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PINNING MOTHERHOOD: THE CONSTRUCTION OF MOTHERING IDENTITIES ON
PINTEREST

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the new social media site, Pinterest, to uncover the processes through which mothers construct self- and public-identities. Despite being valued at over $3.8 billion dollars (Perez 2013), having an impressive user retention rate (Moore 2014), and having a highly gendered user base (Tekobbe 2013), Pinterest has been the site of limited sociological inquiry. Seventeen semi-structured qualitative interviews on mothering and Pinterest use were conducted with central Florida mothers who have a Pinterest account and at least one child between 6 months and 10 years old. Through analysis based in a grounded theory approach, three central themes emerged from the data: (1) mothers negotiate motherhood ideals, perpetuated through Pinterest, through drawing on gendered ideologies; (2) mothers' use of Pinterest both supports and impairs construction of positive self-identities, complexly overlapping with concerns of technology overuse; and (3) the compartmentalized nature of Pinterest facilitates the activation of multiple identities which allow 'escapes' from the pressures of motherhood and everyday responsibilities. Insights derived from this research can also be helpful in explaining the overlaps between online and offline identities, how women manage motherhood ideals, and the compartmentalization of self-identities.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are a large and expanding industry. In 2012, the Pew Research Center reported that of people who use the Internet, 67% use Facebook and 15% use Pinterest, demonstrating the wide influence that these sites have. Reports also suggest that it is common knowledge that women make up the majority of Pinterest's users (Bercovici 2014; Moore 2014). An article in *Forbes* claims that Pinterest pin creation—or user activity—continues to increase in 2014 (Bercovici 2014). Additionally, 84% of women who began using Pinterest are still active after three years of using Pinterest; this includes logging on regularly and pinning items to boards (Bercovici 2014).

There is a limited body of academic research exploring Pinterest, except that which outlines quantitative demographic information (Pew Research Center). Existing academic research includes limited studies which explore Pinterest's interface design, quantitative inquiry into user processes (Ottoni et al 2013; Gilbert, Bakhshi, Chang, and Terveen 2013), and how Pinterest can be leveraged as a tool (Hansen, Nowlan, and Winter 2012). There are far more publications in non-academic blog and online magazine format, which highlights a more diverse range of topics and applications of Pinterest.[1]

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[1] e.g. http://techcrunch.com/2013/10/23/confirmed-pinterest-raises-225-million/
http://blog.rjmetrics.com/2014/05/07/pinners-be-pinnin-how-to-justify-pinterests-3-8b-valuation/
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/11/pinterest-stress-moms-social-media_n_3253475.html
http://www.forbes.com/sites/stevecooper/2013/09/25/pinterest-launches-article-pins/
http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-24/why-investors-love-pinterest-so-much
http://www.theguardian.com/media/media-blog/2013/oct/09/pinterest-social-networking-article-pin

Although online interaction has been well-researched in the sociological community, social media has only recently become a topic of inquiry. This research on social media includes, for instance, presentation of self on Facebook (Chen and Marcus 2012), how text-based interaction is changing communication (Burkhardt and Brass 1990), and political activism via Twitter (Choi and Park 2014), yet few researchers have explored the social happenings of Pinterest. Pinterest offers the unique opportunity to see where the future of social media may lay, especially in regards to visual non-direct communication. It is important to understand social media uses and users' motives as these technologies of communication become more pervasive in modern societies.

Beyond this, because of the gendered dynamic of Pinterest, this social media site presents a platform by which to understand how social media influences or can be a tool for women to negotiate gendered ideals and mothering. While increasing research reveals a culture of motherhood (Nelson 2009) and the pressures of intensive mothering (e.g. Hays 1996), little research has yet to explore the place of social media in the construction of mothering identities. This thesis explores the ways in which mothers are using Pinterest, revealing a process of distancing and accepting gendered ideals, the management of expectations and the act of self policing, and compartmentalizing identities and escaping the present through Pinterest.

Data were collected via qualitative semi-structured interviews. Seventeen mothers with children between the ages of 6 months and 10 years who self-identified as Pinterest users were interviewed. During these interviews mothers referenced their actual Pinterest account, from which they were able to accurately recall the reasons they used Pinterest. For the analysis phase

of my research, I utilized a social constructionist theoretical framework to explore why mothers were using Pinterest, how they began using Pinterest, and why they continue to use it. This research also draws on elements from gender ideology, as topics related to gender were discussed by participants. This approach also enabled an analysis of if and when mothers connected their Pinterest use to mothering. However, the focus of this research remains on the constructions of how mothers are using Pinterest.

