonstrating why mommy blogs can perhaps bring these polarized female ideologies closer together.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### *Polarization of Female Identity*

According to Abbott (1833) “mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations, as all other earthly causes combined” (p. 159). Therefore, Meckel (1982) argues that mothers have historically been persuaded to adhere to certain roles and duties by male superiors as a way to influence mass ideology and develop cultural norms. He notes that mothering literature has played an integral role in shaping female identity, most notably through organizations linked to evangelist, Baptist and fundamentalist Christianity (Meckel, 1982, p. 406) who are also referred to as conservative Protestants (CPs) in contemporary culture (Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Furthermore, by placing an emphasis on a woman’s *religious* duty to embody the proper gender role as wife and mother, women have adopted and maintained fundamentalist gender norms since the first half of the 19th century (Meckel, 1982) leading to cultural and political influence.

Woodberry and Smith (1998) unveil that fundamentalist Christians have mothers, in particular, to thank for this religion’s impact on contemporary politics. They write that there is little evidence of a massive population increase among this group of fundamentalist Christians; however, “higher birth rates and greater retention of CP children cause much of the relative growth” (p. 42). Therefore, encouraging mothers to procreate and educate their children with consistent ideological beliefs through the controlled environment of homeschooling, would be advantageous for male

fundamentalist leaders who want to preserve their positions of power and their ability to influence the national political climate (Woodberry & Smith, 1998, pp. 43-44).

Connell (2005) notes that because women have the ability to impact political climate through their roles as wives, mothers, and educators of future generations, women have derailed several women's movements that challenged traditional gender roles amidst Reagan era conservatism of the 1980s. By "demonizing welfare mothers, homosexuals and glorifying the 'traditional family,'" women were in essence limiting their own options of progress (p. 253). Marshall (1985) argues that women's antifeminism that erupted in the 1980s parallels women's role in antisuffrage movements between 1912 and 1918, demonstrating that in some instances women have thwarted movements that serve their interests. Some theorists argue that perhaps many women feel compelled to participate in antifeminism, or hide their feminist impulses, to please their conservative male superiors as a way to "play by the rules" (Keel, 2004, p. 155) and "adopt the culture of the mainstream" (Triandis, 1976), in order to participate in dominant society through conformity (Orbe, 1998, p. 10).

Woodberry and Smith (1998) find that a woman's religious conviction often has the most significant impact on her thoughts on feminism. They highlight that religious factors often predict people's political views better than do either class or gender (p. 25), showing the deeply entwined ideologies of religion and politics, particularly among fundamentalist Christians. Quiverfull activists and fundamentalist Christian authors Jan and Rick Hess claim that if Christian families would simply have more children, the "Christian right<sup>12</sup> could rise to 550 million within the century" (as cited in Joyce, 2009, p.

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<sup>12</sup> The Christian right is comprised of "right-wing" or conservatively minded individuals who are largely Protestant; this group is also referred to as the "religious right" or "RR" (Woodberry & Smith, 1998).

170). By encouraging Quiverfull women to adhere to the patriarchal ideology of “biblical womanhood,” mothers become “domestic warriors in the battle against what [the Quiverfull] see as forty years of destruction wrought by women’s liberation” (Joyce, 2006, p. 11). In short, the Hesses concur that a half-billion person boycott of a company that violates God’s standards could be very effective (Hess & Hess, 1989), making women’s roles as active antifeminists and prolific mothers imperative for Quiverfull ideological dissemination and growth.

### *Antifeminism*

As Dworkin notes, fundamentalist Christians are often antifeminist because of their “concern for protecting the coherence of the private sphere against the corrosive effects of individuation” (as cited in Himmelstein, 1986, p. 9). This group fears that individuation is perpetuated by feminism, demonstrating why this group is ideologically opposed to feminism’s egalitarian sentiment. Moreover, church attendance is generally more strongly related to antifeminist beliefs than are education, income, occupational status, class, age and location (Himmelstein, 1986, p. 13), showing why such deeply religious groups, such as the Quiverfull, employ women and mothers to advocate antifeminism perpetuating the ideological opposition between “biblical women” and feminists.

