

# CONNECTED: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ATTACHMENT PARENTING

by

KATHERINE ELIZABETH SOULE

(Under the Direction of DIANE M. SAMDAHL)

## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary, mainstream United States, normative discourses construct motherhood as a full-time parenting role in which women lose autonomous identity in exchange for the responsibility of raising children. This view carries over into leisure scholarship where mothers are viewed as constrained by children, and family leisure is described as inferior to independent leisure pursuits. However, many women find great joy in their parenting roles. To explore this apparent contradiction, this study focused on mothers who practice attachment parenting, a parenting style in which mothers remain in close physical contact with their children and take little to no time for themselves. The guiding research question was to investigate the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. Using post-intentional phenomenology, four mothers were interviewed about their attachment parenting experiences. The metaphor of gestation was used to discuss the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon that were revealed through this research. This discussion highlights the ways attachment parenting both resists and reinforces the normative discourse of motherhood, revealing ways these mothers navigated the contextualized power matrices present in their lives. The participants' stories also made it clear that these women found extreme joy in

interacting with their children; contrary to much published research, children were not a constraint to these mothers' leisure. This research highlights the need to expand scholarship on mothers' leisure—and indeed all leisure—to explore relational experiences as well as autonomous free-time activities.

INDEX WORDS: mothers' leisure, relational leisure, attachment parenting, motherhood, discourse, post-intentional phenomenology, feminist research, matrices of power

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KATHERINE ELIZABETH SOULE

B.A., California Polytechnic State University, 2003

M.S., California Polytechnic State University, 2009

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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KATHERINE ELIZABETH SOULE

Major Professor: Diane M. Samdahl

Committee: Corey W. Johnson  
Jori Hall

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2013

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Annabella Brooke Soule, my inspiration for this research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I don't think one parent can raise a child. I don't think two parents can raise a child.*

*You really need the whole village. ~ Toni Morrison*

This journey would not have begun—nor been completed—without my husband, Travis Soule, whose confidence in me succeeds my own. For him, I am blessed.

To my committee ~ Dr. Diane M. Samdahl (Chair)—for pushing me ever closer to the unattainable; for relishing the company of my husband and daughter; for days yet to come. Dr. Corey W. Johnson—for encouraging me to celebrate my biases; for Easter egg hunts; for convincing me that Athens was my home to be. Dr. Jori Hall—for leading me down the rabbit hole into the world of qualitative research.

To my phenomenological lifelines ~ Dr. Joseph Pate—for guiding my journey into post-intentional phenomenology. Brian Kumm—for unearthing the metaphor. James Bryan—for an education in philosophy. Dr. Melissa Freeman—for dissecting the meaning of manifolds & other phenomenological concepts.

To my family ~ Shirley & Bill Peterson—for Monica Ros thru the University of Georgia. Madeline Thompson—for all the miles and everything in between. Jody & Steve Soule—for Baby Bella Boot Camp; for one bathroom and too many adults. Chris and Hannah—for endless phone calls; for editing; for childcare; for friendship.

To Frank and Betsey Kelton—for the generous gift of a space to write. Finally, I am grateful for all the other villagers who raised me into & through this work.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

It is commonly believed that motherhood is a challenging and exhausting time in a woman's life. This period of raising children is frequently likened to an emotional rollercoaster, where mothers are uncontrollably conveyed from miraculous heights to startling lows, all at breathtaking speeds. In particular, mothers of infants and toddlers are portrayed as overwrought because their young children have frequent needs that require an almost constant level of attention. It is often suggested that these mothers must relinquish their individual interests and desires in order to fulfill the constant demands of motherhood.

In the literature on leisure, such beliefs about motherhood are upheld and bolstered through research findings. Children are often viewed as a constraint, with researchers highlighting the ways that children prevent mothers from participating in leisure activities for as long and/or as often as they would wish. In this body of research, mothers' leisure is discussed in terms of decision making and work, where mothers sacrifice their personal leisure interests in order to better meet the leisure needs of their husbands and children. Researchers have often argued that mothers need leisure opportunities that promote individuality and separation from their familial lives. This perspective mirrors a deeper belief within leisure studies that rewarding leisure is characterized by autonomy and independence.

Now into my third year of motherhood, I find this scholarship unsatisfying because it compartmentalizes the reality of motherhood—in all its complexities, joys, and struggles. Stemming from on my own leisure experiences, I notice where researchers have skimmed over mothers' statements about the importance and meaning of familial relationships in favor of a focus on constraints. Reflecting on my own leisure experiences, I do relish autonomous activities—the quiet times I have to drink a cup of coffee and read—as I did before having a child. Every so often, I take time to get a massage or pedicure; however, not nearly as often as I did before. It is not a lack of childcare or money that keeps me from doing these activities; rather, I simply would rather be at home with my family. These days I get the greatest personal satisfaction out of those moments of playing, laughing, and snuggling with my daughter, or watching my husband and daughter play. On a day-to-day basis, most of my leisure time is spent in shared activities, often imparting knowledge and growing together. For example, teaching my daughter to bake bread and practicing patience when flour coats the floor. It takes longer to bake, sew, and hike with my daughter but by interacting with her these activities have taken on new meanings, a new importance.

A small yet meaningful body of literature has captured some of my experiences, challenging normative conceptualizations of mothers' leisure. These studies revealed how some groups of mothers emphasize relationships over personal interests and needs. In particular, researchers found that women's relationships with their children, spouses, and extended family were meaningful and leisure provided opportunities to experience greater connection. Such research challenges central leisure tenants that autonomy is

important for all mothers' leisure, arguing instead that it is necessary to consider the contexts of mothers' lives when examining their leisure experiences.

This study examines the experiences of mothers' who follow an attachment parenting lifestyle, a parenting philosophy that places the child(ren) as central in parents' lives. Mothers who subscribe to attachment parenting stay in close physical contact with their babies as much as possible through on-demand extended breastfeeding, sleeping with their babies throughout the night, and wearing their babies in a carrier or sling. In following attachment parenting practices, mothers strive to form strong bonds with their babies, which are believed to promote independence as these children grow up. These mothers often spend 24 hours a day with their children and take little, if any, time each day to themselves. Considering the commonly purported belief that children constrain their parents' lives alongside the equally strong assumption that leisure should provide opportunities for independence and autonomy, one might believe that mothers who practice attachment parenting could have no leisure of their own. However, an examination of these mothers' experiences begins to splinter these central beliefs about motherhood, children, and leisure. For this reason, studying mothers who participate in an attachment parenting lifestyle offers valuable insights that could expand the current recreation and leisure studies discourse on mothers' leisure.

### **Central Tenets in Leisure Studies**

For most people, including leisure scholars, the central tenets of leisure emphasize freedom, personal satisfaction, independence, and autonomy. This is evident in the social psychological paradigm that frames most North American leisure research. Researchers operating within this paradigm believe that participants' experiences of leisure can be

measured and that individuals, as well as society, should be moving progressively towards something desirable (e.g. desired states of being or experiences). Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) explained that the conceptualization of leisure as “an experience or state of mind [that] is uniquely individual” (p. 315) has contributed to the field’s acceptance of the social psychological paradigm, which encourages practitioners and researchers to examine “structuring the leisure environment in such a way as to create or encourage a predictably satisfying experience” (p. 317). Since scholars operating within this paradigm are interested in explaining and improving individual’s experiences within social contexts, researchers ask questions that are focused on the individual’s experiences of leisure: the benefits received, one’s feelings and perceptions, the results of treatments or experiments on the individual, motivations to participate, and other such components of an individuals’ leisure participation.

As these types of questions suggest, researchers are interested in knowing: “How do people’s personalities and the social situations that they encounter during their daily lives shape their perceptions, experiences, and responses to leisure?” (Kleiber et al., 2011, p. xvi). In seeking this knowledge researchers remain focused on the individual and are oriented towards research results that can assist people in improving and increasing their positive leisure experiences. As stated by Kleiber et al., “a social psychology of leisure [can] be used to more effectively plan leisure services, but also individuals, through an awareness of the social psychological dimensions of leisure, may be able to extend more control over their lives and better enjoy their own leisure” (p. xviii). The research findings that result from questions deemed important by this paradigm reinforce patriotic notions of autonomy, give individuals the ability (and responsibility) to improve

their life situations, and provide measurable outcomes that are respected by our society-at-large. In North America, it is unsurprising that fields of social science research, such as leisure studies, embrace paradigms that reflect our cultural values, emphasizing autonomy, individuality, and happiness.

However, from within the social psychological paradigm it can be difficult for researchers to see the boundaries that limit their work. As Kuhn (1962/1970) indicated, a paradigm outlines the questions that researchers might consider studying, in addition to providing a framework for how researchers understand the world. The social psychological paradigm—like any paradigm—determines the findings that researchers will seek and value as they pursue answers to the questions that the paradigm has constructed as meaningful and interesting. Since these predetermined findings about the individual inherently support the usefulness of this line of inquiry, researchers reify theories within the paradigm, which serve to further support and articulate the paradigm's assumptions. For these reasons, researchers working within the social psychological paradigm do not examine broader questions that transcend the individual. Consequentially, these scholars are unable to consider larger cultural and historical contexts, power differentials, or societal structures beyond individuals' experiences.

### **Mothers' Leisure**

Leisure research on motherhood developed from the larger body of research on familial leisure. Utilizing the social psychological paradigm, which examines individual's leisure almost to the exclusion of relational experiences, this paradigm framed familial leisure as a social context in which individuals' leisure experiences may occur. Such scholarship validated beliefs that familial leisure is beneficial for individuals, promotes



bonds between family members, and encourages an increased sense of familial unity (c.f. Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Consequentially, family has been viewed “almost by consensus, as a positive leisure context for the individual” (Harrington, 2001, p. 346). However, early feminist scholars critiqued the concept of family leisure as a positive context. These researchers pointed out that for women, and most specifically stay-at-home mothers, their obligations exceeded work commitments outside of the home (Bella, 1992; Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1989; Wearing & Wearing, 1988).

In their examinations of mothers’ leisure, researchers have concluded that mothers’ leisure is limited and constrained by the presence and obligation to care for their children. Shaw (1999) iterated the commonly accepted belief that “women who are mothers of young children, especially if they are employed, are clearly the group most disadvantaged in terms of time stress and opportunities for leisure for themselves” (p. 273), exemplifying the assertion that children, especially young children, constrain mothers’ leisure. In a recent literature review, Craig and Mullan (2012) concluded that family leisure time “cannot be defined as true leisure for the parent, but as part of childcare...the presence of children implicitly entails supervisory care work” (p. 213). This quote exemplifies how existing leisure scholarship has framed parental care not only as work but also, consequentially, as the antithesis to true leisure. The findings from such studies reinforce the traditional leisure tenets by suggesting that mothers should participate more fully in leisure experiences outside of their family lives and concluding that mothers are constrained by having children.

For more than three decades, feminist scholars have critiqued the assumptions of traditional leisure tenets, arguing that “the artificial separation of areas of life into ‘work’

and ‘leisure’... marginalized the experiences of women and obscured the significant ‘overlaps’ that happen in real life” (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1989, p. 1). Since feminist scholars argued that family leisure as a positive context examines leisure experiences through a male-centered focus, one might expect that research on women’s leisure would have broken away from the traditional leisure tenets in the examination of motherhood, particularly given the feminist critique of male bias within leisure research. However, that has not been the case. Research focusing on mother’s leisure often parallels the traditional tenets, describing leisure as those activities that enable autonomy and individualization. This body of scholarship has argued that mothers need opportunities to engage in individual and independent leisure experiences, and seems to value autonomous leisure activities over shared, familial experiences (e.g. Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Currie, 2004; Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997; Miller & Brown, 2005; Shannon & Shaw, 2008; Trussell & Shaw, 2007; Wearing, 1990). Assumptions about leisure as autonomous, non-obligated time and/or activity have framed the scholarship on mothers’ leisure, describing mothers’ leisure as those activities that exist outside of family obligations and enable a mother to experience autonomy and independence.

### **Expanding Conceptualizations of Mothers’ Leisure**

Despite the meaning that mothers may place on activities such as dancing around the living room with their children or taking their babies to “mommy and me” yoga, researchers exclude these activities as leisure because they entail responsibility for one’s child. The assumption that leisure is autonomous, non-obligated time not only validates researchers’ assertions that mothers’ leisure is constrained, it demands this conclusion.

When leisure is defined as free time with no obligation, there is no way that children (and family in general) could be anything besides a constraint to mothers' leisure. In these ways, much of the existing scholarship on mothers' leisure has limited our understanding of mothers' experiences by reifying traditional leisure tenets. Conversely, a small body of research has taken a more open approach to studying mothers' leisure, enabling the participants to explain how leisure is meaningful in their lives.

In one study, Freeman, Palmer, and Baker (2006) examined the leisure of women who were stay-at home mothers and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Based on prior research findings the researchers anticipated that study participants "would not feel entitled to leisure or make it a priority in their lives" (p. 209).

Unexpectedly, the participants valued, prioritized, and felt entitled to leisure experiences; however, this leisure was not always autonomous, personal leisure. Instead the women indicated that "being a mother and spending time with their families" was what they enjoyed most in life (p. 212). Rather than reframing these women's experiences, the researchers shared their conviction to "trust that our participants are telling the truth and are the experts regarding their life experiences...[W]e did not feel it would be appropriate to impose a sense of oppression on these women when they did not describe such feelings" (p. 215). Ultimately, the participants' experiences of "development, self-determination, and self-expression...led [the researchers] to question assumptions that quality of life may be measured by the amount of unconstrained leisure time a person has available." (p. 218). When the participants' experiences contradicted the researchers' understandings, rather than patronizing their study participants the researchers stretched their own understandings of leisure.

In another study, Tirone and Shaw (1997) utilized a similarly open qualitative research approach to “explore all aspects of life that [Indo Canadian] women found to provide a sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, enjoyment and relaxation” (p. 227). While the researchers cited the traditional leisure tenets in this article, they were willing to suspend them for this population of women, who were not participating in a normative North American lifestyle. They concluded people who have “different life experiences” may not accept Western views of leisure and that “further research will help [leisure scholars] to better understand marginalized groups and how they conceptualize the notion of leisure in their lives” (p. 243). Similarly, the participants in the Tirone and Shaw (2007) study “spoke of their families as being central to their lives...[F]amily members were considered to be of utmost importance to all participants” (p. 232). Further, these women “placed little or no emphasis on their own personal interests” (p. 234). Additionally, the researchers reported that the study participants “were offended by some of the values held by North American women toward private time and time away from children, husbands and extended family” (p. 241). Since the researchers were willing to acknowledge and interrupt their preconceived assumptions and beliefs about mothers’ leisure, they were able to see leisure experiences that exist outside of autonomous, non-obligated time.

In both studies, the researchers suspended their own conceptualizations of leisure as autonomous, non-obligated activity in order to make sense of the participants’ leisure experiences. In doing so, these researchers were able to describe mothers’ leisure as it occurred within a relational context. These studies point to the need to acknowledge the situational contexts of women’s lives. The majority of the research that contributes to our

understandings of mothers' leisure examines white, middle class, heteronormative leisure (c.f. Kawash, 2011; Kelly, 1997; Mulcahy, Parry, & Glover, 2010; Watson & Scraton, 2001). Since this socio-cultural context constitutes the dominant discourse of mothers' leisure, researchers have used its theories and assumptions to examine mothers living in different contexts. However, what has been discovered about normative mothering cannot be extended to all mothers. Not all socio-cultural contexts, including those in the contemporary United States, value activity and time that is autonomous and non-obligated. In order to understand participants' experiences, researchers must be willing to consider the specific situational contexts in which mothers' live, as well as wider cultural phenomena that impact them.

However, from my own experience, I know that people who are not parents (or mothers in particular) and are less familiar with the complexities of parenting may be at a disadvantage when trying to synthesize and interpret statements that are rich with emotion and often seem contradictory. For example, how do we interpret findings from an interview where a mother says that staying home with her children is the greatest and most meaningful experience of her life, and a few minutes later says that staying home with her kids can make her crazy? Particularly if we do not have relationships with children of our own? One of the great challenges of researching mothers' leisure is to acknowledge such paradoxical feelings and desires. Motherhood is messy and complicated—at least in the contemporary United States. By acknowledging the complexities of motherhood, rather than compartmentalizing mothers' experiences, researchers can expand our understandings of mothers' leisure.

## **Attachment Parenting**

Since my own experiences of motherhood are not represented in the literature, I recognized that researching mothers like myself—those who place greater personal significance on familial relationships than autonomy and independence—might enable me to complexify mothers’ leisure experiences. Therefore, I decided to examine the experiences of mothers’ who practice attachment parenting. Attachment parenting is a philosophy and lifestyle that stems primarily from Dr. Willane Sears and Martha Sears, RN who have described it as a childrearing method that promotes strong bonds between children and parents (Sears & Sears, 2003). The central beliefs in attachment parenting are that responsive parenting promotes children to develop strong attachment to and trust in their parents and that these relationships ultimately foster age-appropriate independence in children as they grow into adults. Attachment parenting is closely connected to Attachment Theory (Becker-Weidman & Shell, 2010), where a primary goal “is the creation of a secure base from which the child can explore the outside world and to which the child can return to refuel and be nourished physically and emotionally” (p. 2).

Sears and Sears recommend seven practices to develop this parent-child attachment including bonding at birth, breastfeeding, baby wearing, co-sleeping, responding to babies’ cries as a form of communication, avoidance of schedules and baby training, and teaching positive behaviors. As true for most parenting practices, both parents (and other caregivers) may be involved in these parenting practices but the mother typically has the greatest parenting role, particularly in the first years of a child’s

life. A mother who follows these practices is continuously in close physical contact with her baby.

Throughout most of the day, a mother who practices attachment parenting will carry her baby in her arms or against her body using a sling or other cloth baby carrier. While she may use a car seat to transport her baby, once at her destination, the mother will resume carrying her baby instead of using a stroller. At home or work, she will go about her day with her child sleeping, nursing, or watching from the sling. As often as the baby wishes, the mother will provide her breast for nourishment or comfort. Most mothers will forgo pacifiers and bottles; however, mothers often keep a bottle of breast milk for occasional use. At bath time, the mother will bathe in the tub with her baby. When it is time for bed, the mother (and often the father) will sleep throughout the night with the baby. During the night, the mother can nurse her baby without needing to get up or leave the comfort of bed.

The seven parenting practices are described as “tools” that promote parent-child attachment. While many parents practice some combination of these behaviors, a lesser number practice all of them for an extended length of time. According to Sears and Sears (2003) there are no hard and fast rules for an attachment parenting practice and they encourage parents to take their children’s individual temperaments and needs into consideration as they develop their parenting practices. Some mothers who practice attachment parenting find that what works well for one child may not work well for all children. A mother may find that one child will continue to nurse through toddlerhood while another child stops during infancy. Likewise, some children will continue sleeping in their parents’ beds longer than others. Despite such differences, a commitment to

attachment parenting means that a mother is likely to be in constant physical contact with her babies. These mothers have chosen to interact with their children rather than participating in autonomous leisure activities, placing great personal significance on familial relationships and connection with their children.

### **Study Background**

The above discussion raises some interesting questions. In reading the literature on motherhood and mothers' experiences of leisure, one might expect mothers who practice attachment parenting to feel that they are sacrificing their own interests for the benefit of their children. Current conceptualizations of leisure and motherhood suggest that these mothers would experience greater leisure constraints than most other mothers as they have little autonomy, if any. Such conclusions project commonly accepted leisure values by suggesting that all mothers should participate more fully in leisure experiences outside of their family lives. Yet, such conclusions may not do justice to these mothers' appreciation and desire to be in close relationship with their children.

**Pilot study.** To begin exploring these issues, I conducted a pilot study during Spring 2012, examining the experiences of mothers' who practice attachment parenting. At that time, I had not constructed a research question and was interested in exploring leisure and attachment parenting practices. For this pilot study, I used convenience sampling to identify mothers who were breastfeeding, co-sleeping, and babywearing. The interview script used phenomenological interviewing and focused on the practices of attachment parenting. For example, I asked participants: "Tell me about your experiences with breastfeeding [co-sleeping, babywearing, birthing, etc.]." At the end of the



interviews, I also asked the mothers: “How do these practices impact your ability to do the things you enjoy?”

Before conducting these interviews, I anticipated that I would need to probe the women to consider ways that their attachment parenting practices enabled them to do things they enjoy. Thinking about my own experiences, I reflected on how I felt that I could not go for early morning walks because I might wake up my daughter, who was sleeping in bed with us. However, I was surprised by the participants’ responses since the women repeatedly described how attachment parenting enabled them to do things they enjoy, such as shopping, visiting with friends, or going to the park. For example, they explained that breastfeeding and baby-wearing meant that they could stay away from home for longer periods of time because they did not need to be home for naptime nor did they need to worry about keeping milk at the proper temperatures for storage and feeding. Similarly, the women explained how co-sleeping helped them feel rested and refreshed for the things they like to do because, unlike their non-attachment parenting friends, they did not need to get up multiple times a night to attend to their babies.

Their comments made me cognizant of how I had internalized the central leisure tenets despite my own decision to practice attachment parenting. Before the pilot study, I had noticed that leisure studies focused on mothers’ participation in autonomous, non-obligated leisure and disregarded relational leisure pursuits. Afterwards, I was more aware of how discussions around constraints, affordances, and resistance were missing the complexity of mothering experiences. The women in the pilot study were not describing how they overcome or resist the constraints of motherhood nor were they speaking about affordances. Rather, they were describing their experiences as lived: their

enjoyment of relational activities with their children and the ways they incorporated their parenting practices and their children into daily life. When the women shared their experiences, I realized how often I had made similar comments and their stories helped me verbalize the nagging sensation that my own parenting experiences were not reflected in the literature. With this new awareness, I also started to consider how researchers' assumptions about parenting and literature might have limited the scholarship on mothers' leisure. In these ways, the pilot study helped shape my interest in deconstructing the leisure studies' scholarship on mothers' leisure.

**Study purpose.** This pilot study validated my belief that mothers who practice attachment parenting are an example of women whose experiences challenge the dominant leisure scholarship. Since mothers who practice attachment parenting spend the majority (if not the entirety) of each day close to their children, their parenting choices challenged assumptions that mothers' need to participate in independent, non-obligated leisure away from their families. Through this preliminary research, I wondered if I could emphasize the limitations of these conceptualizations by highlighting the juxtaposition of the normative discourses of mothering and mothers' leisure with the lifestyle of attachment parenting. To explore these ideas, this larger study examined the experiences of mothers' who practice attachment parenting. Through this research, I strive to reveal the complexities of mothers' leisure including the importance of relationships that are overlooked or cast aside in the traditional emphasis on autonomy and independence. While I do not provide a new definition of leisure—or even of mothers' leisure—I hope that my work will encourage leisure scholars to consider new ways of portraying and studying mothers' leisure experiences.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMING

Through this chapter, I introduce the two theoretical frameworks that have shaped this study: feminism and the Foucauldian theory of discourse.

#### **Feminist Framework**

In my comprehensive exams, one committee member, Dr. Corey Johnson, asked me: “Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?” It took significant contemplation and effort to answer this question, and I began with a trip to the university library. While checking out five books that all had the word “feminist” printed on their covers, I recognized a familiar anxiety rising up in my thoughts, rooting itself in my body. Tension pulled my shoulders in towards my chest and I could feel my clenched jaw muscles flexing. I snuck a few furtive glances at the student working the counter, trying to determine if she was actually sneering or if I was just reading too much into her silent demeanor. She appeared to be in her early twenties, was not wearing a wedding band, and had a well-composed appearance. I assumed she was Baptist, or maybe some other Christian denomination. I commanded my thoughts: Stop stereotyping. But I quickly justified my original assumption, reasoning: Well, it is the South. I continued to play out the storyline: She is judging me as some man-hating, God-less, *feminist*. I smiled serenely while holding off on the urge to show her that I am not *that* kind of person by mentioning that I was headed home to be with my baby so that my husband could go hunting. I

dropped the books three times before I made it back to my car. The entire time, I was asking myself: Am I a feminist?

I had always felt uncomfortable with labeling myself as a feminist. Despite my academic training, I associated the word with racism, classism, and viriphobia. Schwartz (2008) explained that viriphobia “only reverses the abject gender while maintaining the opposition and widening the gap between the sexes...revers[ing] misogynistic arguments by projecting ‘man’ as the new scapegoat for all social evils” (p. 95). I subscribed to the postfeminist opinion that “those still ‘harp[ing]’ about women’s victim status are embarrassingly out of touch” (Siegel, 1997, p. 75). Without understanding the theoretical implications, I preferred to think of myself as a humanist. Raised in a matriarchal home, my father embodied the nurturing kindness many attribute to mothers so I was not indoctrinated into a culture of normative gender roles. Growing up, I watched as my peers mercilessly belittled boys who were artistic, affection, quiet. Always one to intervene, I would speak privately with the bullies, encouraging acceptance and feeling sad for what I perceived to be their misplaced anger and hard childhoods. In junior high, one of the popular girls lamented: “Katie, I don’t know why you hangout with *those* kids. You’re cool. We’d let you hang out with us.” Two years later, when I was enrolled at the local private Catholic high school, my parents received a phone call from the dean. He wanted to express his concern over the fact that I had become good friends with the boarding students from Korea rather than the other white kids. Even now, I find these recollections heartrending.

I believe that I perceived injustice where others did not because of my own family history. I grew up in a family torn by racism and discrimination that was inflicted by a

woman I love, my maternal grandmother. A staunch Italian, my grandmother disowned her daughter for marrying my uncle, who is black, and refused to meet her first grandchildren. As a teenager and young adult, I believed that the feminist movement focused too narrowly on one issue of discrimination, minimizing other areas of social dominance that impacted so many people. Of course, I was not the first to think so (c.f. Dicker & Piepmeyer, 2003; Kavaka, 2001). Beyond patriarchy, my understanding of the world has been touched by personal exposure to the consequences of racism, ableism, heteronormativity, classism, and other hegemonic forces. Yet, in order to effectively contest inequality and discrimination, I have learned that I need more than the empathy these experiences inspired in me. An effective response must come from a deeper passion, which for me arose with the unanticipated conception of my daughter.

Issues of motherhood are my issues; they are embodied in my physical being. During childbearing and birthing, I felt the consequences of living in a patriarchal, medicalized, consumerist society. I witnessed my experienced and adept midwife, nurse, and doula each surrender their expertise upon the arrival of a male doctor. I felt powerless and diminished, not only by normative birthing practices but also by the natural birthing discourse. Upon my arrival at the hospital, 36 hours into a failed attempt at a homebirth, I was subject to disapproval from both birthing communities. My intuition and needs were devalued by those whose voices were privileged in both discourses. I have continued to experience discrimination for my choices about how I use my body as a mother. Recently while flying from Charlotte to New York City, a stewardess demanded that I stop breastfeeding my daughter after a male passenger complained.

Such experiences have forced me to see the strength and omnipotence of patriarchy. Now and in the future, I hope to transform my anger into advocacy through my work. In Stryker's (2007) words, I hear my own call to intellectual and political action:

These issues are my issues, not because I think it is chic to be politically progressive. These issues are my issues, not because I feel guilty about being white, highly educated or a citizen of the United States. These issues are my issues because my bodily being lives the space where these issues intersect. I articulate these issues when my mouth speaks the words that my mind puts together from what my body knows. It is by winning the struggles over these issues that my body as it is lived for me survives—or by losing them that it will die. (p. 66)

While Stryker was writing about herself as a transgendered woman, many could herald these words—everyone who feels that their lives embody the intersection of various forms of discrimination and hegemony.

Through my writing and research, I struggle to make discursive space for individuals' experiences who are marginalized by multiple discourses, whose intersecting identities have been overlooked. In what is stated as obvious, I probe for alternatives, other ways of understanding. I resist firm conclusions, wanting to leave space for new ways of seeing. As a research assistant and doctoral student, this voice—my voice—often got covered over with academic discourse because I perceived that uncertainty was not often valued and conclusions are desired. I find myself colluding with the normative discourse in our field, all the while wanting to resist. In order to find space—to make myself a place—in academia, I have been complicit in the perpetuation of theories and research that serves to enforce and reproduce hegemony.

I wrote all of these things in response to the question, *Am I feminist?* Yes. But for a variety of reasons, in the past I have not labeled myself as such. As a feminist, I have

not want to be taken for someone who believes that men are at fault because I believe we each contribute to the power of patriarchy and that men also suffer from this discourse. I do not want to be taken for someone who believes issues of patriarchy are more significant than discrimination enforced by other hegemonic discourses (e.g. racism, heteronormativity, classism) because it is not. I have also been afraid to call myself a feminist because I am aware that normative academia does not favor feminist scholarship. However I have come to understand that for these perspectives to change, I must own the feminist label.

Many women of my generation have decided not to call themselves feminists. I now can see how separating ourselves from a label has lead to confusion and given more power to the normative discourses present in our lives. In wanting to acknowledge the hegemonic forces that have influenced so many individuals' experiences, we have glossed over patriarchy, discounting our own reproduction of its power. Considering the present state of feminism, scholars have evoked a multitude of terms for my generation: postfeminists, contemporary feminists, third wave feminists, and now even fourth and fifth wave feminists. Kinser (2004) noted such references might be best understood within quotation marks, "allowing us to participate in the current larger dialogue about feminism while recognizing that the [wave] metaphor is imprecise" (p. 132). For the most part, these terms are ambiguous, with unclear definition and boundaries and creating numerous grey areas of overlap. Each scholar delineates how she conceptualizes these terms in her essay, book, or article but the usage of these terms is inconsistent across the literature. Even as I read about "the current state of feminism" I wonder: How exactly is the third wave movement that is attributed with "strategic engagement with (loosely

understood) postmodern and poststructuralist theorisations of identity and difference” (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007, p. xxv) different than poststructural feminism? Without a clear understanding of the intricacies of these particular movements, I am weary of claiming participation in a certain feminist movement.

However, the attitudes behind third wave feminism, as I understand them, match well with many of my concerns about labeling myself as a feminist. In her introduction to third wave feminism, Walker (1995) explained:

For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for individuality....We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad. (p. xxxiii)

Third wave feminism arose from these fears, constructing a new feminist identity that acknowledges the existence of contradiction, plurality, and differences in individuals’ lives (Gillis et al., 2007, p. xxiv). Living in a world where popular culture often embraces postmodernism, these feminists emphasize a need to respect individuals’ right to choose their own ways of being, of expressing their identities, at the same time acknowledging the impact of hegemony on individuals’ abilities to make these decisions.

While I value this positioning of feminism, I have previously hesitated to align myself as a third wave feminist for the following reasons. Many third wave feminists have been adamant in distinguishing themselves as different than previous feminists (Gillis et al., 2012, p. xxii), which has often been divisive rather than constructive. Third wave feminism has also received ample critique by other feminists for emphasizing the personal and pleasurable while failing to delineate core beliefs or establish theory (c.f. Dicker & Piepmeyer, 2003; Gillis et al., 2007). Further, third wave feminism is perceived



as a grassroots movement, focusing on individuals' activism and "doing" of feminism that exists outside of theoretical and academic discourse (c.f. Baumgardner & Richards, 2005; Labaton & Martin, 2009; Purvis, 2004; Whelehan, 2007). For these reasons, I have been troubled by the belief that in academia a third wave feminist perspective will be discounted by other feminists, as well as by the normative academic discourse.

Nonetheless, this dissertation research is reflective of my feminist perspective. My desire to acknowledge the intersectionality in people's lives, to celebrate places of contradiction, plurality, and difference, reflects the overarching feminist framework of this study. Additionally, I am cognizant that my perspective—as a white, heterosexual, female researcher—impacts all aspects of this study, from the topic to participant selection to the conclusions that I will disseminate. Feminists scholars have critiqued aspects of qualitative research for "(1) the increased salience of race/ethnicity, gender, and class in the research relationship; (2) the objectification of research subjects; (3) the influence of social power on who becomes a research subject; and (4) problematic assumptions in the conventional analytic approaches" (Sprague, 2005, p. 121). Aligning with feminist research practices, I do not take these concerns lightly and I strive to be conscious of the ways in which my research reinforces and resists these power dynamics. When possible, I acknowledge these limitations in my research. Undoubtedly I am still blind to many areas where I, as a researcher, influence my research and findings.