Staying close to the social constructionist approach, the views expressed by the mothers were not analyzed as inherent to being a mother, or intrinsic within each participant. Rather, the approach explored these stories as based in their reactions to interview questions and conversation based in their situated reality. As mothers, these women are subjected to the criticism and advice from people in face-to-face interactions as well as over the Internet (McEwan and Zanolla 2013). The participants in this research tell stories in which they respond to societal pressure to enact good mothering techniques and use Pinterest to help fulfill this goal. While none of the participants heralded Pinterest as the most important parenting tool they utilized, the conversations and insights that took place revealed that Pinterest is another tool that mothers use to exercise their agency. This usage then directly and indirectly affects their mothering identities.

Overall, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to understanding construction of identities through social media and exploring how and why mothers use Pinterest. This investigation will utilize qualitative interviews to unearth how mothers construct their uses and experiences with Pinterest. Moreover, this research will explore the contradicting processes of distancing and

embracing gendered role identities, which mothers use to negotiate various situations. Additionally, this research explores how mothers manage expectations and the repercussion of unmet expectations, leading to discussions of self-policing and the medicalization of technology use. Finally, this research will discuss the compartmentalization of multiple identities and how social media mediates this process.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the self has expanded in past decades as theories of poststructuralism, cultural studies, feminism, and queer theory have changed the landscape of research on the self (Callero 2003). More recently, the effects of globalization on the self can be seen working through global media and the Internet (Callero 2003). Specifically, social media allows people a new medium through which to communicate; this form of communication is a new types of social interaction which can be analyzed to understand institutionalized ideologies. Understanding how people construct identities online is an important new research opportunity.

Contemporary symbolic interactionists have furthered the understanding of how people communicate the self to others, or identity construction, both of which are theorized as emergent, negotiated phenomena (Blumer 1969; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goffman 1959; Stone 1981). Furthermore the identities we create are situated within role structures and individuals negotiate their identity when navigating daily situations (Blumstein 1973; Styker 1980; Turner 1976). Symbolic Interactionists also recognize that created identities are located with a network of institutional and organizational contexts (Arthur 1997; Stryker 1980). Mothers actively participate in creating meaning, managing identities, and defining situations through interactions. This research uses these premises to investigate how and why mothers are using Pinterest.

Identity Theories and Online Identities

Standing alone identities have no inherent meaning instead individuals use signs to evoke meaning, which then invokes another's response (Schwalbe and Schrock 1996). That is to say, identities are constructions which are understood through use of understood language, symbols,

and situations. Accordingly, identity is not a static role but a tool to create a situated self (Schwalbe and Schrock 1996). Following Schwalbe and Schrock's (1996) example, identity work will be used to call attention to the purposeful maintenance of identity and the coordinated nature of interaction. Identity analysis was traditionally defined as spoken word in which one explains one self (Hunt and Benford 1994; Lyman and Scott 1968; Snow and Anderson 1987). In order to move the discipline of identity work forward, analysis of new mediums of self-expression was begun. For instance, Stone's (1981) analysis of the appearance and self and Finkelstein's (1991) analysis of various methods that people use to signify themselves signaled the wider semiotic view adopted by researchers. This view can be further widened by expanding identity analysis to online appearance of self and the process of constructing identity, particularly amongst mothers (see, e.g. Hewer 2013 on feminine consumer identities).

Individuals can access and construct multiple identities that are defined by various group memberships, relationships, and roles that comprise the self (Afflerback et al 2014; Brewer 1991; Jones 2008). After interviewing first time mothers, Bailey (1999) proposes that identities can shift in regards to the self-identity and the mother-identity, the body and the self, the working person, practices of the self, the rational sense of self, and experiencing time and space. The ability of people to shift between different identities is exemplified by Bailey's (1999: 335) work by examining how women are, "excused" from aspects of their identity in the process of pregnancy, but remain within the same "regime of subjectification," in an online context. Thoits (1983) found that multiple identities do not necessitate role strain or conflict. Having multiple identities does not mean that they are discrete from each other; while time spent in one identity

results in time not spent in another, a form of network-embeddedness can create commitment to different roles and upholding these multiple identities (Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1983).