Gallagher (2004) argues that conservative Protestants and feminists are “inescapably at odds” because conservative Protestants must maintain an “alternative cultural world as a way to resist modernity” initiated by the corroding effects of feminism (p. 452). Antifeminism is largely what coalesced the “Christian right” in the 1980s and

then the “Promise Keepers” in the 1990s<sup>13</sup> in an attempt to restore men to their rightful place as patriarchs within the family (p. 453). In her interviews with women who identified as fundamentalist Christians, Gallagher (2004) found that the women have shifted in their beliefs in recent decades. Gallagher notes that the majority of the fundamentalist Christian women she interviewed initially supported women’s rights as “correcting” unfair social inequalities; however, *feminism* seems to have abandoned those “reasonable goals” and become “extreme” by focusing on sexual politics and “male bashing” (p. 457). Furthermore, fundamentalist women interviewed in Gallagher’s study argued that contemporary feminism is so “wacked out” and “crazy” that it is far too remote and outrageous to pose much of a threat to fundamentalists’ core values (p. 58).

Nelson et al. (1997) note this framing of feminism is a rather ubiquitous tool to discount feminist initiatives and is not limited to the “Christian right.” They argue that many individuals, like antifeminist CPs, subdue and challenge feminist ideology through routine and unfavorable framing of all feminists as “femi-Nazis” who desire to dominate and emasculate men (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 227). To counterpoint this framing, feminists remind their critics that “coercive power or control and dominance over others is not one of the tenets of feminism, simply because much of feminism derives from an awareness of the negative impact of power” (p. 228). Instead, feminists propose the perspective of “power to” as opposed to “power over” (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Yet ideological tensions persist.

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<sup>13</sup> The Promise Keepers is an evangelical men’s movement mobilized to rejuvenate “godly manhood,” highlighting men’s innate strength, “long-range vision and achievement-mindedness” as reasons for their need to restore their role as patriarchs within the family (Bartkowski, 2000; Messner, 1997; Cole, 1982).

*Feminism*

Nelson et al. (1997) argue that feminists often arrogantly assume that traditional or antifeminist women are “unenlightened victims” who are so subconsciously brainwashed that they cannot think for themselves. But some women simply do not see their interests represented by feminists and consciously distance themselves from its ideology. Some women worry that the protection and identity on which they rely (e.g. child support) will be taken away if women ascend to men’s level in society, demonstrating why some women are fearful of gender equality’s potential effects (Nelson et al., 1997, p. 230).

Some antifeminists are clearer about their ideological stance. Chafetz and Dworkin (1978) explain that some antifeminists do see feminism as a threat to their own power; therefore, antifeminists encourage others to view feminism as a threat to the more sacred religious and family values, in order to discredit and diffuse feminism ideology. Antifeminists, both male and female, have historically thwarted women’s movements, even covertly. As Horney (1967) confesses it is the “function” of an ideology to “deny or conceal the existence of a struggle” explaining why there is often little awareness of the inequality between the sexes. Because “it is in the interest of men to obscure this fact” (p. 116), antifeminism is often enacted in a surreptitious manner.

However, by acknowledging the horizontal hostility that exists between fundamentalist Christian women and feminist women, perhaps women can begin to understand and actualize their strengths and goals by gaining a collective sense of identity as women. I argue that this collective identity can be spurred and mobilized in part through mommy blogs because it highlights the unique and valuable role that women



fulfill as mothers, while creating an environment of understanding among women. As Lerner (1993) posits, feminist consciousness is likely to lead to the formation of a united front to right the wrongs of a patriarchal society founded upon the value of power and the need for domination.

### *Limitations*

Limitations posed in this study revolve around the narrow scope of female identity explored. Mothering discourse has traditionally highlighted the experiences of white, married, financially sound, heterosexual mothers as the “universal” (Dobris & White-Mills, 2004; Johnston & Swanson, 2003b). Therefore, women’s perspectives who fall outside this narrow scope (e.g. women of color, non Christian mothers, single mothers or lesbian mothers) are not represented. Additionally, this study looked at mothering blogs; therefore, mothers who do not have the financial or educational means to exist online are rendered invisible. Lastly, the ideological tensions present in “mommy wars” assumes that all mothers have the choice to stay home and care for their children; however, many mothers must work in order to financially survive and do not have the option to stay home (Hays, 1996).

As hooks (2000) notes, early women’s liberation argued that motherhood was the “serious obstacle” to women’s progress as something that trapped women in the home as caretakers, cleaners and cooks; however, poor women and women of color had always filled these roles, if not in their own home, then in the homes of others, regardless if they were mothers or not (pp. 133-135). Early women's liberation, therefore, demonstrated its assumptive perspective that often only represented the viewpoint of privileged, white women. The inequality experienced among women also indicated the assumption that all

mothers did not *have* to work outside the home, yet many do out of necessity since they do not have financial means to stay home. By employing feminist standpoint theory (Bullis & Bach, 1996; Mumby, 1996; Wood, 1992), which acknowledges that not all group members occupy the same standpoint, one could glean a better understanding of the competing ideological experiences and various inequalities that exist among and between mothers because “the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity, not only their own position but...the shape of social systems as a whole” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 8). These limitations demonstrate the need for future research to address the often ignored experiences of mothers who exist outside of the “universal” white mother’s realm.

