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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
WOMEN WITH MULTIPLE ROLES**

By

Mary Burkett

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

College of Nursing

1997

ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN WITH MULTIPLE ROLES

By

Mary Burkett

This study is a secondary, qualitative analysis of responses from a sample of married, professional women with children. The purpose of this study was to discover the lived experience of women with multiple roles. Four questions were chosen to get at their lived experience. The questions asked whether, given the opportunity to live life over again, they would do anything differently related to career, marriage, or children. Additionally, they are asked if they feel they had over invested in any of the three roles of parent, wife, or career person. Professional women who had been married and had children were included in this sample. This study is a longitudinal, six wave study with participants completing questionnaires at various intervals. Using a hermeneutic methodology derived from Heideggerian phenomenology, a qualitative analysis was completed. The constitutive pattern was identified as: "Looking back makes possible the revealing of what was, what is, and what can be." Themes which were common to the responses include 1) Making sense of the struggle, 2) Going it alone, and 3) Putting self on hold. Results from the data may be used to develop strategies for care by the Nurse Practitioner.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Thank you to my husband, Don. Without his support this project could not have been completed. Thank you to my children, Don, Jason, Becky, and Brian, for their good natured cooperation over the past three years. Finally, many thanks to my parents, Marge and Bill Theriault, who taught me that I could do anything I really wanted to do.

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INTRODUCTION

Womens' health and wellness are major themes for the 90's. Major changes including the need for two paychecks, women wanting to have a career, and large numbers of single parent families are just a few of the factors which have altered traditional roles for baby boomer women. The social and economic revolution occurring since the 1960's has allowed females to go into career areas where they have never ventured before. More than half of the women with children under the age of eighteen now work outside of the home. Women with children under the age of six are the fastest growing segment of the female workforce (Zambrana, Hurst, & Hite, 1979; Berns, 1988). Now women who have lived the experience of combined multiple roles of spouse, parenthood, and career person are in the majority and are experts in the life experience of combining multiple roles.

Traditionally, only single, divorced, or widowed women were found combining home and family roles simultaneously. As a result, many of the women opting for this combination today have few role models. Now, thirty years into the Women's Liberation Movement, women have had the experience of coordinating the roles of career, spouse, and parent. As these women have combined roles for the past thirty years, it seems reasonable that they have had to find new ways of being in careers, marital relationships, and parenthood. The role models these women observed growing up are not congruent with today's role combinations. These women who combine career, spouse and parenting roles are now experts in the area of multiple roles. As such, they may provide insights for

other young women making similar choices regarding their future.

This study is a secondary, qualitative analysis of responses from a sample of married, professional women with children for the purpose of discovering the lived experience of combining multiple roles (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). Four questions were chosen from Wave V of a six wave longitudinal study which examined women's overall perceptions of role conflict and enhancement, coping strategies, health, social support, and role functioning. The study began in 1985. The questions specifically chosen for this study asked participants in 1993, if, given the opportunity to live life over again, they would do anything differently related to career, spouse, or parenting. Additionally, they were asked if they felt, based on their lived experience, that they had over invested in the roles of career, spouse or parent. These questions required respondents to reflect back on their lived experience, and to decide if they would make other choices.

A phenomenological approach was used in this study. This approach emphasizes the complexity of such role combinations, the varied ability of women to create their own experiences, and that truth is a synthesis of different realities. Use of open-ended questions allowed for a qualitative analysis of how different decisions may have been made based on the lived experience of combined roles. Interpretation of the replies provided information which may be useful for decision making strategies of women combining work and family roles in the future.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are several research studies which identify the health implications created by the strains of multiple roles on women (Thoits, 1983; Verbugge, 1983; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). There is very little written about the thoughts of women on aspects of their lived experiences in combining roles.

Conceptual Definitions

In retrospect, counterfactual thought is one of the primary concepts represented in the questions about what these women would change in marriage, parenting, and work roles. Counterfactual thought is defined as the thoughts about events leading to an outcome where there are systematic thoughts about how events might be mutated to simulate a new outcome. The counterfactual thought process is felt by some to be basic to social cognition judgments, regrets, elation, perceived happiness, and event causality (Wells, 1989). Research also suggests that counterfactual thoughts are concerned with how a negative result might have been avoided (Davis, Lehman, Wortman, Silver, & Thompson, 1995).

Regret has been termed a relative of counterfactual thought. It has been defined as the “counterfactual emotion,” and implies a sense of emotional discontent with outcomes (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982). Regret, unlike counterfactual thought, does not encompass the element of change in order to alter future outcomes. Counterfactual thought is most critical in middle age since there is still time to make changes which may have impact on future outcomes (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

We often speculate about what we might have changed in hindsight. This process of imagining other alternatives to the present reality is termed counterfactual thinking (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995). For purposes of this study, counterfactual thought will be defined as that process of imagining alternatives to reality, or what might have been done differently. It was chosen as the way to best capture the lived experience of these multiple role women because of the process of reflection counterfactual thoughts initiate.

Review of the Literature

Many studies have been done which consider the impact of multiple roles in mental and physical health. Employment has been implicated as having very positive effects on women's health (Verbugge, 1983), especially when it provides a high degree of satisfaction (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). One of the pioneer studies on combining work and family roles suggested that women are seeking a wider variety of roles to increase their resources, privileges, and self worth (Sieber, 1974). Factors have also been identified which cause less successful role combination such as decreased job satisfaction (Kelly & Voyanoff, 1985), poorly divided household responsibilities (St. John-Parsons, 1978), and decreased parenting satisfaction (Thompson & Walker, 1989). The majority of the studies dealing with the strain of multiple roles indicate that multiple roles, in and of themselves, do not create strain on the women. The strain is related to two combined factors: the enhancement and conflict that result from living multiple roles (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990).