Perhaps the most obvious way that my study is feminist research is simply the topic itself: I seek to examine alternative experiences of mothering that challenge the normative assumptions that have framed the leisure studies scholarship of motherhood. Utilizing the poststructural conceptualization of deconstruction, feminist scholars have

troubled everyday practices. Deconstruction is used to arouse contradictions and tensions within a text, belief system, or common practice. While deconstruction might reveal new meanings, the purpose is to trouble our understandings, to continually displace meaning, to show that “meaning emerges in specific temporal and discursive contexts” (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 76). Through this research I seek to deconstruct normative conceptualizations of mothers’ leisure in order to highlight the complexities and tensions surrounding motherhood and leisure.

Poststructural approaches that emphasize reality as constituted by discourse have been taken up in feminist scholarship to reveal “the historical, cultural, social, and discursive patterns through which current oppressive or dominant realities are held in place” (Gannon & Davies, 2012, p. 73). Yet, individuals are not simple dupes of a socially constructed reality; rather, individuals are complicit in the construction and reproduction of discourse. These insights have enabled feminists to examine and deconstruct previously taken-for-granted truths or “essential” characteristics of human nature as generated through discourse and to consider potentials for individuals to resist normative, hegemonic discourse. Similarly, in utilizing such an approach to frame my study, I am examining the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, and practices of both normative mothering and attachment parenting (as an alternative discourse, but a discourse nonetheless) in order to consider how mothers continue to resist normative discourses of mothering.

### **Foucauldian Discourse**

According to Foucault, discourses actually create reality, so that individuals’ identities are formed through discourse. Spatially and temporally specific, discourses

organize individuals' understanding of the world, weaving together threads of associations, ordering one's interactions, and creating a tapestry of reality that is comprised of social influences (and rules) that dictate the desirability of certain practices, knowledge, and behaviors. Individuals internalize and embody discourse, believing that certain ways of thinking and acting are natural. Foucault (1972) discussed discourse as a "body of rules...[that] thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance" (p. 47). These rules are often accepted, yet unstated. Discourse is unconscious because the rules that created the discourse are woven into social reality, permeating into the collective subconscious through one's upbringing, education, popular media, common language, religious teachings, and so on. As individuals embody these rules, they behave and make meaning that falls into alignment with the dominant discourses of their time and culture, or subculture.

Interpreting Foucault's works for feminist scholarship, Weedon (1997) explained that "discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern" (p. 105). Understanding "the nature of the body" as a consequence of discourse means that gender can be reconstructed through alternative discourses. Feminist scholars have utilized this explanation of behavior and meaning as shaped by discourse to explain how gender is constructed, the power of patriarchal discourse, the ways this discourse is validated and reinforced, as well as the potential for resistance. Holmes and Marra (2010) explained that "current approaches to the study of language and gender focus on the dynamic ways in which people draw on discursive resources to construct their social identities, and especially their gender identities in

different social contexts” (p. 6). This assertion indicates that once aware of the impacts of discourse, people can depart from the rules and social expectations that have previously constructed their identities.

Power relations, also described as power networks, have a substantial role in the perpetuation of discourse. Power exists everywhere as relational forces that create and reinforce the rules that embody discourse, which appear as social norms and legalized policy. Implicit in these power relationships are dissent and resistance, which also exist throughout the power networks. It is through the existence of any given discourse that the possibility of resistance is made possible. Foucault explained:

Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (1972, p. 101)

Acknowledging reality as shaped by discourse opens space for the possibility of other ways of being, which are formed through alternative discourses. Foucault indicated that “we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one” (p. 100). While alternative discourses vary in social acceptance and power, Foucault (1990) asserted that “relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are ‘matrices of transformations’” (p. 99). Foucault emphasized the value of examining the role of these matrices, or power networks, in the creation and maintenance of discourse (Foucault, 1990, p. 97).

Individuals contribute to the power of discourse through their acceptance and enforcement of social norms, which afford certain individuals particular privilege within

a given discourse. For example, doctors are given privilege in normative medical discourse, while professors are privileged in normative educational discourse. Individuals engaged in upholding the normative beliefs of the discourse accept these beliefs as truth, never thinking to question their veracity. Individuals uphold the truth of a given discourse because the discourse is presented as self-evident through individuals' upbringing and wider social influences, such as educational systems and popular culture. As individuals are brought up within a discourse, they learn to enforce its rules, reinforcing both the power and the truth of the discourse.

**The normative discourse of parenting.** Normative parenting in contemporary, mainstream United States is constituted by the gendered roles of a heterosexual couple raising children and positions having children as an instinctual urge (c.f. Carroll, 2012) that leads to personal fulfillment. This discourse stems from the wider cultural construction of femininity and masculinity. The mother is responsible for the basic, daily caregiving routine. While these responsibilities change over time as her children grow, she manages the feeding, diapering, clothing, bathing, transporting, health, and education of her children. The father, on the other hand, is responsible for making money, which most often requires substantial time away from his children. When he is with his children, the father's role generally involves entertaining or watching his children while the mother completes some other domestic task (e.g. making dinner, picking up groceries, or writing thank you cards). It is clear through this discourse that the mother is engaged in a full-time parenting role while the father is expected to parent only part-time. This distribution of childcare provision is given status as biological imperative, suggesting that it is more natural for mothers to want to care for their children than fathers, and that mothers have

an innate ability that fathers lack. Sunderland (2006) explained that even “a discourse of full-time fatherhood [is articulated] as driven primarily by economic imperatives and a (rather unusual) breadwinning distribution, rather than inclination or ability” (p. 506). Even when a father stays home to raise his children, it is justified financially benefiting the family.

Beyond the specific behaviors associated with gendered parenting roles, this discourse outlines numerous beliefs about parenting practices that facilitate a proper environment for children, which is conducive to learning, health, and social good. There is significant social pressure to raise “good kids” and parents are expected to impart accepted values and social behaviors to their children (c.f. Driver & Martell, 2002). Good parents provide their children with a happy family life, an organized and cleanly home, a strong religious/moral foundation, educational materials and training, opportunities for socialization, and conventional medical care. To meet these standard provisions of good parenting, fathers provide the economic means and mothers “serve as keys to consumer life,” (Cook, 2008, p. 227) by taking their children to doctor’s appointments, purchasing educational supplies, and enrolling children in recreational activities. Consumption and consumer culture play a significant role in the production and maintenance of this discourse. Governmental policy, popular culture, advertising, and other forms of social pressure, indicate that such purchases and experiences are the necessary minimum needed to care for their children. In this way, parents align with the belief that good parents do everything possible to ensure their children have healthy, successful lives by participating in the extensive purchase and consumption of material goods and services.

The power relations sustained through the normative discourse function to homogenize parenting, conceal the existing diversity in parenting practices, and oppress non-normative parenting. In this way, this discourse minimizes the social complexities of parenting in the contemporary United States, ignoring the intersectionality of individuals' identities, lives, and experiences. The gendered roles and parenting expectations propagated through this discourse— well-aligned with wider cultural discourses—are institutionalized and internalized, so individuals take their rationality for granted. For example, it is not questioned why mothering behaviors are subject to public and private scrutiny, while fathering practices are not.

**The normative discourse of motherhood.** As the preceding discussion suggests, the normative discourse of motherhood stems from this normative discourse of parenting and is profoundly entrenched in our culture. Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) stated that the normative discourse of motherhood causes mothers “to conform to particular standards and ideals, against which they are judged and judge themselves” (p. 1-2). So much so that “motherhood ideology reaches deeply into the lives of individuals and family processes...it shapes women’s very identities and activities. Even when resisted, mothering ideology forms the backdrop for action and assessment” (Arendell, 1999, p. 3). From infancy this discourse takes root because one’s most intimate relationships are often with one’s mother. As one grows, the discourse is reinforced through media portrayals, religious teaching, literature, and governmental policy, as well as through social norms and training.

Certainly, this discourse privileges white, middle class women who are housewives and have access to medical and financial resources. At the same time, this

institutionalized discourse lends power to the wider cultural phenomena with which it aligns, most obviously patriarchy and heteronormativity. This discourse perpetuates the power of medical institutions, privileging doctors' (even male) scientific training, while medicalizing pregnancy, birth, and childrearing. Additionally, this discourse reinforces the power of a capitalist, consumerist culture as mothers are taught that consumption equates to care and love for their children. In addition to sustaining institutionalized power, the discourse also constructs individual mothers' identities.

Through actions or everyday conversations with others, individuals supporting these naturalized beliefs about motherhood become complicit in the maintenance and reproduction of systems of power and privilege that are embedded within this discourse. To illustrate this point, I share a personal example: When I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I received a doll for my birthday, who I named Cathleen and took most places with me, including to school. Two months later at Christmas, I was disappointed when all the gifts I received were for my doll: diapers, clothes, and a stroller. Sensing my disappointment, my mother explained: "Once you have children, everything is for the kids." Reflecting now, that memory says much about how my mother internalized, reinforced, and taught me the normative discourse of mothering, which I initially perceived as unfair. Years later, as a mother I was wrought with guilt over my decision to move my family to Georgia, a decision which placed my personal interests above my daughter's enjoyment of her many grandparents. In moving, I broke the rule that "everything is for the kids" and deemed myself selfish and a bad mother.

As I discovered, when women participate in alternative parenting practices, they confront the construction of normative motherhood. This awareness reminds me of



Foucault's (1990) assertion that "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one" (p. 100). Although I choose to deviate from lessons my mother attempted to teach me about the normative discourse of mothering, my guilt divulges how deeply those rules are engrained in my beliefs. As Goodwin and Huppertz proffered: "Women may know [the good mother] is a hegemonic form, and be aware of her part in the reproduction of gender inequality, yet remain very much subject to her" (p. 1-2). In fact, these scholars believed that "the good mother appears differently in different settings—she is a nuanced and multiple form" (p. 1). Even within alternative discourses of motherhood, the good mother seems to set the standard, embodying the specific qualities and characteristics expected for mothers in these contexts (e.g. the working-mother, the Jewish mother, the mother in academia, the single mother). The hegemonic ideology of good mothering points to the complex power matrices constituted by the normative and alternative parenting discourses.

**Attachment parenting as an alternative discourse.** Since the attachment parenting discourse has grown from within the normative motherhood discourse in the contemporary United States, attachment parenting both resists and reinforces the hegemony and power of the normative discourse. As a response to normative motherhood in the United States, attachment parenting speaks to those mothers who are privileged in the normative motherhood discourse, who were most likely raised in accordance with normative parenting. For this reason, mothers who practice attachment parenting are likely to be married, heterosexual, white, and middle class. Analogous to the normative discourse, attachment parenting makes the most sense in the context of patriarchal

assumptions about gendered parenting roles that position mothers as natural nurturing and fathers as less capable of cultivating children's growth.

At the same time, attachment parenting resists aspects of the normative discourse of motherhood. Unlike the normative medicalization of motherhood, the attachment parenting discourse encourages women to learn about pregnancy, birth, and childrearing and to reclaim their positions as knowledgeable about their bodies and their children. Attachment parenting contests the normative consumerist culture of motherhood, arguing that spending time and emphasizing relationships with children—rather than purchasing goods and experiences—are necessary for children's development. Most significantly, by focusing on familial relationships attachment parents challenge normative assumptions that value childhood independence and posit separation from wider familial networks as natural. For mothers, this is a particular place of resistance since normative motherhood marginalizes the relational meanings that women make through attachment parenting. In these ways the attachment parenting discourse resists aspects of the dominant discourse of motherhood, as well as the wider discourse of normative parenting.

Describing this discussion in Foucauldian terms, contemporary parenting in the United States is not simply a division between the accepted, normative parenting discourse and the alternative, dominated discourses. Since these parenting discourses are spatially and temporally specific, they maintain the values and beliefs of the wider North American culture and make sense to those people who have been raised within this wider culture. These parenting discourses come together in matrices of transformation, with

power flowing through the matrices from one discourse to another, as individuals reinforce and resist hegemony.

### **Research Significance and the Guiding Research Question**

This discussion highlights the complexity of mothering in the contemporary United States. Women's childrearing choices are influenced by numerous social norms and expectations stemming from discourses that dictate the desirability of motherhood, gendered parenting roles, and accepted parenting practices. Further, women's self-identities are constructed by the systems of power and privilege that comprise the matrices of motherhood discourse. The dominant discourse on motherhood has constructed the "good mother" who is considered to be constantly nurturing and selfless, always putting her children's needs before her own.

Connecting these concepts with the discussion in Chapter One has significant implications for research on motherhood and mothers' leisure. The study of mother's leisure intersects the normative discourse on motherhood, which tells women to selflessly devote themselves to their children, and the normative leisure discourse, which values autonomy and independence. Leisure research has been concerned with mother's autonomous and non-obligated leisure experiences and has positioned the family context, and children in particular, as constraining to women's leisure participation. A small body of research has shown that women who place greater personal significance on familial relationships than autonomy and independence do not fit well into the normative discussions on mothers' leisure.

Mothers who practice attachment parenting are in such a group of women, participating in parenting practices that promote almost constant physical contact with

their babies. These mothers choose to interact with their children over participating in autonomous leisure activities, placing greater significance on familial relationships than autonomy and independence. Considering these mothers' parenting practices alongside the normative discourses of motherhood and leisure raises some interesting questions: How do mothers who practice attachment parenting negotiate the normative discourse of motherhood, as well as the wider discourses of autonomy and independence that are present in the contemporary United States? How do normative discourses of motherhood and leisure impact the participants' experiences? How are these mothers' parenting decisions validated by the wider culture? How are their decisions othered? How do these women's experiences challenge and/or reinforce the assumptions that have framed leisure studies scholarship of motherhood?

To explore such topics, this study is shaped by the following research question: What are the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting? This research question reflects my efforts to open room for participants' own meaning-making to remain salient within the research. At the same time, I entered into this research interested in complexifying current understandings of mothers' leisure to show that the common conceptualizations of mothers' leisure are too specific to a single socio-cultural context, which is not applicable for many people. Mothers who practice attachment parenting are only one of many populations that could reveal such a limitation in our field; but, as issues of motherhood are my issues, it is through a feminist study of attachment parenting that I hope to contribute to this theoretical discussion.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING

In setting out to examine issues of mothering and mothers' leisure, I had to consider which methodological framework would support my interests in complexifying common conceptualizations of motherhood and leisure. Through this chapter, I introduce the phenomenological framework utilized in this research and demonstrate the usefulness of this approach in relation to mothers' experiences.

#### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is both a method for research and a philosophical way of understanding. Phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, in order to combat Positivism, which Husserl perceived as limiting because it could measure only what scales had been developed to measure. For example, Positivism could develop a formula to find the perimeter of an isosceles triangle (an idealized, hypothetical triangle) but it could do little to explain what truly exists in the world. Further, Husserl was dissatisfied by the implications of the Cartesian Split, or the assertion that consciousness is separate from the rest of the world, that limited existence to one's own perceptions of the world. He departed from this thinking, arguing that humans are conscious *of* something and highlighting the connectedness between subject and object (Husserl, 1936/1970, p. 85). Through phenomenology, Husserl proposed to study human consciousness and its relationships to objects (or phenomena). In his early

writings on phenomenology, Husserl suggested that suspending one's own prejudices and judgments about the world allowed one to examine "things as they are in themselves." By peeling away the layers of subjectivity and symbolic meanings that cover over a thing, one might reach the fundamental meaning (or the essence) of the phenomenon, that which does not change as the layers are peeled away. Husserl's ideas about phenomenology eventually developed into the descriptive phenomenological research method.

One of Husserl's students and critics, Martin Heidegger, began what would become the competing branch of research: interpretive phenomenology. Heidegger (1927/1998) felt that Husserl lacked ontological discussion in failing to examine the question of *being*, specifically of being a human; he abandoned Husserl's focus on consciousness, focusing instead on the nature of human existence. Heidegger asserted that the work of phenomenology is "to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself" (p. 30). This assertion holds something of a double meaning. Phenomena are self-showing, they reveal themselves. Yet it is not enough to simply describe these phenomena in their appearance, there is also meaning in what is concealed behind that appearance. For example, a fever can be a symptom of underlying illness or infection, which is not itself visible. In order "to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself," one must bring to awareness what is concealed by a phenomenon's appearance. In this way, Heidegger also believed that a human engages with the world interpretatively, having "the inclination to be entangled in the world in which it is and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light" (p. 18). For Heidegger the human interest in interpreting itself reinforced the notion that humans are

not neutral; interpretive phenomenology asserts that we bring our concerns and desire to interpret to our investigations.

If philosophical “phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (Sokolowski, 2000, Kindle Location, 43), what do phenomenological philosophers study? Husserl used the word *object* when he spoke of phenomenon. While this may give a sense of physicality—a thing I can see and touch—he used the term differently, denoting any phenomenon (the object) that receives human (the subject) awareness. Other philosophers have described phenomenon as “whatever appears to consciousness” (Moran, 2002, p. 1), “units of meaning” (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 66), and “a thing...as it presents itself to, or as it is experienced by, a subject” (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008, p. 33). Whether they were following the descriptive or interpretive approach, these philosophers were attempting to describe the human experience *of* some phenomenon. The content of that experience is not essential to the definition of phenomenon in general; the experience *of* could relate to a material good, a relationship, a memory, prejudice, language, etc. Significantly, it is not the experience itself that is being studied; rather, it is the human consciousness *of* the experience.

**Intentionality.** Husserl called this human consciousness *of intentionality*. It is necessary to explain that phenomenological intentionality has a different meaning than the verb “intention” as we commonly use it to refer to resolve or “a determination to act in a certain way” (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2012, para. 1). Rather, in phenomenology intentionality refers to our awareness *of* some phenomenon. Phenomenologists after Husserl have found their own ways of illustrating intentionality.

Heidegger described it as a way of *being-in-the-world*. van Manen (1990) described intentionality as our “inseparable connection to the world” (p. 5). Ultimately, intentionality is the *awareness of*; it is the connection/link/relationship between one’s consciousness and an object.

The complexity of human consciousness allowed Husserl to extend intentionality beyond awareness of physical objects to include non-physical objects (i.e. perceptions, memories, dreams). As the phenomenological philosopher is interested in human consciousness, intentionality allows for an examination of “the object *as* it is apprehended” as opposed to “the object *which* is apprehended” (Macann, p. 11). This apprehension is complicated by an object’s *manifolds*, the differing apprehensions of (or intentional relationships with) an object that people may have. Husserl (1936/1970) explained that no one really experiences an object as it is “seen, since it is always in motion, always, and for everyone, a unity for consciousness of the openly endless multiplicity of changing experiences and experienced things, one’s own and those of others” (p. 164). In examining the various manifolds of an intentional relationship with a phenomenon, our understanding of that phenomenon continues to grow, as does our awareness that the thing is an enigma, impossible to fully comprehend. Vital to this discussion of intentionality is the recognition that phenomena have a reality and truth that extends beyond our perceptions of them. In phenomenology the world and its phenomena cannot be reduced to our perceptions of them (Heidegger, 1927/1998; Husserl, 1936/1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1947/1964). As one could never examine (or even encounter) each and every manifold of a phenomenon’s identity, phenomenologists anticipate that



some understanding will always be lacking and their findings will inherently be incomplete.

**Bracketing.** Bracketing is the process used by phenomenologists to examine how the world comes to be constituted through our consciousness. Bracketing requires one to distance oneself from the phenomenon of interest by holding the phenomenon outside of one's understandings of it. While Husserl used the term *bracketing* to label this process, many since have likened the process to the use of quotations. In writing, an author uses quotation marks to separate her own ideas and words from everyone else's. Similarly, bracketing serves as "a series of methodological attempts to neutralize" (Moran, 2002, p.15) our own knowledge, experiences, and biases of a phenomenon. As van Manen (1990) has indicated, "The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (p. 46). Through this process, it is hoped that we can now "look *at* what we normally look *through*" in order to better "distinguish the object from its appearances" (Sokolowski, 2000, Kindle Location 684).

In this way, Ricoeur (1981/2002) suggested, "we interrupt lived experience in order to signify it" (p. 590). Husserl (1917/2002) offered an example to help clarify this action. Consider one of your personal, deeply held convictions. Without surrendering this conviction, bracketing asks you to examine that conviction from a place of interest, uncertainty. Can you imagine a person for whom this conviction would not ring true? Can you imagine someone approaching this conviction for the first time uncertain of its value? In this way, phenomenologists view the belief, analyze its character, and follow its possible coherencies. By examining convictions this way, phenomenologists consider the

*what* and *how* of our conscious processes. Similarly, all phenomena can be held outside of our understandings of them.

At the same time, suspending phenomena “is not to deny [their existence] and even less to deny the link which binds us to the physical, social, and cultural world. It is on the contrary to see this link, to become conscious of it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 49). After bracketing a phenomenon, we are left with the phenomenon of experience, the phenomenon as “grasped by reflection” (Husserl, 1917/2002, p. 130). This reflection, Husserl indicated, is now “pure and exclusive” (p. 130). Through bracketing, any thing of nature, any “persons, personal communities, social forms and formations, poetic and plastic formations, every kind of cultural work become headings for phenomenological investigations” (Husserl, p. 131). However, this would be, for example, a phenomenological study of the human experience of mothering, not a phenomenological study of mothering. No matter the phenomenon of interest, phenomenological inquiry examines the human awareness *of* the phenomenon. After bracketing, “consciousness and what it is conscious of” is our field for pure reflection (Husserl, p. 131).

Bracketing is an iterative process that requires awareness of one’s preconceptions and significant contemplation. To “be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, ‘conscientious’ decision, but is ‘the first, last, and constant task’” (Gadamer, 1960/1994, p. 266-7). Bracketing is the central work of phenomenology. Ultimately, phenomenological inquiry “is hard and requires laborious concentration on the data” (Husserl, 1913/2002, p. 149). This troublesome, penetrating work occurs in the returning again and again to the bracketed phenomenon, as one moves through one’s layers of preconception until understanding becomes refined. In more contemporary

language, van Manen (1990) has described bracketing as “a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (p. 77). For those of us working in today’s world of qualitative inquiries, *bracketing* may sound familiar, even conventional, but Husserl’s developments were a significant and radical departure from the scientific inquiries of his time. Husserl (1936/1970) called for a withholding of “all objective theoretical interests [and] any critical position-taking which is interested in their truth or falsity” (p. 135). He placed humanity—and human consciousness—back into the natural, hard sciences and argued that to do so was the necessary foundation for all knowledge.

### **Post-Intentional Phenomenology**

In an attempt to reimagine phenomenology as a human science research method in an entirely new way and to reconnect phenomenology with its radical roots, Vagle (2010a) developed post-intentional phenomenology. He sought to combine what was useful from both descriptive and interpretive approaches with elements from other, complementary philosophies. Vagle explained:

For me, post-structural conceptions of how knowing and understanding are fleeting, momentary, tentative, and dangerous opens up phenomenology more—it draws out phenomenology not only as a philosophy of lived experience, but also as a philosophy capable of being used toward political ends. (p. 6)

By fusing philosophical phenomenology, research methods, and “post” theories, post-intentional phenomenology enables researchers to explore issues of power, oppression, and resistance. In this way, researchers can explore how lived experiences are constructed and contextual.

In addition to bringing phenomenological research methods to contemporary ways of thinking, Vagle also strove to reconnect with phenomenology’s philosophical

founding. While these developments transcend the founding philosophers' epistemological (Husserl, 1936/1970) and ontological (Heidegger, 1927/1998) foci, the post-intentional phenomenological approach endeavors to apply their philosophies to "post" theories. Connecting phenomenology with other theories enables researchers to accomplish understandings "that neither [phenomenology nor post-theories] can accomplish in the same ways on their own" (Vagle, 2011a, p. 11). To accomplish this, post-intentional phenomenology relies heavily upon the philosophical phenomenological concept of intentionality and requires researchers to carefully examine intentional relationships introduced through research.

**Emphasizing intentionality.** In evaluating phenomenological research approaches, Vagle critiqued researchers who disregarded intentionality by focusing on the lived experience rather than the experience *of*. In addition to emphasizing the importance of examining intentionalities, post-intentional phenomenology also requires researchers to consider how intentionality is entwined in the research process. As an intentional relationship exists between every researchers and the phenomena they investigate, "dynamic intentional relationships...tie participants, the researcher, the produced text and their positionality together" (Vagle, 2010b, p. 399). For Vagle (2011b) intentionality is "constantly being constructed, de-constructed, blurred, disrupted...[it] is running all over the place, all the time" (p. 8). Further, the human herself, as subject, "is both constructed and constructing...is both agent and acted upon" (p. 9). For these reasons, a researcher cannot simply state the route from subject through *consciousness of* to phenomenon. Intentionalities, as phenomenon themselves, remain complex, partial, and indefinite. This conceptualization allows researchers to discuss the situated meanings

of intentionality (or lived experience) as separate from the essence of a phenomenon.

Post-intentional phenomenology draws out the distinctions between the natural world and the life world—the world as lived.

**Bridling.** Bridling is the process through which post-intentional phenomenologists examine their own intentionalities with the phenomenon, as well as the intentional relationships introduced through the process of conducting research. Bridling proceeded from the concept of bracketing, which requires one to distance oneself from the phenomenon of interest by holding the phenomenon outside of one's understandings of it (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008). Shifting from bracketing to bridling, this framework recognizes researchers' passions as the framework of the study and celebrates reflexivity, connection, and exploration with the data. Bridling not only includes “the restraining of one's pre-understandings” (Dahlberg et al., p. 129) but also “systematically and carefully scrutinize[ing] the road to the decision of understanding” (p. 130). The researchers believed that phenomena are intimately connected to other phenomena, as well as to researchers themselves.

Researchers must take time to detangle themselves from their intentionalities with the phenomenon and the research process, probing their own understandings and everyday interactions. Dahlberg et al. (2008) wrote that “the open bridling attitude should be practiced with such tenderness and sensitivity that the phenomenon is allowed to keep its indefiniteness as much and for as long as possible” (p. 134). Post-intentional phenomenology requires researchers to actively engage in bridling throughout the research process in order to acknowledge preconceptions, assumptions, biases, and

prejudices, as well as their impact on the research process, data analysis, and interpretations.

### **Researching Mothers' Lived Experiences**

The post-intentional phenomenological approach enables researchers to consider how the lived experiences of mothering are constructed by socio-cultural context. Drawing distinctions between the natural world and the life world, post-intentional phenomenology enables researchers to discuss the constructions of motherhood and mothers' leisure as lived, as well as veiled power dynamics impacting motherhood. To accomplish this, this approach requires that researchers investigate the meanings of mothers' lived experiences through openness and contemplation, probing into what seems obvious and taken for granted. The discussions in previous chapters highlighted how the experiences of mothering can be a challenging phenomenon for researchers to study. Researchers—even those who are not parents—already have knowledge, experiences, and assumptions about mothering. These personal understandings combined with the widespread ideology of good mothering and the normative discourse of motherhood influence research methods. In the following sections, I consider where researchers' bias influenced the methodological framing of previous research on mothers' leisure and how a post-intentional phenomenological approach might redress these influences.

**Interviewing.** While there is a marked acceptance that interviewing enables participants' voices to be heard, interviews are not intrinsically free from researcher bias. The topical areas, interview questions, language, setting, and inherent power dynamics each contribute to the construction of the participants' voice. The following examples of

scholarship on mothers' leisure demonstrate how the methodological framing of interviews reflect and ultimately reify researchers' assumptions about mothers' leisure.

Bialeschki and Michener (1994) explained that their study “focused on the meaning and importance of leisure, [as well as] the influence of family on the woman's leisure” (p. 61). During their interviews, the researchers asked questions such as, “What effects have marriage/partnership and children had on your leisure?” (p. 61). By using the heavily connotative term *leisure* in their questions, as well as by positioning children and marriage as factors that impact leisure, the researchers grounded their interviews in normative conceptualizations of leisure. In essence, their word choice consequentially positioned children and marriage as constraints to participants' leisure. It is improbable that the participants would speak about activities they enjoy when they are with their family because the researchers' use of the word leisure directed them to consider activities that facilitate freedom, personal satisfaction, and autonomy. Therefore, it is not surprising that participants described leisure in ways that fit our fields' common conceptualizations, stating that leisure was “non-obligation” (p. 62) for which they needed to “[separate] themselves from family roles” in order to focus on themselves (p. 64-5). The questions the researchers asked shaped the data they obtained. Although the researchers hoped to understand mothers' meanings of leisure, their own preconceived notions of leisure and motherhood prevented them from asking about or examining activities and meaning-makings that capture other aspects of mothers' leisure.

In another example, it is possible to see how researchers' assumptions about leisure impacted their study even when they avoided using the word leisure in their interviews. Miller and Brown (2005) “explored determinants of active leisure

participation” in mothers’ of young children (p. 405). Additionally, the researchers were interested in exploring how “the acceptance or challenge of traditional ideologies of motherhood may further explain the diversity in access to independent leisure time for physical activity among women with young children” (p. 407). In describing their interview guide, Miller and Brown explained that they asked participants

about current leisure activities (e.g., Do you have any time in your day to do things you want to do?), strategies for accessing leisure time (e.g., How do you manage to get time to yourself for whatever you want to do?), [and] the role of their partner in supporting independent leisure time (e.g., How does your partner make it easier for you to get more time for yourself?). (p. 409)

From this description, it appears that the researchers avoided using the word “leisure” during the interviews. However, their acceptance and use of the traditional conceptualizations of leisure is clearly present in the interview questions, appearing in phrases like “things you want to do” and “time to yourself.” These questions reinforce the notion that leisure is autonomous activity and shaped the participants’ responses so it was unlikely the participants would discuss relational and family leisure activities.

Unsurprisingly, the researchers found that “childcare and household responsibilities were significant barriers to leisure” (p. 410). The researchers’ normative assumptions about leisure framed the interview questions, and thus the researchers’ findings.

To reduce the influence of researchers’ bias, phenomenological interviewing uses open questions to elicit detailed descriptions of participants’ experiences. These interviews are often unstructured and guided by just one or two questions (Roulston, p. 17). The purpose of this type of interview is to learn from the participant “in that the interviewer’s role is to be a student of the interviewee, learning as much about the topic of inquiry as possible...follow[ing] up on participant’s responses without interrupting the



story flow to gain specific details of the participant's experience" (p. 17). By asking general, open questions about women's mothering experiences, researchers would allow participants to reveal what they believe is meaningful and important about their own lived experiences.

Additionally, post-intentional phenomenology supports reflective dialogue between researchers and participants, an interviewing technique that asks participants to examine intentional relationships alongside the researcher. In this framework, participants not only provide data, they also engage in data analysis, allowing researchers to diverge from the traditional "separation of the researched from the researcher" (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 123). In these ways, a post-intentional phenomenological research approach investigating mothers' lived experiences would collect interview data that is populated by the mothers' meaning-make while limiting the influence researchers' preconceived bias on data collection.

**Interpreting data.** At the same time, post-intentional phenomenology acknowledges that despite utilizing an open, unstructured interview script, researcher bias will still greatly influence the study, from the phenomenon of interest to the interview questions to data interpretation. While our intentions as researchers may be to examine and share our participants' points-of-view, our assumptions about leisure and motherhood can impact our ability to understand the participants and to probe for deeper meaning. Utilizing any research approach, it can be challenging for researchers to see where our own assumed agreement with participants prevents us from examining participants' statements more deeply.

To illustrate this idea I consider Irving & Giles (2011) commentary on the following participant quote from Holly, a single mother who participated in the Irving and Giles' (2011) study:

When I have time off and I don't have Sam I tend to feel guilty enjoying myself when I don't have her because I feel like we're one. I almost feel like it's wrong, I should be with her, mothering her, doing things with her. But then I think that it is imperative to have time for yourself because it fulfills my needs and makes me a better person and ultimately a better mother, right? (p. 369)

Immediately following this quote, the researchers stated “[I]t is evident that Holly is aware of the importance of ensuring that her needs are met, which follows an emerging discourse in literature for new parents” (p. 370). Although Holly seems to be seeking affirmation, posing her statement as a question (“right?”), the researchers state her awareness as “evident.” Pairing this quote with the assertion that Holly is aware of the importance of meeting her own needs with time away from her child, the researchers emphasize their assumption that mothers should spend time away from their children. Additionally, the researchers overlook that this time away is the consequence of custody agreements—not choice—as well as Holly’s comment about feeling at one with her daughter, a comment that may have revealed important differences between the researchers’ and participant’s conceptualizations of motherhood if explored further.