Other future research that stems from this study could address the role that technology embodies between the polarized ideologies of Quiverfull and feminists. Technological progress and its impact has traditionally been dismissed in favor of more natural, communal and familial forms of interaction among Quiverfull groups (Joyce, 2009); however, the role of mommy blogs as a technological outlet of the private sphere among this group may exhibit a telling shift in the ideological motives of this population.

Another theme that is worth exploring is the role of national identity and patriotism among the Quiverfull. Two of the four bloggers analyzed in this study were overtly patriotic, supportive of the armed forces, and their husbands were active in the military. However, all four bloggers homeschool their children due to the perceived ill effects of public education and refuse financial, government assistance when needed, further distancing themselves from government and social institutions. Therefore, future research on Quiverfull and fundamentalist Christians’ ideological negotiation between national identity and religious identity warrants analysis.

*Summary*

In this study, contemporary mothering literature was explored and discussed as a way to establish the ephemeral and culturally constructed “norms” in mothering. Additionally the role of women in the blogosphere and the patriarchal norms that limit their contributions provided the framing of women bloggers and mothers as “muted groups.” By chronicling the recent scholarship on motherhood and blogs, the rationale for this study was proposed. Analysis of four mothering blogs provided rich firsthand accounts of mothers who struggle to negotiate their roles as Quiverfull “biblical women” and mothers. Through ideological criticism, I explored how Quiverfull mothers construct and maintain their own rhetorical vision of motherhood through mommy blogs, in an effort to understand if Quiverfull mothers also struggle to “get it right” like so many other contemporary mothers, faced with cultural contradictions.

By unveiling emergent themes that both reinforced and challenged contemporary mothering models that often substantiate the status quo and patriarchal norms, I found that Quiverfull mothers struggle with many of the same ideological pressures that mainstream mothers endure such as being almost entirely responsible for childrearing, wanting to find time for themselves amidst society’s demands that children become a mother’s “everything,” and negotiating their role as mothers in the public sphere. But on the other hand, Quiverfull mothers differentiated themselves from mainstream mothers through their relationship with God. By relinquishing all control to God’s will, Quiverfull mothers challenge the notion that good mothers must always be in control (Hays, 1996; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). More significantly, Quiverfull mothers

distance themselves from feminist ideology by promulgating the need for male authority and criticizing all pro-choice sentiment.

Moreover, through the exploration of these online artifacts, this study acknowledges the ideological differences between mothering groups, yet exposes that both mainstream and Quiverfull mothers find success as a mother almost unattainable. Therefore, this study proposes that mommy blogs have the rhetorical ability to question why mothers cannot seem to “get it right,” and therefore, reshape what constitutes “good mothering.”

*Mommy Blogs as Nontraditional Unifier*

In conclusion, Mommy blogs’ role within contemporary female discourse may not only provide a common ground among the muted group of mothers and imbue value to mothering, but may help connect the polarized female ideologies of fundamentalist Christian Quiverfull mothers and feminists in what hooks (1994) refers to as the “recognition of the Other,” which disrupts the possibility of domination (p. 232). Blogger Jen of “Hands, Hearts, Quiver Full” asserts that her “bloggy community” has truly come together in times of trouble and provided her support and encouragement as a woman and mother. Ending her post, she exclaims “GOD DOES MIRACULOUS THINGS through these crazy computers” (Isaiah, Feb. 20, 2009), showing the potential value of contemporary, nontraditional forms of discourse as means to unite polarized female ideologies into supportive consciousness raising groups who better understand the motivations and rationale behind their differing worldviews. Furthermore, mommy blogs offer varied female rhetors the opportunity to question the culturally constructed “timeless truth” of mothering and offer their firsthand perspectives on the value of this

role. Ultimately, through rich female narratives, mommy blogs provide a much needed voice to a long silenced, muted group.

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Deering, E. N., Anderson, L. B. & Noblet, N. P. (2010). *Staying Oncourse: Communication recommendations for the IUPUI School of Liberal Arts*. Edited volume, Wroclaw, Poland.