The process of counterfactual thought has been studied as a simulated process to determine the sequence of how outcomes are mutated. Studies have used psychology students who were given various scenarios to read and then manipulate outcomes based on counterfactual thinking to see if there were patterns in how people mutated events. Conclusions showed that subjects tended to mutate events in the direction of normalcy rather than toward exceptional outcomes (Wells, 1989). While this study (Wells, 1989) dealt with counterfactual thought in a strictly hypothetical situation, other studies have used the process of counterfactual thought as it relates to traumatic life events and levels of coping. Participants in one study of counterfactual thought had lost a child or a spouse to a motor vehicle accident or an infant to sudden infant death syndrome. The subjects were asked how often they engaged in counterfactual thought about the loss of their loved one, four to seven years after the event. In general, it was found that mentally trying to undo these traumatic life events was associated with heightened distress (Davis, Lehman, Wortman, Silver, & Thompson, 1995).

Other studies which focus on possible selves have studied the link between cognition, counterfactual thought, and motivation to makes changes for the future. In other words, studies have linked how a person views himself/herself today (cognition) and the potential for what he/she may become (motivation) or is afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Norm theory has also been used to examine the role of counterfactual thought and how individuals determine what is normal and what are unrealized alternatives (Kahneman & Miller, 1986).

Research examining counterfactual thought and its relationship to emotional

distress has evaluated outcomes such as vision for the future. Individuals who engage in counterfactual thought are more likely to envision changes taking place in the future (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995). Results have indicated that an individual who engaged in the process of counterfactual thought may have more of a tendency toward depressive mood states. While counterfactual thought is normal, the events leading to it, as well as timing, may be linked to varying outcomes.

Counterfactual thought in the form of “missed opportunities” has been studied as a longitudinal study beginning in 1964 and continuing through 1986 (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995). The participants in 1986 were specifically questioned about personal counterfactual thought, especially as it related to missed opportunities. Categories investigated included family, education, occupation, attitudes, and values. Participants in the study were middle-aged females, had been married at some point in their lives, were college educated, and had incomes exceeding \$50,000. Results of the study reported that 63% of the women felt they had missed career opportunities, 3% felt they had missed parenting opportunities, and no one reported missing relationship opportunities.

Critique of the Literature

Many studies have examined how individuals use counterfactual thought to imagine different outcomes. Some of the studies have used artificial lab situations while other studies relate to tragic outcomes and were very situation specific. Research related to missed opportunities describes particular events in life roles (family, education,

occupation, attitudes, values) and what might have been done differently. Many of these studies do not include participants across the economic and educational spectrum, as well as people in non traditional families, and sample sizes tend to be small. Several of the studies have used students and proposed hypothetical situations (Wells, 1989).

The study on missed opportunities (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995) begins to examine what women perceive as deficits in their lived experience. Women who are currently living the experience of combining marriage, children, and career are the experts. Given the opportunity to engage in counterfactual thought, the women may be willing to share their thoughts on what they might have done differently related to their marriage, career, or parenting roles. Their reflections on what they would do differently may then be interpreted to make some conclusions about their lived experiences.

Philosophical Framework

Martin Heidegger was a philosopher who held views which were in direct opposition to the traditional Western philosophers' ideas on persons and their ways of knowing (Dreyfus, 1991). These Western philosophers, including Descartes and Husserl, professed an idea that one could understand the universe in a detached way. Their philosophy espoused that one could have a theory about everything, even humans and how they relate in their world (Dreyfus, 1991). It was felt that humans know and act by applying principles. This then is a theory of information processing where the way of

“knowing” is the result of theories which assist with information processing (Dreyfus, 1991; Guignon, 1993).

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger takes a much different approach to how we have knowledge of the world. Heideggerian phenomenology holds a belief that our existence as persons is based in interpretation and understanding of the world (Dreyfus, 1991; Rather, 1992). World is defined as that meaningful set of relationships, practices, and language that we have by virtue of the culture we are born into (Leonard, 1989). The goal is to make visible the nature and meaning of Being. Being is defined as the being of whatever is. A human being is only one aspect of being. It is possible to understand meanings of Being in the world through our daily lived experience. Understanding the experience of Being helps others to explore personal possibilities. Language is the vehicle used to share these ways of Being (Dreyfus, 1991; Rather, 1992).

The philosophical framework of Heideggerian phenomenology has, in time, come to be identified with areas of research seeking to identify the meaning of various lived experiences. Kondora uses Heideggerian hermeneutical analysis to describe the lived experience of survivors of incest (Kondora, 1993). Rather uses the same method to investigate the lived experience of the returning RN to baccalaureate programs (Rather, 1992). Benner uses the Heideggerian approach in trying to understand the phenomenological perspective of explanation, prediction, and understanding in nursing science (Benner, 1985).

Thus, it is necessary to understand that Being means being socialized into the practices of a culture (Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger goes on to define experience as the

turning around of preconceptions. When an event can refine, elaborate, or disconfirm a previous knowledge, experience has occurred (Benner, 1984). Here lies the application of this philosophy to the present study. Women are often socialized in traditional roles of wife and mother. Socialization as a career person has been limited in this culture. What women know is what they have been taught by the culture. Changing times and cultural values have placed women in the position to combine the roles of wife, mother, and career person in various ways. Based on their lived experience, this researcher hopes to discover if changes have occurred related to previous knowledge of role combinations. The purpose of this study is to capture the lived experience of multiple roles for these women.