Miller and Brown (2005) offer another example of how researchers’ assumptions may impact their data interpretation. These researchers determined that the active leisure participation of mothers with young children is constrained. One of their study participant described how she either carried her children or pushed a stroller on their morning walks. The researchers described this mother’s walking “while *encumbered* with young children” as a “*substantial barrier* [emphasis added] to physical activity participation” (p.

411). The researchers' negative framing of family walks highlights the way the researchers give prominence to mothers' non-obligated, independent activity over relational activities. Even in situations when their participants had high levels of active leisure participation with their children, Miller and Brown concluded that these women "had incorporated this behavior into the role of the good mother...[T]hey also justified their participation in active leisure as good for the whole family" (p. 415). The researchers dismissed the participants' meaning-making as "subscrib[ing] to traditional notions of being 'the good wife' and 'the good mother' (p. 412). The researchers used language that minimized the women's decision to engage in familial activities (e.g. "justified," or "subscribed") suggesting that the women's decisions to be active with their family (as opposed to participating in autonomous activity) had to be extenuated.

Of course, I am not immune to the influence of researcher bias. As I mentioned in Chapter One, I conducted a pilot study during Spring 2012 to examine the experiences of mothers who practice attachment parenting. Insights from the pilot study also pointed to ways that post-intentional phenomenology would be a useful approach for controlling my own subjectivities. As I look back on that study, it is clear that the participants' responses revealed the need for me to continue to examine my own intentional relationships with attachment parenting, as well as the need to notice where my personal values prevent me from understanding others' perspectives. For example, in one interview a mother explained that her child was gaining very little weight but that she was committed to exclusive breastfeeding. I privately disagreed with her decision. When my own breast milk was slow to come in, I supplemented with small amounts of formula during the first week of my daughter's life. Luckily during this interview, I was able to maintain a

neutral countenance and probed, “Tell me more about that.” The participant articulated her decision making process, emphasized her doctor’s support, and explained how she often felt criticized by others for this decision. Had I responded with my feelings, I would have added to that external criticism. From such experiences I realized that in order to understand and accept other mothers’ meaning-making, I must be able to identify and suspend my own values. The post-intentional phenomenological approach required that I continue to explore issues of researcher subjectivity throughout the research process.

While bridling does not eliminate research bias, this approach expects researchers to be cognizant of their bias and utilizes bridling to help researchers illuminate and explore assumptions and preconceptions. Through bridling, researchers endeavor to prevent their own assumptions about mothering and mother’s leisure from “taking hold of them” (Vagle, 2010b, p. 17). In this way, bridling can help researchers see where a question might be more appropriate than a statement, making room for new discussions and ways of thinking rather than reifying embedded assumptions.

Additionally, post-intentional phenomenology positions interpretations as “tentative manifestations” (Vagle, 2010a, 2010b) rather than as concrete findings. This position lessens the influence of researchers’ assumptions by moving away from an authoritative voice to situate the tentative manifestations of participants’ lived experiences as contextual, partial, and incomplete. This approach supports efforts to complexify issues of motherhood, and is particularly relevant to mothers’ leisure, because post-intentional phenomenology requires researchers to examine the lived experiences of attachment parenting as malleable and contextually situated.

## Summary

This research utilizes a post-intentional phenomenological research approach to explore the lived experiences of mothers who follow an attachment parenting practice. This approach values mothers' experiences and reflections as rich accounts of lived experience. Each mother's perspective is valued as knowledgeable and accurate—despite any contradictions between and within mothers' perspectives and experiences—because phenomenology recognizes the existence of various manifolds of phenomena, expecting findings to be tentative and possibly paradoxical. Recognizing findings as tentative, post-intentional phenomenology does not attempt to explain all mothers' experiences. Instead, this approach places the findings within their situational context of the participants' lives.

Drawing on phenomenology's radical roots, post-intentional phenomenology connects essential philosophical phenomenological concepts and research methods with “post” theories. Paired with a researcher's reflexivity, openness, and contemplation, the post-intentional phenomenological approach can be used to examine the contextual power relations, privilege, and avenues of resistance that impact lived experiences of mothering in the contemporary United States. By exploring the contextualized and tentative manifestations revealed through this study, this approach allowed me to examine the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting in order to deconstruct and complexify normative conceptualizations of motherhood and leisure.

My decision to use a post-intentional phenomenological approach was not quick or easy. I was drawn to the approach; however, I did not have a clear understanding of the methodology or the philosophy behind it. So, I constructed a reading list of twenty-

one books and articles (from the references listed in Vagle's publications and workshop materials, as well as recommendations from colleagues) and began a self-led foray into post-intentional phenomenology. That summer, I lived two lives: one grounded in the day-to-day moments of living and another in the otherworldly realm of philosophy. Holed up in bagel shop, I felt myself to be in the dark vastness of outer space with insights gleaming, like stars, to light up my surroundings. Although I was initially drawn to post-intentional phenomenology as a research method, I also came to recognize that the philosophy of post-intentional phenomenology aligns with my own ontological beliefs.

Nonetheless, post-intentional phenomenology is a new research approach that was introduced less than three years ago (c.f. Vagle, 2010a). Thus far, research using this approach has been conducted by students at the University of Georgia and the University of Minnesota under Vagle's guidance. As a new methodology, post-intentional phenomenology is not vetted and does offer a fixed design protocol for researchers to follow. Therefore, in designing this research study, I drew from post-intentional phenomenological philosophy and adapted this methodology to meet my research interests and needs. These methods are described in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

Through this study, I explore the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting utilizing a post-intentional phenomenological research approach. Data were collected through interviews and observations. Analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, as well as afterwards through bridling, writing, and contemplation. The methods I employed are presented in this chapter through the following sections: a post-intentional phenomenological research approach, participant selection, data collection, ensuring data quality, and data analysis and interpretation.

#### **A Post-Intentional Phenomenological Research Approach**

My design for this research incorporated the five interrelated components of a post-intentional phenomenological research approach. Although numbered, these components do not occur in a step-by-step process. Rather, as researchers become more intimate with the phenomenon, they iteratively address each of these components throughout the research process, continuously building on their prior understandings. Describing these five components, Vagle (2010a, p. 9) explained that a researcher should:

1. Identify a phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts;
2. Devise a clear yet flexible process for collecting data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation;

3. Make a bridling plan;
4. Read and write your way through your data in a systematic, responsive manner; and
5. Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.

Since these components are interlaced, I found it impossible to separate them fully for the purpose of describing research design. Instead, I address each of these components within the following discussions.

### **Participant Selection**

Study participants were recruited through an email group service for parents interested in conscious parenting practices. I utilized an IRB-approved recruitment text (see Appendix A) with information about the study in an attempt to recruit volunteers. This text asked mothers who were interested in participating to contact me by email. Twenty-four women volunteered to participate in the study and four of those women met the inclusion criteria. I determined eligibility of each volunteer using an IRB-approved screening script (see Appendix B) that asked volunteers questions to determine if they meet the following inclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria required that participants followed an attachment parenting approach to raising her child(ren). One of the easiest ways to assess whether or not a mother meets the inclusion criteria was to determine if she actively implemented the attachment parenting practices (e.g. extended, on demand breastfeeding; baby-wearing; co-sleeping). There are mothers who utilize the parenting practices recommended by Sears and Sears (2003) but who are not following an attachment parenting approach. For



example, some mothers may breastfeed, co-sleep, and babywear for medical or economic reasons, as opposed to a mindful effort to promote attachment with their child. These women were not eligible to participate. In order to make this determination, I asked volunteers: “Do you do these parenting practices as a way to bond with your child(ren)?” To capture the experiences of mothers who were most absorbed in this lifestyle, I sought out participants who were actively engaged in attachment parenting with a child between the age of one and three. Additionally, I was interested in recruiting mothers who choose to be in close physical contact with their children for the majority of the day, so I recruited volunteers who spend the majority of each day with this child. Finally, volunteers needed to be willing and available to participate in multiple interviews from December 2012 through May 2013.

**Participant descriptions.** Mothers of all ages, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation were welcome to participate in this study. Since these interviews were conducted in Athens, Georgia and the participants were recruited through convenience sampling, it seemed likely that most participants would be middle to upper-middle class and Caucasian. In actuality, all of the participants were middle to upper-middle class and in their mid-twenties to early thirties. Two of the participants reported that they are white, one reported that she is Hawaiian, and the fourth reported that she is white and Japanese. All of the participants grew up in the United States. The participants are briefly introduced in the following sections.

**Jennifer.** Jennifer lives in Athens, GA with her husband, Michael. They have one child, Lane who was 11 months old at the time of the first interview. Jennifer owned her own business before becoming a mom. Since becoming a mom, she has reduced the

number of clients she accepts and plans to reduce further. When Jennifer is meeting with clients, Michael cares for Lane. Jennifer does not use other childcare.

**Amanda.** Amanda lives in Athens, GA with her husband, Jason. They have two children: Riley who was 22 months old and Ryland who was 4 months old at the time of the first interview. Amanda had a professional career before becoming a mom. When she was pregnant, she made the decision to stay home with the children until they begin school. Amanda rarely uses childcare but will infrequently hire a babysitter to have a date night with Jason.

**Sara.** Sara lives in Athens, GA with her husband, Aaron. They have three children: Sage who was five years old, Rowan who was three years old, and Elias who was 12 months old at the time of the first interview. Sara decided to quit work and stay home to homeschool her children two years ago. Recently, Sara started a small business. She exchanges childcare with another mother one day a week. When her children are with this other family, Sara completes her work for her new business.

**Trinity.** Trinity lives in Athens, GA. Two weeks before the first interview, Trinity separated from her husband, Samuel, who moved into an apartment one mile from their home. They have three children: Jamie who was five years old, Haley who was two years old, and Aiden who was seven weeks old at the time of the first interview. One week before the first interview, Trinity started working three 12-hour shifts a week. She spends the other four days a week with her children. Samuel comes over in the evenings and mornings to help and spend time with the kids. When Trinity is working, Samuel watches the children. When Samuel and Trinity are both working, a babysitter watches the kids

(approximately 10-16 hours/week over two days). This babysitter was taught to follow attachment parenting practices.

**Participation incentive.** Interview participants received a \$15 gift card after each interview as acknowledgment of the value of their time and to thank them for their participation in the study. Participants selected whether they wanted a gift card to a grocery store that sells natural and organic products, or a store that sells socially responsible children items and craft supplies.

### **Data Collection**

The participants were interviewed three times over a six-month period, December 2012 through May 2013. Each interview lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. The first round began on December 28, 2012 was concluded on January 8, 2013. At the beginning of these interviews, the women were asked for consent to voice record the interview following an IRB-approved interview consent script (see Appendix C). All participants granted consent. These initial interviews utilized a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) through which I strove to limit my bias and to allow the participant's experiences to be privileged in the research process. In following with phenomenological interviewing, this script was intended to keep the attention focused on participants' lived-experiences and meaning-making. Therefore, the interview script was intended to engage the participants, allowing them to share and reflect on their personal experiences and understandings in order to explore the interconnected meanings that come into being as a mother practices attachment parenting.

The questions on this guide were intended to keep the conversation directed on the phenomenon. I asked participants about their parenting practices, their

conceptualizations of what it means to be a good mother, how becoming a parent has impacted their lives, and about the things they enjoy. The guide also included potential probes that were intended to aid the participants in describing their lived experiences and to keep the discussion focused on the interconnected meanings in participants' lives. Additional non-scripted probes were used to discuss the meanings participants hold in relationship to the experiences they described. I used probing to bring the discussion closer to participants' meaning-making in order to explore how mothers understand aspects of the attachment parenting practice such as "creating strong bonds" or that attachment parenting is "instinctive." Probing also allowed me to seek out distinctions, exploring how participants' experiences were different from my own or from other participants' experiences. The purpose of seeking out these distinctions was to more fully explore the phenomenon, to challenge my own biases and assumptions, and to ensure data quality, thereby increasing the credibility of the research findings. For example, in one interview a participant focused on only the positive aspects of breastfeeding: "I would say, I love, I just love breastfeeding. I just, I love being close and I just love that you can soothe them immediately and help keep them peaceful." I probed her experiences and meaning by asking: "Have there been times when you felt uncomfortable breastfeeding?"

I did not follow the order of the interview questions as laid out on the script but bounced around, asking questions that seemed to fit the direction of the interview as it progressed. The interviews followed the mothers' meaning-making, so each interview flowed differently, led by the mothers' interests. At the end of these interviews, I asked the women if there was anything else they wanted to add, inquired if they would be

willing to meet with me again, and thanked them for participating. Then I would turn off the voice recorder. Once the recorder was off, the participants frequently remembered some other details and experiences that were important to their meaning-making. So, immediately following each interview I wrote a field note and a bridling entry to document what was not captured in each interview by the recorder.

The field notes provided objective information about the interviews (e.g. date, location, length), as well as descriptions of the setting, activities observed, interactions, nonverbal communications, and any artifacts introduced by the participants. Although the field notes are housed in my bridling journal, the field notes provide descriptions of the interviews. After writing a field note, I wrote a bridling entry in my journal. These entries discussed my subjective reflections on the interview, including emotional responses and musings. Additionally, these entries included any thematic ideas or questions that I had begun to form in response to the interview.

An independent transcriptionist was hired to transcribe these interviews. Because the process of transcribing is a subjective process through which a transcriptionist might purposefully or unintentionally alter the participants' meanings (Roulston, 2010, pp. 105, 107), I followed Roulston's protocol for cleaning sub-contracted transcriptions. I read through each transcript while listening to the recording of the interview and paid close attention to how the transcription captured the participants' meanings, corrected typos, added inflections and pauses when needed, and inserted pseudonyms into the transcription document. Using a transcriptionist meant that I had one less opportunity to engage with the data. However, I had ample opportunity to immerse myself in the data

through cleaning the transcripts as well as listening to the recordings and reading through the transcriptions multiple times.

The second round of interviews began on January 14, 2013 and was concluded on February 1, 2013. For each of these interviews, I developed an interview guide from the questions and tentative concepts that arose from the initial interviews. While these guides were similar for all participants, I personalized each guide with questions and quotations relevant for the individual participants (for an example, see Appendix E). The purpose of this interview was to focus on unpacking and clarifying my understandings of the phenomenon that derived from the first round of interviews. Following the reflective dialogue interview method (c.f. Dahlberg et al., 2008), I strove to keep the interview centered on the participant's understanding and meaning about the phenomenon, asking questions focused on deepening this understanding. For example, I said, "In the first round of interviews, all of the mothers have talked about their own mothers' influence on their parenting. Can you tell me more about this?" As the participants responded, I probed for clarification, seeking to understand the participant's meaning. Following the second round of interviews, I also wrote a field note and bridling entry, and transcripts of the interviews were produced following the processes outlined above.

**Observations and artifacts.** While interviewing participants, I had opportunities to observe how the women interacted with their children since the interviews were conducted in participants' homes with their children present. Dahlberg et al. (2008) indicated that "when researchers participate directly in phenomenal events [it is necessary] to pay attention to all the nuances and the richness of meaning" (p. 220). I was particularly interested in the interactions between the participants and their children and

watching these interactions provided rich phenomenological observations of the phenomenon. In the time I spent with the participants, I noticed how the participants communicated with their children, how much time they spend in physical contact with their children, and the ways the participants balanced their children's needs with the act of participating in an interview. During most of the interviews, there were pauses and interruptions in my conversation with the participants when they would focus on and interact with their children. These observations of mothering and parent-child interactions helped me understand the participants' experiences, as well as highlight areas of tension between the participants' actions and their explanations of their experiences with attachment parenting. After each interview, I noted these observations in the field notes and often reflected on them in a bridling entry. Additionally, when I could identify these moments in the audio recordings, I would add bracketed phrases within the transcripts to also document the occurrence of these observations.

In my bridling entries, I also made notes of discussions of artifacts presented by the study participants. In my observations, I also made notes of objects that are displayed in the participants' homes. During the interviews participants referred to books, blogs, and other resources that they use to help inform their parenting practices. I did not directly ask participants to produce such artifacts. However, when the participants referred to them during interviews, I did make notes of them in my field notes. In some cases, participants emailed me resources (e.g. articles, curriculum, product information) after an interview because they wanted me to understand what they were talking about. Likewise, when participants made specific references to an artifact, I would later examine

those artifacts (e.g. reading articles and books, following a blog) in order to deepen my understanding of the participants' meaning-making.

**Interviewing the transcriptionist.** After the second round of interviews, I invited a fifth mother, the transcriptionist, to participate in an interview. In our previous conversations, it was clear that she was responding to the content of the interviews. Although she does not follow an attachment parenting practice, as a mother of a three-year-old son she felt strongly about participants' comments and experience. As she transcribed the interviews, she related what she was hearing to her own parenting experiences. I realized that interviewing her could help me define some of the grey areas of overlap between attachment parenting and other types of parenting, as well as help draw out distinctions. While her interview did not contribute to the data that was analyzed, she provided a valuable perspective as a mother outside of the attachment parenting practice.

She was interviewed on March 5, 2013. Like the study participants, I asked her to select the location of the interview. She elected to come to my home and brought her husband and son with her. Our husbands played with our children in another room while we conducted the 90-minute interview. Even more than the participants' interviews, this was an unstructured, unscripted, open interview. I began by asking her to explain her role in the study. She expanded on her role as transcriptionist: "This is all really exciting to me to hear all of these mommy's stories." From this place, we explored her reactions to the interviews and her own meaning-making around attachment parenting. Similar to the other interviews, I wrote a field note and bridling entry after this interview, and a transcription of the recording was also produced following the processes outlined above.



## **Ensuring Data Quality**

I employed a number of techniques to increase the trustworthiness of these data, following suggestions from Vagle (2010a; 2010b) and Lincoln and Guba (1996). First, I have had prolonged engagement with the phenomena itself, through my own experiences with the interconnected meanings that come into being as a mother who practices attachment parenting. Although my experiences give me insight into the phenomenon, my subjectivities also impact the research process and were particularly influential during selection of the research design and data analysis. Spending more than five hours with each of the participants and their children in their homes over a period of six months, I have explored and observed other mothers' experiences and understanding of the phenomena. In my research relationships, I allowed for multiplicity of perspectives by probing for cases of distinction during the interviews, and directly asking participants about negative and alternative experiences. I purposefully sought validation of my understanding of the participants' meanings through probing and subsequent interviews. Additionally, I engaged in extensive bridling and utilized an outside advisory panel to explore alternative ways of understanding the data.

**Outside advisory panel.** Throughout the study, I participated in debriefing with an outside advisory panel. The purpose of establishing an outside advisory panel was to have guidance from other parents, beyond those women participating in the study. This panel consisted of three mothers. Two mothers were actively parenting young children and the third has one child who is 13 years old. I invited each of these women to participate in the outside advisory panel because we have an established rapport and they are each willing to give me critical feedback. Two of these women have practiced

attachment parenting and the other one has not practice attachment parenting, so they provide parenting perspectives from both within and outside of attachment parenting.

Whenever I found myself struggling with a concept or idea, I sought advice from these women. I would call the women individually and share my struggle. While I would try to talk to all of three women about the same issue to get a variety of perspectives, there were times when I would only be able to connect with one or two. Throughout data collection and data analysis, I called them to share my ideas and conceptualizations, seeking alternative understandings to ascertain where my thinking might be expanded. They offered me support and encouragement. Excited by the topic and the data, these women affirmed the value of this work. Therefore, they often challenged me by presenting alternative ways of interpreting quotes and experiences, as well as by questioning the specific terminology I used to describe the tentative manifestations.

**Research relationships.** Post-intentional phenomenology, and qualitative approaches in general, require that researchers be mindful in their relationships with study participants, as well as with the phenomenon being studied. In considering my study participants, I have reflected on Marotta's (1998) assertion: "Culture has a strong hold on individuals but mothers are particularly vulnerable because of...their desire to do the right thing by their babies and children...[M]any mothers absorb advice and standards set forth by experts" (p. 11). Study participants often perceive researchers as "experts," so this quote emphasizes the importance of considering how to position myself as a researcher in order to responsibly engage with study participants in motherhood research.

In order to lessen my "expert" position, I invited participants to select the location of the interview. Rather than simply asking participants where they would like to meet, I

proposed a number of suggested locations that deviate from normal interview settings in an effort to ensure opportunities to observe the participants' interactions with their children. To accomplish this, I asked participants: "Where would you like to meet for the interview? We could meet at a playground, your home, my home, or any other place you prefer." All of the interviews occurred in the participants' homes and their child(ren) were present during these interviews. Having children present during the interviews provided opportunities to observe the participants interacting with their children. During one interview, a participant was explaining how much she enjoys making coffee with her daughter in the mornings. When I asked her to describe this experience, she brought me into her kitchen so that I could watch them make coffee. These opportunities to observe mother and child provided material for rich phenomenological descriptions.

To continue moving away from the "expert" role of detachedly watching participants' interact with their children while interviewing them, I inquired if the participants were comfortable with me bringing my own daughter to the interview. My daughter, Annabella, joined me at five of the interviews. Having children present and playing presented difficulties for maintaining a research interview since our conversations were frequently interrupted. This was particularly the case when Annabella was present because I was both a researcher and a mother. Not only was the participant distracted by her child(ren) but I was also distracted. Those interviews reminded me of socializing with friends and it seemed that the tone of the conversation reflected this change. For example, during one interview the participant and I worked together to make a snack for the kids, peeling grapefruits, pouring honey, and talked about her wedding. The children's voices and laughter also interfered with hearing the recorded interviews

during transcription. Additionally, an unexpected challenge arose during one interview when I nursed Annabella and that upset a participants' daughter who had recently been weaned. Overall, having children present during the interviews provided opportunities to observe the participants interacting with their children, lessened my position as the "expert," and also encouraged rapport between myself and study participants, allowing them to feel more comfortable talking about their own attachment parenting practices.

Another way that I attempted to reduce my role as the "expert" is connected to the post-intentional phenomenological emphasis on taking a position of openness, curiosity, and not knowing towards a phenomenon. During the interviews, I strove not to rely on my own experiences and assumptions when interpreting the participants' experiences and used probes to try to ascertain the participants' meaning. This was particularly challenging for me as a mother who practices attachment parenting because I brought my own experiences and understandings with me as I conducted research. In most of the interviews the participants used the word "natural" to describe their parenting practices. This is a word that I have frequently used to describe my own parenting; however, rather than believing that I understood what the participants meant, I would say: "You said some of the practices seemed really natural. Tell me more about that." Despite my efforts to notice places where I was making assumptions, after several interviews I thought of a few areas where I could have probed more deeply in order to further explore the mothers' meaning making. In those cases, I recorded my questions and addressed them in subsequent interviews. In this way, I strove to be open to understanding the participants' meaning making rather than privileging my own preconceived meanings.

**Bridling.** Recognizing that the phenomenon of attachment parenting is intimately connected to other phenomena, as well as to my own experiences, I have taken considerable time to detangle myself from my intentionalities with the phenomenon and the research process. In post-intentional phenomenology, a researcher's commitment to bridling is "non-negotiable" (Vagle, 2010a, p. 15) because "it is important to serve as our own best critics by being skeptical of ourselves, our design, our data, and our assertions" (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009, p. 362). Recognizing bridling as an integral component of the post-intentional phenomenological methodology, I developed the following plan for bridling during this study.

To begin, I developed initial bridling statements (Vagle, 2010a) about research relationships, as well my reflexivity (see Appendix F) as a method of examining my assumptions about attachment parenting. During data collection and data analysis, I revisited and rewrote these statements to continually address my reflexivity. I also maintained a bridling journal, which served as my place to think, express, and wonder through writing. I wrote a dated entry in the journal after each event, i.e. interview, transcribing session, reading through a transcription (see Appendix G). Additionally, I used this journal as a space to record those spontaneous research insights and musings that manifested at any and all times in my life.

I found bridling particularly helpful when I felt unsettled or uncomfortable with an aspect of the study. There was one time, when I was reading through a particular transcript for the fourth time, that I found myself suddenly weeping. I bridled:

I needed to stop data analysis for a minute to write out some emotions that are coming up. In the eighth interview, the participant spoke about how epidurals (and their consequences) prohibit a woman's body from producing the natural hormones that she needs to prompt strong feelings of love and connection to a

newborn. Even as I read through this transcript for the fourth time, I am crying...in *Big City Bread*. This knowledge breaks my heart and I can't help but think about how detached I felt from Annabella in those early, early days. I wonder how I could have let her sleep those first hours in a plastic tub in the hospital room, how I missed her first bath, how being tired and sleeping could feel more important than those first hours. I feel that I missed so much and as I write this, I see that I am still holding onto so much guilt and remorse. These feelings are so physical, so connected to my bodily sensations and I cannot simply release them and forgive myself. I wish so much that I had researched the consequences of intervention while I was pregnant in case I came to a place where I might need to choose what to take. In my efforts to not bring that energy into my birthing experience, I feel that I was negligent. This brings out a strong desire to want to promote education about birthing and drugs. All of these feelings make it hard for me to analyze this passage...I probably need to take it to my advisory panel. I think I have even overlooked this passage in an effort to not feel these emotions that dwell in me. I should take it to May in particular because she pointed out this detachment to me in an honest way (and the memories of that conversation still hurt) as well as the other moms who may be able to help me see beyond my experience into the text itself.

Although the act of bridling did not bring resolution to my questions, the process of writing and questioning helped me realize that I had been neglecting a portion of this interview because my own emotional reaction was so strong that I could not remain open. In this journal, I documented my own messy, invigorating, and contradictory experiences and reactions to the processes of conducting research.

In addition to written bridling, I participated in three bridling interviews. Bridling interviews are conducted with the researcher as the interviewee and are used to help researchers examine their own involvements with the phenomenon of interest—in this case, attachment parenting (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2009). Dr. Joseph Pate, who is experienced in post-intentional phenomenological research, conducted these bridling interviews. One bridling interview was conducted after each round of participant interviews. Through these interviews, Joseph probed into my research processes, insights, and reactions. During our second bridling interview, we talked about how I was

struggling with having to determine how to represent the participants' experiences. As Joseph probed, I admitted to him (and myself): "What I want to do is just glorify attachment parenting and talk about all of these beautiful things that come out of it." During our conversation, I realized that I was struggling because I did not want to be critical of a practice that I value and am committed to. Joseph celebrated this awareness, encouraged me to "own" those feelings, and then to do the phenomenological work, stating: "That's all value laden, you are trying to pull back from value and give a snapshot of what this is." While writing in my bridling journal allowed me to process those places where I identified my own biases, the bridling interviews helped me identify and examine those assumptions and prejudices that I was unaware of but were definitely impacting the research process.

**Outside advisory panel.** Throughout the study, I participated in debriefing with an outside advisory panel. The purpose of establishing an outside advisory panel was to have guidance from other parents, beyond those women participating in the study. This panel consisted of three mothers. Two mothers were actively parenting young children and the third has one child who is 13 years old. I invited each of these women to participate in the outside advisory panel because we have an established rapport and they are each willing to give me critical feedback. Two of these women have practiced attachment parenting and the other one has not practice attachment parenting, so they provide parenting perspectives from both within and outside of attachment parenting. Whenever I found myself struggling with a concept or idea, I sought advice from these women. I would call the women individually and share my struggle. While I would try to talk to all of three women about the same issue to get a variety of perspectives, there were

times when I would only be able to connect with one or two. Throughout data collection and data analysis, I called them to share my ideas and conceptualizations, seeking alternative understandings to ascertain where my thinking might be expanded. They offered me support and encouragement. Excited by the topic and the data, these women affirmed the value of this work. Therefore, they often challenged me by presenting alternative ways of interpreting quotes and experiences, as well as by questioning the specific terminology I used to describe the tentative manifestations.

**Management of data.** The participants' identities in this study have been treated as confidential. Contact information for all participants, paper field notes, and other hard copy documents were kept in a locked safe. The digitally recorded interviews, transcriptions, and other electronic documents are stored electronically and protected by password. Pseudonyms were used for all names in the transcriptions and in any discussion of the data. I selected pseudonyms by looking up popular names during each individual's birth year. As I read through those names, I choose the name that reminded me in some ways of that individual. For the participants' children, I selected gender-neutral names when feasible. My doctoral committee had access to review the study data once pseudonyms had been inserted into the transcriptions.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Through the processes of phenomenological interviewing, reflective dialogue, and bridling, I continuously contemplated the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. The early stages of data analysis informed the content and direction of the proceeding interviews. After the initial interviews, I reviewed my field



notes and transcriptions, making notes of questions and ideas that arose. The second interview guide was developed to allow me to consider these ideas with the participants, pursuing a deeper and more thorough discussion of the phenomenon.

Once the second round of interviews was complete, I began a more structured data analysis process. In reading and writing my way through data analysis, I utilized a whole-parts-whole process (Dahlberg et al., 2008; van Manen, 1990; Vagle, 2010a; Vagle, 2010b). I began by re-immersing myself with the data from each interview individually. This included first reading through the corresponding field notes and bridling entries and then rereading the transcription while listening to the recorded interview. The purpose of this first “whole” portion of the whole-parts-whole process was to be fully reengaged with the content of each interview.

Moving into the “parts” portion of the process, I re-read the transcript, again while listening to the recorded interview, but in this subsequent reading I marked salient quotations, noted my questions and ideas, and wrote in my bridling journal. This process occurred separately for each of the interviews. During this second line-by-line reading of each transcript, I strove to keep my attention on the phenomenon of interest, the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. Further, I strove to remain as open as possible to the data within the transcripts, framing my thoughts as questions rather than statements. For example, I wondered: “What is the role of social media in attachment parenting?” At this stage, to help manage the concepts being exposed, I created a document for each of the interviews that contained excerpts and phrases from the transcript that help elucidate aspects of the phenomena (for an example, see Appendix H).

I then undertook the second “whole” portion of the whole-parts-whole process. In this third line-by-line reading, I developed my thoughts about each aspect of the phenomena discussed by each of the participants. I examined the meanings and questions from each transcription based on my insights from across the interviews. At this stage, I began to develop my tentative understandings about the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. I strove to remain as open as possible during all three stages of the “whole-parts-whole” analysis; however, in this final stage I found it difficult to continue remaining open. I found myself theorizing, sketching, and categorizing—both in my head and on paper (see Appendix I). While I did not want to impose preconceived ideas onto the data, I also did not want to lose the connections that I was making. While I completed the third reading of the final two interviews, I had to remind myself to focus only on the data in front of me and to not unconsciously apply the ideas I was formulating. Writing about these challenges, my budding understandings, and related musing in my bridling journal help me to stay focused on the data.

Once I completed the “whole-parts-whole” analysis, I began the deliberate contemplation of how the various aspects of the phenomenon related to the research question. To describe the interconnected meanings coming from the data, I created a Venn diagram with four circles (see Figure 1). At this time, I had identified four meaningful aspects of the mothers’ experiences (labeled as *knowing*, *tension*, *evolution*, and *negotiation*) which I envisioned overlapping. I envisioned that the place where all four circles overlapped represented the interconnected meanings of attachment parenting in this early concept map. I then returned to the documents I had created for each of the

transcripts during the “parts” portion of analysis (see Appendix H). Using these documents, I identified those excerpts and phrases that represented *knowing*, *tension*, *evolution*, and *negotiation*. Through this process, I realized that the diagram in Figure 1 was too narrow. There were numerous excerpts and phrases from each interview that could not be represented by *knowing*, *tension*, *evolution*, and *negotiation*. Reading through these overlooked portions of data, I added three additional circles to the Venn diagram (see Figure 2). These circles encompassed additional meaningful aspects of the mothers’ experiences, labeled as *way of life/lifestyle*, *consciousness*, and *relationship*. At this point, I felt the Venn diagram in Figure 2 was representative of the data obtained in the first and second rounds of interviews.