Deering, E. N. (2009). "Fancy don't let me down": An ideological analysis of Reba McEntire's music video, "Fancy." pp. 18-20, ISBN: 978-5-9935-0137-6, Volgograd State Pedagogical University Press, Volgograd, Russia.

## **GENERAL PUBLICATIONS**

Deering, E.N. (2002). Living on empty in a drought. *New York Times' Upfront Magazine*. New York: Scholastic, May.

Deering, E.N. (2000). My team. Weekly sports column in *Portland Press Herald*, Portland, ME, August-October.

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

Crosby, E.D. (2011). Speaking about the basic course: How student voice is constructed and expressed. Competitively selected panel to be presented at the National Communication Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, November.

Deering, E.N. (2011). Biblical womanhood in your living room: A fantasy theme analysis of reality show "18 Kids and Counting." Competitively selected paper presented at the Central States Communication Association Conference, Milwaukee, WI, April.

Deering, E. N., Davidson, R. D., & Anderson, L. B. (2011). Dirty work in the classroom: Utilizing shared narratives as a taint management strategy. Competitively selected paper presented at the Central States Communication Association Conference, Milwaukee, WI, April.

Schrader, S.M., Deering, E.N., & Zahl, D.A. (2010). Visually storying living with HIV: Bridging stressors and supports in accessing care. Competitively selected paper individually presented at the National Communication Association Conference, San Francisco, CA, November.

Schrader, S.M., Zahl, D.A., Deering, E.N., & Shapiro, A. (2010). A civically engaged simulated patient objective structured clinical exam (OSCE) process between dental students and patients living with cancer. Competitively selected to present poster at the International Academic Research Service Learning Civic Engagement Conference, Indianapolis, IN, October.

- Deering, E.N. (2010). Stories to the consumer: Understanding branding's evolution through semiotics. Competitively selected paper presented at IUPUI Student Achievement Night as Outstanding Graduate Research Paper, Department of Communication Studies, April.
- Deering, E.N. (2010). Stories to the consumer: Understanding branding's evolution through semiotics. Competitively selected paper presented at the Central States Communication Association Conference as one of four Top Graduate Papers, Cincinnati, OH, April.
- Deering, E.N. (2010). Making arrows for the war: The bible's role in the maintenance of motherhood. Invited to present paper at the annual IUPUI Women's History Month Conference as member of a panel: Building the Bridge between Theory and Practice: A Multi-Method Feminist Approach to Childrearing Expectations, Indianapolis, IN, March.
- Schrader, S.M., Zahl, D.A., Deering, E.N. (2010). A civically engaged partnership between the Indiana University School of Dentistry and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH/A). Invited to present poster at the IUPUI Civic Engagement Showcase, Indianapolis, IN, April.
- Deering, E.N. (2010). "Women aren't funny": Cultural constructions and humor. Research presented as part of a competitively selected panel, Humor in the Media, at IUPUI Communication Week, Indianapolis, IN, March.
- Deering, E. N., Anderson, L. B. & Noblet, N. P. (2009). Staying Oncourse: Communication recommendations for the IUPUI School of Liberal Arts. Paper presented at the annual International Conference on Communication and Culture, Wroclaw, Poland, May.
- Deering, E.N. (2009). "Fancy don't let me down": An ideological analysis of Reba McEntire's music video, "Fancy." Invited to present at the IUPUI Student Achievement Night as Outstanding Graduate Research Paper, Department of Communication Studies, April.
- Deering, E.N. (2009). "Fancy don't let me down": An ideological analysis of Reba McEntire's music video, "Fancy." Paper presented at the competitively selected IUPUI Communication Week: Rise to the Challenge Panel, Indianapolis, IN, March.
- Deering, E.N. (2009). "Fancy don't let me down": An ideological analysis of Reba McEntire's music video, "Fancy." Invited to present paper at the IUPUI International teleconference with Volgograd State Pedagogical University, Volgograd, Russia, March.



## **RESEARCH IN PROGRESS**

Deering, E.N. (under review). Invitational rhetoric and feminist narratives: Exploring Bobbie Gentry's life through music.

Deering, E.N. (under review). Changing the conversation through visual voice: A schematic analysis of Wroclaw, Poland's architecture.

Deering, E. N. & Davidson, R. D. (in progress). Exploring the intersection of gender and self: The enhancement of Women's Studies through the study of self disclosure.