The complexity of human identity has resulted in a multitude of research on identity commitment (Roccas and Brewer 2002). Individuals participate in various social groups, many with strikingly different features; for example, family roles, employment, religious affiliations, sexuality, and differing hobbies and interests create a myriad of facets from which people draw to present themselves. Identity salience helps to explain when people signify particular identities. Stryker (2000: 286) defines the concept of identity salience as, "the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations." In other words, depending on the social situation people can draw on a variety of resources to perform in a way that is appropriate to the context of the interaction. For example, when asked a question in school regarding cats and dogs, a student can draw on information and past experiences constructing her identities as a pet owner, an animal enthusiast, and a member of a biology club. These identities may overlap, or they may be completely separate, but she may draw on them based on their relevancy to the situation.

This research views roles as the activation of a situated self--meaning that people act and react based on the circumstances of a situation, and an understanding of the situation emerges through these interactions. Based on previous experience, actors become familiar with expectations for how to act in particular situations. Goffman (1961) discusses "role distance" as being the gap between role obligation and role performance. In other words, people do not always fulfill the roles that are expected of them and are constantly negotiating their identities, especially in undefined situations (Coser 1966). This research discusses distancing as activation

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of other roles, rather than not fulfilling a motherhood role. On Pinterest this distancing is acted out by mothers creating identities that are not centered around motherhood. An opposite yet related identity management tactic is role embracement. Arthur discusses role embracement as the incorporation of a role into an individual's identity (1997). Role embracement can be understood as accepting, incorporating, and adopting an aspect or a role into ones identity. This research discusses embracement of roles as actively constructing motherhood pins. The acts of distancing and embracing role identities are similar processes, with opposite effects.

Stryker (1968) also posits that there is a hierarchy of identity salience, in which individuals rank the relevance of identities based on the present situation. Following the previous example, a student may rank their identity as a pet owner above their identity as a soccer player in the situation of answering questions on cats and dogs. Beyond this, invoking different identities can be institutionalized into some interactions (Stryker 1968). The institutionalization of identities refers to becoming so accustomed to acting out one identity in a situation to the extent that one does not have to manage or call on other salient identities. A student knows how to behave when answering a question in class, by raising her hand, because her student identity is the most applicable and no other reference is needed.

Identity management and online identities come together when mothers use social media. Mothering ideals are complex and situated in societal settings. In the contemporary United States. mothers navigate online spaces; the importance of understanding the ways mothers act and interact online is becoming increasingly important as online activity becomes more salient to the construction of identities.

<u>Motherhood</u>

The identity work that mothers engage in to understand and manage their changing circumstance, their sense of self, and their relation to society at large is significant enough on its own to merit further investigation (e.g. Nelson 2009). Research into motherhood has expanded in recent years as scholars try to make sense of the intricate and often contradictory place of motherhood in modern society. There are many attributes associated with mothering, ranging from romanticized notions of mothers as the cornerstone of society to mothers being attacked for social policies such as abortion and welfare (Kleinberg 2006). This research will approach the identity of mother as a social construct, rather than a biological fact. Mothering as a social construct means that this identity is situated in a social context, has gendered and culturally specific qualities, and continually emerges through interaction and is thus subject to change over time (Kleinberg 2006).

Previously, the study of motherhood began with analyzing the effects of mothering on children, but research has shifted so as to include a broad set of activities and of mothers (Arendell 2000). Sharon Hays (1996) outlines in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* the multitude of contradictions that mothers face in contemporary society, and notably the choice between fulfilling rational economic decisions in the workplace while also accomplishing the selfless mother standards. Hays (1996) posits that "intensive mothering" or the dedication of time and resources to children before economic potential, is due to the legacy in the U.S. of mothers being valued more as mothers than as workers (see also Kleinberg 2006). By valuing women who stay-at-home more than those in the workforce, the current power structure benefits men to a greater extent because the competition and availability of jobs remains the same and

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men are provided free child care while they pursue their economic potential (Hays 1996; Kleinberg 2006). Although working mothers have higher self-esteem and suffer from less depression than stay-at-home mothers, women with full time jobs are more tired and get sick more often compared to their husbands (Hochschild 1997). Women also experience less agency when picking what chores they contribute to in the home, and are often the ones who sacrifice time at work to care for children (England 2005; Hochschild 2012). Not only do women not get to be as selective as their partners in what they contribute to their families, they also contribute an inordinate amount of child and homecare. Hochschild reports that, as compared to their spouses, mothers work an additional month of 24--hour days conducting house and child care (2012). Intensive mothering remains a challenge to navigate for women in contemporary U.S. society, and effects how mothers construct their identities (Afflerback et al 2013).