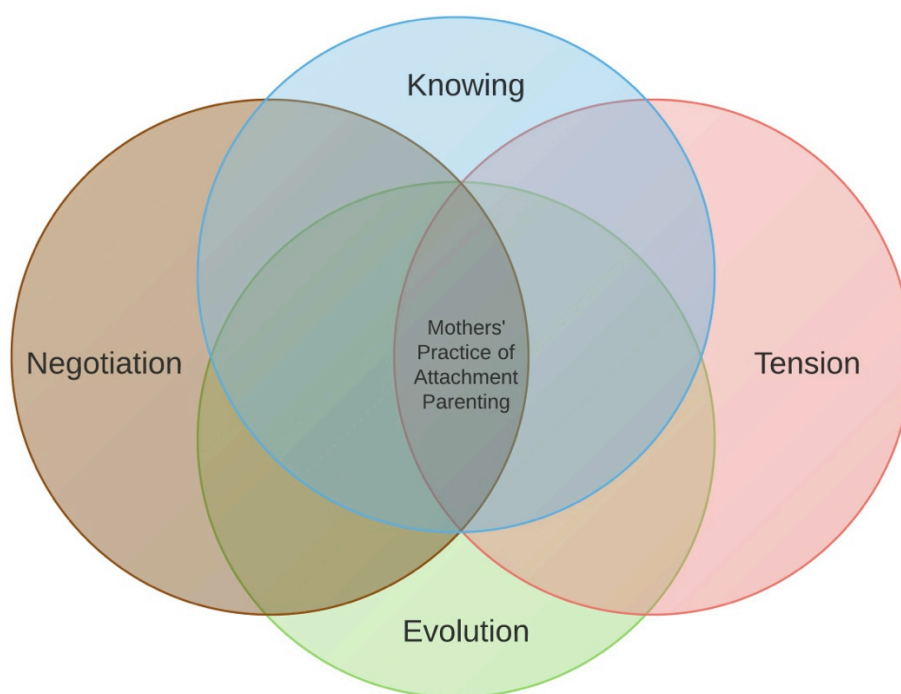


Figure 1. Early Diagram A

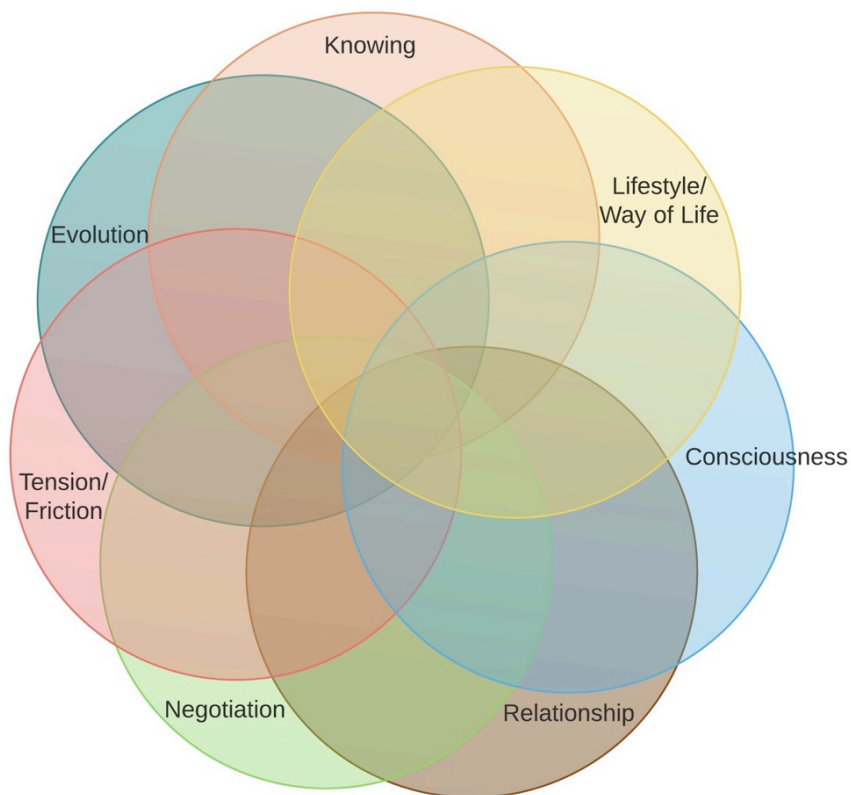


Figure 2: Early Diagram B

I was excited about finding a way to represent the data but was also aware that something was incomplete. I envisioned that each participant would have her own Venn diagram to represent how these experiences existed in her life. However, the lines on the diagram frustrated me because they seemed to imply concreteness and boundaries that were not reflective of the fluidity and continuous change described by the participants. I was dissatisfied with the labels that I had created for each of the circles on the diagram, uncertain if they were truly representative of the women's experiences. I shared my struggles and ideas with the outside advisory panel, colleagues, and professors. Through these conversations and bridling, I began to refine my conceptualization of the data, as well as the labels I was creating. I realized that the interconnected meaning was not limited to the very center of the diagram but rather could be found in each place of

overlap. Likewise, I began to describe the circles as manifolds of the phenomenon, pulling on phenomenological terminology to highlight the tentativeness of the findings.

This process of contemplation was invigorating and I continued to move forward with the data analysis, exploring and playing with the data and the meaning of the phenomenon. Privately, I imagined that this diagram existed within the context of the mothers' womb, embedded in the connection—oneness—of mother and child. In conversations with my colleague, Brian Kumm, I decided to embrace my conceptualization of the womb as context. I realized that without this context, my representations of the tentative manifestations were missing an important aspect of the phenomenon: the role of the body as the site of the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers' practice attachment parenting. This decision helped me dig deeper into the data and led me to utilize the imagery of embryonic cleavage, which is the rapid cell division that occurs in the first twenty-four hours of pregnancy.

Over the course of these discussions, contemplations, and insights, I modified the labels used on the diagram. While the manifolds remained the same, I changed the labels to more closely depict the meanings encompassed in each manifold. For this reason, *knowing* became *sensations of rightness*, *lifestyle/way of life* became *way of life*, *tension/friction* became *places of contraction*, and *evolution* became *evolvment*. These changes are reflected in Figure 3.

At this point, I returned again to the transcripts and used their stories and explanations to create an individualized diagram for each of the participants. To make these diagrams, I returned to the participants' interview transcripts and the corresponding entries in my bridling journal. I made each diagram on separate days because I did not

want to entangle my thinking from one woman's data with another woman's. I began by creating a new document, which included the label and description of each of the manifolds (at this stage the Venn diagram still retained seven manifolds). Line-by-line, I read through the data and copied, cut, and pasted each piece of data into its corresponding manifold(s). Once this document was complete, I read through the data that comprised each manifold. I then constructed the diagram, layering and stretching or shrinking each circle to reflect the significance I believed that manifold had in that particular woman's parenting practice. Needless to say, this was a very subjective process.

In fact, it was so subjective that I decided to initially share only the generic image, *Embryonic Cleavage in Attachment Parenting* (Figure 3), with the women in our final interviews. I interviewed the study participants a third time to discuss these conceptualizations of the data with them. This final round of interviews began on April 5, 2013 and was concluded on May 3, 2013. These interviews were unscripted but followed a similar format. I shared Figure 3 with the participants and explained each of the manifolds in the diagram. To help clarify these manifolds, I also shared quotes from each woman's own transcripts with her so she would understand how I was working with the data. Then I asked each woman to create a diagram—on my computer—with these manifolds to reflect their own parenting practice. I showed the participants how to use the software, explained that they could alter the size and shape of each circle, and encouraged them to organize the shapes in ways that reflected their experiences. While they worked on creating their own diagrams, I played with their children, giving the women space to think and create. Once they had completed their diagrams, I encouraged each woman to explain the diagram to me. At this point, I presented and discussed the diagram I had

created for the participant. We talked about similarities and differences between our diagrams (see Appendix J). During these conversations, I asked the women about the labels for each of the circles, how they understood these ideas to be relevant or irrelevant

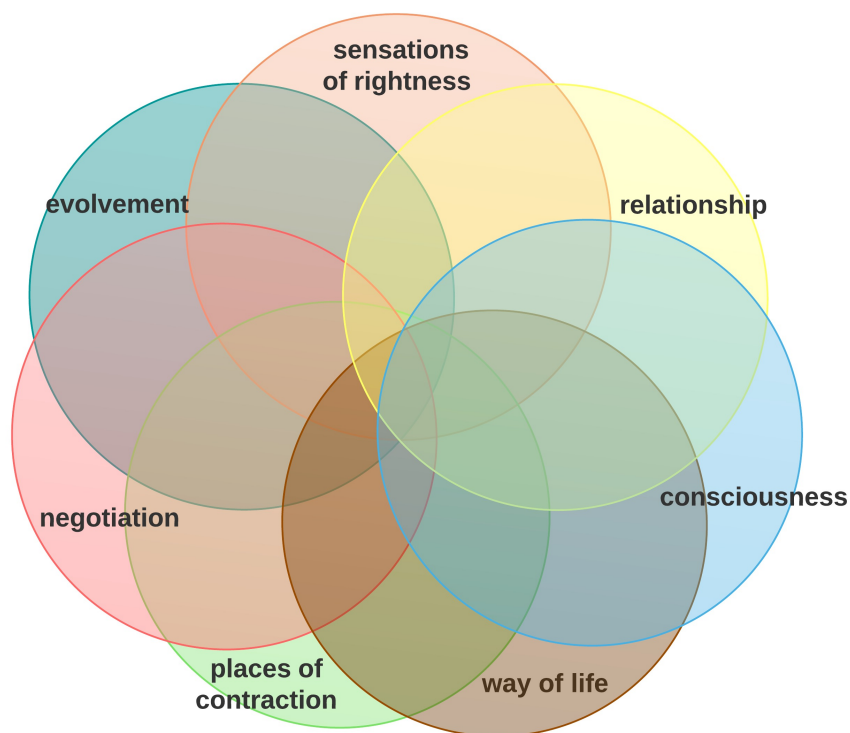


Figure 3: Early Diagram C

for their parenting, and if there were other aspects of their parenting that they would add to the diagrams. In these interviews I sought to find where my understandings of the interconnected meanings experienced as mothers practice attachment parenting were similar to and different from the participants' meaning-making. Like the previous two rounds of interviews, these interviews were voice recorded and transcribed.

Due to conflicting schedules and illness, I was unable to interview Sara in person; however, she still participated in this third interview through email. I sent Sara a written description of the Venn diagram and the manifolds, which I had read to the other participants, along access to the Venn diagram software and instructions on how to create

her own diagram. Sara emailed me once she had completed her own diagram, with an explanation of the diagram that she made. We have been unable to schedule a time to discuss the similarities and differences between the diagrams that we made to represent her parenting experiences.

In our final interview, Jennifer explained that *negotiations* and *places of contraction* seemed to be outside of her day-to-day parenting practices with her son. Rather, she understood these manifolds as occurring between herself and the outside world, those who believe in contemporary, mainstream parenting. I asked the other mothers about her ideas in their subsequent interviews and they agreed. Likewise, the mothers felt that I had left out the important role of supportive friends and families. These discussions also pointed to the need to clarify some of the manifold labels to reduce confusion and to emphasize the focus on the mothers' parenting practices. After this final round of interviews, I wrote about and contemplated the tentative manifestations identified through this study.

I came to new insights about the metaphor and how to best represent the phenomenon. The image of embryonic cleavage was retained to describe the mothers' developing attachment parenting practices. However, as the mothers in this study suggested, I removed *negotiations* and *places of contraction* from the embryonic cleavage diagram (see Figure 4). I also reconsidered the labels for the remaining five manifolds. The labels *sensations of rightness* and *way of life* were not altered. I modified the final three labels to clarify the experiences they represented. To describe the focus on mother-child bonding, the label *relationship* became *connections with one's child(ren)*. To position the mothers' parenting practices as central to the investigated phenomenon,



the label *evolvment* became *evolution of parenting practice* and the label *consciousness* became *conscious parenting practice*.

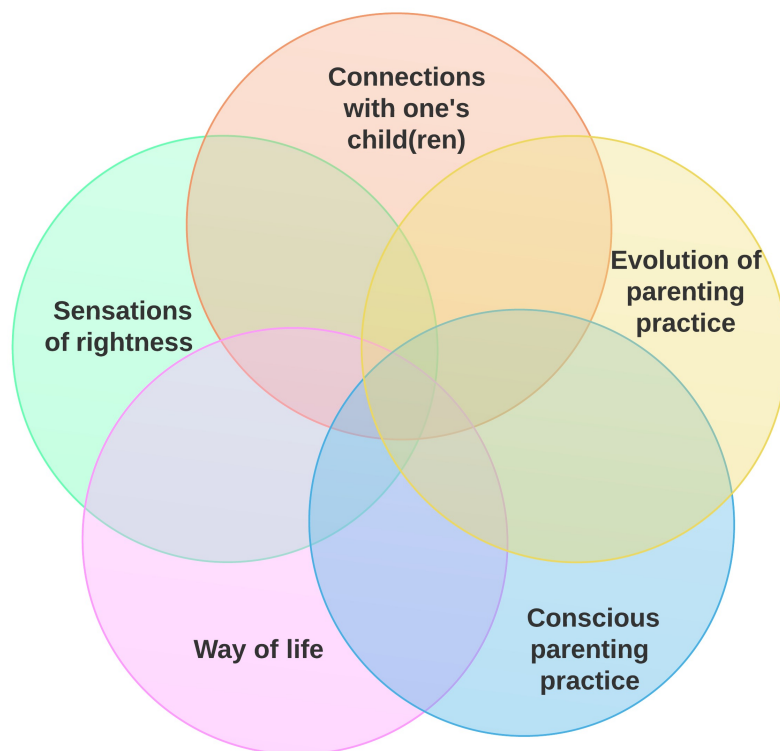


Figure 4: Final Diagram, Embryonic Cleavage in Attachment Parenting

While I removed *negotiations* and *places of contraction* from the embryonic cleavage diagram, they remained important tentative manifestations of the phenomenon. I considered how to retain these aspects of the phenomenon, ultimately expanding my use of metaphor to reflect gestation, rather than only the embryo. In this metaphor the embryonic cleavage diagram represents the growing fetus. Negotiations are likened to amniotic fluid, which I present as amniotical geste, and places of contraction correspond to the mothers' labor contractions. While writing, I developed umbilical connections to portray how the mothers cultivate relationships that support their parenting practices and eliminate unsupportive relationships. Ultimately, data analysis and interpretation led to the refined data representation presented in Chapter Five.

In agreement with the philosophy of post-intentional phenomenology, it is my belief that data analysis would occur as long as I continued to write and engage with the data. Similarly, if other researchers reviewed the data from this study they would undoubtedly produce different findings. Therefore, the findings contained within the next chapter are partial and incomplete—they are tentative manifestations of *this* study, meaningful and important but not comprehensive.

## CHAPTER 5

### TENTATIVE MANIFESTATIONS

In this chapter, I present the tentative manifestations revealed through this investigation of the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. Utilizing a post-intentional phenomenological approach, I emphasize that these manifestations are partial and inherently contextual.

#### **Our Bodily Situation**

We both stood in her kitchen with a counter and three stools between us. My open laptop sat on the counter and botanical images were slowing rotating on the screen. Ryland, seven months old, sat on the floor, gnawing on the Earthfare gift card I just gave Amanda, his gums raw and swollen from two teeth pushing their way through the flesh. The sounds of Riley—Amanda's two-year-old daughter—playing in the backyard floated in through the open window above the sink. Amanda moved through the kitchen space, filling a kettle with water, preparing the coffee filter while fitting her body and Ryland's together into a Moby wrap. There was silence between us, a pause, while I honored the dance of motherhood unfolding before me. Amanda, I suppose, did not notice the pause, her mind momentarily occupied with the tasks before her. She moved easily, almost rhythmically, between competing errands; her comfort in this space—her kitchen—was obvious. Unexpectedly, with her body suspended between motions, Amanda spoke: "I, I didn't like that 'Mama.' That, that makes me nervous." No longer

present in the kitchen, Amanda's attention was focused on Riley, whose quiet pleas for "Mama" were imperceptible to me. Amanda's anxiousness was palpable from the furrowed expression on her face to the higher pitch in her voice. Closest to the yard, I stepped from the kitchen through the sliding glass door to the patio while Amanda quickly made her way to the same place. Riley, wearing only her brightly colored cloth diaper, did not appear to be in any physical harm, so I stood back, watching as Amanda reached her daughter. Picking up the remains of a beloved toy that had been chewed apart by one of the family dogs, Amanda's sorrow was as clear to me as Riley's. Shooing away the dogs, Amanda soothed, "I'm so sorry, Baby. I'm so sorry." Her words composed of love and comfort came together as almost a lullaby and she enveloped Riley into her body. From my vantage point, I saw Amanda's back as she folded her body down to the height of her child. Ryland, still in the Moby wrap, was held close to Amanda's body, his legs wrapping around her waist and his left hand holding her tightly. Riley too was pulled into Amanda's body, against her brother. In that moment, my presence was all but forgotten and in the distance between myself and Amanda's body—"comparable to the work of art...a knot of living significations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1974/2012, p. 153)—my perception of some things was shaped.

This moment (along with others that occurred during this study) has shaped my perceptions of two things in particular. First, the separation between myself, as a researcher, and the moment-to-moment lived experiences of my participants and their families. Acknowledging this separation—the phenomenological perch (c.f. Sokolowski, 2000) from which I examine and philosophize about the phenomenon—requires that I emphasize the tentative, partial, and incomplete nature of the findings, which Vagle

(2010a) more aptly labeled tentative manifestations. It led me to turn back to my participants with my understandings and to seek out places of agreement, divergence, and ambiguity. Secondly, that moment made me aware of the role of the body as the site of the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers' practice attachment parenting. Recognizing the mothers' body as the site of this phenomenon has led me to develop a metaphor of gestation through which I understand and discuss the tentative manifestations of this examination.

### **Gestation As Metaphor**

To examine the phenomenon of the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting, I have had to acknowledge the role of the body, the physicality involved in attached mothering. In my early conceptualizations of the data, I secretly envisioned a mother's womb as the context for the interconnected meanings that I was noticing. Yet, I tried to hold that thought separate from my articulations of the findings because I believed that I was straying too far from valued academic discourse, that this thought was too radical. However, while discussing my study in a class with my fellow graduate students, another student—Brian Kumm—commented on the disconnect between the images of the parental body (featured strongly in my presentation) and the cognitiveness of my data representations. Through our discussions, I confessed to Brian that I understood the mother's body to run through and within all of the data, that I imagined this phenomenon to be rooted in flesh—to be rooted in the womb. Although I was fearful of positioning myself on the fringes of academic research, I realized that my discussion of the phenomenon devoid of the body was

incomplete, that something important to the phenomenon was purposefully being withheld.

Therefore, I resolved to fuse the phenomenon with the flesh, to acknowledge “that even the realization of an objective world is set in the realm of existence...[that] what allows us to link to each other the ‘physiological’ and the ‘psychic’, is the fact that, when reintegrated into existence, they are no longer distinguishable” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974/2012, p. 89-90). The interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting cannot be distinguished from the fleshed connections between a mother and her children, for it is through her body that both her children and this practice are born. As one participant noted: “I let them suckle for comfort because I would rather be the comfort to our child than a plastic pacifier.”

To accomplish this fusion, I conceptualize the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting using the metaphor of gestation. This metaphor enables me to discuss the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon that have been uncovered through this study, and also to examine the attachment parenting discourse as growing from within the normative parenting discourse, as the fetus grows from within the womb, the flesh of its mother’s body. While I do not strive for anatomical accuracy in the use of this metaphor, I have often pulled on early gestational terminology because attachment parenting, happening in the first few years of a child’s life, can be thought of as the early stage of parenting. Specifically, I consider the developing attachment parenting practice as the fetus during *embryonic cleavage*, discuss the negotiations mothers make between their commitment to an attachment parenting practice and the wider context of normative parenting as *amniotical geste*, describe the

cultivation of supportive relationships and elimination of unsupportive relationships as *umbilical connections*, and portray areas of tension in mothers' attachment parenting practices as *places of contraction* (see Figure 5).

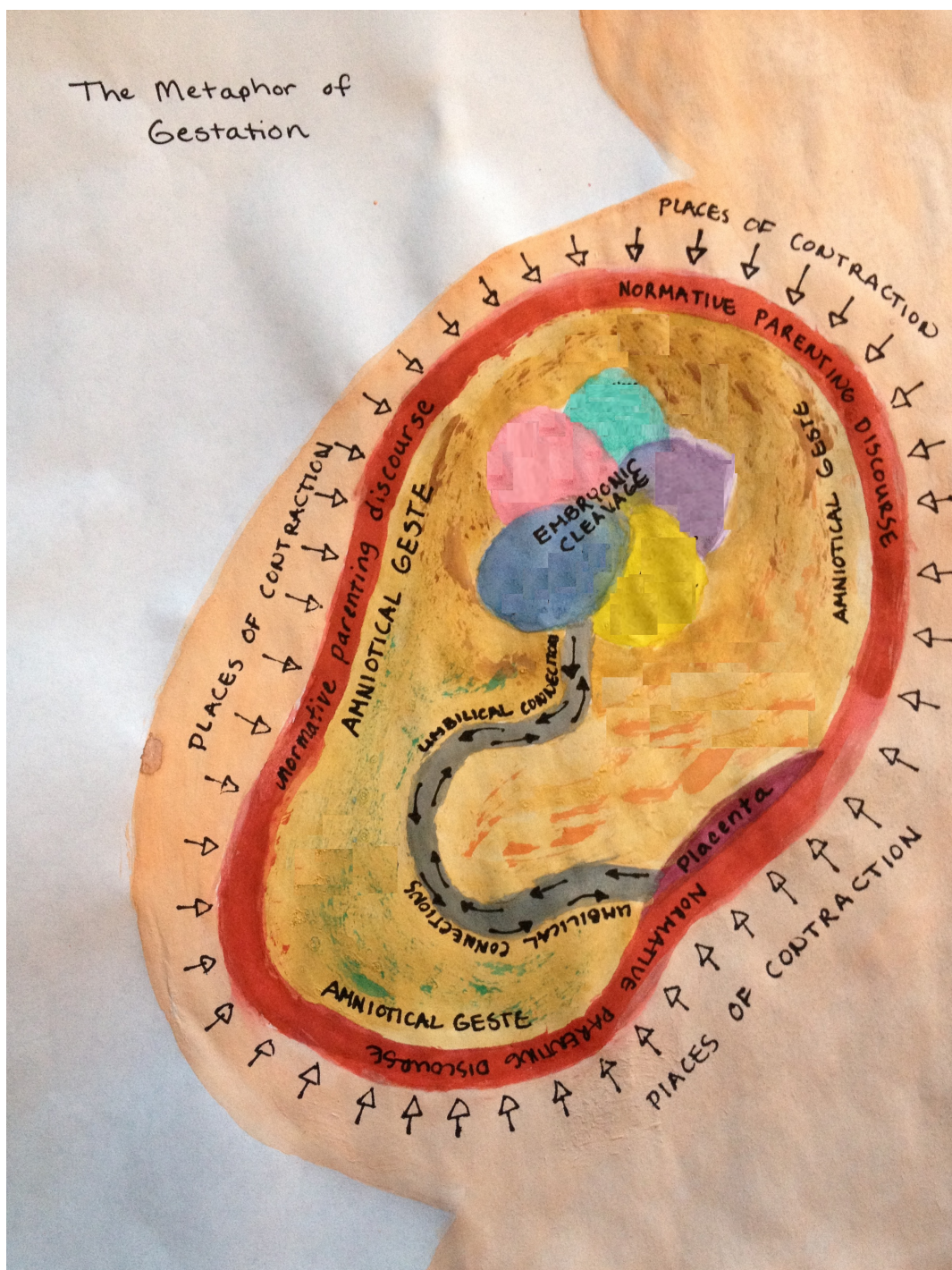


Figure 5: The Metaphor of Gestation

## Embryonic Cleavage

Within the metaphor of gestation, mothers' attachment parenting practices are represented by the growing fetus in its early developmental stage, which I label *embryonic cleavage*. Embryonic cleavage is the rapid cell division that occurs in the first 24 hours pregnancy. This stage of gestation is marked by constant transformation and growth. Figure 6 is a screen shot from a video clip that captures one of a multitude of steps in the embryonic cleavage stage of fetus development. Similar to the beginning of pregnancy, the attachment parenting practice is formed during the early months of parenting and is often characterized by transformation and growth. I encourage the reader to watch the following 30-second clip of embryonic cleavage because a clear understanding of the process of transformation occurring during this stage is critical to understanding my use of this metaphor:

[http://www.thevisualmd.com/read\\_videoguide.php?idu=13100&q=embryonic cleavage](http://www.thevisualmd.com/read_videoguide.php?idu=13100&q=embryonic%20cleavage)

Analogous to the screen shot in Figure 6 that illustrates a single stage of embryonic cleavage, Figure 7 depicts the manifolds of mothers' practices of attachment parenting that were uncovered through this study.<sup>1</sup> Utilizing this imagery, the manifolds are likened to the rapidly dividing cells. In this second figure, the spaces of overlap represent places where manifolds meet and generate meaning-making in mothers' practice of attachment parenting. These manifolds are contextual and—much like the dividing cells of early pregnancy—fluid, partial, and incomplete. Set to motion, the

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<sup>1</sup> In the previous chapter, Chapter Five: Methods, I discussed how this diagram began with four circles, grew to seven circles, and through the final interviews with participants was ultimately constructed with five circles.



manifolds would stretch, divide, and shrink, while the areas of overlap would converge and diverge.

The five manifolds presented in Figure 7 are discussed in upcoming sections; however, I cannot over-emphasize the need to understand these manifolds as cellular structures that are rapidly dividing with fluid boundaries, enabling one manifold to emerge from another through cleavage. When I began writing this section, I tried to pull out the distinctions between the manifolds; however, I believe this section ultimately highlights the interconnectedness of these manifolds. Using the language of phenomenology (c.f. Sokolowski, 2000), these manifolds are not *pieces* of the phenomenon that can be presented apart from the phenomenon, as entities of their own. Rather, these manifolds are *moments*, like color or texture, that cannot be presented as entities apart from the phenomenon. These five manifolds are necessarily—inherently—interconnected, cleaving from one another into a multitude of possibilities.

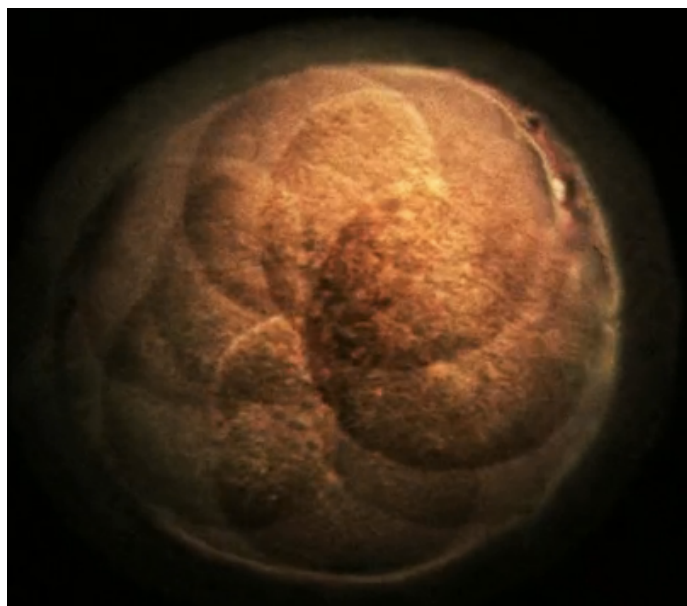


Figure 6: Cleavage in Developing Embryo (The Anatomical Travelogue, LLC, 2013).

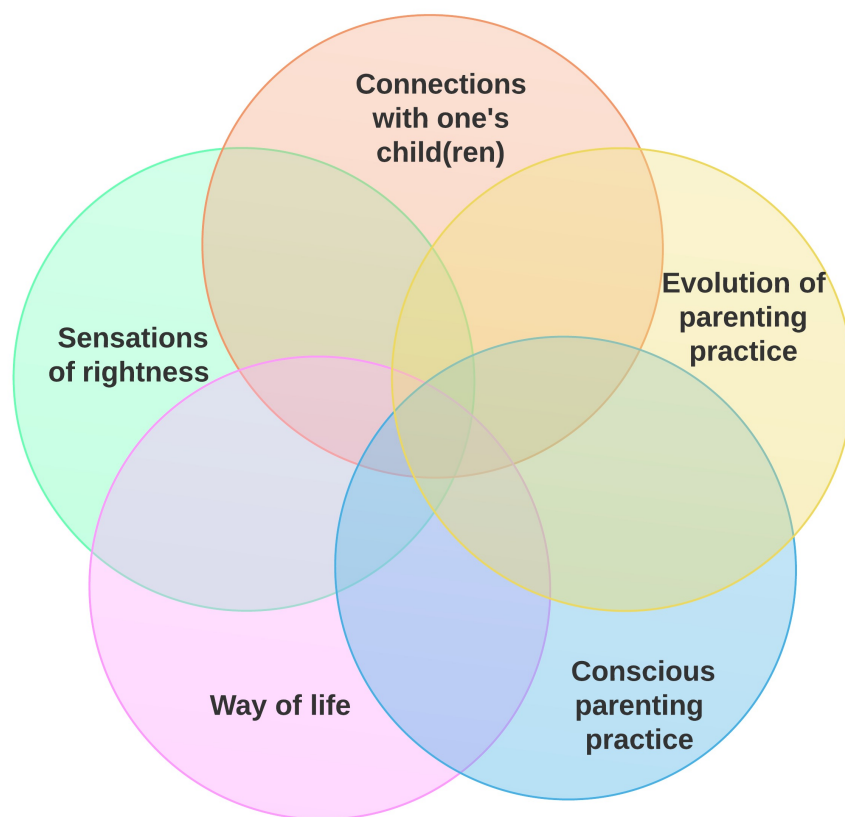


Figure 7: Embryonic Cleavage in Attachment Parenting

**Sensations of rightness.** This manifold arose from the participants' descriptions of their decision-making processes around their parenting practices, which frequently corresponded to sensations. The mothers in this study indicated that their sensations of nervousness, anxiety, and uneasiness signaled that something was not right, while sensations of rightness encompassed the physical, emotional, and intellectual qualities associated with a mother's belief that her decisions are in accordance with what is right for herself and family. Amanda concisely exemplified this when she explained:

I just never felt like I could let a baby cry. Even though I wasn't breastfed, my aunt breastfed her four children and I was around it and I just remember being a small child thinking, 'That's what you are supposed to do with your baby.' It just always made sense to be natural.

Each mother described the sensations she associated with what feels right in different ways, using words and phrases like "feels right," "instincts," "I know," "came to me,"

“common sense,” and “natural.” Whichever terms the mothers used, these sensations of rightness seemed to influence their decision-making and motivated them to continue specific practices.

Jennifer described the physical sensation she experienced when she found the right pediatrician:

We met with four pediatricians before I found one that I liked. I actually started to get so nervous about it that I thought we might end up going to the health department for shots. So one question that I would ask was their views on co-sleeping. And one doctor, who I thought we were going to love, said ‘Well, if you are asking if [co-sleeping] gives me the warm fuzzies, it doesn’t.’ And I was like, ‘Okay. I think we are done.’ We use Dr. Richardson and they are really great. I mean, it was one of those things that was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders whenever I met with her because I just knew it was going to be a good experience.

Similar to how Jennifer described knowing that this doctor was a good fit for her family as the physical sensation of a weight being lifted off her shoulders, the mothers in this study seemed to rely on such physical sensations in their decision-making processes.