METHODOLOGY

Women of the 90's are engaged in role combinations which have not been part of past social traditions. A review of the literature verifies that researchers are studying the various effects that multiple roles can have on the role of wife, parent, and career person. Understanding what women perceive to be issues in role combination can help participants in planning the future, provide young women who contemplate the combining of these roles with information from experts of the lived experience, and assist researchers who seek to understand the effects of these role combinations on the women.

This study is a qualitative, secondary analysis of open-ended questions from Wave V of a longitudinal study which examined women's perceptions of role conflict and enhancement, coping strategies, health, social support, and role functioning (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). Qualitative research focuses on reality as it is viewed by the subject. There are no right or wrong answers. This style has limited researcher imposed structure.

Most qualitative research is done by interview technique. This study was originally designed to be a quantitative investigation. Written responses to open-ended questions which were part of the Wave V questionnaire for data collection were identified as possible tools to investigate the lived experience of women with multiple roles. It was in the personal, written reflections of these women that the lived experience was shared. At the time of Wave V, the women had been participating in the study for nearly eight years.

The section on Role Satisfaction begins: “As you know, the reason you were asked to participate in this study is because you are a woman who has chosen to pursue several different roles simultaneously. If you had your life to live over again, are there things you would do differently concerning your job or career? If you had your life to live over again, would you do anything differently concerning your marriage? If you had your life to live over again, would you do anything differently concerning your child(ren)?” A final open-ended question asks: “Would you do anything differently related to your investment in these three roles if you had it to do over again?”

Participants/Sample

This current study involves secondary analysis of four open-ended questions from Wave V of a longitudinal study which examined women’s perceptions of role conflict and enhancement, coping strategies, health, social support, and role functioning (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). Information related to the primary study can be found in Appendix A. Participants in this Wave V study were professional women who were married when the study began in 1985, had been employed full time and had a preschool child (children). These women were professionals from two occupational groups, business women and university professors.

Women who took part in the original study were contacted by letter and invited to take part in this follow up questionnaire. One hundred sixty-six women, or 83% of the primary study participants took part in Wave V. All completed questionnaires were

forwarded to the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research for data entry. Open-ended question responses were transcribed for each respondent by respondent number.

Human Subjects Procedure

The primary research has been approved by the Michigan State University Human Subjects Committee (UCRIHS). This study is a secondary analysis and as such an exempt review was sought and approved through Michigan State University UCRIHS (see approval letter, appendix B).

Research Design

“Through investigation the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” explains Heidegger (Dreyfus, 1991). This study is a Heideggerian hermeneutical analysis of the lived experience of women who have combined multiple roles. Hermeneutic means interpretation. It is a method that the Greeks used to provide a systematic approach to interpreting written and oral texts (Polkinghorne, 1983). Because Heidegger believed that we come to understand the meaning of Being through our experience in the world, he also stated that we all exist hermeneutically with meaning found everywhere in the world (Kisiel, 1993; Dreyfus, 1991).

These data were handled according to the guidelines for hermeneutic methodology. Finding common meaning, skills, experiences and practices among people who share common cultural meanings are the outcomes desired by hermeneutics. Access to the everyday lived experience of people can give new understanding of the person

(Benner, 1994; Dreyfus, 1991). Understanding the lived experience implies, according to hermeneutic phenomenology, understanding the cultural and linguistic boundaries of the participant (Leonard, 1989; Dreyfus, 1991).

Hermeneutical analysis involves a seven step process. This method was used to interpret this data (Diekelmann, Allen, & Tanner, 1989). Stage one was the reading of the overall data by the researcher and another expert for the broad understanding of the text. In this case, two faculty members read the text as well as the student researcher. Stage two involved a summary of each text for possible themes by the student researcher and two faculty members. The written analysis was supported by excerpts from the data with reader consensus as the goal. During stage three, the student researcher's interpretations were compared with the faculty members' analysis for similarities and differences. When disagreement occurred, clarification was achieved by referring to the original text. The material generated in the previous stages was studied for themes which were derived from common meanings in stage four. Once common themes were identified, a constitutive pattern began to emerge in stage five. The constitutive pattern expresses the relationships between relational themes and is the highest form of hermeneutical analysis. Once themes are established, there may be validation of these constitutive patterns by individuals not on the research team in stage six. This is often when one or two participants might be asked to review the documentation and validate the analysis. This has not been done in the case of this research. Finally, the document is prepared using excerpts from the interviews so that the reader can validate the findings also.

By using these stages of analysis which involve frequent comparisons by several different readers, areas of inconsistency can be identified. This also helped to control for bias as well as to identify inaccuracies which were not supported in the text. The researcher is a self- interpreting human being with shared background and meanings (Benner, 1984). Following this seven stage process helped to retain validity within the data analysis.

In summary, a seven stage hermeneutical analysis was completed using written responses to open-ended questions asking women what they might have done differently related to marriage, career, or parenting, as well as their investment in these roles. The researcher attempted to capture the phenomena of the lived experience of married career women with children through the questions about what they might have done differently.

Results/Findings

During the Wave V sample, 91.5% of the women were still married to the same person as they were at the inception of the study in 1985. Work schedules were somewhat altered with only 85.1% still employed full time, 11.7% now worked part time, and 3.2% were not employed outside of the home. The children ranged in age from one through eighteen. Family incomes for 55.8% of the participants were greater than \$100,000. One hundred sixty-six participants took part in the Wave V study (83% of the original 200).