<u>Mother Identity</u>

Before becoming a mother, a woman may derive large parts of her identity from her marital status or occupation; however, becoming a mother can overshadow both of these identity transitions (Rogers and White 1998). Motherhood is associated with the work that women do because of the ties to femininity and associations with the core identity of women (Arendell 2000; Glenn 1994; McMahon 1995). Some women may feel like their pregnancy provides a watershed moment, where they can drastically change their lives and significantly change their lifestyle, while other women may resist the idea of conforming to traditional mothering identities (Bailey 1999). The transition to motherhood is often associated with progress, becoming more adult or responsible and capable, and less selfish (Bailey 1999).

A mothering identity will also be affected by the current socio-historic ideology. Who cares for what aspects of home management, what sort of punishment is considered appropriate for children, and who carries out the majority of child care labor are all dependent on the context of society and subject to changes in norms (Hays 1996). Even as norms emerge in contemporary society, there is still a struggle for mothers to find and enact an ideology that works for them (Johnston and Swanson 2006). For example, a good mother is often constructed as a middle aged, married, full-time stay-at-home, white woman, which already limits the ability for many individuals to fulfill ideals of a good mother (Hill, et al. 2007; Johnston and Swanson 2006; Boris 1994). This construction of a "good mother" marginalizes anyone who does not fit into this narrow category, thereby marginalizing adolescent women, working women, women of color, lesbian women, women living in poverty, older women, or single women (Johnston and Swanson 2006). The intensive mothering ideology is currently engrained in our culture to such an extent that the majority of mothers have assumed roles as the primary care giver and performer of the majority of household labor (Afflerback et al. 2014; Erickson 2011; Hochschild 2012; Johnston and Swanson 2006). This internalization is seen through working mothers who will use techniques to create the appearance of fully embracing intensive mothering expectations while also accommodating their professional standing (Garey 1995; Johnston and Swanson 2006). Research suggests that mothers will modify their behavior based on their work situation in order to live up to the tenets of intensive mothering (Garey 1995; Ladge, Clair, and Greenberg 2012). Bailey (1999) suggests that the type of job may affect the amount of anxiety that a woman experiences about being pregnant at work or returning to work after having a child, which aligns

with England's (2005) ascertain that women are more likely to choose jobs that are "mother-friendly."

Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) suggest that some women are creating different outlooks that can help bridge their identities as independent women and mothers. These tactics can include first, framing the child's well-being as being dependent on the mother's accessibility; second, mothers can find contentment beyond their role as mother and convey that happiness to the child; and third, viewing themselves primarily as working women rather than as mothers. By reframing the expectations of the intensive mothering ideology, mothers are able to maintain their work status as well as good mother status. Stay-at-home mothers as well as working mothers are affected by intensive mothering ideology, and how they frame expectations in their own lives. The process of identity production and management becomes more complex when mediated through the Internet.

Mother Identity Online

While there has been an increased attention towards mothers online, there is still a need to have research that is "focusing our investigations on mothers' identities, experiences, and activities, and their understandings of each, [so] we can secure far more realistic and less normative portrayals of mothers' lives…" (Arendell 2000: 1202). The Internet is a unique space for mothers because the primary signifiers of their status as pregnant or as a mother--their body and children--are not visibly present (Madge and O'Connor 2006). Some research suggest that the Internet is an empowering space for women in which to engage in political issues and exchanging information, leading to a sense of community, belonging, and support (Pudrovska and Ferree 2004). However, other research suggests that gendered inequalities are being

reproduced online, and mothers are being confined to stereotypical spaces (Mitra 2001;

Morahan- Martin 2000; Madge and O'Connor 2006). These conflicting research findings warrant

further research in order to fully understand the implications and repercussions of virtual

interaction on the lived experience (Madge and O'Connor 2006).