To offer another example of this manifold, Trinity began her first interview by telling me about an experience she had in the hospital after giving birth to her first child, a now five-year old named Jamie. This experience greatly affected Trinity’s understanding of parenting, as well as herself, and was such an empowering occurrence that she mentioned this same experience to me in both of our subsequent interviews:

He was crying and crying. I couldn’t get him to latch onto the breast and I was getting really anxious. One of the lactation nurses took off all of his clothes, put him in his bare diaper, put him on my bare chest, and he just immediately was at peace. He was so peaceful that I continued to do that on a more regular basis. I think a lot of his first month he might have just slept on my chest because it was just the easiest thing. He was happy there. Something like [skin-to-skin contact] would never have crossed my mind to do but it seems like the most natural thing to do, when you think about it. And so, I guess from there, in terms of parenting, I just started gravitating toward, ‘Okay, what would be the most natural thing?’

What would we do if we were animals? Or what would we do if, like two hundred years ago, we didn't have these things that we have now?'

The physical sensation of skin-to-skin contact with her newborn son and the ensuing comfort it provided led Trinity to the attachment parenting practices. Like Trinity, for all of the mothers in this study the sense of what is right is directly connected to what they believe to be natural.

I grasped early in the interview process that having the sensation that this “feels right” was important in the mothers’ parenting practices. During the last interviews, I shared my impressions about these sensations with the women and I was surprised to learn how important these sensations are. Trinity described this manifold as the center of her parenting practice, where it is “touching everything because it does affect my way of life.” Amanda explained that these sensations were the groundwork of her decision to have an attachment parenting practice:

Sensations of rightness was the first part, where, like, this is what we are gonna’ do, and this is how it is, and now it’s just been that way for so long, that it just, that it’s just our way of life now.

Similarly, Jennifer indicated that these sensation are part of “the foundation for why I attachment parent...they form our life in some ways.”

**Connections with one’s child(ren).** This manifold encompasses the mothers’ emphasis on developing meaningful relationships and emotional attachments to their child(ren). This manifold may seem applicable to most parenting styles and almost self-evident in attachment parenting, where specific parenting practices are followed because they are believed to promote strong bonds with children. Nonetheless, discussions around the development of relationships with children constituted substantial and often highly

emotional portions of our conversations. I believe the following comment from Trinity illustrates this emphasis:

A priority for me is to have a relationship with them. I don't want to be just their caretaker. A lot of people say 'Oh, you just keep them fed and warm, and you are doing the best that you can.' But you know, I really, I want to know them.

As this quote suggests, the mothers' emphasis on developing relationships with their children goes beyond a sense of obligation and care.

Many of the mothers commented that even when presented with an opportunity to socialize without their children or to simply to have some time alone, they prefer to be with their children. Trinity spoke about this when she told me about her mother's most recent visit:

My mom was here the other night, she was like 'Go out to eat. Leave the baby here with me. I will give him a bottle.' And it's just like, 'Mama you are trying to de-stress me but you are actually increasing my stress.' I just want to be peaceful here with the baby. It's actually more fun for me if I have an activity where I am watching my kids have fun, and I am having fun too. I don't particularly like doing things on my own, I actually prefer being around the kids.

While the desire to have relationships with one children may be present for most parents, this quote from Trinity (and similar stories from the other women) points to a difference in normative and attachment parenting. The mothers recounted numerous examples of having to convince others that they wanted to stay with their children because their friends and mothers could not understand this desire. In fact, Jennifer said: "I don't think my friends believe me. I think that they think, 'Oh, she has to be miserable. She needs some time out of the house.' And I just don't feel that." For these mothers, their desire to deeply connect with their children surmounts their other interests.

From my conversations with these women, I have come to believe that this interest in relationship is rooted in the mothers' joy, contentment, and self-fulfillment. In our second interview, Jennifer's face lit up as she told me:

This morning [Lane] just started making noises, kind of talking. He wakes up and is really ready to go, and I am not always. So, usually I take a few minutes and smile at him and laugh at him and that kind of thing. Then the cutest part is I will usually throw my phone to the end of the bed and he will crawl after it and then I will crawl to the end of the bed and get off, and then he will grab my hands and stand up. Then he smiles and gives me the biggest hug when he stands up. So it's really cute.

As she was speaking, Jennifer's joy was unmistakable; it was written across her face and evident in the tone of her voice. After I mentioned my observation to her, I asked Jennifer if there were other moments that bring her this kind of fulfillment. She told me about reading with Lane, being outside together, and playing with Lane in the house. I found it really interesting that everything she described were activities she does with her son. So, I asked her about things she does by herself that bring her that kind of joy. She responded:

I mean, there are things that I used to do that I wouldn't say that they brought me the same kind of joy. It used to be going on a date with Michael or when I was editing photos and I came across a photo that I just really loved and I was so happy that I captured it. But that doesn't make me feel that way anymore.

Similar to this conversation with Jennifer, it was not unusual for a woman to tell me that even simple, day-to-day interactions with her children has brought greater joy into her life than connections with other loved ones or those things she enjoyed doing before having kids.

The women were clear that although there are moments of incredible joy, raising children is not always easy and there also are moments of doubt and frustration. However, our discussions lead me to believe that placing emphasis on connecting with

their children—through moments of happiness and challenge—brought the women a sense of deep personal fulfillment. The following quote from Sara exemplifies this idea:

Right now being home is the most rewarding thing for me. There are days that I go absolutely insane and I am like, ‘I cannot believe I decided this was going to be a good idea, and I can’t believe that I decided that I could homeschool my children.’ But when I look overall at the moments and the quality of time that I have gotten to have with them, it makes sense for us and that’s been the most rewarding feeling, like I am doing what I feel is best for my family right now.

Sara was the only mother who homeschooled her children; however, all of the women talked about knowing that cultivating relationships with their children was best for their families, as well as themselves.

Some of the women felt that focusing on relationships would be the foundation of their parenting even before they had children. When I interviewed Amanda, she spoke not only about wanting to cultivate connections with her children but also about having children in order to have relationships with them:

We have kids because we want, I mean we invited our kids to our party. They are invited to the party. We are really celebratory people, like we are like constantly celebrating life. Like, when we get up on the days my husband has off, the music is playing louder, and we are out in the yard, and we will have mimosa if we want one or a bloody Mary or a midday beer. I mean the kids aren’t invited to that party, but you know life is a party for us. I feel like we are constantly celebrating, or we are making a big meal. I guess this house is about food, music, and libations kind of. And they are invited to all of that minus the libation.

I repeated this idea—inviting kids to the party of life—with Jennifer in a subsequent interview. She exclaimed:

I feel exactly like that! I mean, you know people always say, ‘We want to take this vacation before we have kids, or we want to do this before we have kids.’ And we didn’t feel that way. We wanted to take him with us on the vacation. We want him to experience it with us.

However, for some of the women, the depth of their desire to connect with their children came as a surprise. For example, before having kids Trinity explained that she most enjoyed reading and literature and was pursuing a graduate degree:

Before you have a baby you just can't know what the feeling is. There is no way to even imagine it. When the baby came out, came out on my chest straight from delivery, and I heard him crying and I would sing to him. Just like falling in love with him. And then I ended up actually finishing out my semester as a teacher and resigning and resigning from my graduate program too. I decided that was not what I wanted to do with my life, because as passionate as I was about English and literature, I was more passionate about having time as a mom. I just can't see myself being that person anymore. Sitting there reading for hours somewhere else. You know? I just wanted to have time with the kids.

For all of the women, organizing their lives to have time with their children was a choice. Most have at least one college degree and all had successful careers before having children. While they all spoke of picking up their professional interests again in the future—after their children were no longer at home throughout the day—they recognized their decision to be with their children as a day-to-day choice that they value.

In their efforts to connect with their children, the women explained that they have not forsaken their personal interests. In many ways, the mothers have built relationships with their children around the activities that they enjoyed before having kids. Amanda explained:

Riley is doing most of these things with me. If I am slicing carrots, she is eating carrots or playing with mixing cups. Or, we will make banana bread together and she will dump the stuff all over the floor, but then we just do it again and sweep it up together....These are the types of things that I did with my grandfather. He really involved me growing up with him, making elderberry wine and seeing the balloon blow up. Or the beer that was bubbling and that is cool to kids, so it doesn't necessarily have to be an adult activity, it can be a kid activity too. I think it just builds relationships and it's also, I am just really into learning things.

Coming into the women's homes to conduct the interviews, I was often able to watch the women interact and engage in these types of activities with their children. The youngest



children were often in their mothers' arms as the women washed dishes, cooked, or played, while the older children were moving dishes, fetching bread, or laying out paints. The mothers often initiated the activities, which were not focused on entertaining the child. Rather, the mothers used the activities that they enjoy—making coffee, watering the garden, or chatting with another adult—as an opportunity to interact with and engage their children.

**Evolution of parenting practice.** This manifold encompasses the unfolding, developing, or working out of one's parenting philosophy and practices. Mothers used various forms of the word “evolve” (e.g. “evolved,” “evolving,” “evolution”) to describe how their parenting practices had developed and how they anticipate these practices will continue to change in the future. The women also talked about an evolution in their general understandings of what it means to parent.

Many of the women in the study talked about how their participation in specific parenting practices is very different from what they imagined it might be like, particularly in regards to co-sleeping. In the contemporary United States, co-sleeping is perceived as dangerous and many believe that co-sleeping is “counterproductive to [children's] developmental growth...from a dependent, emotionally attached infant to an independent, psychologically separated child” (Stein et al. 2001, p. 873). In one of our interviews, Sara recalled how her negative views on co-sleeping have significantly changed since she had her first child:

When we first had Sage I had some friends who were practicing attachment parenting. They practiced what they called a family bed and they planned that all of their children would sleep with them for forever, as far as I understood it. And I thought it was insane. I mean absolutely insane. Now, we have more children in our bed now than we did when she was a baby.

As Sara's parenting experience increased, what had once seemed insane became a common parenting practice in her home. Amanda also reflected on changes in her thoughts about co-sleeping:

It has definitely evolved. I probably wouldn't have thought I would have slept, kept our baby in our bed. I kind of thought when I was pregnant with Riley, maybe for the first three months, and then it just worked so well. You know some people call it lazy parenting but we just think of it as parenting, and it was just so much easier that way. I didn't want to get up in the middle of the night over and over and over again. And she was happy. We were just all happy.

For both women, their personal experiences with co-sleeping normalized the commonly questioned sleeping practice in their families' daily parenting.

In this discussion, Amanda mentioned the phrase "lazy parenting." Many attachment parents refer to their parenting style as "lazy parenting." This term stems from the attachment parenting founders. Dr. Willane Sears noted that his wife, "Martha [Sears,] has dubbed night nursing as the 'lazy mom's option.' She has slept with and night nursed most of our babies and still felt rested the next day" (AskDrSears, 2013c, para. 3). The other mothers I interviewed also used this term, often as a method of negotiating between their co-sleeping practice and the wider discourse of normative parenting, which depicts co-sleeping as deviant. However, Amanda's comment highlights how the term may actually be deprecating the attachment parenting practice because "lazy" has negative connotations in the United States, where productivity is greatly valued. While attachment parenting practices are not standard in the United States and different than what Amanda had anticipated her own parenting to involve, her thinking about parenting has changed. For Amanda, attachment parenting has simply become parenting.

Similar to Sara and Amanda's evolution in thinking about co-sleeping practices, Trinity explained how her ideas about parenting have drastically changed from when she was pregnant:

It's taken me years to really grow into what I believe. I read some horrible book called *Babywise* and I was thinking of the baby as a task. I wasn't thinking of it as a relationship or somebody that I just was totally enveloped with and wanted to be with.

The book she referred to, *On Becoming Babywise* (Ezzo & Bucknam, 2012), is a popular parenting book, particularly in the South, which combines normative parenting principles with Christian values. In the introduction, the author's state:

It is our opinion that the achievements of healthy growth, contented babies, good naps, and playful waketimes, as well as the gift of nighttime sleep, are too valuable to be left to chance. They need to be parent-directed and parent-managed. These are attainable conclusions, because infants are born with the *capacity* to achieve the outcomes, and equally important, the *need* to achieve them....The Appendices sections of this book contains, charts, worksheets, and additional information relating to infant care...[these] should never be considered less important than the general reading, but only of *different importance*...The principles contained within these pages can help parents develop workable strategies that meet the needs of their babies and the rest of the family.

From these introductory statements, I can see how these ideas about parenting appealed to Trinity's pre-parenting thinking. With numerous charts, worksheets, and workable strategies that promote newborn's capacities to achieve, this book would be a valuable resource for people who view parenting as a "task" that needs to be accomplished. Trinity went on to explain:

So when I read *Babywise*, I was like, 'Yeah, this will work.' We tried to do it the first couple of weeks and I was just in tears, 'This isn't working. My baby doesn't follow this formula.' The first night we accidentally let our son sleep with us, we slept a four-hour stretch. We were like, 'This is incredible. I think we need to be doing this.' We just fell into co-sleeping and then I started researching stuff online. I had big ideas about what I was going to do with my baby. It's totally different now.

Trinity's accidental success with co-sleeping combined with her new understanding of parenting as a relationship (rather than a task) caused her to try different ways of parenting, which led to her attachment parenting practice.

Many of the mothers spoke about an evolution in their understanding about what parenting—the act of raising children—means. Jennifer discussed her thinking:

Before you have kids, you are like, 'Oh, I don't want my house to look like it has been taken over by kids,' and 'I don't want it to look like this!' or 'I don't want it to look like that!' Now, I want our house to look lived in. I want it to look like the kid lives here and I want him to feel like he is integrated in the space and not you know pushed to a room. People always talk about 'You need a playroom. You need a playroom.' I don't want a playroom. I want our living room to be the playroom. I want to be able to play wherever we are because I feel like he is part of our family.

Similar to Jennifer's realization that connecting with and including their child was more important than other things that had once seemed important, such as how her house looked, Sara reflected on how her parenting ideals have evolved:

There was an NPR thing where they were like call in and let us know your story. 'Are you good at multi-tasking? What do you do when you are multi-tasking?' I have always been super proud that I can multi-task. So I called in and I told this experience about how I went to go pick up Sage from pre-school, and I was wearing heels and my work clothes, and I had Rowan in my sling and she wanted to be pushed on the swing set. So we are on the playground, in mulch, and I am in heels, and I was nursing him, while swinging her, and I was so proud. It was really cool to hear myself on the radio, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so cool! I have totally made it as a mother.' Then, the very next person that came on was an older gentlemen and he said, 'I have worked really hard at not multi-tasking in my life. I choose one task and I do it well, and then I move on to the next one.' And when I heard that I was like, 'Why do you have to come on after I talked about everything that I have done?' Because it completely made sense, that when your focus is all scattered it is very difficult to even enjoy the things that you can check off your list. And so that has been something that I have worked on.

This quote from Sara emphasizes the role self-awareness plays in the evolution of parenting. As I listened to this story, I thought about Sara's capacity to consider the applicability of another's differing comments in relationship to an area of her life of

which she is particularly proud. This capacity seems to allow the women to continually reflect on their parenting and move in directions that they feel will enhance their practice. Through my conversations with the mothers in this study, it seems to me that the women's awareness of the changes in their parenting practices and thinking is connected to their conscious development of a parenting practice that resists normative parenting.

**Conscious parenting practice.** The name for this manifold was pulled from the email group where participants were recruited for this study: Athens Conscious Parents. This group describes itself in the following way: "We come from a variety of parenting philosophies, but all of us share the desire to parent peacefully and consciously—reflecting on what is best for our families, our children, and our planet." (Athens Conscious Parents, 2013, para. 1). Speaking about consciousness, Sara explained: "In attachment parenting, consciousness is the whole purpose of parenting. It's not just like one part of parenting, it overlaps every aspect." This manifold is expressive of the mothers' deliberate act of resisting normative parenting in the United States, which involves the thoughtful design of family life and self-reflection. As Jennifer put it: "Attachment parenting is different from the way most people do things."

Amanda and Jennifer both knew when they were pregnant that they would be developing a conscious parenting practice. Jennifer explained:

I always thought I would be a good mom, and I read stuff even before I was pregnant about being a mom and I knew what kind of mom I wanted to be.... I knew kind of the parenting style that I wanted to have.

For Amanda, conscious parenting was less about the style and more about how she wanted to parent:

It's not like I am trying to be this attachment parenting guru. When I found out about attachment parenting I already had this type of parenting in mind, before I

knew it had a name. It wasn't like I just discovered attachment parenting and was like 'Oh, I want to do this.' It just always felt like the way I wanted to do things, and then I found out it had a name through the internet.

Both of these women had a distinct idea of the way they wanted to parent before they had children. In contrast, Trinity and Sara's conscious parenting practices developed since becoming parents as they sought out information about attachment parenting philosophies and saw positive results in their parenting practices.

Whenever the women began their attachment parenting practices, they were all aware that their parenting style resists normative parenting and wider cultural beliefs.

Illustrating this self-awareness, Amanda said:

I am without a doubt the most radical person as far as parenting in leaning towards attachment parenting side of things that I know. I can't think of anybody.... I guarantee you there have been people that have had conversations about the way Jason and I parent. Definitely. Because we are definitely on the extreme, I guess even kind of parenting liberally.

Through their attachment parenting practices, the women were consciously resisting the widespread power of normative parenting, a power they perceived many parents to be unaware of in the United States. Trinity's comments highlight this idea:

Probably the majority [of mothers] are making decisions out of what they see around them, what their moms and grandmas are telling them. There is a lot of people in America that believe formula is better than breast milk. It is just engrained in our culture somehow, with all of the marketing and advertising. It's just really sad. It's like the whole consumer culture is just trying to find something that we can make people be dependent on buying. I feel like that is part of what is ruining or has ruined our parenting culture.

Sara described it like this:

The stereotypical American parenting is more didactic, there is a right and a wrong to do things and a right and a wrong way to live, and only one way is right. And any other way, people seem to be fearful of it or judgmental or both. One of the biggest things that always concerns me about Americans is a lack of awareness.

Although the women were consciously resisting normative parenting, they clarified that they were not criticizing other mothers for their lack of awareness. Trinity emphasized:

I don't think that moms are selfish who don't breastfeed, I think our society does not support them, the way they need to be supported. I mean the fact that we only get a six-week maternity leave. That's ridiculous! It's taboo to breastfeed in public, or 'If you are breastfeeding, you are doing something sexual.' Nobody can look and talk to you while you are breastfeeding. Even if you are covered, some people are like 'Oh, I can't even talk to you.' And then just the culture around it, it's just not seen as normal.

As this quote from Trinity suggests, the mothers in this study noticed ways that larger social and cultural forces impacted mothers' choices in the United States. They were clear that they had made a conscious decision to parent differently—to parent with an awareness that they believe is absent in normative parenting. Outside of parenting, these conversations were also indicative of the mothers' interest in doing things differently in many other aspects of their lives as well.

**Way of life.** This manifold exemplifies the mothers' manners of living beyond parenting that reflects their personal values and attitudes, which resist normative lifestyles. I did not immediately comprehend the importance of this manifold as it relates to the interconnected meaning that coming into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. The importance of this manifold was brought to light through interviewing the transcriptionist. After transcribing most of the interviews in this study, the transcriptionist—herself a mother of a three year old—told me that she was interested in some of the specific parenting practices of attachment parenting and that by listening to the interviews she “learned that [attachment parenting] is just such a nurturing way to parent.” However, she also said:

I don't know if I would consider myself as an attachment parent.... I think it's a complete lifestyle...not just co-sleeping, breastfeeding, things like that. I could relate in some aspects but some of the things they said was just like, 'Oh, wow! That is totally not what I would have said.' Attachment parenting is about food...and having gender-neutral toys...and the whole shot thing with the doctors...and another thing, they do a lot of research.

Through her comments, I became aware of something that I had known but had not realized was important to the phenomenon: Like their conscious parenting practices, the mothers' way of life deviates from and often resists aspects of a normative North American lifestyle.

In one interview, Amanda stated: "It's not just about parenting for me; it's about life. I had this life before they were born, and I will continue it when they leave the house. So it's not just a parenting thing." For Amanda, this life began quite sometime before her children were born and since her school days she has been conscious of how normative ways of living and thinking perpetuate discrimination:

I had a really hard time with my peers. The boys would make fun of people and they were really into talking about how girls looked good. It always disgusted me. They would say that certain males were gay, and I, I just was always different. And I was not raised by people who made me different by any means. My mom was a stay-at-home country club mom that played tennis, and my dad is a banker. I was just always different. I would get upset and get pulled out into the hall by my teachers because I would want to cry when they were bullying other people. I never understood why they were just mean. I just have always been different.

Amanda's story reflects how each mother in this study resisted accepted ways of thinking and living. Jennifer stated it like this:

I would say it's not just parenting that makes me different. It's a lot of seeing the way people— in our country especially— do things and view things, and not necessarily wanting to be one of those people.



In talking with the women, I made a connection between this resistance to normative lifestyles and the mothers' interest in research. Trinity's explanation highlights this connection:

I just try to research myself and come up with my own ideas.... I am a nurse and you know I do believe in evidence to a certain extent. You can't do a blind randomized trial for everything. In my mind, if people were to say something to me, I could say 'Well, okay, there is research that shows otherwise.' Since I gave up dairy for my baby, I have just been eating vegan, but I don't tell that to people. I just feel like if you tell people what you think, they will start saying, 'You can't. That's not normal. That's not natural. You can't survive off that.' All of that kind of stuff. And I did the research and I was like 'Okay, the only thing I could possibly lack is vitamin B12.' Which I am taking a supplement for. I try to think about 'What would you eat in nature?' You wouldn't be eating all of this beef every day, or all of this cheese and that kind of stuff. It's gonna be frustrating trying to live against such an engrained culture, but I think that hopefully things will change with time and we will all become, our society will become, more responsible and thoughtful and conscious about the decisions we are making.

Trinity believed that people's beliefs about nutrition are engrained, as opposed to factually based. Rather than accepting others' assertions that veganism is "not natural," Trinity researched the health impacts of a vegan lifestyle. Like Trinity, all of the mothers in this study examined research reports and findings while resisting standard, engrained ways of living.

The connection between research and questioning normative parenting practices is highlighted in this discussion with Amanda, when she recounted how she came to the decision to continue drinking while she was pregnant:

I don't just read CNN's synopsis of some research. I go to the actual journal and read it. I read about drinking, breastfeeding, and drinking while pregnant. I have drunk wine. I have wine. I did not just look at Good Morning America's report on these studies that show that a couple of glasses of wine don't hurt babies. I read actual journals and read them intensely and talked to friends that had wine while pregnant. Maybe the report would come out on CNN and I would see which journal did it and then I would read the actual study because I want to read the whole thing, not just the snippets to get a news story. I would like to get the real

thing. With the drinking thing, like, I say ‘Who paid for this study?’ I know that someone pays for studies.

Similarly, Jennifer spoke about her skepticism towards research that reifies normative ways of living and thinking:

I was always skeptical of all of the other stuff. I mean you clean something and your hands are completely dried out afterwards. That kind of stuff bothers me, to think about what you are breathing in and you read the stories about the people using those Swiffer’s and it killing their dogs. I can research that stuff to death. I already have my mind set in a certain way and it doesn’t take a lot for me to say, ‘Okay, we don’t need to use that anymore.’ I do the same thing with hair products and all that kind of stuff.

The mothers’ need to question normative practices and to research alternative points of view seem to enable their ways of living that resist normative lifestyles in the contemporary United States.

Like their parenting, this manifold is dependent on the mothers’ sensations of rightness. Along these lines, Jennifer recounted:

I will research something until I feel like it’s okay and then I am done researching. It is just a feeling of being okay with it. There is not any more research that I can do that is going to tell me something that is going to change my mind.

I was intrigued by the relationship between conducting research and relying on “a feeling of being okay.” While the women in this study reported spending a great deal of time researching issues for themselves, they also rely on these feelings of “being okay.” Once they experienced a sensation of rightness, it seemed to provide them with confidence to follow their own ways—in parenting and life.

**Summary of embryonic cleavage.** These five manifolds (sensations of rightness, development of relationship, evolution of parenting practice, conscious parenting practice, and way of life), understood as embryonic cleavage, illustrate the constant

motion of and growth in the early years of an attachment parenting practice. Drawing on the metaphor of a single cell dividing into many cells, this metaphor emphasizes the interconnectedness of these aspects of an attachment parenting practice. *Sensations of rightness* exist in all other aspects of a mother's attachment parenting practices, informing her decision-making process. Likewise emphasizing *connections with one's child(ren)* is important to each aspect of her parenting practices and, as a core principle of her parenting philosophy, highlights her resistance to normative parenting philosophies. *Evolution of parenting practice* touches all aspects of a mother's attachment parenting practice, occurring as she becomes aware of some new insight and as her children grow. Equally embedded in her parenting is her *conscious parenting practice* and resistance of normative parenting practices, a need which seems to stem from her *sensations of rightness*. A mothers' *alternative way of life* is intimately connected to each of these aspects of her parenting practice, motivated by the same awareness that led her to embrace an alternative parenting style.

For each mother, the founding manifolds—those manifolds upon which others are founded (c.f. Sokolowski, 2000)—differ, as would places of overlap, where manifolds meet and generate meaning-making in mothers' parenting. For example, one mother may found her evolution of parenting practice upon sensations of rightness, while another may found her evolution of parenting practice upon connections with one's children. Further variation would exist from moment-to-moment for each mother. The metaphor of embryonic cleavage accentuates the phenomenon, highlighting that at a given moment any number of manifolds may contribute to mothers' meaning-making, be it these five, only two, or many more.

## Amniotical Geste

During this research, I noticed that mothers made use of similar strategies to negotiate between their own parenting practices and the wider context of normative parenting in the United States. I draw on the function of amniotic fluid to describe these strategies. A growing fetus floats in amniotic fluid, which protects the fetus by providing cushioning, allows for fetal movement, and promotes fetal growth of the muscular and skeletal structures. Amniotic fluid envelops the fetus and is necessary to sustain the fetus' life. Drawing on these functions of amniotic fluid, I created the term *amniotical geste*. By transforming the word "amniotic" to "amniotical," I signify a movement from the literal, physical world to the subtle and complex world of human experience. Geste means "deed," "gesture," or "deportment." Once geste is combined with amniotical, the term *amniotical geste* utilizes the capacity of an adjective to invoke in the reader (or listener) a deeper understanding of an author's use of a noun. My use of amniotical geste is an invitation to readers to imagine mothers' negotiational strategies within the metaphor of gestation. This language captures the ways that mothers' amniotical gestes protect their parenting practices, cushion them (and their families) from external criticisms, and provide space for evolution in their parenting practices. Mothers' amniotical gestes enable their alternative parenting practices to exist within the wider context of normative parenting.

Developing effective amniotical gestes is important to the successful continuation of an attachment parenting practice. Mothers' face frequent critique because they are engaging in practices that challenge social norms, as well as self-doubt when departing

from the rules and social expectations that previously constructed their own understandings of parenting. As Amanda explained:

When you have your first [child] and you are trying this alternative method, especially from what your parents did, you are second guessing yourself a little bit. If someone were to say anything, you would feel it inside and think, 'Am I doing the right thing? Am I spoiling them? Everyone keeps saying I am spoiling them.'

The mothers in this study developed ways of navigating the power matrices formed by the normative and alternative discourses of parenting, which are implicit in the mothers' interactions with strangers, acquaintances, friends, family, and their medical communities. The following amniotical gestes were exposed as particularly meaningful in this navigation process: avoidance, deliberate crafting of language, and articulated diffusion.

**Avoidance.** One of the ways that mothers' negotiate within the wider context of normative parenting is encompassed in avoidance. Avoidance refers to amniotical gestes that mothers use to prevent direct confrontation between themselves and others who are vested in normative parenting. Trinity explained how she uses avoidance:

Especially around other nurses [I work with], it's just like '[Co-sleeping] isn't safe.' Even in the hospital. Like when you don't want your baby in the nursery, and you don't want your baby in the bassinet, you just want him to sleep on you. And [the nurses] talk about those women. They would be like, 'Oh my God! I just walked in and the baby was asleep on her and she was asleep. I'm just so scared.' I mean, I have heard them talk and when they are talking I just, I don't say anything, I just think 'Whatever.' So, yeah, just learning to keep my opinion to myself.

Trinity's use of silence allowed her to protect her parenting practice, as well as her position within her work structures. Similar examples from the other participants has lead me to believe that mothers often choose to not talk about their beliefs and practices with people who they do not know on a personal level.

Beyond keeping quiet, mothers also spoke about times that they utilized physical avoidance to circumvent situations where they may be made to feel uncomfortable around those outside of the attachment parenting practice. Amanda spoke about her use of this amniotical geste around her family:

My aunt and cousin were here the other day and I didn't want to breastfeed her in front of them because it just seemed, like, I don't know, they just seemed so uptight. They ended up saying they didn't care but I feel like they are probably the type of people that when they walk out the door are like, 'I can't believe she is still breastfeeding that baby.' Maybe they don't say that. I know they at least think it. I mean, I am not trying to make anybody uncomfortable. Like I said, I am not trying to be a breastfeeding champion. I am just trying to give my kids nutrition.

The women also spoke about going to the car or another room to nurse. In our conversations, the mothers explained that avoidance enables them to protect themselves from criticism while continuing to provide nutrition and comfort for their children.

However, when I asked the mothers to tell me more about this way of negotiating the normative discourse of parenting, many explained their use of avoidance is a method of respecting other mothers' decisions to parent differently. Jennifer told me:

Generally speaking, I am maybe a little bit careful of who I talk to and how I talk. Although, I am relatively open with anyone if they ask but I am not one of those people who likes to just shout it out that 'This is what I am doing. This is what you should do too.' I don't ever want anyone to feel like I am judging the way they do things and because attachment parenting is different from the way most people do things.

Similarly, Amanda talked about it this way:

The majority of my girlfriends did not meet their goal in breastfeeding. And succeed is a scary word because you have to be so careful about how you talk to women who didn't breastfeed as long as they wanted to or were told that their milk supply was too low. They go into it and they don't think they are going to put their kid on formula and they think that they are going to have a natural birth. They want to do these things but then they don't and so I try not to talk about it too much. Because, I am telling you, back in the day when we were in high school and stuff it was boys, and clothes, and hair, and nail polish but now it's birthing,

babies, and feeding babies, and cloth diapering babies that offends women. So I try to be careful. I don't want to make enemies.

Such comments have left me with the impression that protecting other mothers' feelings is as important to these women as sheltering themselves from critiques stemming from normative parenting.

**Deliberate crafting of language.** Drawing on Foucault, feminist scholars have considered the ways that people use discursive resources to construct and reconstruct their gendered identities (c.f. Holmes & Marra, 2010). Each of the mothers in this study spoke about the ways they deliberately craft their use of language when talking about their parenting practices with those who may be unfamiliar with or unsupportive of attachment parenting. Mothers mentioned that this deliberate use of language allows them to reconstruct their mothering identities in ways that seem most appropriate for the context and audience.

Trinity explained the strategies she has developed:

People are always like, 'You look rested.' And I was just like, 'Oh. Well, I kind of cheat. I sleep with the baby.' It makes them feel a little better if you say it that way. Like, 'I know. I am not doing it right.' I try to kind of meet people where they are. Like figure out where they are and just kind of, maybe, say little things just to feel them out, and then discuss it from there.

Trinity's use of the word "cheat" allows her to place herself within the normative parenting discourse while assessing the listener's response. If she receives a positive response, such as "That's what we did too," Trinity may speak more openly about her co-sleeping practice. However, when she receives a negative response, such as "But that's so dangerous," Trinity has learned "to just keep my opinion to myself and just don't say anything."

Amanda, being more apt to tell the world about her attachment parenting practices through social media and comfortable addressing people's opinions about her parenting, uses this amniotical geste in a different way. We talked about the way she selects specific words to craft a statement that people would find some agreement with, altering those words for each intended audience:

For some reason my father-in-law thought it would be really appropriate to ask, in front of all of the family that was visiting in the living room, when we got home from the hospital, 'So you guys didn't circumcise him?' I just didn't understand why we needed to talk about his penis, we weren't talking about anybody else's penis in the room. They were just, like, shocked. And we responded, 'God made Ryland perfect to begin with. We didn't need to do this violent—' we didn't say violent. We were a lot more, you know, understanding.

I commented, "It sounds like you kind of chose those words to craft a statement that people would find some agreement with." Amanda agreed: "Right. Because we are not, we are not heavy churchgoers like most of our family members." When talking with her husband about circumcision, Amanda dropped the religious focus she had employed with her father-in-law and chose to focus on the pain circumcision causes instead:

I Googled a circumcision video because I thought, 'You need to see what it looks like when a little boy gets circumcised and you tell me after you have loved this little girl right here that you could let her go through that or a boy go through that.'