The hermeneutical analysis was carried out as previously outlined. The research team consisted of the student researcher and two faculty members: one, a faculty expert in

Heideggerian phenomenology, and the other, the faculty thesis chair. Themes which were identified by the research team were: 1) "Making sense of the struggle"; 2) "Going it alone; and 3) " Putting self on hold." The constitutive pattern which emerged as a result of the hermeneutic process was "Looking back makes possible the revealing of what was, what is, and what can be." This overall pattern connects the themes. It is in the personal reflection of their lived experience (looking back) that women were able to see their struggles (what was), identify feelings of being alone (what is), articulate how it feels to put self on hold for a variety of reasons, and finally, identify what they might do differently (what can be).

Research Question

This study is a secondary, qualitative analysis of responses from a sample of married, professional women with children for the purpose of discovering the lived experience of combining multiple roles. Information was interpreted through a hermeneutical analysis of open-ended questions which inquired about whether, given the chance to live life over again, these women would do anything differently related to career, marriage, parenting or their personal investment in any of the roles.

Constitutive Pattern

“Looking back makes possible the revealing of what was, what is, and what can be.”

We saw the great brooding wings
 Hump by.
 We felt the empty air rush back.
 We saw there was no obstacle
 he-who-looks-behind-without-looking,
 he-who-looks-ahead-without-blinking
 could not thread through, backward, or
 forward,
 And we were falsely comforted.

Maxine Kumin
The Cleansing of Bosnia

Maxine Kumin writes of the owl who can turn its head completely around and also stare ahead without blinking. While the owl may not be able to consider the meanings of the past, humans can reflect on the lived experience of their lives and consider the past, acknowledge the present, and plan for the future. Women who live multiple roles often do not take time to stop and reflect. By reflecting on the questions posed as part of this study these women looked back, which made possible the revealing of what was, and is, and gave them the opportunity to look into the future.

Heideggerian phenomenology holds that “Being” is the being of whatever is (Dreyfus, 1991). Making the lived experience of multiple role women intelligible is the result of interpretation and understanding. Language becomes a vehicle to help understand the ways of “Being”. In accepting the idea that each person finds meaning in her own lived experience, there is acceptance of more than one way of “Being”. As each participant took time to look back at their lived experiences, a wide variety of responses

surfaced in relationship to their roles as career person, parent, and spouse. Using their lived experience, these women were able to recognize ways to be in the world.

As women reflected on their lived experience, some of the things they might have done differently may seem very ambitious to some readers. If, however, the woman's lived experience of role combination was a positive force, she may feel empowered to take on larger roles. In response to the question about things which might have been done differently related to job or career, one university professor wrote:

“(I would have) . . . had more children. Write more papers. Eat less.
Exercise more.”

Another university professor, speaking to what she would do differently related to her career, clustered her views about the role combinations into one response. Again, reflection on the past allows the participant to consider other ways of “Being”. In this case, there appears to be a sense that her way of “Being” in the world is less than some of the others that she has observed. What she would do differently, as a result of her lived experience, would be to have a grander sense of “Being” in the world.

“I’d like to have a more sensitive, smarter child, a more successful,
outgoing husband, a bigger house, more help, more time for
imaginative writing, and a better body.”

Other women, as they look back, recognize that what they know about “Being” is the result of the past experience. They admit that without the past, they could not “be in the world” in the same way. As a result, they validate what Heidegger says when he states that everyday experience, as it is lived, is concerned with rendering the lived experience

intelligible as the place where meaning resides (Dreyfus, 1991; Rather, 1992).

“I might not make the job change (transfer) away from my husband - but, looking back, I might not have learned what I did. So it’s better that things happened the way they did.”

When reflecting on the past, other women note what they consider to be deficiencies based on their lived experience. Again, they are also able to acknowledge that their ability to know is the result of the exceptional experiences they have had. While they speak to possibilities of different experiences related to children (what was), they acknowledge value in the experience they have (what is), and can verbalize a decision that they would not change anything (what can be).

“My youngest child has a disability and it puts a strain on the marriage and life. I would love to have two healthy children but I would not trade the little “monster” I have now.”

One business woman responded to what she might have done differently related to her marriage stating:

“Somewhere along the line our ability to communicate has disappeared. I have let problems continue instead of addressing them. It has made me see problems clearly, but I still have not acted on them as I should.”

This professional woman has utilized her experience as she looks back on her marriage. She is able to recognize changes in the experience of the marriage related to

communication and her lack of addressing problems. She notes that presently she can see the issues, but it is not within her experience to act on these problems as she feels she should. It seems to indicate that some women may see negatives related to an experience but make a conscious choice not to alter the future.

Other women, as they look back, know they would have chosen a different path to “being in the world”, at least as it relates to marriage and children. In one case, the experience has led to a strong realization that the way the woman has experienced the combined roles has caused her to know she would rather “be” in a different way.

“I wouldn’t be married - I wouldn’t have children - I’d be more career oriented and more productive.”

Heidegger tells us that understanding is grasping one’s own possibilities for being. At times, because our lived experience seems very ordinary, the meaning can be hidden. The reflections shared by some women indicate that they would make changes based on their lived experience.

One university professor wrote:

“I would have chosen a vocation with horses when I was young and tried to make a career of it (without concern for pay or stakes).”

Common Themes

Making sense of the struggle.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

T. S. Elliot
Burnt Norton

There is a cyclic course to our “Being”. In the present, we look back to where we have come from. At the same time, we also look forward to possibilities of what might be. This “Being” of the future may be purposely altered because of the lived experience, or it may be quietly accepted as fate. Whatever the nature of the “being-in-the-world”, it is the result of our past and present experience. There is a choice to use the experience to change the course, to continue on and accept the path of least resistance, or continue on the same, having glimpsed a different one. No matter the choice, it is the daily living which will define our lived experience. In the reflection of the experience is a desire to make sense of the struggle, and in analyzing the choices, the struggle is illuminated.