We know that women, and presumably mothers, are using social media platforms at high

rates (Duggan and Brenner 2013). McDaniel, Coyne, and Holmes (2012) found that new mothers

were spending approximately 3 hours a day on the Internet. Previous research has observed that

women will utilize the Internet to solve problems and find support while they are still pregnant

(Madge and O'Connor 2006) and women who blog after giving birth report high marital

satisfaction, less parenting stress and depression, and feel closer to their extended family and

friends (McDaniel, Coyne, and Holmes 2012). These layers of Internet and social media usage

contribute to the complexity of motherhood because they add different situations to navigate.

Managing these complex layers becomes more profound when taking into consideration that the

increasingly relevant part of the modern person's experience is virtual interactions, which

includes the presence of a virtual self; it is estimated that 73% of the general US population uses

the Internet (Horrigan 2008).

There has been a rich and diverse history of research on identity and the Internet ranging

from self- expression and role playing games (Turkle 1995), to exploring anonymity and the self

(Markus and Nurius 1986), and self-disclosure online (Tidwell and Walther 2002). Giang

explores the connection between identity development and the Internet, finding that it is not the

anonymous environment that drives users' self-expression but rather the unique environment and

characteristics associated with particular online spaces (2010). Yates (1997) explores how gender

and identity play out in computer mediated communication, finding that the Internet produces conflicting instances of gendered oppression being reproduced in issues such as access to technology and communicative processes. However, there are also opportunities on the internet to challenge and create identities.

An increasingly popular way to connect with a network of people is through social media platforms. Through these platforms users can interact with each other through storytelling and narratives. While storytelling is affected by the audience and context of the situation, Maines (2001:177) defines narrative structures as "cultural frames and ideologies that prefigure some stories." As the social context of computer mediated communication is considered the subject matter of interaction the act of story-telling and creating narratives through images and URLs opens opportunities for enriched sociological research and discovery (Yates 1997). Finally, Yates (1997:13) posits that identity is not defined by "material observable characteristics, but rather by transitory marks in an electronic text." If we can expand this definition from marks of text to marks which create images, the same principles of identity creation can expand into identity creation through images. The complexities of mothering identities online come to the forefront when analyzing the social media site Pinterest.

<u>Pinterest</u>

It is established that Pinterest's users are overwhelmingly women (Moore 2014; Perez 2013). According to the data collected from Pinterest's public pages, 80% of users are female, while 20% of users are male (Moore 2014). More telling is the finding that 92% of all pins are made by women; similarly women repin pins 15 times more often than men (Moore 2014).

Additionally, Moore report that 84% of women using Pinterest are still pinning 3 years later, and they suggest that female users become more active as more time passes (2014).

More broadly, Pinterest is a platform through which users can save, organize, and curate a collection of images and URLs for themselves as well as share with followers. Pinterest itself has pre-created subcategories which users can choose to browse. The most popular among these include the Food and Drink category (20%), the DIY & Crafts (12%), and Home Décor (11%). Interestingly, Pinterest is touted as having more industry and financial capacity than other social media sites, due to the high percentage of female users. The rationalization is that since women make an estimated 85% of household purchases, and Pinterest has several outlets that promote consumption of household items and ideas, Pinterest drives consumers to producers' websites (Tomassoni 2012).

Literature has established that mothers are operating under socially constructed conflicting ideals. While there is research on how these ideals are propagated in real life there is less research regarding the online reproduction of motherhood ideals. There is even less literature regarding how and why mothers are using Pinterest.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Using a grounded approach this research aims to investigate how and why mothers are using Pinterest. As research progressed mothers revealed how Pinterest was used in their everyday life, including how Pinterest affects their identity construction and the process of mothering. Elvin- Nowak and Thomsson (2001) suggest that through interviews and by speaking with mothers about their everyday life experiences, it is possible to understand how motherhood is socially constructed in U.S. society.

Data Collection and Participants

Overall, 17 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with mothers; these interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. The interviews were performed through a convenience sample of women in the Central Florida area, through solicitation of personal contacts and University pages on Facebook. The call for participants was advertised through the researcher's personal Facebook page, resulting in Facebook friends sharing or promoting these status updates as well as tagging potential participants in their networks, resulting in an efficient method for recruiting local participants. A call for participants was also posted in a private mothering group on Facebook, which aided recruitment. Finally, a call for participants was posted in a private Facebook group for faculty and staff at a local university. Through these means of recruitment, 17 participants were interviewed.