Like Trinity, Amanda uses deliberate crafting of language to position herself (or her practices) in relation to the listener; however, Amanda is not trying to ascertain her listener's position so much as to appeal to their position.

Beyond simply interacting with others who exist within the normative discourse, the mothers must also contend with institutionalized power and legalized policy. Sara told me about her use of deliberate crafting of language, which she developed to help



alleviate her concerns over being reported to child services for some of her parenting practices:

Our pediatrician knows about our home birth and she was able to say, ‘Just so you know, it’s not something that you should tell people because they could call child services.’ She’s been excellent. So, I am careful about anything that I put on Facebook. On Facebook it is obvious that I had a homebirth but I always paraphrase it with, ‘I didn’t make it to the hospital on time,’ or ‘The midwife didn’t make it.’ Just because if ever there was a situation [with child services], I don’t want to have this weird paper trail, and I have like all of my prenatal records and everything, just so if there ever was a question.

The deliberate crafting of the language Sara uses to describe her planned homebirth enables her to position herself as participating in normative parenting when she feels it is necessary to protect herself from the legal policy constructed to reinforce this discourse. This story also speaks to the discourse’s omnipresent power and highlights the privilege and power possessed by the pediatrician, who (without strong justification<sup>2</sup>) instilled in Sara the fear of losing her parental rights.

**Articulated diffusion.** Family interactions are perhaps the most emotionally charged interactions for mothers. Some of the greatest family conflicts occur between a woman and her own mother. Perhaps these interactions are most challenging because they reflect the conflict between normative and attachment parenting discourses against the backdrop of a deep love between the women. This idea seemed to be encompassed when Trinity told me about her mother’s opinions about Trinity’s attachment parenting practices:

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<sup>2</sup> In my own research of laws in the state of Georgia, a homebirth is not illegal; however, midwives are not licensed to practice at homebirths. In fact, the State of Georgia Department of Human Services provides forms for parents to document a homebirth and obtain a birth certificate (SOS, 2013). In an informal conversation with an Athens-Clarke County Department of Children and Family Services social worker, I was told that any report of suspected child abuse and neglect must be investigated but that a homebirth does not constitute child abuse or neglect.

She thinks that it wears me out. She's like, 'Sometimes you just gotta put the baby in the crib and just let 'em cry and just leave 'em.' You know, like, 'Go do what you have to do.' You know, and, 'I just don't want you to be worn out. I just don't want you to be unhappy' or whatever. But my theory on it is the baby cries less, and I know the baby better. I think initially I was more sensitive of my mom's criticism, but now I have just realized that we are two really different people.

Each family has different dynamics and the mothers with the most parenting experience (like Trinity) commented on the learning curve required to figure out how to navigate those dynamics, as well as the varying dynamics of their extended family and in-laws. Sara explained:

I know how my relatives, both my husband's and mine, will respond in different situations. And so I can diffuse it by knowing myself how to respond to make it not a big deal. Because I know it's just not this huge calamity and it's just about reactions.

Understanding that negative family dynamics are often about how one reacts has enabled the mothers to diffuse potentially volatile situations. Jennifer revealed that her mother is generally supportive of her parenting practices; however, Jennifer's mother is not supportive of extended breastfeeding. Jennifer told me how she negotiates interactions with her mother around breastfeeding:

Typically I try to avoid conflict, but last time she was here she asked how much longer I was going to nurse him. She has asked that like so many times. Finally, I just told her 'At least until he is two.' And then I just left the room. It wasn't like I left the room abruptly or anything like that, but I was like in the middle of something and so I just left the room. I try to say things like 'Have you ever researched this? Do you know why I say that?' and that kind of stuff, but she is not that big of a researcher herself. So she just is basing it off of what she knows or cultural norms and that kind of thing and it's just hard to argue with that. I don't want to necessarily argue with that and I am not that interested in changing her mind about it. I would rather just keep the peace.

As I reflected on this story, it seemed to me that Jennifer was able to state her opposition to her mothers' position within the normative discourse while also diffusing the

possibility of conflict by opening physical distance between herself and her mother, which gave both women space to compose their emotions.

Another area of familial tension mentioned by the mothers was related to gift-giving, which may have been of immediate relevance to the women as the first round of interviews was conducted around Christmastime. The mothers spoke about explaining their desire for fewer gifts (and specific types of gifts) to the grandparents, who often participated in and enjoyed the consumerist culture of grandparenting. While any parent may have particular ideas around gift-giving, this issue is salient within attachment parenting; some of the parenting tips provided by Attachment Parenting International (2012b) include: “Put people before things,” “Avoid over-scheduling,” and “Spend time just being together” (para. 5, 7). These tips support the belief that providing children with extensive goods moves focus away from cultivation of relationships.

Amanda spoke about how she and her husband addressed their decision to not give their children toys that require batteries with their parents:

Last year, one set of grandparents gave her this plastic noisemaker push toy. She would get really mad at it and start screaming and just act crazy. My husband, Jason, told them before Christmas we are trying to really raise them with dirt and slingshots. So this past Christmas, they did an amazing job with toys. They actually, and I think it helps knowing her because she is just so quirky and so independent and is an old soul, and so they got her a radio flyer wheel barrow for Christmas. There are pictures that they see of her doing gardening and that was really cool, so I think things are on the up.

By talking about their feelings with their parents and encouraging them to notice the toys their children play with, Amanda and Jason felt that they had enabled their parents to reflect on the unintentional consequences of giving the noisemaker. Such comments from the mothers caused me to consider how the mothers’ articulated diffusion through attention to having respectful conversations with their family members allows them to

build positive familial relationships and minimize negative dynamics around their parenting choices.

**Summary of amniotical geste.** Mothers' amniotical gestes enable alternative parenting practices to exist within the wider context of normative parenting by protecting and cushioning the practice from external criticisms, while also providing room for the practice to grow. Mothers may utilize one of these amniotical gestes (avoidance, deliberate crafting of language, and articulated diffusion) more than others, and their usage may change over time. Similar to the reduction in amniotic fluid in later pregnancy, as a mother's attachment parenting practice grows, becoming more refined and articulated, the need for amniotical geste is lessened but never entirely absent. As Sara mentioned:

I have got a ton of support [in Athens] and a ton of support through my parents. And when it comes to different places in Georgia, I have support or I don't have support. With the first baby it bothered me, but by the third baby it doesn't bother me anymore.

This insight led me to consider umbilical connections.

### **Umbilical Connections**

During pregnancy, the umbilical cord houses vascular lifelines that are critical to a fetus' development, enabling the transportation of oxygen, nutrients, and antibodies to the fetus' bloodstream, as well as conveyance of the fetus' waste products to the mothers' bloodstream through the placenta. Utilizing gestation as metaphor, umbilical connections nourish a mothers' attachment parenting practice through familial support, friendship, expert advice, and positive social messages, while also permitting a mother to release unsupportive relationships and negativity. During pregnancy as the fetus grows, so does the umbilical cord, which begins from within the same cellular structures as the embryo

and the developing placenta. Likewise, umbilical connections seem to grow from within a mothers' developing attachment parenting practice. At the beginning of a mothers' attachment parenting practice, she may have developed few umbilical connections; however, as her practice becomes further developed and better articulated, her umbilical connections grow stronger and more plentiful.

**Cultivating nourishing relationships.** For the mothers in this study, a component of nourishing an attachment parenting practice is cultivating networks of support. These networks often included mom's groups, church groups, and social media. For example, all of the mothers in this study are members of Athens Conscious Parents (ACP), an online listserve for like-minded parents in the Athens area. By subscribing to Athens Conscious Parenting, these women have sought out community with other mothers whose parenting practices stem from similar beliefs. Each mother mentioned that she uses this group to get information, seek out support, and develop community. Sara explained:

As soon as we got to Athens, we started looking around for parenting groups. And as soon as we got here, like within the first week, we had gone to the library and as moms were passing by, I was like, 'Hey are you part of any kind of parenting group that I can join?' And that is where I met my really good friend now. So within the first week, we were plugged into the ACP. The ACP group has been really great if we have a question. We have used them as a really good resource.

In addition to gaining support and community from these networks, the women also used these networks to support and encourage other mothers in the attachment parenting community. Jennifer explained how her playgroup "talks a lot about books that we read and resources that we find helpful." These umbilical connections increase the mothers' sense of belonging and inclusion, reaffirming the viability of the attachment parenting practice.

The women also spoke about developing philosophically aligned friendships with like-minded mothers. Sara spoke about such a friendship:

Like one of my best friends [who also parents this way] I actually met as a mama also. When we hang out, we overlap everything. We let the kids run wild, we are usually outside, and then we figure out how to do some sort of craft, and get some sort of dinner made for the next week, so that we can put it in each other's freezers. It is always very productive when mamas get together, it seems.

Jennifer told me about reconnecting with a friend from high school because of their similar parenting practices:

One of my friends, she was a friend from high school, and then we lost touch. We got in touch with each other and, we were very different in school, but we are very similar in our parenting styles now. It's really interesting. We got back together while I was still pregnant, and her daughter was six months old.

Amanda also mentioned how women who are interested in attachment parenting have sought out her friendship and support:

I get a lot of—I talk to a lot of girls, who I am friends with, throughout the day who are learning about different ways to do things. Like, yesterday I got a text message about changing over to cloth diapers. I just get lots of like, 'What did you do?' or 'What would you do?' type questions, because I am on the far end of things.

The mothers explained that they call these friends, who also practice attachment parenting, about their parenting challenges. This stood out to me because most were adamant about not asking for parenting advice from other people but in the case of these like-minded friends, the women trust that their friends' advice will not contradict their own parenting values. In addition to supporting one another, these connections also reproduce attachment parenting practices and values through the counseling of friends and mentoring new mothers.

Familial relationships provided another source of nourishment and support for some but not all of the mothers in this study. Unlike the cultivation of supportive

networks and friendships, these relationships were not built off of a common parenting philosophy. From our conversations, I understood that the women most appreciated their family's willingness to hear about parenting challenges without judging or offering unwanted advice. Sara described this encouragement:

Both of our parents are really supportive, like really supportive. There have been times that they have given advice that we did not want to follow and they were like, 'This is your family. You guys are ultimately responsible for your family. So, this is what we would do, this is what we did, but whatever you guys want to do, just let us know how to do that when the kids come over.'

Similarly, Amanda, whose own mother has died, talked about her appreciation for her mother-in-law: "She is not this advice thrower outer. She is not like that. She is more supportive. She is non-judgmental and just amazing."

Additionally, the women expressed their appreciation of family members whose help enabled them to parent in the ways that made the most sense to them, even if those family members were not supportive of the attachment parenting practice. For example, Amanda talked about how her mother-in-law was willing to help Amanda despite their different ideas about parenting so that Amanda could bring Lane when she had to photograph a wedding:

I don't know that my in-laws really get our style of parenting because they were so different. But his mom tries really hard to understand and she is pretty good about it. We shot a wedding when Lane was two months old and we took Lane with us and my mother-in-law went.

During our three interviews together, Trinity often spoke about how much she struggled with her family's negative opinion of her parenting practices. In our second interview, Trinity told me that she had argued with her sister who had moved in since Trinity's recent separation from her husband:

I was like, ‘Since you are living with me and you are staying at my house, can you just respect my opinion, and uphold the way I want to parent? You know, if he is crying you pick him up. That is all I ask.’ You know? She was like, ‘Okay, fine.’

In our final interview, Trinity reflected: “My sister that moved in with me has been a big help.” Despite their different perspectives on parenting, the women appreciated their families’ willingness to help care for their children. While family relationships often did not provide the community and sense of affirmation that the women cultivated through supportive networks and friendships, the women valued and cultivated these positive familial relationships.

**Discarding toxic relationships.** For the mothers in this study, another component of nourishing an attachment parenting practice is reducing relationships with people who are unsupportive. Trinity and Sara both talked about their decisions to find a new pediatrician after former pediatricians were critical of their parenting practices. Jennifer explained:

During pregnancy, I was so much in charge of my own care. The midwives would give me their suggestions and their professional opinions on things but ultimately it was my decision. And when I made a decision they were supportive, or at least understanding, of that. I wanted that in a pediatrician because while they are his doctor, I am still his mom. And I think that a mother's instincts can account for a lot.

Trinity reflected on her decision this way:

We switched pediatricians. The first guy was much more conservative. When Jamie turned one year old, my husband was like ‘Jamie is still not sleeping through the night. You need to wean him so that he will sleep through the night.’ I remember being emotionally like, ‘I cannot wean my baby. He is a baby.’ I asked my pediatrician and he was like ‘Well, this is not professional opinion, but I do think it’s time you wean. In my opinion I think it’s time you wean, because he is a year.’ I was like ‘Okay. Thanks for your opinion.’ I specifically asked around if anybody knew somebody that was more progressive. I vaccinate on schedule but I appreciate a pediatrician who is open to alternate vaccination schedules because it



seems to me that it says that they respect parents' autonomy and their ability to think for themselves, so I found that pediatrician, Dr. Wyatt.

Reflecting on these women's stories, the mothers seem to be very aware of doctors' privilege in normative parenting, as well as their role in reinforcing this discourse. Rather than accepting doctors' privilege as inherent, the mothers sought out pediatricians whose expert advice would be dispensed to empower the women to care for their own children in ways that supported their parenting practices.

Most of the participants also talked the influence that attachment parenting had on their friendships. Unlike their discussions around familial relationships, the women shared that friendships (particularly with friends from childhood and high school) were dissoluble, less enduring than familial relations. Jennifer told me about losing her best friend as a result of their different perspectives on breastfeeding:

My best friend, before I had [Lane], she said, 'The only advice I have to give you is don't feed that baby on demand.' And I already knew, before she said that, that that's what I intended to do. I just sort of ignored it and probably just kind of smiled. But then she came over a few times after he was born and was so uncomfortable when I would breastfeed in front of her that it was just, it was almost a deal breaker. Like religion and politics.

While talking about cultural norms that problematize breastfeeding, Trinity noted that the practices of extended breastfeeding and baby-wearing were problematic for friendships:

Breastfeeding is just not seen as normal, so it's hard for people. I mean people don't see it happening, so it's hard for them to imagine themselves into it. Anytime you see images of babies, you see bottles, you see little girls with their dollies and bottles. My daughter held up her stuffed animal and she was like 'I am nursing my panda.' And, she's two now, and when I told that to some of my friends they were like 'ugh!' So, it also affects, for me, my friends. Attachment parenting just kind of shapes who you can be friends with and hang out with too in a way because I have a hard time meeting them and I don't leave my baby.

Their friends' discomfort with the women's decisions to continue their attachment parenting practices, particularly breastfeeding, ultimately created a rift in these friendships.

**Summary of umbilical connections.** A mother's umbilical connections nourish the growth of her attachment parenting practice. Similar to the vascular functions of the umbilical cord, umbilical connections encompass the development of supportive relationships and networks and also the reduction of unsupportive relationships. As mothers begin their attachment parenting practice there may need to eliminate toxic relationships while they build a system of support. This support system becomes more populous as her parenting practice grows and becomes more refined analogous to the burgeoning development of the umbilical cord.

### **Places of Contraction**

This manifold encompasses the tensions that exist in a mothers' attachment parenting practice. Within the metaphor of gestation, I liken these tensions to contractions. Similar to how women do not consciously direct the rhythmic contracting of the uterine muscles during labor (and menstruation), these places of tension seem to be the involuntary or unconscious response to uneasiness, uncertainty, or challenging aspects of parenting. In the interviews, the mothers identified numerous aspects of parenting where they were aware of tensions, but as a researcher I also noticed other places of tension.

**Discipline.** Attachment parenting founders Sears and Sears (2003) indicated that one of the seven core parenting practices is to establish "consistent boundaries, not only for the discipline of the children, but for the sanity of the parents" (p. 574). On their

website, Sears and Sears (2013d) position their comments about discipline in relationship to the normative parenting:

Initially, we had to work through the fear that we were letting our children manipulate us, because we had read, heard from others, and grown up with the idea that good parents are always in control. We found, however, that considering our child's point of view actually helped us take charge of them. (para. 3)

Although Sears and Sears do not directly refer to the normative parenting discourse, their comment illustrates the power of normative parenting. First, Sears and Sears described their own fears around discipline, which stem from the normative discourse. However, they also reposition their own recommendations for discipline within the language of normative parenting (i.e. “take charge of them”). Sears and Sears’ use of the language of the normative discourse hides their emphasis on connection with one’s child. Using phrases such as “authority figure,” “obedience,” “firm, corrective response” and “defiant” seems incongruent with their assertion that “with the high-touch parenting style called attachment parenting, you can build and strengthen the connection between you and your child, laying the foundation for discipline” (para. 1). This tension in the attachment parenting philosophy was reflected by the mothers in this study.

These women—who were disciplined within the context of normative parenting as children—often mentioned discipline as a source of uneasiness and uncertainty in their own parenting practice. Most of the mothers spoke about the challenges of disciplining their children, hesitating even to use the word “discipline.” Sara articulated some these tensions around discipline:

Discipline has always been something that is difficult for us because we are trying to find a balance between how our parents disciplined us, and what we think. We don’t like that word but at the same time there has to be boundaries for safety. If absolutely nothing else, for safety. So that has probably been the hardest thing for us, trying to figure out what that means for our lifestyle.

She is not alone. Most of the mothers expressed similar concerns and struggle to figure out what disciplining means in their own parenting practices.

Jennifer talked to me about her uncertainties around discipline and boundary setting in all three of our interviews, beginning in December and ending in April. She was aware of her uneasiness and had checked out numerous books on the subject. However, she indicated that she had yet to read any of these books. I also noticed that she owns *The Discipline Book: How to Have a Better-Behaved Child From Birth to Age Ten* by Sears and Sears. As I listened to her talk about how she struggled to reconcile discipline with attachment parenting, I noticed that Jennifer spoke about similar ideas as the attachment parenting founders, struggling with whether or not she should discipline undesirable behavior that she believes is appropriate for his developmental stage. She told me the following story about how Lane had his first tantrum while they were grocery shopping in Earthfare:

He literally flung himself on the floor and started kicking and screaming. I was like ‘Wow! I don’t know.’ I just tried to calm him down and get on his level and talk to him a little bit. Michael and I were actually kind of laughing about it because it’s like ‘What do you do?’ I felt pretty lost in terms of how to deal with it. Plus he is not even one yet. I am not sure to what degree he understands that’s not really an acceptable thing to do. He also has no other way of communicating, so he was just telling us ‘Hey, this is what I want to be doing, and you are not letting me do it.’ I know I am not going to screw him up by handling something incorrectly one time but at the same time I want to make sure if it happens again that I am handling it in a way that makes him feel like he is being understood and makes it feel resolved for him and at the same time doesn’t continue behavior that is not really acceptable. But at the same time I guess what I am kind of struggling with is, ‘Is that acceptable?’ Because he doesn’t have another way to communicate that, then maybe that is okay if that is what he is doing.

Sears and Sears (2013d) believed that “many conflicts arise when parents expect children to think and behave like little adults. You need to know what behavior is usual for a child

at each stage of development in order to recognize true misbehavior” (para. 3). Jennifer was not aware of the similarities in their thinking about discipline. When I pointed to their book on discipline sitting on her shelf, Jennifer said she had not read it yet, indicating:

I am kind of ambivalent about the discipline aspect right now. Right now what I do is pretty much just talk to him about it. Even if he doesn’t understand, he will eventually understand me.

Over our three interviews, it seemed clear to me that Jennifer was not “ambivalent” about discipline.

As I reflected on Jennifer’s struggles over whether or not and how to discipline Lane, I wondered if she was waiting for the situation to resolve itself. We continued to talk about this tension around attachment parenting and discipline and Jennifer said:

Maybe that is why I am struggling with it because we weren’t necessarily disciplined in that way.... I guess for me it’s just the desire to make sure that I am doing everything, I don’t want to say the right way, but the way that it feels the best to me.

Jennifer’s reflections on her struggle to find a new way to discipline her son emphasized the challenge she experienced in her efforts to depart from normative disciplining approaches.

Amanda also struggled with discipline. In one interview, Amanda stated: “We don’t use time out really because we feel like we can talk to our kids.” However, in our second interview she confessed that talking with Riley was not the most effective method of stopping unwanted behavior:

She was biting her friend and she bit him for months and months. And I tried everything. We tried to talking about it at first, and then I went to time out, and nothing was working. After six or seven months of biting him and biting other children, she bit a five month old that was just sitting here, not even looking at her. I finally bit her back. I did not want to do it but other children were suffering

constantly because of it. And so I did the attachment parenting no no, and I bit her back, finally. But it was after months, and months, and months of biting. I don't want her to hurt anybody and she hasn't since then. But she did pull hair since then, she has been pulling hair for such a long time. I finally just pulled [her hair] and I was like 'That hurts! Do you see how that feels?' And she hasn't pulled his hair since. So, I don't think you should do it to begin with but at first we thought it was a teething thing and then we could see it was a frustration thing, and then it just escalated and it became a bad habit. I don't necessarily have to subscribe to every attachment parenting method, you know, just like whatever feels right, and feels like we are raising good people.

Like Jennifer, Amanda also referenced her feelings of rightness. However, Amanda's used "whatever feels right" to justify her decision to use normative discipline practices.

In our final interview Amanda repositioned her discipline practices, reconnecting them to the attachment parenting practice:

You know, when you've told someone to do something, to not hit their brother, so nicely for five, six, seven months and then one day, you're just like, 'If YOU hit him again...' Sometimes, at some point you just can't be a doormat anymore. You have to say, 'This behavior...' You know, like at what point are you enabling them? Attachment parenting isn't permissive parenting.

Across all these examples, discipline was a clear source of tension for the mothers. From my perspective, this tension arises from within the attachment parenting discourse. Some of the mothers in this study are struggling to resist normative discipline within their attachment parenting practice. Other mothers in this study struggle to connect their use of normative discipline practices with the attachment parenting discourse. I believe these struggles are heightened by the way Sears and Sears (2013d) frame their recommendations about discipline with language that is reflective of normative discipline.

**Fathering.** Another place of tension that I identified in the mothers' attachment parenting practices had to do with determining the fathers' parenting role. The attachment parenting founders, Sears and Sears, often reinforce normative conceptualizations of the

mother as full-time caretaker and father as breadwinner. Because attachment parenting was developed in response to normative parenting, the discussions around gendered parenting roles are still framed within the context of normative parenting. For example, Sears and Sears (2013a) wrote:

While mother preference is natural to the baby in the early years, the father is not off the hook. The father creates a supportive environment that allows the mother to devote her energy to baby matters.... Take breastfeeding, for example, which is the only infant-care practice fathers can't do. Yet the father indirectly feeds his baby by helping to care for the mother, who feeds his baby. As one involved husband boasted, 'I can't breastfeed, but I can create an environment that helps my wife breastfeed better.'

Although Sears and Sears emphasized their belief that “fathers are not just substitute mothers, pinch-hitting for the real mother while she is away,” they still reinforce gendered parenting roles, emphasizing that it is natural for mothers to devote themselves to caring for their children while fathers focus on providing a supportive environment for attachment parenting.

These ideas were reflected in the interviews. Some of the mothers described this as an unavoidable, inherent limitation of attachment parenting, and parenting in general. In our first interview, Trinity revealed that she had recently separated from her husband, who was having an affair. During data analysis, a colleague approached me with a story about a different woman who practiced attachment parenting and had gotten divorced. This colleague asked me if a mothers' commitment to attachment parenting often leads to cheating and divorce. I cannot answer that question from this study; however, my discussions with the mothers in this study about their family dynamics reflected how attachment parenting practices can limit their husbands' roles in parenting, as well as the husbands' abilities to connect with their children.

Although she frequently spoke negatively about her husband, whom she was separated from, Trinity told me: “He’s along the same lines as me as far as how to parent. He’s a good parent. You know we both parent well together.” However, when she spoke about her decision not to work night shifts, she indicated that her husband could not safely participate in co-sleeping with their new baby:

I try to [co-sleep] safely and I do think it’s not safe for [the baby] to be sleeping by [my other kids] and even my husband. I was almost going to work night shift, which I was like, “Forget about.” Because I didn’t know how I felt about my husband co-sleeping with the baby. I think that the safest situation is a breastfeeding mother.

In addition to her belief that fathers should not co-sleep with their babies, Trinity also seemed to believe that fathers possess less natural parenting abilities than mothers. At one point she mentioned:

Dr. Sear’s has this great article for fathers too. He has a metaphor for about like starting at the bottom, like changing babies’ diapers and from there you build this relationship with your child, for dads.

I looked up this article and found that the text, entitled *10 Tips to Help Fathers Become Disciplinarians*, encouraged father to “learn to softly convey a ‘father in charge’ message” by “managing a squirmy body and smelly bottom” (AskDrSears, 2013b, para. 3) and likened fathers’ parenting discipline to climbing the corporate ladder. While this article illustrates how the attachment parenting practice (and its founders) reifies normative fathering roles, it also helped me clarify Trinity’s belief that her husband needed to learn about how to build a relationship with their children.

Like Trinity, Jennifer told me that her husband “pretty much parked very on board with everything that I do” in terms of how to parent their son. When I asked her if there were ways her husband could be more supportive of parenting, Jennifer explained:



My husband definitely wears Lane and stuff like that, but Lane's had maybe six bottles his entire life. Every other meal he has had has come straight from the breast and he is definitely more attached to me than he is to my husband.... I do wish that my husband could comfort Lane a little bit more, but I do think that is sort of the nature of attachment parenting in some ways. I think my husband probably wishes that too because when Lane falls and gets hurt or something like that, basically my husband can try but it ends up that I am holding him because that's just is what's most comforting to him.

Jennifer did not fault her husband but she expressed her wish that he could be more involved in comforting their son; she said her husband shares this desire to be able to comfort their son more. Jennifer identified breastfeeding as the attachment parenting practice that limited her husband's ability to care for and connect with their son.

However, later in our interview she commented, "It's pretty rewarding to know that I kept him alive for the first six months solely through breastfeeding and that is a pretty incredible thing when you think about it." Jennifer recognized that breastfeeding limited her husband's ability to comfort their child; however, Jennifer was proud of Lane's almost exclusive at-the-breast feeding. She opted to continue exclusively breastfeeding rather than to enable her husband to offer more comfort to their son by pumping and storing breast milk for bottle feedings.

Even more than the other mothers, Amanda was very cognizant of how both normative and alternative parenting discourses tend to minimize fathers' roles. She expressed her frustration:

Even just looking at American history and advertisement and things like that, her toothpaste, its Tom's, says, 'Loved by kids or something, and trusted by moms.' And every time I see it I am just like 'UGH!' Because it just, it leaves dads out of the equation.

She was aware of how the attachment parenting discourse specifically addresses mothering, occasionally providing tips specifically for fathering. When I asked Amanda

about how she includes her husband in the parenting equation, she talked about putting her husband in charge of deciding whether or not to circumcise their first child:

We didn't know the sex of either baby. Before she was born I knew I didn't want to circumcise if we had a boy but I was trying to give him room to make a decision, because you know, moms make so many decisions. So I was like, 'Okay. So you research circumcision and you make the decision.' And I just knew that he was going to read about it and be like, 'This is messed up. I'm not doing this. Like father, like son is not a big enough reason.' Well, he went into the Google search with a pro-circumcision mind, so what he was reading and Googling was pro-circumcision. So he came back to me and was like, "I think we should circumcise. This is why, why, why, why." And thank God she was a little girl.

Although Amanda wanted to include her husband in parenting decisions, she did not seem to be cognizant of how her authority and power to give him the right to make a decision reified their gendered parenting roles. Further, she required that his part in the equation matched the way she wanted to parent. When her husband's decision did not reflect Amanda's values, she showed him a video of a newborn being circumcised just before their second child was born. She recounted:

My husband was furious when he saw the video. He was furious at me because he was really mad at himself on the inside that he could have chosen that decision. Then five minutes later he was like, 'We will absolutely not circumcise our boys. It's not going to happen.' And so he was on board.

In our third interview, I mentioned my observation that while she framed this story as putting dad back into the parenting equation, Amanda had actually forced her husband's decision to fit within the way she understood her parenting and family. She reflected:

I feel so manipulative. But you know once we had a child, I had to see what would happen if we had a boy. I had to. And my husband told me it was manipulative but he is also glad I did it. I think *mom* has a whole lot to do with any kind of parenting really and dads would just follow in the footsteps of their parents, for the most part. I want it to be different and I sometimes mess up. I do it the way I don't want to do it sometimes because I am just so frustrated. And sometimes that just works.

Although Amanda seemed surprised by my observation, she quickly acknowledged that there are tensions between how she wants to parent and how she actually parents.

**Summary of places of contraction.** I originally positioned these places of tension between normative parenting and the attachment parenting discourse as a weakness of the attachment parenting practice. During my final discussion with Amanda, I realized that I had been thinking of the tensions involved in the mothers' attachment parenting practices as a negative aspect of the phenomenon. Working through these thoughts, I came to understand that during a mother's parenting journey there are challenging places of tension that can ultimately lead to an evolution in parenting practice or new self-awareness, similar to how painful labor contractions ultimately lead to the birth of a child. This manifold—which highlights how the attachment parenting practice reinforces aspects of the normative parenting discourse—is simply another one of the interconnected meanings of the phenomenon.

### **Summary of Tentative Manifestations**

This study explored the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting and utilized a post-intentional phenomenological approach. Aligning with the philosophy behind this approach, this chapter presented the tentative manifestations revealed through this research. These tentative manifestations were presented within a metaphor of gestation, highlighting the mother's body as the site of the phenomenon. The mothers' developing attachment parenting practice was likened to the rapid cell division occurring through *embryonic cleavage*. I developed *amniotical geste* to describe the negotiations mothers make between their attachment parenting practices and the wider context of normative parenting. *Umbilical connections* encompassed the

mothers' cultivation of supportive relationships and elimination of unsupportive relationships. Finally, *places of contraction* illuminated areas of tension within the mothers' attachment parenting practices.

In the discussion on embryonic cleavage, I described five meaningful manifolds of the mothers' attachment parenting practices. Continuing the metaphor of gestations, these manifolds were likened to embryonic cleavage, the rapid cell division that occurs during the first 24 hours of pregnancy. The five manifolds encompassed the mothers' sensations of rightness, connections with one's child(ren), evolution of parenting practice, conscious parenting practice, and way of life. Sensations of rightness described how the mothers often relied on physical, emotional, and intellectual sensations in their decision-making processes. Connections with one's child(ren) represented the mothers' focus on developing meaningful relationships with their children. Evolution of parenting practice highlighted the constant development and unfolding of the mothers' parenting philosophies and practices. Conscious parenting practice conveyed how the mothers' parenting approaches were often a deliberate resistance to or turn from normative parenting. Finally the discussions around way of life, showed how the mothers' lives beyond parenting also resisted normative ways of living in the contemporary, mainstream United States. By describing these manifolds together as embryonic cleavage, I strove to characterize these manifolds as a potential snapshot of a single moment in a constantly developing attachment parenting practice. Understood as embryonic cleavage, these manifolds are inherently interrelated, having cleaved from one another and ultimately leading to the emergence of future manifolds.

In the discussion on amniotical geste we saw strategies that mothers use to navigate between their attachment parenting practices and the normative discourse of mothering. In the gestational metaphor, these strategies were related to amniotical fluid, which protects the fetus and promotes fetal growth. Three amniotical geste were presented as particularly meaningful: avoidance, deliberate crafting of language, and articulated diffusion. Mothers used avoidance to prevent direct confrontation with people who are rooted in normative parenting. By avoiding such confrontation, the mothers protected themselves from external criticism. The women also used avoidance to protect the feelings of mothers who do not practice attachment parenting, believing that talking about their attachment parenting practices would make other mothers feel judged. Additionally, the mothers deliberately crafted their language to position themselves within normative parenting. Some women also used specific words and phrases to appeal to others' values in an effort to normalize their attachment parenting practices. Finally, articulated diffusion described the mothers' efforts to state their opinions or decisions firmly but respectfully in order to build positive relationships and minimize negative interactions with others around their parenting practices. These strategies protected and cushioned mothers' attachment parenting practices from external criticisms that stems from the wider context of normative mothering, while also creating necessary space for these mothers' practices to grow.