Each participant in this study was asked to reflect back on what they might have done differently related to career, marriage, and parenthood. Within the responses to these questions, a desire to make some sense of the struggle seemed to surface. Some responses speak clearly to the timing or choice of combinations of the roles.

One participant wrote in response to what she would do differently about children:

(I would) . . . “Not delay getting pregnant. I had a stillbirth (at age 34), then a live kid (age 36), then years of unsuccessful attempts, with two miscarriages.”

Other women perceive different information from their lived experience. As such, they note that they would opt to alter their choices in a direction, but for different reasons. It is their lived experience which gives them the ability to make choices about what

might have worked better in combining roles.

“I would have married earlier. I would have had my children earlier so they’d be older now.”

A business woman notes:

“I’d start a family later in my career. Marry farther into my career.”

A university professor felt that her experience would lead her to:

“Marry a different type of man.”

One physician felt she definitely would change her career if she could live her life over again.

“I’d have chosen a different career - less stressful.”

While some of the ability to make sense of the struggle is related to simple timing issues in how the roles are combined, others live with issues which complicate the whole role process.

One participant shared some very personal aspects of her lived experience as she tried to share her struggle. In her description of the struggle, she indicates a desire to use her lived experience to create change in her future. She intends to actively alter her way of “Being” in the world.

“I am conscious of my tendency to drink too much alcohol and I’m taking a serious look at that. I’m aware of my changing hormone balance and the real impact it has on my ‘performance’ as wife, mother and physician at certain times of the month, and I’m seeking help with that too.”

Another woman wrote of a different struggle with alcohol, and the effect it had on her marriage. Her being-in-the-world is strongly impacted by her spouse's ability to "Be" in the world.

"My husband is an alcoholic who is not in recovery. This makes life rather chaotic, and I'm strongly considering separation/divorce. I don't like the idea that my daughter would be raised by a single parent, the main reason I am still in the marriage. The change I need is total independence from my spouse or a major change in his behavior."

Struggle, which is identified in reflection on the past, is not always the result of another human's "Being" in the world. Other forces also impact our ways of "Being" in the world. These same forces can have strong impact on our role combinations. As this university professor wrote:

"Sometimes it can't be helped (job stress). I've had some pretty hairy political battles that tend to create great stress at home. I don't know how I could have done anything different - I almost quit twice in the past seven years but my spouse and family (my parents/siblings) supported me. I think I'm stronger each time."

The struggle to combine roles can cause some women, in looking back at their experience, to see that the value of their "Being" is taking on a deteriorating quality.

"In the overall stress of juggling parenting, marriage, and job, the marriage often gets pushed aside. It's hard to be a good, loving

wife when you're on a tight schedule and under stress a lot. My husband does not respond well when I'm stressed and we frequently hit downward spirals when challenges in my job or in parenting emerge rather than supporting me in the situation - but I've reached the point where I just care less though I know this is unhealthy for the marriage."

There are some who, in thinking about their lived experience, recognize that the ways of "Being" in the world are an exciting challenge. This woman's approach to role combination has taken on a different twist:

"My only complaint is that I feel like I am constantly juggling - probably have one ball too many. I fear that some day all the balls will fall-but they haven't so far . . . I do get some satisfaction from that realization."

Many of these women are combining traditional and non traditional roles in a way that has never been done. As a result, it has been difficult to measure success. As one person explained when describing her marriage:

(I would) . . . "Not waste so much energy coming to terms with the fact that I'd never have the kind of traditional marriage my parents did and feel good about my flexibility in achieving a different kind of marriage."

Finally, one woman shared her thoughts on the fact that she did not intend to be in the world as a woman with multiple roles:

“I always thought I’d be a stay at home mom. I never really intended to have a career.”

Across the spectrum of respondents, there were many, varied ways that these career women tried to make sense of the struggle.

Going It Alone

“Little I ask
And that little is not granted
There are very few crumbs
In the world anymore.”

Elizabeth Coatsworth
The Mouse

Envision the small mouse begging for a crumb or two. It does not ask for anything costly, large or elaborate, just a bit of help to survive. The mouse does not ask the world for much, but there is no help in the world to meet its needs. Women, surrounded by families and co-workers, have a sense of “going it alone.” The aloneness can take a variety forms. It is a personal response to the environment, and, as such, those around the woman may not perceive this sense of “going it alone”. One commercial banking president wrote in answer to what she would do differently about her career:

“(I’d seek) . . . more meaningful job content; female peers to relate to; friendlier, more open culture to live in; better marital relationship.”

It would seem on the surface that this professional has male peers to relate to, an outer circle of relationships as well as relationships within the home. In her lived

experience, this banker seems to define her “aloneness” by what she feels is lacking in her present situation. She identified her marriage and career as having deficits she would like to change if she could live her life over again. There is sense of being closed out from interaction with select human beings at home and in the work place.

Other women seem to define the aloneness as a function of the physical distance they encounter with the combination of multiple roles. Commenting on her career and how it impacts her lived experience, this attorney comments about the effect of commuting on her roles:

“Too many hours away (commuting/working) from home and family, stress of juggling responsibilities, (I’m) physically worn out.”

Driving back and forth to work alone while mentally trying to juggle responsibilities is stressful and leaves the participant physically worn out. She describes long hours away from the family and a fatigue which probably diminishes the lived experience time spent with her spouse and children. This contributes to the feeling she is “going it alone.”