## **AWARDS & HONORS**

- 2011 Outstanding Graduate Research Award Winner for "Changing the Conversation through Visual Voice: A Schematic Analysis of Wroclaw, Poland's Architecture." Awarded by the IUPUI Communication Studies Department
- 2011 Outstanding Graduate Research Award Winner for group paper, "Dirty Work in the Classroom: Utilizing Shared Narratives as a Taint Management Strategy." Awarded by the IUPUI Communication Studies Department
- 2011 Awarded "Best Themed Learning Community" for "Writing Women Back Into (Her)Story: Making Connection Among Indiana Women," selected based on teaching performance, curriculum, student evaluation, retention and campus engagement
- 2011 Awarded Free NCA Membership by the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies
- 2010 Outstanding Graduate Research Award Winner for "Stories to the consumer: Understanding branding's evolution through semiotics." Awarded by the IUPUI Communication Studies Department
- 2010 Selected as member of Golden Key Honor Society
- 2010 Selected to develop new Women's Studies Themed Learning Community
- 2010 Appointed as the graduate student representative for the School of Liberal Arts Diversity Committee by Dean William Blomquist
- 2009 Outstanding Graduate Research Award Winner for "'Fancy don't let me down': An ideological analysis of Reba McEntire's music video, 'Fancy.'" Awarded by the IUPUI Communication Studies Department
- 2006 NCAC Defensive Player of the Year (Division III Varsity Lacrosse); became all time goal and points scorer in Allegheny College history; four year 1st Team All-Conference Selection; team captain 2004-2006
- 2006 Alden Scholar (3.3 GPA and above) 2006 Academic Year
- 2005 Selected as member of Communication Honor Society Lambda Pi Eta
- 2004 Competitively selected by Allegheny College to study abroad at Lancaster University, U.K., July - December
- 2004 Alden Scholar (3.3 GPA and above) 2004 Academic Year
- 2003 Selected as member of Service and Philanthropic Honor Society Lambda Sigma
- 2003 Alden Scholar (3.3 GPA and above) 2003 Academic Year
- 2002 Four year Trustee Scholarship recipient, Allegheny College

- 2002 U.S. Lacrosse Academic All-American, All-State selection  
 2001 Selected as Girls State representative, Bonny Eagle High School, Standish, ME

### **TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Course Number/Title</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Fall 2009	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking - 15144	26
	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking - 19094	26
Spring 2010	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking - 20462	27
	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking - 20464	24
Fall 2010	W105 Introduction to Women's Studies - 4196	24

### **INDEPENDENT COURSE DEVELOPMENT**

- 2011 Minicourse, The Ellis School, (Her)story: Understanding women's identity through the exploration of communication and culture  
 Responsibilities include: Preparation of all curriculum and exams
- 2010 Women's Studies Themed Learning Community, Introduction to Women's Studies  
 Responsibilities include: Preparation of all curriculum and exams, selection of new texts, implementation of online student forums, and the independent development of two outside campus wide events: Democracy Plaza and the "IUPUI Celebration of Hoosier Women"

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- 2010 Reviewer, Central States Communication Association, Women's Caucus  
 2010 Research Editor, Oral Health Care for Cancer Patients online resource, [www.ohccp.org](http://www.ohccp.org)  
 2010 Judge, Curtis Memorial Oratorical Contest  
 2009 Judge, IUPUI Dominata Classic Speech Competition

### **UNIVERSITY SERVICE & CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT**

- 2010 Judge, IUPUI Fall Speech Night Finals  
 2010 Moderator, IUPUI Democracy Plaza, "He Said, She Said, We Said: Constructing Gender Stereotypes on Campus"  
 2010 Planner, marketing coordinator, and host, "IUPUI Celebration of Hoosier Women" with invited guest speakers: author and former Indiana Secretary of Commerce Michael Maurer and Vera Bradley Designs co-creator Patricia Miller  
 2010 Proctor, Patients with Special Needs Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs), IU School of Dentistry  
 2010 President, Graduate Communication Club, 2009-2010 Academic Year  
 2010 Judge, IUPUI Spring Speech Night Finals  
 2010 Member, IUPUI Spring Speech Night Planning Committee

- 2009 Proctor, Infection Control Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs), IU School of Dentistry
- 2009 Judge, IUPUI Fall Speech Night Finals
- 2009 Critic, IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Preliminary Round
- 2009 Member, IUPUI Fall Speech Night Planning Committee
- 2009 Judge, Indiana State Individual Events Speech Tournament
- 2009 Member, IUPUI Spring Speech Night Planning Committee
- 2008 Member, IUPUI Graduate Communication Club

**PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS & AFFILIATIONS**

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| National Communication Association (NCA)        | 2009 - Present |
| Central States Communication Association (CSCA) | 2009 - Present |