The types of questions that were asked of the participants were open ended questions regarding definitions, beliefs, and explanations of motherhood and Pinterest. Broad questions were asked such as, "What does being a 'mom' or 'mother' mean to you?' and 'Why did you

start using Pinterest?" to get a conversation started. These questions were phrased in ways which allowed for explanation and clarification as mothers saw fit. Interviewers were structured to allow for continuity of experience, but were performed in a way which allowed space for participants to bring up topics which they felt were relevant to explaining their experiences.

The criteria for participation in this research included that the individual must have a Pinterest account, must identify as a mother, and must have at least one child between the ages of 6 months and 10 years old. The rationalization for the range of age of children is that within this span children would be old enough that the mother would have established her bearings, and the children would be young enough that mothers would still be actively caring for and tending to their children. Additionally, keeping the ages of children open until 10 years old allowed for mothers with different perspectives to participate.

The majority of interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, although three interviews were conducted in a private room on a university campus, and two interviews were conducted in a café. We sat together face to face in the setting of the participant's choice, with interviews lasting between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. Each participant provided informed consent and was aware they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and could stop the interview at any time.

The youngest participant interviewed was 20 and the oldest was 40 years old. The median age of the participants is 30.38 years old, and the median reported income is $73,076. This income statistic may be influenced by some participants relying on parents for housing, and reporting their individual income rather than their household income (See, Table One). Of the 17

participants, 9 were married, 4 were in a committed long term relationship yet unmarried, 2 participants were divorced, and 2 participants identified as single mothers. This sample was also representative of the Pinterest population because of the amount of participants who are in or have completed college: 7 participants were still attending University, 5 completed a 4 year degree, 2 completed their 2 year degree, 1 respondent only had one year of college, and 2 participants had graduate level degrees. Of all the participants interviewed, only one was a stay-at-home mother with no outside form of employment. Three participants work 0 hours a week, but attend school full time, 6 of the participants work 1- 30 hours a week, and 7 participants work 40 hours or more a week. Out of the 17 participants, 3 identified as Hispanic, and there were no participants that identified as African or Asian American. This offers an area for future research into how non-white Pinterest users are utilizing the site. This data sample is representative of the overall Pinterest population, which tends to be white, young, well--educated, and have a household income over $30,000 (Duggan and Brennar 2013).

Table 1Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	# Children	Ages of Children in years	Marital	Income	Education of Mother	Work Hours
Mary	39	3	8, 14, 15	Married	140,000	AA	40
Stephanie	36	2	7, 10	Married	65,000	AA	30
Lacey	26	1	1.3	Married	65,000	MA	45
Rebecca	33	3	3,4,7	Married	140,000	Graduate	25
Skylar	25	1	3.5	Com Rel	60,000	Some College	45
Olivia	40	2	7,10	Married	90,000	BA	45
Allison	32	2	6,9	Divorced	37,500	BS	40
Kaitlyn	22	1	2	Single	8,000	In College	15
Laura	20	1	2	Single	7,000	In College	20
Sarah	26	1	1.25	Com Rel	35,000	In College	20
Sonja	30	3	2, 5, 9	Com Rel	85,800	In College	25
Regina	33	2	2.5, 5	Married	180,000	BA	0
Caroline	35	2	2.5, 5	Married	180,000	BA	40
Amber	26	1	3.5	Com Rel	19,000	In College	40
Carrie	34	1	7	Divorced	0†	In College	0
Elizabeth	32	3	4, 7, 9	Married	30,000	In College	0
Josie	33	2	3, 5	Married	100,000	BA	10

*As reported by participants
^Com Rel = Committed Relationship but Unmarried
†Supported by parents

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer and then coded line by line, first using In Vivo coding to remain close to the data. After initial themes emerged, the data were analyzed using focused coding (Charmaz 1995) in order to connect what was being constructed in relation to motherhood, and how it was constructed (Gubrium and Holstein 1998). Pseudonyms were given to the participants and any family member identified during the interview to protect the identities of participants and their families.