“Going it alone” can take the form of isolation in the midst of other human beings, or as a result of external constraints such as commuting. For other women, their lived experience of “going it alone” is the result of absent or non supportive spouses, or children who do not share the work of the home. One woman stated bluntly that she had to “do it all”, sharing that sense of immense burden which is sometimes felt when there is no connection to another human being.

“I do it all - no spouse.”

For others, there is a connection to human beings, but when “crumbs” of help are asked for, nothing is given. So again, the lived experience takes on the “Being” of “Going it alone.”

“No support doing chores at home, (or with) responsibility with the kids.”

And still another shares that her success at “going it alone” caused yet more isolation in her lived experience:

“Chronic imbalance in responsibilities. I carried the bulk of financial support, child rearing, household maintenance, and coordinations. I became much more successful than my husband (artist), which he became resentful about, and passive-aggressive, not meeting my needs.”

Many women felt emotionally alone and could identify feelings of:

“Lack of emotional support, empathy, encouragement, sharing.”

The loneliness of bearing most of the responsibility was experienced by one woman who wrote:

“It would be nice to be married to a mature person who understood me and on whom I could lean, sometimes, and NOT have to be so TOTALLY capable all the time.”

So it seems that being-in-the-world is not a guarantee against feelings of doing it all alone. While a few women did mention supportive, encouraging spouses, most seemed to express the sense of “going it alone”. These feelings may be present in any combinations of the career, parenting, or marriage (divorce) realms. The sense of “going it alone” can be the result of external barriers (job/commute distance), lack of

peer/community interaction leading to isolation, functioning within units which are insensitive or unresponsive to the womens' needs, or truly functioning alone without support from other human beings. Ironically, although working with other multiple role women, it was through participation in the study that the respondents could share these lonely feelings. One participant related:

“I was somewhat relieved to think that others may experience similar problems.”

Putting Self On Hold

He sets forth the time for birth and the time for death,
The time for planting and the time for pulling up.
The time for killing and the time for healing.
The time for tearing down and the time for building.
He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy.
The time for silence and the time for talk.
He sets the time for love and the time for hate.
The time for war and the time for peace.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: 2-8

This poetry reminds us of the need for balance as we proceed through life. Many of the participants in the study speak to the issue of putting “self on hold”. This lack of balance can occur for long periods of time and without any immediate prospects for improving. The lived experience of these multiple roles is particularly difficult for some women. One woman responded to what she would do differently concerning her career:

“I’d demand equal career consideration regarding relocation decisions for my family. (I would) . . . not resign a position to move with my husband when he changed jobs until I had a position secured where he moved. (I would) . . . be less involved in supporting his career.

For years I was pastors' wife. I spent long hours doing church work and being social 'hostess' for church. I would do less - stay home, and, for example, not be at church for every service and/or function."

This professional definitely felt she had put her career on hold. Another woman lamented on the effects of putting her career on hold:

"My husband volunteered for an officer's commission in the U.S. Army in 1987. He went on active duty in January of 1988. He was assigned to Ft. Benning; then to a small farming community in Germany from 1990 to the present. I had to resign my position to keep my marriage and family."

A third woman commented on the effects of putting her career on hold for eight years:

"I took many years off (about 8) in order to raise the children and help my husband's career. This has created problems when I took up my career again. It created some expectations which have been difficult to change. When I went back to work I had to 'catch up'."

Still another woman wrote of putting her career on hold and the frustration she felt:

"I took a step down to a clerical position because of my family. I feel trapped, unappreciated, under utilized, and under paid."

For other study participants putting self on hold related more to personal time issues.

As one physician reflected:

“I did a time schedule and noted how little time I had for myself,
my own interests.”

Another writes of putting self on hold:

“The week long (time) studies were a real eye opener. I saw I had very
little, if any, time alone.”

Finally, one woman, though satisfied with her roles, wrote of the need for “alone
time”:

“At this point I am more satisfied in my dual position of
career/mother. However, I still do not allow myself enough alone
time and I’m always pushing to do more.”

Critical Hermeneutics

As discussed in the literature review, there are many ideas about what happens when women combine multiple roles. Some studies allude to psychological distress (Barnett & Baruch, 1985), other speak to spill over from family to work (Crouter, 1984), yet others to women’s health (Auerbach & Figert, 1995). Based on the hermeneutical analysis of responses given by this group of career oriented mothers who were mostly married (91.5%), it is very difficult to “label” a key to successful combination of the roles or generalize the outcomes for all. While Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley’s study identified that 63% of participants had missed career opportunities, only 30% of women in this secondary analysis would make changes in their career if they could live

life over again (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995). It is also difficult to know, if at the time these women chose to combine multiple roles, they truly understood the implications of their decisions. The struggles which have been shared point to personal growth.

At times, the women have made a decision to continue or alter paths. It is the openness of these women to the lived personal experience and a willingness to share it with others, which provides us with valuable ideas. The experiences are neither good nor bad. They are simply each woman's evolving legacy of being-in-the-world. At times, blame is placed on women for struggling, and the struggle itself is characterized as a negative process. The struggle needs to be framed as a method of reinventing new ways of being wives, mothers and career women in the world.