In the discussion on umbilical connections we saw as mothers developed their attachment parenting practices they refined their relationships, fostering and sustaining those relationships that are supportive of their parenting practices while dropping those that were unsupportive. In the gestational metaphor, these connections were analogous to

the vascular lifelines housed in the umbilical cord, which enable the transport of nourishment to the fetus and waste from the fetus to the mothers' bloodstream. Mothers cultivated nourishing relationships by building support networks and friendships with other like-minded parents. In these relationships, the mothers participated in community building by providing and accepting support and encouragement. Extended family members were also a source of support for many of the mothers. The women in this study also discarded toxic relationships, particularly those with unsupportive pediatricians and friends. By surrounding themselves with a network of supportive relationships, the mothers built a community that affirmed the viability of their parenting practices.

Finally, in the discussion on places of contraction, we saw that there are places of tension between the parenting practices of the mothers in this study and the normative mothering discourse. In the gestational metaphor, these tensions are equated with labor contractions. Two such places that stood out across the interviews were discipline and fathering. While the mothers often wanted to avoid normative discipline practices with their children, they struggled to understand which discipline practices were right for their own parenting approaches. I also noticed tensions around fathering. The mothers described ways that their attachment parenting practices limit their husbands' roles in parenting, as well as the husbands' opportunities to connect with their children. Even when conscious of the gendered roles built into the attachment parenting practice, the mothers continued to make parenting decisions that limited the fathers' roles but were in harmony with their own parenting philosophies.

Utilizing the metaphor of gestation to portray embryonic cleavage, amniotical geste, umbilical connections, and places of contraction, I rooted these tentative

manifestations in mothers' flesh. By emphasizing the mothers' body as the site of the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers' practice attachment parenting, I strove to capture the complexity and richness of the phenomenon. Connected physically with their children throughout the majority of each day and night, the mothers' meaning-making went beyond cognition—it was also visceral.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING MOTHERS' LEISURE

The preceding discussion presented the tentative manifestations revealed through this study, which examined the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting. In Chapter One, I suggested that traditional conceptualizations of leisure present challenges for understanding mothers' experiences because many mothers have little opportunity for autonomous, non-obligated time, being responsible for the care and upbringing of children. Feminist scholars have pointed to the need for new definitions of leisure that can encapsulate such mothering experiences (c.f. Wearing & Wearing, 1988). Nonetheless, scholarship on mothers' leisure has continued to reify traditional leisure tenets and positioned children as a constraint to mothers' leisure. Many of the tentative manifestations discussed in Chapter Five challenge such assumptions. Therefore, the lived experiences of the mothers in this study provide a meaningful context for highlighting how leisure is relational, as well as independent.

#### **Theoretical Considerations**

I generally arrived early to each interview, using those five minutes to organize my scattered thoughts before walking up to the participants' doors. The women often knew I was there and would have the door open for me before I could knock. Crossing over the threshold, there was a distinct change in my day. These interviews felt unhurried, peaceful. Maybe it is more accurate to say that I felt unhurried and peaceful



for there were often children running, playing, and screaming. There were dogs barking, music playing, and almost comical moments of mishap. Yet, while I was with them, these women did not embody the harried, exhausted mother. These ninety minutes were, well, leisurely. Most of the children were too young to recognize that I was different than their mothers' other visitors and our "visits" did not seem to change the flow of these families' mornings. After the first round of interviews, I wondered about the easygoing atmosphere that had welcomed me at these homes. Six months later at the end of all the interviews, I recognized this feeling as part of what the mothers' described about their daily lives: peace and contentment.

Trinity was the exception. Arriving to her home the first day, I was met by a pajama-clad woman whose puffy, red eyes revealed she had been crying. Her new baby, only weeks old, was asleep in a baby swing and her two year old daughter stood mere inches from a large, flashing television screen. Just separated from her husband with a new baby and in her first week back to work, Trinity was exhausted and heartbroken. All through that first interview, I wondered whether or not Trinity still met the inclusion criteria and noticed how "this" image of attachment parenting was so unlike the others in the study. Challenged by my own bias—my preference to be in the company of peace and tranquility—I returned to Trinity's home the next month and again a few months later. Over this time, she found new places to breathe without her husband's daily presence. She found great joy in her children. But she still struggled, having to leave her children three days a week to go to work. Although Trinity stood out from the other women in this study, they were all connected by their commitment to an attachment parenting practice.

As I discussed in the section on *connections with one's child(ren)*, these mothers all placed greater personal significance on developing relationships with their children than on any autonomous pursuits. In many ways these women's experiences reflect how their values differ from many other mothers' values. For example, commenting on her personal leisure a mother in the Currie (2012) study said, "I try to switch off from [my children]. Because I feel that this is my time. And as pressures are mounting up at home you are looking to this [time] more" (p. 231). While the mothers in this study never spoke about wanting to "switch off" or disconnect from their children, they did talk about finding space and time for themselves. When I asked Amanda about time she takes for herself as an individual, she explained:

I get double naps a lot and so I bring the monitor outside and I'll do my gardening or I will write a blog or I will just sit or I will read. I don't turn on the TV or anything, or I will clean up or fold diapers... I didn't get it yesterday and I was like 'I did not get a double nap today. I have been babies all day, no mama time at all. I am just ready to go to bed. Let's get these kids in bed and go to bed.'

Sara also spoke about how her personal time happens at home:

For me personally, when I just want myself time, when Aaron comes home from work or school, he plays with the kids and I get to cook. And that's my, my creative outlet and that's what I love to do.

In response to my question, Trinity said: "I love running, that is one thing that I like for me. But I do have a running stroller that I use a ton." Like mothers in prior studies, the women in this study valued time to do things for themselves; however, this time often remained connected to their family environment.

Although the women in this study emphasize relational and connective experiences with their children, they do make space for themselves within their family environments. This makes me wonder about how we use the word autonomy in leisure

scholarship. How does autonomy exist within our society's complex social matrices? Is a mother cooking in the kitchen while her children are playing with their dad in yard autonomy?

The women in this study also asserted that their own independent leisure had become less meaningful and less important since having children. They explained that activities such as attending concerts, going out with friends and family, and reading were once fulfilling and important in their lives. However since they had children, the women found that these activities were "just not as important" as they had been. As I quoted in Chapter Five, Jennifer said that capturing photographs and having dates with her husband used to bring her great joy but those activities no longer make her "feel that way anymore." Instead, Jennifer found that daily interactions with her son brought her the greatest sense of enjoyment in her life.

Reading through prior scholarship on mothers' leisure, I began to suspect that such sentiments might not be limited to mothers who practice attachment parenting. Participant quotes in other studies suggest that those mothers may have also experienced a similar change in their personal valuation of independent leisure activities after they had children. The researchers, however, criticized this change in mothers' leisure, emphasizing the mothers' reduced participation in autonomous leisure activities. This was illustrated in the Shannon and Shaw (2008) investigation of mothers and daughters' leisure:

Many mothers' leisure behaviors, self-described and as described by their daughters, did not provide examples of personal leisure. Rather, family leisure took priority. For example, Jill noted, "Well, I think like me, what leisure [my mother] did [sic] have revolved around the family. She was a good example of what happens to your leisure when you have a family . . . we did a lot of things as a family." A few mothers set examples for their daughters about how leisure and

time for self could be incorporated into work and family life. These examples were important and helped daughters make personal leisure a priority. (p. 11)

Rather than exploring the idea of family leisure or the meaning that the participants' made from these family leisure experiences, the authors critiqued the mothers' lack of personal leisure. Later, the authors remarked: "Breaking the cycle of mothers not taking time for personal leisure may be challenging" (p. 13). The authors' statements reveal their assumption that mothers should take time for autonomous leisure, despite the women's own meaning making that suggests the contrary. Ultimately, Shannon and Shaw concluded: "The findings from this research suggest that it is important for mothers to take time for themselves when their daughters are at an age where they may be observing their mothers' behaviors" (p. 14). I contemplated this final statement, dissatisfied that the authors never discussed the value of relational, family leisure, asserting only "that it is important for mothers to take time for themselves" (p. 14).

As I continued to consider the tentative manifestations in *connections with one's child(ren)*, I noticed that the mothers in this study described their relational and connective time with their children using terms that mirror frequently cited outcomes of traditional, autonomous leisure participation (e.g. self-fulfillment, personal growth, enjoyment). While the women in this study told me that not every moment of their lives is peaceful, they explained that their moments of greatest joy, contentment, and peace are those of connection with their children. The similarities between the mothers' experiences and the traditionally proclaimed benefits of leisure caused to me marvel again at leisure scholars' description of mother-child activities as incompatible with true leisure.

The common portrayal of mothers' leisure was effectively summarized in a recently released, second edition of an introductory textbook for recreation and leisure studies. In the opening pages, this text conferred:

The benefits of [the parks, recreation, and leisure] field ensure that we have sufficient clean air and water to sustain life, opportunities to live purposeful and pleasurable lives, memories of happy times with friends and family, and options and opportunities for health and well-being throughout our lives. (O'Sullivan, 2013, p. 4)

This description of leisure does not seem incompatible with the experiences of the mothers in this study. However, as I kept reading this textbook I was struck by how blatantly our field tends to emphasize the challenges and frustrations of motherhood, often overlooking the rewards of relational leisure. I found it ironic but unsurprising that mothers' leisure was discussed in a section entitled: "Leisure and Recreation for Individuals in Society." Utilizing a social psychological paradigm, mothers' leisure was examined as though the mother operates individually within a family context, rather than examining family leisure as relational. In this section, the authors stated:

The burden of family care has a greater impact on females; thus, women's leisure and recreation are often quite fragmented.... Although a woman may plan an afternoon of relaxing reading, she may be interrupted by children who need clothes washed or a husband that needs her help. (Yoder & Martinez, 2013, p. 69)

Despite the earlier affirmation of positive family memories, this hypothetical description of mothers' leisure emphasizes the assumption that family constrains women's leisure experiences. A few pages later in a discussion on "Implications for Professionals," I read:

[K]nowing the demands and limitations placed on single mothers...professionals must offer programs that allow them the opportunity to participate. Perhaps that means that some fitness programs take place in the middle of the morning and the agency offers a toddler play period at the same time. Given the fact that money is in short supply for this population, the agency must also subsidize the program so that the mothers do not have to choose between their own physical fitness and paying the utility bills. (Yoder & Martinez, p. 76)

Focusing on children as a constraint to mothers' leisure, the authors claim childcare would afford mothers opportunities for leisure and recreation. It seems that shared leisure between mothers and children is incompatible with the authors' assumptions that mothers' leisure should be autonomous and independent.

Such assumptions—stemming from central leisure tenets—entirely miss the meanings the mothers in this study expressed. As an example, in our final interview Trinity reflected on how she felt about having to be at work again since separating from her husband:

I worked yesterday and I was sad... I just felt like I needed to cry but you can't 'cause you are work and I just kept looking at pictures of the kids. I was just, just feeling cracked. It's just like why does our job have to be so compartmentalized? We have work, we have family, we have leisure, and you just have to... everything has its own box. I wish that it would more connected.

As a single mother, Trinity would not appreciate a fitness class and separate childcare. Rather than more compartmentalization in her life, she yearns for greater connectivity.

When I paired Trinity's comments with the cited textbook passages, I saw the power of research. Yoder and Martinez's (2013) recommendation echoes the advice of prior recreation and leisure researchers, which has likely shaped program offerings at many recreational sites. I wondered: How many mothers would appreciate program offerings that provide low to no-cost opportunities to spend time with their children? The way mothers' leisure is conceptualized and discussed corresponds to researchers' power to confer meaning to activities they perceive to fall within leisure boundaries. Why do leisure scholars describe "an afternoon of relaxing reading" as leisure but not also reading books with a child? If a mother's enjoyment of reading with her children is as great or

greater than reading alone, who are we, as leisure scholars, to dismiss this activity as not leisure?

When I reflected on the tentative manifestations associated with the manifold *consciousness parenting practice*, it seemed to me that the women in this study viewed their decisions to be in close relationship with their children as a turn away from standard parenting practices in the United States, including the widely accepted discourses of motherhood and leisure that construct mother's individuality as meaningful. The women in this study described how they feel different than other parents, wanting to "take [our son] with us on the vacation" or having "invited our kids to the party [of life]." While most of the women shared memories of when they had taken time for personal leisure since having children, these were rare occasions. Instead of choosing to take time for themselves, the mothers described how they have chosen to spend time with their children. As Amanda said, "I think other people would probably say we should work on time for ourselves... but I really like to be at the house with the kids." When the women did take time for themselves, it often occurred within their family environments. Autonomous and independent leisure activity has less space in these mothers' lives since they consciously choose to prioritize relationships with their children over autonomy.

These sentiments may also be applicable to some mothers who have participated in prior leisure research. For example, a participant in the Currie (2004) study was quoted as stating: "I feel that I'm a mum: I didn't have the children to be pawned out to someone else. They've never been to day-care" (p. 230). However, this comment was not explored as a mothers' choice to prioritize family. Instead, the quote was framed through the researcher's lens, who introduced that quote with the following context:

Approximately one third of the mothers interviewed could be described as aligning themselves with traditional notions of mothering. This proud proclamation was probably the most extreme comment made by one of the mothers. (p. 230)

The researcher aligned the mothers' experiences with "traditional notions of mothering" rather than considering the possibility that these women might be resisting discourses that privilege individuality over relationships.

The lived experiences of the women in my study suggest that assumptions that have framed scholarship on mothers' leisure are limited, not describing the experiences of mothers who place greater personal significance on relationships with their children. At the same time, much of the scholarship on mothers' leisure provides extensive documentation of mothering experiences that are radically different than the experiences of the mothers in this study and supplies countless quotes from mothers who relish and desire greater autonomy and individuality in their lives. Considering all of these lived mothering experiences, it becomes clear there is a need for greater openness when examining mothers' leisure. Understanding leisure as both relational and personal may provide the necessary space to allow us to break down the compartmentalization of mothers' experiences and more fully understand mothers' meaning-making around leisure in their own lives.

### **Methodological Considerations**

During our second interview together, Jennifer and I were talking about car seats. In our previous interview, Jennifer said that car rides were challenging because Lane hated riding in the car seat. In this second interview she said, "Ideally, he can ride in the car in my lap or in a wrap or something like that. But, they haven't invented that. They haven't decided that there is an acceptable and safe way of doing that." I asked if Jennifer



would choose to hold Lane in the car rather than use the car seat if it was not illegal.

Although Jennifer demurred, I suspected that she was worried I would judge her, so I mentioned that I would have held Annabella if I could. “Really?” Jennifer inquired. With my positive confirmation, Jennifer responded: “I think there are times that I would have held him for sure...I mean there are times I have held him driving, like a mile.” We began to talk about the scene from the *Babies* documentary where a Mongolian woman held her newborn baby while riding on the back of a motorcycle, and our conversation took another turn.

Later when I was analyzing data, I identified this conversation as an example of negotiation (at this stage of data analysis, negotiation was still a manifold in embryonic cleavage). In our final interview, I told Jennifer that I thought it was an interesting example of negotiation, particularly because it happened between *us* during an interview. I read her the conversation as it was transcribed from the recording. She responded:

I don't know if that was totally what was happening with me there. I don't feel like I was ever really holding back or concerned with what you would think or anything like that. Probably, I just wasn't thinking about that fact that I had done that until we started talking about it.

This experience affirmed my decision to go back to the participants with my preliminary analysis. Not only did the women help me to better understand their experiences through these final interviews, our discussions lead to deeper data analysis and the development of richer tentative manifestations. I bring up this occurrence because it exemplifies how this study may offer leisure scholars methodological considerations that could open space for examining the meaning of mothers' leisure. Specifically, these considerations include understanding that intentional relationships develop as a result of conducting research, as well as recognizing researchers' distance from their participants' lived experiences.

**Intentional relationships.** As I discussed in Chapter Three, post-intentional phenomenology posits that intentionality is entwined in the research process, and through the process of conducting research “dynamic intentional relationships...tie participants, the researcher, the produced text and their positionality together” (Vagle, 2010b, p. 399). Since I agree that intentional relations are developed through the process of conducting research, I paid particular attention to how the mothers who participated in this study were “both constructed and constructing...both agent and acted upon” (Vagle, 2011b, p. 9). Certainly, I am not aware of all of the ways that mothers were affected by this research but I did hear from these mothers that this study changed how they understand themselves and their parenting practices.

Between our second and third interviews, after Jennifer said that she had held Lane in her lap during short car rides, Jennifer reflected on our conversation:

I saw a baby in a car and she was definitely under one and she was forward facing in her seat. Even though were times that I was like, “I can’t put this sleeping baby in a car seat” it just bothered me. I was thinking at the end of the day you want what is safest for your kid and if we ever got into an accident and he was not in a car seat, I don’t think I would ever forgive myself for that.

At the end of our final interview, Jennifer said “I have enjoyed doing this and it’s really fun to kind of reflect on it too. And to think about it because it make me think about it a lot in between.” She said that she even decided to read a book about discipline.

At the very beginning of my final interview with Amanda she announced: “It has all changed since I last saw you. It has been so hard lately. Two sucks.” We talked for a little while and then the conversation turned towards the preliminary data analysis. After I read her quotes from our previous transcripts, which I described using the early manifold labels *relationship with one’s child* and *consciousness*, Amanda’s response surprised me:

“Wow! I really needed to hear all of these things right now. We are going to have a really good day after you leave!” I am not sure if Amanda did have a good day afterwards because I went on to share my observations about the tension in her husband’s fathering roles. These observations prompted Amanda to quip: “I feel so manipulative.” Even so, after our final interview, Amanda wrote in an email: “I am so thankful that I answered your ACP [Athens Conscious Parents] ad.” Beyond the emotions inspired during that interview, Amanda mentioned to me on two other occasions that she frequently thought about our conversations during her daily life.

Like Jennifer and Amanda, Trinity and Sara also mentioned times they had thought about specific conversations we had in a prior interview. In our last interview, Trinity told me that she had learned a lot about herself from participating. Often during an interview, one of the women would say “I thought about that the other day” or “I thought of you when...” Throughout the six months the interviews took place, many of the mothers sent me emails with thoughts, articles, product information, book titles, curriculum, and other information they wanted to share with me. In one such email, Sara wrote: “Love all your questions - very interesting as well as very helpful for me to take the time to process through certain decisions.”

As this discussion highlights, participants do not simply interact with researchers’ abstract findings by examining how those findings might relate to their lives. Rather, through the process of research, the women in this study were asked to consider issues that seemed meaningful and important to me, as the researcher, and to examine themselves through the questions (and possibly the lens) of another. Consequentially,

they were touched. The way they see themselves as mothers and the way they understand their parenting practice has been altered, perhaps more so for some mothers than others.

For these reasons, when we conduct research on mothers' leisure, utilizing our own lenses, we must cognizant of how participants may be changed. When we ask mothers about their leisure—or other life experiences—we ask them to consider how the leisure experiences we value exist (or fail to exist) in their lives. For example, in one interview with Sara I commented that her family did not encounter a lot of normative parenting because of the people with whom they choose to spend their time and the places they take their kids to play. She responded:

We really don't and it sounds so strange saying that now. We really don't. It sounds like we have put ourselves in this little bubble and I haven't even really thought about it until you say this.

When we interject our own understandings of participants' leisure experiences, it is likely that such conversations can stay with the participants and could possibly affect their decision-making processes.

**Researchers' distance.** I have mentioned a couple times that I perceive researchers to be at a distance from their participants' experiences. By this expression, I mean to point out that as researchers we cannot know how our participants feel, interpret, and experience, no matter how close we are to them or their life experiences. As I have mentioned, I faced this knowledge a number of times throughout the study. During the final interviews the mothers and I shared the Venn diagrams (Appendix J) we had created without each others' input. As we compared our diagrams, I was keenly aware of the numerous differences between them.

In one of these interviews, when Amanda began to create her own diagram, she relayed her immediate insight as she was constructing her diagram: She did not understand these manifolds in the same way I did. I had put substantial thought into these manifolds and she had only been introduced to them a few moments earlier. Therefore, the meanings of the labels were not immediately clear to Amanda. Additionally, I realized that I had looked across the interviews while constructing these manifolds and the participants had only their own experiences to reflect on.

Some differences stood in the diagrams across all of the participants. In the diagrams I created, *places of contraction* and *negotiation* were more prominent than in the participants' diagrams—either because I made them larger or because I placed them in closer relation to the other manifolds than the participants did. Jennifer explained: “I feel like I am pretty solid in the relationship that I have with him...I feel like [places of contraction] is more of an outside force that we are talking about.” Similarly, when Trinity reflected on where she placed negotiations in her diagram she explained: “I don’t feel like me dealing with others is central. That is something I have to do but it’s not as central to me.” Reflecting on why negotiations and places of contraction seemed more prominent to me, I realized that I had often probed the women about the ways they negotiated with others in the normative discourse and had actually sought out places of tension in their parenting practices. For this reason, these discussions comprised a substantial portion of our conversations. Consequentially these manifolds appeared more significant to me than the mothers because I had only the data I had obtained while they were reflecting on their entire parenting practice.

Additionally I consistently identified a different manifold as the center of each woman's parenting practice than she did. This surprised me and I was aware again of my own distance from the mothers' lived experiences. As I contemplated these differences, I recalled how the women commented on how different this diagram would have been a month ago or in another month. I realized that I was creating diagrams from our first two interviews, which had happened two to three months prior. It seems likely that their parenting practices had changed and evolved since our first two interviews. Yet, the women's comments about the temporal nature of these diagrams corroborated my use of the embryonic cleavage metaphor. We all saw these diagrams as representative of the moments in which they were created.

This experience leads me to believe that returning to our participants with our conclusions and findings may help us, as researchers, identify where our interpretations are limited by our distance from the mothers' own meaning-making. If we ask participants about the challenges in their lives that prevent them from participating in autonomous leisure, we may mistakenly conclude that these challenges are more significant than our participants would agree. Conversely, if we happen to conduct an interview with a mother who recently had a positive leisure experience, than that conversation may reflect more positivity than she generally feels in her day-to-day life. By revisiting our findings and conclusions with our participants, we can gain benefit from their reflections on the data, as well as our own.

The participants' insights were invaluable in helping me see where my thinking could be expanded, as well as where I did not understand the women's experiences. As a result of these interviews, I re-evaluated the diagram I had constructed and expanded the

metaphor, now describing gestation rather than only embryonic cleavage. Yet, I feel compelled to point out that I did not return to the participants again (and again) with my revised findings. I describe this research as partial and incomplete and I am convinced that a fourth round of interviews would reveal new and contradictory understandings. Nonetheless this is a dissertation and, as all researchers, I had to stop collecting data and craft the final text. Despite my efforts to reduce my role as the “expert” and recognize the distance between myself and the women’s lived experiences, in the end I have crafted this text, constructed this metaphor, and it is through my interpretation that the participants’ voices are heard.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed considerations for scholarship on mothers’ leisure that arose during this research. I suggest that examining mothers’ leisure as both relational and autonomous would expand our understandings of mothers’ experiences. Additionally, I advocate for researcher acknowledgement of the intentional relationships that occur during research, as well as the distance between researchers and participants’ leisure experiences. It is my hope that this discussion may encourage others studying mothers’ leisure to consider the influence they have on the research process, as well as their participants’ lives. When we can recognize the limitations of our research, we may be compelled to leave space for other possibilities, alternative explanations, unexplored ways of being. Although this is the case for most research topics, this study has highlighted the need for such space in scholarship on mothers’ leisure.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Coming to the end of this dissertation—and my doctoral studies—I am daunted by the task at hand: crafting a conclusion. A chapter that can stand alone *and* wrap up all that has come before. A chapter that symbolizes the culmination of more than 25 years of education. It is a bittersweet task since this dissertation has been as much a personal journey as a professional one; the end of this chapter also concludes a most beautiful chapter of my life. As I bring to a close this text, which has explored the interconnected meanings that come into being as mothers practice attachment parenting, I am steeling myself to tour a full-time preschool for my own daughter because my husband and I have both accepted full-time jobs. In writing prior choppy and wandering drafts of this chapter, I tried to compartmentalize my life—to provide a cheery conclusion while in many ways struggling with the very issues this research has explored: mothers' navigation through the interweaving and sometimes conflicting demands shaped by normative parenting, discourses that privilege autonomy and independence, and an attachment parenting practice.

Through this work, I have come to understand that this navigation happens differently for each mother. And for each mother this navigation changes depending on the day-to-day and moment-to-moment contexts of their lives. In each moment, mothers negotiate between their self-preservation, their sense of what is right for themselves and



their families, advocacy for their beliefs, and concern for others' well-being. At times the best a woman can do is keep her mouth shut, holding back her emotions. Other times she might use her body as a symbolic gesture, nursing in public to promote breastfeeding. With some people she might explain her decision-making processes or firmly state her positions as a parent. With others she might demur, not wanting someone else to feel judged.

Reflecting on the fact that the women in this study said they avoid talking about their parenting successes or were careful about how they talked about those success because they did not want other women to feel criticized or judged, I wondered if their concern for protecting the feelings of normative mothers actually leads back to the hegemony of the normative parenting discourse. I pondered: Who benefits when mothers who practice alternative parenting methods silence themselves for fear of hurting other women by talking about their breastfeeding successes (or natural births or feeling well-rested by co-sleeping with a newborn)? The women in this study seemed aware of the large social structures that reinforce normative parenting in the United States (e.g. a six-week maternity leave, the taboo of breastfeeding in public, the medicalization of childbirth). At the same time, the women seemed unaware of how larger social norms may be influencing their own beliefs that their success stories would be harmful to other women, rather than being viewed as messages of hope and encouragement.

Whether or not they speak about their personal experiences and beliefs, these mothers resist normative discourses through their attachment parenting practices. For example, as an attachment parent, a doctor of neuroscience, and a television actress, Mayim Bialik (2012) proclaimed:

It is just as much a feminist choice to be a parent as it is to not be one.... We object to routine inductions with pitocin and interventions during labor because of the risks to the mother and the baby. We believe that breast milk is biologically and nutritionally superior...that sleeping next to your baby releases positive hormones that facilitate bonding. We have empowered ourselves and refuse to endure a male-centered obstetric history that has taken women's bodies and molded them to their preferences for their convenience, their comfort and for their world view. Now tell me how attachment parenting is inconsistent with feminism? (para. 2-3)

While only one woman in this study described herself as a feminist, all of these women believed their role in childbearing, birthing, and nursing are empowering aspects of womanhood. They asserted that as women and mothers they are knowledgeable about their bodies, birthing, and their children's health. Limiting their exposure to conventional medical models by interviewing and carefully selecting their medical providers is just one of the many ways these mothers negotiate and resist normative discourses.

The mothers in this study also developed community with like-minded individuals, creating supportive networks through social media, parenting groups, and friendships. While I believe that these communities have enhanced the women's efforts to parent in ways that match their personal values, at the same time I found myself reflecting on Bobel's (2002) discussion about the ways alternative discourses can be as domineering and limiting as the normative discourses they contest. Cultivating supportive relationships and networks certainly has allowed women who practice attachment parenting to draw strength from one another. However, as they turn to other attachment parents for advice and support, mothers' beliefs and practices are shaped and formed by the attachment parenting community. Through these relationships, it is possible that the attachment parenting discourse has "take[n] on hegemonic proportions" (Bobel, 2002, p. 98) in the women's lives. For example, Jennifer was unable to discipline her son because

of her uncertainty about whether discipline would conflict with the nurturing role that attachment parenting had defined for her. Jennifer's need to do the right thing each time left her unable to do anything. It seems likely to me that an ideology of good mothering is developed and reinforced through interactions with other attachment parenting mothers. Consequentially, the mothers may judge themselves and others through an attachment parenting lens.

Mothers' negotiations through these matrices of power relations that are present in their lives are comprised not only of passive and active resistance. Rather, their parenting practices also reinforce normative discourse in many ways. Like the attachment parenting founders, the women in this study asserted that these gendered parenting roles are natural, minimizing fathers' interest in and ability to care for their children. The women also justified these gendered parenting roles by referencing their biological ability to produce breast milk as indicative of their innate capability to better comfort their children. These comments stood out to me since, in my personal life, attachment parenting has been a family practice with my husband and father-in-law taking equal—and sometimes greater—portions of childcare than I was able to provide while completing my research. More than once during this study I wondered what attachment parenting might look like for a gay couple raising children or for other single mothers.

Beyond reinforcing gendered parenting roles, it was clear from my conversations with these women that attachment parenting—like normative parenting—is most relevant for middle class families. While attachment parenting is not solely a middle class discourse, mothers with lower income would have additional challenges to overcome (e.g. long working hours) and mothers with higher income might have alternatives (e.g.

live-in nannies). The women in this study were cognizant of how their husband's financial support and provision enabled these parenting practices. Testifying to the husband's role, although she was separated from her own husband, Trinity spoke about struggling to continue her attachment parenting practices as a single mother living on one income. At the same time, many parents engage in a number of the same practices (e.g. co-sleeping or breastfeeding) out of economic necessity. However these parents are not consciously and deliberately turning from normative parenting like the mothers in this study.

Although I believe another researcher—one who is not white—would have greater insight into the following issue than I do at this moment, I believe that the emphasis on autonomous nuclear families is related to the whiteness of this attachment parenting discourse. In some other cultures, parenting is not a solo endeavor with individual mothers raising their children at home alone. With my own daughter, I often rely on the care provided by our families and friends; therefore, I was surprised when the participants in this study did not share similar experiences. Although they appreciated their families' support and assistance, the mothers did not often leave their children with extended family members or friends. Instead, these women embraced the middle class, white discourse of autonomy and independence by raising their children with as little outside care as possible.

This emphasis on raising one's children autonomously—with little assistance from their husbands, extended family members, friends, or paid childcare providers—is interesting considering the mothers' resistance to having autonomous, independent time for themselves. These women intentionally resist normative discourses that promote the

need for mothers to take time away from their families. They described their autonomous leisure as less meaningful than it was before having children. Even when the mothers took time for themselves they often remained within their family environments, taking advantage of moments when their children were sleeping or otherwise occupied rather than relying on others' to care for their children. For the mothers in this study, meaning-making occurred through relational experiences with their children, which they said provided great personal satisfaction, opportunities for growth, self-awareness, and joy.

When I became a mother almost three years ago, I was genuinely surprised to have such deeply fulfilling experiences with my own daughter. As a leisure scholar, I was familiar with research that described mothers' leisure as constrained by their children and constructed mothers' autonomous leisure as meaningful. So my own experiences led me to seek a rift in the scholarship on mothers' leisure—to open space for exploring the types of experiences I lived. Through this research, I believe I have been successful in beginning that endeavor. However, I also wonder if there are greater implications for leisure scholarship beyond mothers' experiences. As I witnessed and as the mothers described, moments of contentment, connection, and growth were often just that—moments in their daily lives. In these families, there was not a clear demarcation of “leisure time” or “leisure activities.” Yet, it seemed to me that leisure existed in the ways described by Pieper (1952):

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simple the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul...When we really let our minds rest contemplatively on a rose bud, on a child at play, on a divine mystery, we are rested and quickened as though by a dreamless sleep. (46-8)

I believe the mothers in this study often experienced this form of leisure when connecting with their children. Re-invoking such conceptualizations of leisure—which enable leisure to occur within the daily spaces of our lives—could provide rich fodder for future leisure scholarship. Particularly in the increasingly busy lives of those living in the United States today.

Before undertaking this research, I conducted informal interviews with three professional mothers for a class assignment. One woman—who does not practice attachment parenting—admitted that her quality of work had gone down since she became a mother because she missed and worried about her daughter while they were apart. At that time, I wondered why she worked if she felt that way and why she did not rearrange her life to stay home with her daughter? Now, at the end of writing this dissertation, I wonder at the compartmentalization that exists in our society. Like Trinity implored: Why do work, leisure, and family have to be separate? Why can't we create space for more connectivity in our lives? I have come to appreciate that one's mothering—like one's leisure—is not simply a reflection on an individual. Rather I now understand that these aspects of individuals' lives reflect the interconnectedness of the social-cultural contexts present in our lives in the contemporary United States.