The focus codes that emerged included: defining reality, describing ideals, dealing with guilt, and self identity. After these initial In Vivo codes emerged, a constant comparative method was used, where incidents were compared across each category. This process led to integrating categories and their properties, along with the assessment of a theory that would account for these themes (Glaser 1965). After continued analysis original themes emerged from the focus codes. Since questioning the influence of Pinterest on mothering was an empirical question, themes were allowed to emerge that did not explicitly discuss Pinterest. Thus, the three themes that emerged included (1) mothers negotiating motherhood ideals, perpetuated through Pinterest, through drawing on gendered ideologies and conflictingly distance and accept these ideals; (2) mothers' use of Pinterest both supported and impaired construction of positive self-identities, complexly overlapping with concerns of technology overuse; and (3) the compartmentalized nature of Pinterest facilitates the activation of multiple identities which allow "escapes" from the pressures of motherhood and everyday responsibilities.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

While there is a body of literature establishing that the ideals of motherhood and femininity exert pressures on women to live up to different standards, research has yet to establish how social media--and more specifically Pinterest--influences how women negotiate these perceived pressures. Findings from this research explores how women construct and interpret pressures through descriptions of ideal motherhood, gender ideologies, and the late modern pressures of constructing a positive self-identity (Beck [1992] calls these "do-it-yourself biographies.").

Qualitative interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to construct, explain, and contextualize their answers to how and if Pinterest is utilized in a mothering context. Mothers discussed how, when, and why Pinterest was used and the connection between being a mother and using Pinterest. Mothers explained several processes which highlighted their Pinterest use; the process of distancing and embracing role ideals, the process of managing motherhood expectations, and the process of compartmentalizing multiple identities.

Distancing from Gendered Ideals and Stereotypes

Pinterest has become a place where desirable characteristics are being shared, implicitly and explicitly. The visual conversations that are taking place between users and followers carries with them assumptions about social values of individuals and the larger Pinterest community. The online interactions taking place on Pinterest help users learn what topics are appropriate to post about, what sort of projects mothers should be taking on, and the behaviors that mothers should be engaging in. Most respondents were quick to frame their answers as being part of a

bigger social media picture rather than symptomatic of Pinterest specifically. Through our conversations, some common themes of being a good mom became noteworthy: distancing and accepting gendered ideals and stereotypes, managing expectations and self-policing, and compartmentalizing multiple identities.

Mothers described how Pinterest is another form, even if not a new form, of upholding a parenting "paradigm" that defines ideal motherhood, thus creating additional perceived pressures for mothers to be perfect. Participants claimed that women have inherent characteristics such as being competitive, emotional, prone to collecting and organizing, and creativity. These claims help reveal patterns of thought that contribute to type-casting women. Relatedly, the belief that a mother should put her child before herself is a theme expressed through various responses. Participants distanced themselves from this idealized paradigm, predominately by claiming that it is not realistic. For instance, Amber created a board specifically as a reminder of this unrealistic "scripted" identity:

> …I have parenting tools [on Pinterest] I actually think are useful and then I have a board that's literally titled, 'Moms that are Better than You', and it's like those moms that artificially create that perfect parenting paradigm that makes us all think that we suck. So it's like, oh, she perfectly color coordinated her eight children's home school notebooks to the seasons [...] I label it you know, 'Moms that are Better than You' to remind myself that this isn't reality. This isn't... this is scripted as much as reality TV you know. Big Brother or you know, or Survivor is scripted. Wrestling is scripted. Pinterest blogging is scripted.

Amber, a 26 year old mother to a three and a half year old, distanced herself from mothers who appear too perfect in their execution and presentation of parenting. While Amber does not

explicitly align herself with a more genuine mothering paradigm, she identified the unrealistic nature and perfection that Pinterest presents. Amber expresses how this paradigm affects her ("makes us all think that we suck"), and her description represents a process by which Pinterest both upholds external pressures for perfection and by which she negotiates Pinterest.