DISCUSSION

This study is a hermeneutical analysis of the responses of 154 women who consented to take part in a longitudinal study which examined women's perceptions of role conflict and enhancement, coping strategies, health, social support and role functioning. The responses in this study came from Wave V data, which sought to describe the lived experience of multiple role women through their responses to questions about what they might do differently related to career, marriage, or parenting. Additionally, they were also asked if they felt they had over invested in the role as wife, mother, or career person. Analysis of the data identified a constitutive pattern of: "Looking back makes possible the revealing of what was, what is, and what can be." In addition, three themes became apparent: 1) "Making sense of the struggle"; 2) "Going it alone"; and 3) "Putting self on hold".

Limitations

In handling qualitative data, there is not a clear hypothesis regarding what the anticipated results will be. Heideggerian hermeneutics in particular, seeks to discover the meaning of being-in-the-world through the lived experience of the human person. Since each human being is unique, each has an equally unique interpretation of their lived experience. It becomes impossible to take the responses, categorize them, and label them right or wrong. Responses can be grouped into common themes, and the themes grouped in a constitutive pattern which allows the description of the data holistically. This process requires the cooperation of several researchers who seek to extract truth from the

transcribed data.

Limitations of the qualitative process are directly related to the study sample. The ability of the participant to verbalize or write about their lived experience is critical to this type of data collection. Additionally, the participant could decline to share certain lived experiences for a variety of reasons. Because this data set was not based on this researcher directly interviewing these women, but rather on a secondary analysis of transcribed data of personal revelations to open-ended questions, the researcher has no ability to clarify or ask the participant for additional information. Allowing women to tell their story rather than simply responding to open-ended questions would provide an even richer body of description related to the lived experience of women with multiple roles. The subjects are a very homogenous group of essentially well educated, Caucasian, career oriented, mothers who have been married at some point in time. Findings should be interpreted with these women in mind.

Implications of Results for Future Research

There is a need to do further qualitative research in the area of women with multiple roles and the use of counterfactual thought. The current study deals with well-educated women, married at the onset of the study, who have children and careers. More consideration needs to be given to the many roles of single women, with and without children. Additionally, women in non traditional families need to be queried about their lived experiences. Experiences for women who have different educational back grounds, different racial and cultural backgrounds, limited career options, and different social

support systems may have very different themes of the lived experience. There may also be complicating roles which could surface using different sample populations.

Studies done until now have tried to focus on how the combination of the roles affects children, health, chronic illness states, and psychological well being. Few studies have actually asked women what they perceive as the obstacles in role combination. There is also a need to study business and corporate support for women and their families.

Decisions made based on the lived experience cannot be placed in a cook book format. These rich descriptions can provide us with insight not only useful to the study participants, but helpful to other women trying to make decisions. This appreciation for individual uniqueness allows females to know that there are many options in the process of combining roles. The ability to be flexible with given situations, or to alter our decisions based on our lived experience can then be viewed as a valuable female trait which should be cultivated. Data can also allow multiple role women to know they have many counterparts in the world about them. They are not alone.

Implication for Nursing Practice

In terms of advanced nursing practice, the results of these findings can be very useful. Women and children are the most frequent consumers of the health care system. Nurse Practitioners (NP) will have many opportunities to interact with those who live multiple roles. It is imperative that we approach our care in a holistic manner. As we assess an ill child, we can also speak to the mother about the impact the child's illness is

having on her life. Perhaps she has an attendance problem at work because of the illness.

Maybe she can't concentrate on her work because she is worried about an ill child.

Perhaps the child has a chronic illness which is impacting her marriage. At times, the ability to share concerns is, in itself, an intervention. Inviting the parent to share her concerns may give the Nurse Practitioner the ability to initiate much needed

interventions. Interventions may take the form of assessing needs, referral to support groups, direction into financial/federal programs, or basic education and counseling.

These strategies are well within the boundaries of NP's scope of practice and expertise.

As discussed previously, research findings indicate that the use of counterfactual thought is common to most human beings. Clients may need to be invited to reflect on where they are in the lived experience of their multiple roles and what they might do differently. We know that role combination involves both enhancement and conflict (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). Research also indicates that the use of counterfactual thought enables individuals to envision changes taking place in the future (Landman, Vandewater, Stewart, & Malley, 1995).

Nurse Practitioners need to encourage self care strategies. Women need permission to take time for themselves. The NP needs to ask multiple role females to describe what they personally do for themselves on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Some women are able to factor in time for self care. Others need help in developing strategies to identify these personal opportunities. Assisting multiple role females to learn stress reduction techniques can be a very important self care strategy. Because of the traditional care taker role, personal time is often not planned for. By taking a holistic

health approach, we give our clients permission to care for themselves. Women then learn that by taking care of themselves they also take care of the important people in their lives.

In the course of our practice, another nursing implication is the education of other family members. In dealing with a spouse or child, the Nurse Practitioner can encourage a cooperative effort in the family. The Nurse Practitioner has generally assessed the support systems, strengths and limitations of family members. She may be able to direct family members in a positive way to all take more responsibility in household tasks. This is in keeping with the role of advocate and educator.

Helping the multiple role woman to be aware that she is not alone is another important counselor role. At times, support groups may help to provide personal time, as well as link women to others with similar situations. Advocating for the client, whether in the health care system, government system, or by undoing ideas about learned helplessness, helps reinforce self worth. Primary care settings afford a place of continuity of care for many women. They may come with a child, a spouse, a parent, or only themselves, but each encounter with the Nurse Practitioner is an opportunity to evaluate progress, suggest alternatives, and let the client know she is important.

In summary, assisting women to use counterfactual thought in reviewing present situations and envisioning alternatives may be a very helpful strategy. Taking time to think about alternatives can lead to choosing different paths which can result in different outcomes. Helping clients to reflect on personal lived experience and consider “possibilities” is a role of the Nurse Practitioner.