Through the constant, unending process of questioning and re-questioning myself, I endeavored to examine what I normally take for granted and to stay focused on the mothers' meaning-making. Bridling helped me stay as open to the phenomenon for as long as possible before crafting this text, which has been my attempt to illuminate the lived experiences of mothers' who practice attachment parenting. In following with the philosophy of post-intentional phenomenology, I acknowledge these efforts to be partial

and celebrate the room that remains for future research. Yet, I leave the crafting of this text confident some things: Since attachment parenting is an alternative practice, mothers who practice attachment parenting have an additional challenge as they navigate contextualized power relations in their lives. These added challenges stem from the matrices created by the attachment parenting discourse, the normative parenting discourse, normative scholarship on mothers' leisure, and unnamed other discourses. Navigating these matrices, mothers' encounter and confront the privilege bestowed upon those with power within these discourses. By cultivating community and supportive networks, as well as maintaining their own commitment to the attachment parenting practice, these mothers continue to pave avenues of resistance.

I am grateful to the women who participated in this study. This research would have been impossible without their willingness to share their stories, welcome me into their homes, and allow me to observe them interacting with their children. Throughout this study, I strove to remain open to their meaning-making and to stay true to the ways they represented themselves. Nonetheless, I am certain that the last three years of my life, which brought me into motherhood and doctoral studies, are also reflected in each of these pages.

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APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT TEXT

Hello!

My name is Katherine Soule and I am a student at the University of Georgia. I am looking for mothers who would be interested in volunteering to be interviewed about their experiences as a mother. I am particularly interested in talking with mother's who are or have practiced breastfeeding and co-sleeping with their children. If you are interested in finding out more, please send an email to [kesoule@uga.edu](mailto:kesoule@uga.edu)

Thank you,

Katherine

## APPENDIX B

## TELEPHONE ELIGIBILITY CONSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for calling to find out more about our research study. My name is Katherine Soule, and I am a researcher at the University of Georgia's Recreation and Leisure Studies Program.

The purpose of this research study is to look at mothers and their parenting experiences. It's our hope that this research will help us better understand the experiences of mothers. Do you think you might be interested in participating in that study?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time.

{If Yes}: But before enrolling people in this study, we need to ask you some questions to determine if you are eligible for our main study. This should only take about 1 minute of your time.

I doubt that these questions will make you uncomfortable but your participation is always voluntary and you can choose not to answer any questions. All information that I receive from you during this phone interview will be strictly confidential.

Do I have your permission to ask you these questions?

Are you a mother?

How many children live in your home?

Do you have a child between the ages of 1 and 3 years old?

Do you spend the majority of each day with that child?

Have you breastfed that child?

Has that child frequently slept in your bed with you?

Have you worn a sling so that your baby can stay close?

Do you do these parenting practices as a way to bond with your child?

[Option 1, if they answer "no" to one or more questions so they do not qualify] Thank you for volunteering. We're most interested in mothers who have \_\_\_\_\_. I truly appreciate your time but I don't think we will need to interview you for this particular study on mothering.

[Option 2, if they answer "yes" to all of the questions so they do qualify] If you are willing, I'd like to schedule a time when we can talk more. I'd like to hear about your experiences as a mother, especially your decisions about breastfeeding, co-sleeping, and keeping the baby near you. I am hoping to interview you three or four times over the next four months. Each interview might go as long as an hour or an hour and-a-half. To thank you for your participation, you will receive a \$15 gift card to Earthfare or Treehouse Kid and Craft after each interview. Are you willing to be interviewed?

Thank you.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me or Dr. Diane Samdahl at (706) 542-1812. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW CONSENT SCRIPT

Thank you for meeting with me. My name is Katherine Soule, and I am a researcher at the University of Georgia's Recreation and Leisure Studies Program.

The purpose of this research study is to look at mothers and their parenting experiences. We are particularly interested in certain parenting practices that have been defined to promote strong bonds between child and parent. It's our hope that this research will help us better understand the experiences of mothers and that the opportunity to talk about your intentional parenting style may be rewarding to you. Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. For this project, you will participate in three to four interviews that may each last between an hour and an hour and a half. There is a possibility that some of these questions may make you uncomfortable; if so, please let me know. You don't have to answer those questions if you don't want to.

With your permission, this interview will be voice recorded and transcribed. Any information that can possibly identify you, including your name, that I receive from you during this interview, will be strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcriptions and in any discussion of the data. Once data collection is complete, contact information for all volunteers will be destroyed. The audio-recordings will be destroyed after transcription is complete.

At the end of the interview, I will ask if you would be willing to participate in 2-3 subsequent interviews. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time should you become uncomfortable with it.

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time.

{If Yes}: Do I have your permission to voice record this interview?

Thank you.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me or Dr. Diane Samdahl at (706) 542-1812. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with us. Thank you very much for your help.

## APPENDIX D

## INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Tell me about your child(ren).

Tell me about your parenting practice.

Possible probes:

How did you learn about these parenting practices?

How did you make the decision to parent this way?

How is your current parenting practice different than what you imagined parenting would be like?

Does your family doctor/mother/partner support your parenting practices? In what ways?

What are some ways that your family doctor/mother/partner could give you more support?

Tell me what you think it means to be a good mother?

Possible probes:

You mentioned that a good mother \_\_\_\_\_. Can you tell me more about it?

Have your thoughts about what it means to be a good mother changed since you became a parent? How?

Have you ever felt like a bad mother? Can you tell me more about that?

Tell me about those aspects of your parenting practice that are most rewarding for you.

Possible probes:

Why has that been so rewarding?

I am curious about that. Can you tell more about it?

Do you talk to other people about \_\_\_\_\_? How do they respond?

Tell me about those aspects of your parenting practice that are most difficult for you.

Possible probes:

Why has that been so challenging?

I am curious about that. Can you tell more about it?

If you are struggling with a parenting decision, how do you decide what to do?

Do you talk to other people about \_\_\_\_\_? How do they respond?

Tell me about how your parenting practice shapes your family life.

Possible probes:

How do you and your partner make parenting decisions?

Are there things about your family life that you would like to be different?

How do you and your partner deal with differences of opinions about how to care for your child?

Tell me about activities that your partner and child do together.

Tell me about how being a parent has impacted your life.

Possible probes:

Has being a parent impacted your relationships with your extended family? How?

Has being a parent impacted your relationships with your friends?

I am curious about that. Can you tell me more about it? How?

Tell me about the things you enjoy doing.

Possible probes:

What are the most enjoyable parts of your day?

What activities do you do with your children? How much do you enjoy those activities?

Do you include your family in the things that you enjoy doing? If so, how?

Do you ever choose to do things alone?

It sounds like most of the things you enjoy include spending time with your children. Are there things you prefer to do alone?

It sounds like most of the things you enjoy are things you do alone. Are there things you prefer to do with your child(ren)?

Are you willing to meet with me again?

I appreciate that you have taken the time to share your experiences with me today. Thank you so much!

## APPENDIX E

## SAMPLE SECOND INTERVIEW GUIDE

Tell me the story about a time when attachment parenting was really happening for you.

Tell me more about....

You mentioned XXX, can you explain that more

Tell me the story about a time when attachment parenting was wasn't really working for you.

Tell me more about....

You mentioned XXX, can you explain that more

In the last round of interviews, I asked the women participating to describe what it means to be a good mother. You indicated that a good mom "just does the best job that she can and that ultimately her child feels loved and they fell fulfilled lets her child" When I asked about times when you felt like a bad mom you felt like a bad mom "on the few occasions that I have had to do stuff while he was awake... he is like pulling at me, and getting upset, and I don't feel like I am doing what I should be doing then". Other mothers gave similar, very specific examples. I am curious about the fact that working occasionally when he is awake seems like doing the best job you can do but you felt like a bad mother. What do you think about this?

Can you think of a time where you felt at peace, where you weren't striving but were simply being? Describe that to me.

In that description, you were alone. Do you ever feel that way when you are with your children?

In that description, you were with your children. Do you ever feel that way when you are alone.

Last time, you mentioned that one of the things you most enjoy is when he wakes up in the morning and is always smiling. Can you tell me about this, in as much detail as possible?

What other moments or practices bring you this kind of enjoyment?

This might sound like a strange question. But in the first round of interviews, I noticed your wedding ring. Can you tell me about it?

Can you describe your home?

What does home mean to you?

How role does home play in your family life/parenting practice?

In all of the interviews, the mothers used the word "natural" to describe one or another of their parenting practices. Can you tell me about this idea of parenting in a natural way?



You mentioned that you are careful about ways you talk about your parenting practices. Other mothers mentioned how they also use specific language or phrases to describe their experiences and practices. I am curious about this very thoughtful use of language.

From the last interviews, I got the idea that here seems to be an ideal in terms of parenting that people are striving towards. Can you tell me about your parenting ideal?

Is attachment parenting a white practice? Ethnicity?

In every interview, the mothers talked about the research they have done around their decisions to parent. What role does research play in an attachment parenting practice?

In all of the interviews, the mothers have talked about their own mothers' influence on their parenting. Can you tell me more about this?

## APPENDIX F

## INITIAL BRIDLING STATEMENTS

**Initial bridling statement on research relationships.** I feel that attachment parenting is the most natural way to parent and could make many others' lives more simple and stress free. However, I believe that each family situation is different and that parents create parenting practices that work for their own lives. As I respect people's right to choose, as well as the decision making process, I would never tell another parent that they should practice attachment parenting. For this same reason, I get frustrated and angry when I hear someone indicate that other people should be living a particular lifestyle or making certain choices. In striving to be cognizant of my personal biases and how they may impact research relationships as well as my interpretation of the data, I must acknowledge that my belief in people's right to choose and determine what is appropriate for their own lives could impact my research relationships. From experience, I know I am also liable to discount the perspective of a person who cannot value and accept other people's lifestyles. It is possible that I will encounter a participant who expresses such opinions during the research process.

In general, I know that I am thinking via this bias when I begin to dialogue in my own mind rather than listen to what someone is telling me. Essentially, I stop hearing because I am so busy arguing, albeit silently. In this situation, I will need to acknowledge my frustration as a personal bias so that I can successfully facilitate the interview. I usually recognize that I have stopped listening rather quickly, although not always. Once I realize that I have stopped listening, it will be important to ask for clarification. For example, saying, "I want to make sure I understand, could you repeat that?" Once I

understand their point, this may be an opportunity to probe further, asking them if they can think of an example of when that may not be the case. However, it is not necessary that I agree with the participant's point-of-view, so once I have made sure I understand their point, the interview should continue according to the guide. In this event, it will be important to seek another perspective from my outside advisory panel or dissertation committee to ensure that I fully engage with the data supplied from these interviews (see the ensuring data quality section below for a detailed discussion of the outside advisory panel).

**Bridling statement of researcher reflexivity.** I would qualify as a participant in this study. While I am not in physical contact with my daughter 24 hours a day, together my husband and I are raising our two-year-old daughter, Annabella, using attachment parenting principles. My husband, Travis, and I have decided to parent this way because it works well for our family. Annabella breastfeeds on demand, sleeps in our bed, and is often carried. Although other people often indicate that they think we are strange, we enjoy the time we spend together as a family. In these ways, I feel that I have insider status within my research population. However, as a full-time doctoral student with an assistantship, I spend considerable hours away from Annabella everyday. During such times, Annabella eats and drinks whatever my husband fixes her, which does not include pumped breast milk. In these ways, I acknowledge that I am also an outsider and am very likely to have a different parenting role than the mothers in my study.

I continue attachment parenting practices because I believe that they contribute to a strong parent-child relationship that ultimately will allow Annabella to have the confidence to pursue her interests, whatever those may be. Already, she is sociable and

willing to meet new people on her own. She feels comfortable interacting with others out of our direct line of sight and is always happy when we come back together. Travis and I have slept well since having a child and have not experienced the sleep deprivation that is common to many parents. As a family, we travel and camp often, which our parenting style enables. In her two years of life, Annabella has lived in four homes and flown on nineteen airplanes. In simply being with Annabella, we are able to provide all the routine and comfort that she desires.

Clearly, my personal parenting experiences have contributed to my interest in this research topic. Although this idea is the premise of attachment parenting, it is important that I acknowledge my belief that attachment parenting promotes self-confidence in children as a personal assumption. Throughout the research process, I must approach the participants' experiences and meaning as separate from my own. I will need to pursue participants' meaning-making through probing, rather than rely on my own assumptions and understandings.

## APPENDIX G

## SAMPLE BRIDLING ENTRY

**12.28.12**

I felt very comfortable around Jennifer. She and I are about the same age and share similar opinions about parenting as well as life in general. A few times, I caught myself agreeing with her thoughts rather than probing for deeper understanding. I think that this is actually my biggest challenge! After the recorder was turned off, Jennifer and I spoke about how her husband was ready to accept traditional parenting until Jennifer would initiate a conversation, show him research, or a video that would prompt him to change his views. I noticed this same trend in my own relationship with my husband. I am wondering about the role of patriarchy and hegemony in these interactions. Why are women, or mothers, more comfortable seeking out new information, new ways of parenting? Is it because of their intuition, their own feeling that something is not “right?” Has the feminist movement taught women to be more empowered, to question where they sense injustice? Are women forced to make these decisions because their husbands leave them in charge of parenting? Is this a sign of reinforcement, resistance, or perhaps a bit of both?

Jennifer often spoke about her interest in research prompting her discovery and commitment to attachment parenting. This brought up two thoughts. Has the existence of mommy blogs started a revolution in parenting? Do we turn to other mothers via blogs as a source of expert knowledge that is unavailable in traditional parenting knowledge? Second, we actually spoke about the necessity of being brought up in a culture of

normative parenting in order to have the desire, or ability, to seek out alternative ways of parenting. I'd like to pursue this with other participants.

It was challenging to get Jennifer to talk about the struggles, challenges, or difficulties she faces in parenting. She did talk about the frustration of car rides and strollers, money spent on un-necessary baby products, challenges with disciplining an 11-month old, lack of support from her mother about breastfeeding, distance from her husband's family, the challenge of finding an agreeable doctor, the loss of a good friend. However, Jennifer looked for the positive in all of these experience, or at least focused on the positive. I need to include more specific probes or ways of getting to the deeper meaning-making. In all of these cases, it seemed to come back to Jennifer needing to follow her instinct of what was right for her family. In all cases she did not view these as struggles or difficulties with parenting. I wonder if I had phrased the question in terms of difficulties practicing this form of parenting in a culture that is unaccepting. Looking forward to the next interview!

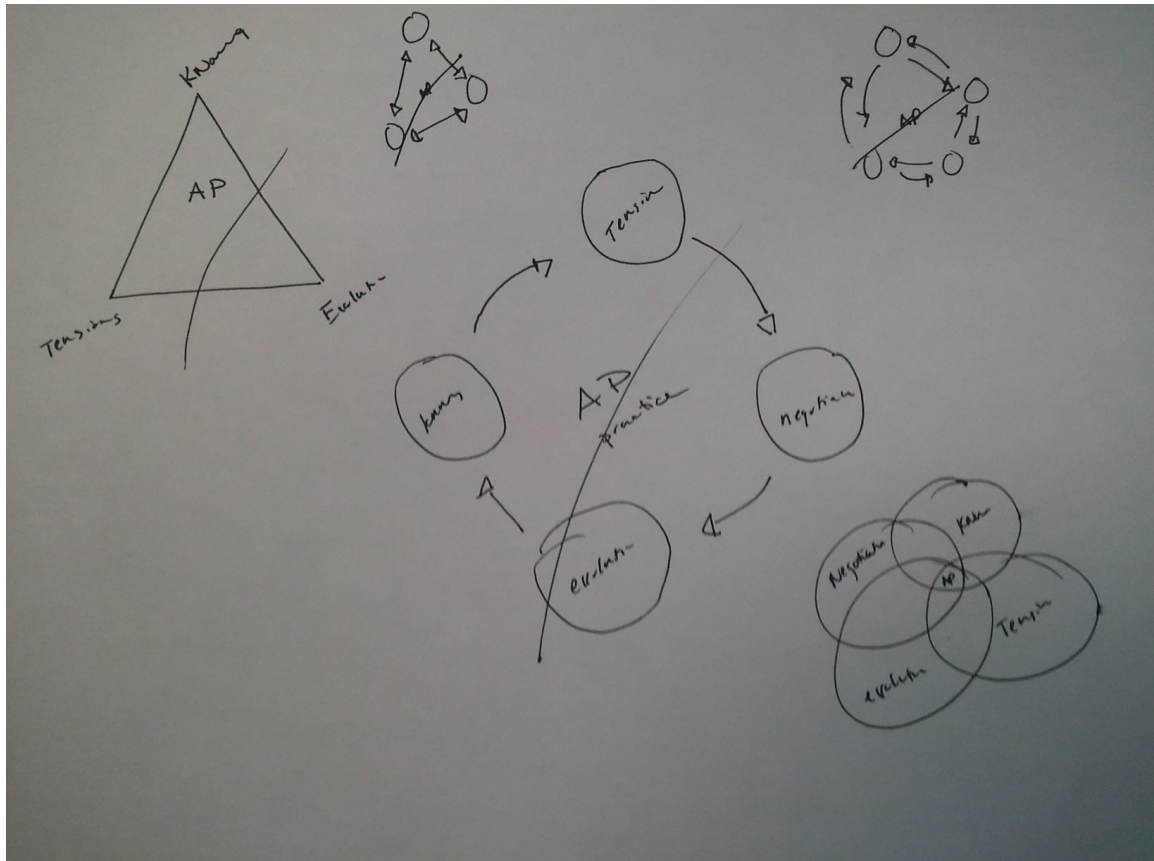
## APPENDIX H

## DATA ANALYSIS DOCUMENT, INTERVIEW FOUR

Evolution in thinking  
 Overwhelmed by emotion  
 for baby...  
 new self-awareness  
 resigned from teaching  
 Fail constantly  
 Having time as a mom  
 (to me)  
 MY HUSBAND  
 Societal challenges  
 Conflicts w/ AP  
 Tension: Breastfeeding  
 explanations  
 Prioritize relationship w/ child  
 Can't be healthy  
 come up with my own ideas  
 - social media  
 - library  
 - wise friends  
 want to put into him  
 Good mom: vulnerable  
 apologize, openness, vulnerable  
 worthy  
 Developmental level  
 not one size fits all  
 Exposure to a new way of thinking  
 - skin to skin  
 - opposing societal norms  
 MY MOM  
 H's friends  
 easier for  
 media increasing  
 Societal awareness  
 acceptance of A.P.  
 lack of social support  
 familial support  
 I found a voice to explain what I was going through  
 Progression of thought - hindsight  
 Tension: work - stay at home  
 Difference b/n big @ home  
 interacting w/ kids  
 Spanking = Christian  
 I know what's best for you  
 Discipline  
 breastfeeding = love; enjoyment  
 impacts friendships  
 pregnancy - phrase - evolution includes kids  
 Peaceful  
 natural thing to do  
 ... design  
 Not so much to live up to  
 So much easier in society  
 Sensitive  
 Use of words  
 - keep my mouth closed  
 Breastfeeding is best  
 it made sense  
 Dr. Sears' Bottom-up vaccine  
 Breaks my heart... not natural  
 He knows I will listen to him  
 so easy... doesn't have to be elaborate  
 Choice P  
 Spoil  
 Multiple

## APPENDIX I

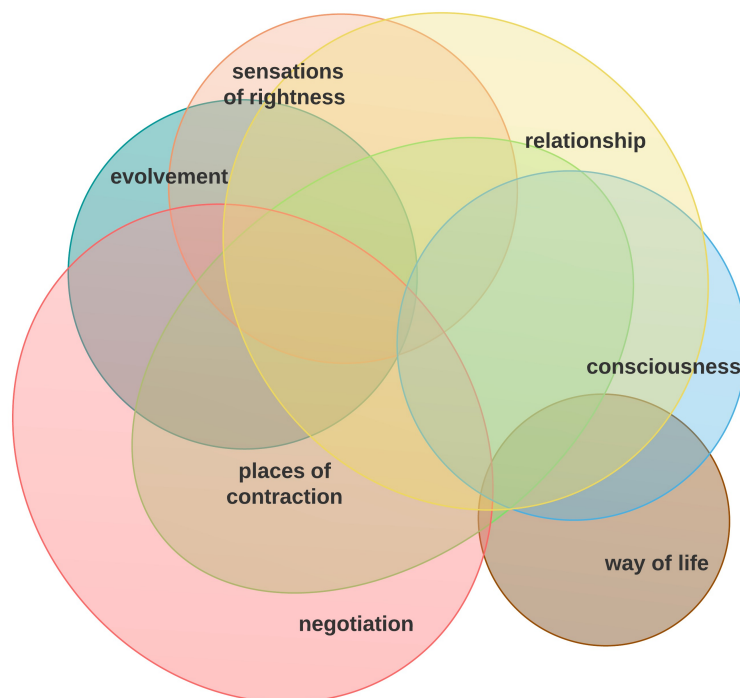
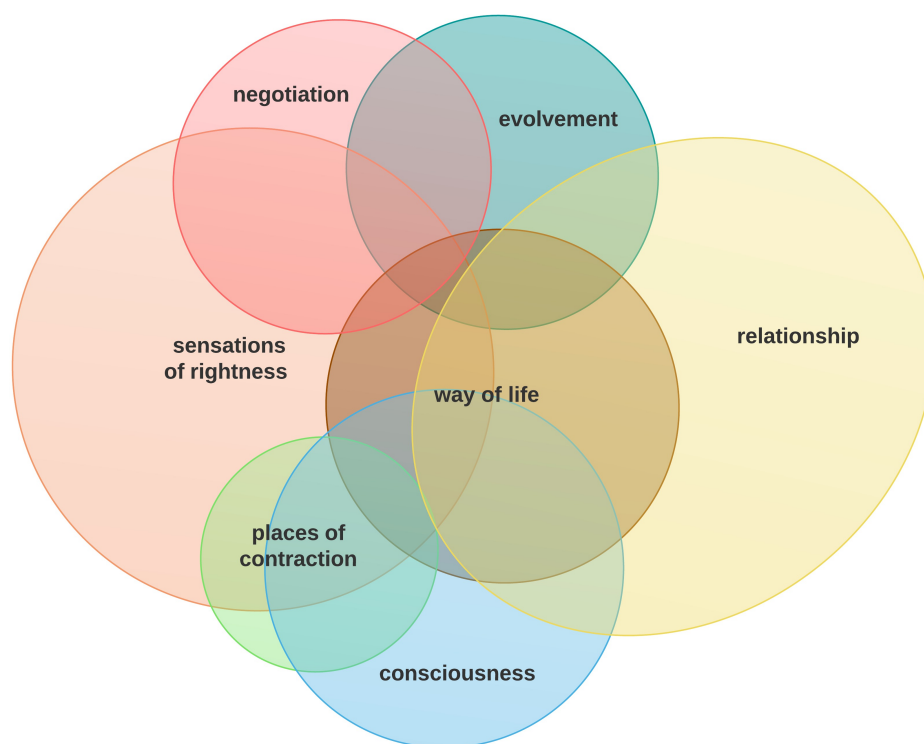
## EARLY CONCEPT SKETCHES



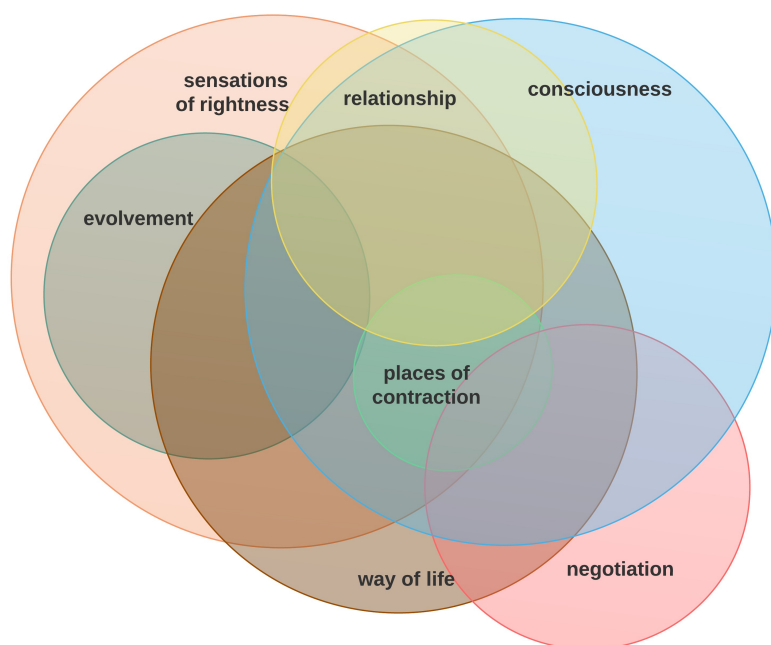


## APPENDIX J

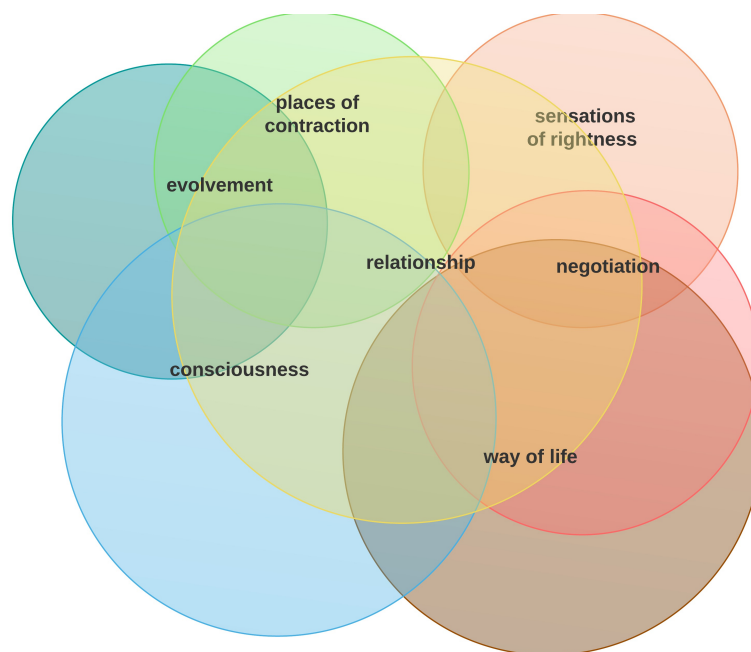
## INDIVIDUALIZED DIAGRAMS, BY PARTICIPANT

**Diagram designed for Jennifer****Diagram designed by Jennifer**

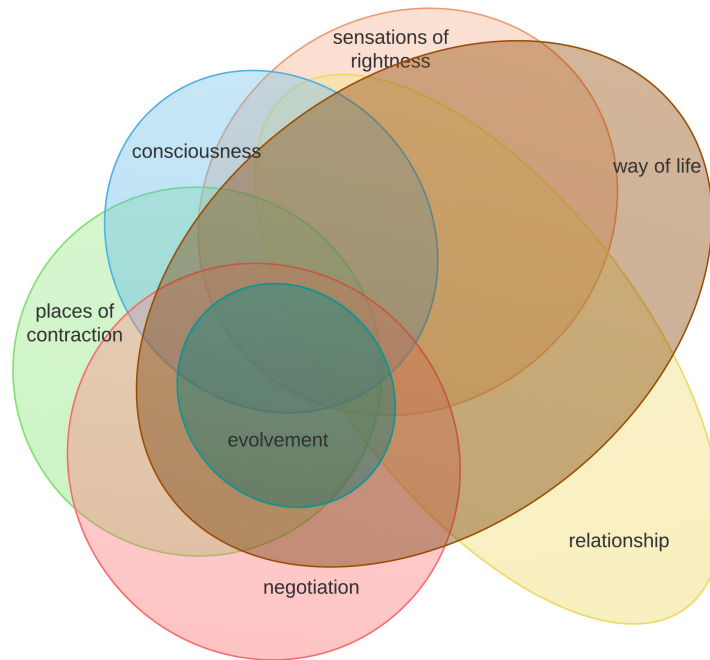
**Diagram designed for Amanda**



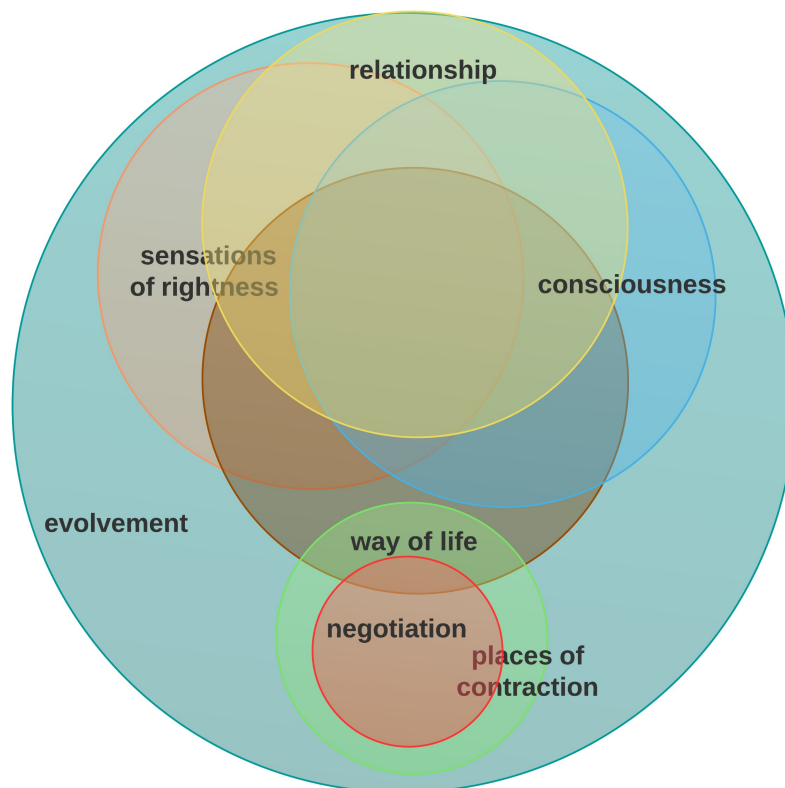
**Diagram designed by Amanda**



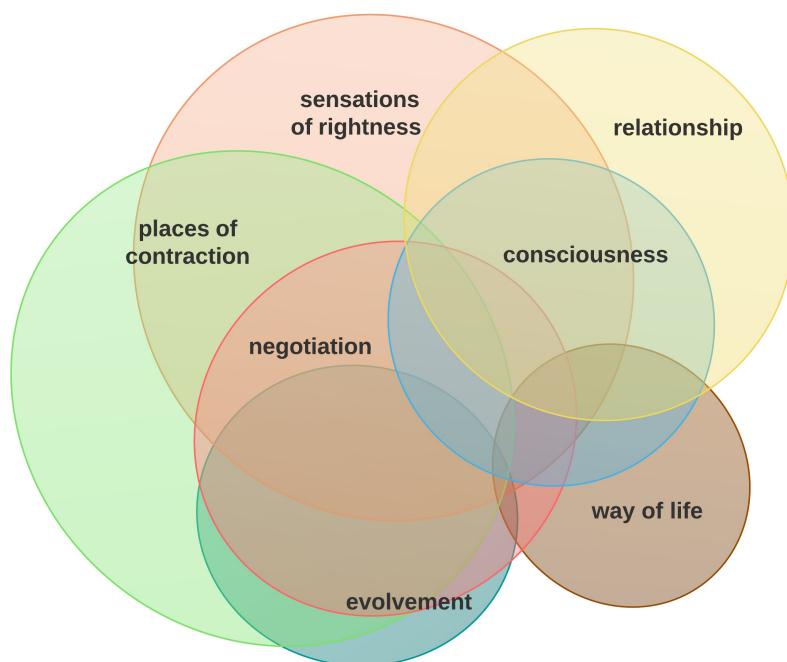
**Diagram designed for Sara**



**Diagram designed by Sara**



**Diagram designed for Trinity**



**Diagram designed by Trinity**