Summary/Conclusions

This study was a hermeneutical analysis of the lived experience of women with multiple roles. The participants were asked if, given the chance to live life over, they would do anything differently related to the roles of career, wife, and parent. Additionally, they were asked if they felt they had overinvested in any of the three roles. Responses were unique to each respondent. An overall constitutive theme was “Looking back makes possible the revealing of what was, what is, and what can be.” Three sub themes also emerged from this data analysis: 1) “Making sense of the struggle”; 2) “Going it alone”; and 3) “Putting self on hold”.

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger to define ways of knowing based on the lived experience of humans was essential when attempting to understand the participant responses. Thinking, or being in the world, is never a static process but rather a journey to where we can let what is “be” in all the possibilities (Benner, 1985). The lived experience of each human is unique, as is the individual’s knowledge of “being” in the world. Language is the vehicle by which the ways of “Being”, or lived experiences are shared within the culture. The hermeneutic researcher seeks common meanings, situations, and practices which will help to achieve understanding related to the lived experience of multiple roles.

The study participants are living experiences which may not have been shared by most of their mothers or other significant past role models. As a result, they seek to combine the roles and create a lived experience the best they can. Over time, when asked to reflect on their life, they are able to look back and see what has been revealed in their

lived experience. They are able to assess their current status and look to the possibilities of the future. Along the journey, they have attempted to make sense of their past, present, and future struggles in various ways. Often, they reflect on the fact that combining the roles of career person, parent, and wife has caused them to struggle and at times to feel alone. In looking back, they also see that they have put themselves on hold for many reasons. Overall, the chance to reflect helps them integrate and savor their lived experience as uniquely their own.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DESCRIPTIVE DATA RELATED TO THE PRIMARY STUDY

ON WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND ENHANCEMENT,

COPING STRATEGIES, HEALTH, SOCIAL SUPPORT,

AND ROLE FUNCTIONING

APPENDIX A

WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF ROLE CONFLICT AND ENHANCEMENT, COPING STRATEGIES, HEALTH, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND ROLE FUNCTIONING

The original study of women's perceptions of role conflict and enhancement, coping strategies, health, social support, and role functioning was a longitudinal study which began in 1985 (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990). Participants in this study were married, professional women with pre school children. This population was composed of professionals from two occupational groups, business women and university professors. The sample was 93% Caucasian, all had a pre school child, and all were employed full time at the beginning of the study. The mean age of the women at the start of this project was 34.6 years and the mean age of the spouse was 36.8 years. These couples had been married an average of 8.6 years and had an average of 1.6 children (with a range of one to five children) in 1985. Eighty-three percent of the women had college degrees and 74% had graduate degrees. The median total family income was \$76,581., while 43% of the families were earning greater than \$100,000. by 1991.

Candidates for this study were identified through their employers. University participants came from the two largest universities in Michigan as well as the two largest universities in the Chicago area. All of the business women came from employers located within the same geographic areas as the universities. Business enterprises were identified by criteria which included a minimum of fifty employees, and locations within

a five-county area in Michigan or in Cook County, Illinois. The business also carried one of the Standard Industrialization Classification Codes (SIC) which correspond to industries which tend to attract female professional employees. For purposes of this study, the professions included were women in banking, accounting, law, and advertising. Small, medium, and large companies were then stratified for the sampling frame (Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat, & Lang, 1990).

To establish that each woman met eligibility criteria, screening telephone interviews were conducted with eligible women. The criteria included a minimum of thirty hours employment per week, living with the spouse, and having at least one child between the ages of one and five years. The initial study was done in 1985, with successive information gathered at four month intervals during 1985 and 1986 (Wave I-IV). Wave V and VI data were collected later in follow up questionnaires (1993 and 1996). Two hundred participants were included in the sample, but spouses did not participate in the 1993 and 1996 follow up. The previously described secondary hermeneutical analysis was collected via questionnaire in 1993.

APPENDIX B
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

February 13, 1997

TO: Linda Beth Tiedje
A-230 Life Sciences Building

RE: IRB#: 97-030
TITLE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN WITH MULTIPLE ROLES
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-C, E
APPROVAL DATE: 02/10/97

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revisions listed above.

RENEWAL: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.



OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
AND
GRADUATE
STUDIES

**PROBLEMS/
CHANGES:**

Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517) 355-2180 or FAX (517) 432-1171.

University Committee on
Research Involving
Human Subjects
(UCRIHS)

Michigan State University
246 Administration Building
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

517/355-2180
FAX: 517/432-1171

Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bcd

cc: Mary Burkett

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Stress and Coping Among Women Professionals

Institute for Social Research

University of Michigan

I understand that the Institute for Social Research wants to study stress and coping in married women professionals who have small children. I understand that I will be interviewed four times over the course of the study about the problems I encounter in being a professional, a wife, and a mother, how I view these problems and how I manage them. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, I understand that if I do not wish to answer a particular question, I may refuse to do so.

If I have any concerns or questions about the study, I understand that I may contact Dr. Carol Emmons at (313)763-4475 or Dr. Camille Wortman at (313)763-2359, and they will try to answer my questions to my satisfaction. Finally, I understand that the Institute for Social Research will keep all information completely confidential. Neither the National Science Foundation (NSF) nor any other agency, organization or academic institution will obtain information about individual respondents. NSF will, however, be provided with a final report with statistical data from everyone combined.

Respondent's Name (please print): _____

Respondent's Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

UCRIHS APPROVAL FOR
THIS project EXPIRES:

FEB 19 1997

and must be renewed within
11 months to continue.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

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