Stephanie is a 36 year old mother of two elementary-aged children. Although she and her husband are employed, she describes the family to be struggling financially, which affects her ability to act on the ideals visually presented through Pinterest. When asked about the mothers who are writing blogs and posting image links to Pinterest, Stephanie explained how it is unrealistic even for a "supermom" to achieve what is presented through social media outlets. Yet like Amber, in negotiating the pressure from these ideals, Stephanie also explained how it is artificial to expect anyone to consistently be able to perform at a perfect level:

> But some of it [mommy blogs and Pinterest] or the collection of all of them is a lot. No supermom in the world, I don't think, can attain that. I can't not yell at my children all the time. I can't have that meaningful discussion with them every time they do something wrong. Sometimes it's just, I'm tired or they're tired and it is what it is. But these women…, if they have a different philosophy and try a lot harder, and have more time or more resources available to them that they can, that they can put this out there good for them. […] But I think it would be unrealistic of myself to go, 'Oh, I'm never going to yell at my kids anymore, and I'm always going to expect the best of the them and be that cheerleader for them on the sidelines every single time, and when they fall I'm going to pick them up and kiss their boo boos.

Stephanie outlines how mommy blogs and Pinterest perpetuate unrealistic and gendered standards. She explains why she is not fulfilling these expectations by claiming that not even a

"supermom" could achieve all of the expectations outlined online. Stephanie is distancing herself from constructions of perfect mothers.

Lacey describes similar unrealistic and gendered expectations. Lacey shares the story of her child turning one year old, and the process of using Pinterest to help throw the party. She says, "Yeah, it [Pinterest] does give you sometimes a sense of guilt […] I know not all of it I'm capable of it." Similarly, Elizabeth explains that Pinterest perfection is not realistic and hypothesizes that "something else" must be going on when a family appears perfect:

> I mean that looks great from the outside in, but in reality there's probably something else going on that you don't even know about. That, if you know, if you always had the best looking home, and you decorated it yourself and those are all your ideas, and you had your kids wearing the nicest clothes, or they were great at everything that you had them doing. It seems like that's how it should be, but in reality what's going on internally in that family? There's something else going on. And it may not be showing from the outside.

Through this description, Elizabeth upholds the ideal mother as the person who is maintaining the "best looking home" that is "decorated" with children wearing the "nicest clothes" and everything appearing fine. Elizabeth is simultaneously distancing herself from that image because it is not feasible and, potentially, not desirable because of hypothesized repercussions of maintaining these appearances (Kleinberg 2006).

Caroline, an upper class mother with two children says:

> You just have to be realistic with your expectations. But, I do think that it [Pinterest] could make a person feel insecure and inadequate. But they were in that space or place before. You know? And that's the weird thing too, you can see it on Facebook, you can

feel it from their posts and stuff but on Pinterest, they could be wallowing in their own

depression about all this stuff and you wouldn't know.

Caroline thus continues the theme of differentiating what is "realistic" in order to help negotiate

these feelings of insecurity. Both Elizabeth and Caroline share views of anticipated negative

actions and a desire to distance themselves from perceived perfections by outlining these ideals

as unrealistic.

<u>Embracing Gendered Ideals and Stereotypes</u>

Some respondents seemed to question the gendered ideals identified on Pinterest, other

mothers told stories that included talk of "inherent" differences, which are "natural" to humans,

women, and more specifically to mothers. Some respondents explained the origins of the

idealized paradigm displayed on Pinterest as not being unique from other social settings and that

mothers will present do-it-yourself perfection because people do this "inherently." Other

respondents reported that competition among women is due to women's increased emotionality,

while on the other hand some participants believed that since women are naturally more creative

than men, the content of Pinterest is more appealing and relevant to their everyday tasks.

Discussion of self-worth, community, and fulfilling these ideals helped contextualize mothers'

responses. For instance, Olivia explains her perspective:

Oh! The Joneses. Absolutely. Absolutely, everyone is trying to one-up their ball jar
decorations. And I don't know where all these people are getting pallets. Pallets to me are
just nasty. But, people are making beds out of them. What do you? Just go to the
junkyard, I don't understand.. But, I don't think we have reinvented the wheel with
anything social media. I think it's exactly the same that everything has always been.
Moms are going to try to outdo each other about how great their kids are and how

amazing their houses are. They're going to be doing it, in whatever format is available. It's, you know, go back to the 1920's when people were trying to... the beginning of time! People were trying to outdo each other, and keeping up with The Joneses. And, they will use any, anything available to them to do that.

Olivia argues that Pinterest is only a newer version of something that has been going on since the "beginning of time." While Olivia alludes to gender, Allison helps to bring gender ideologies to the forefront. Allison explains competition through gendered ideologies and echoes the "inherent" competitiveness of women:

> Allison: I think that there is a little bit of a sense of competitiveness that we don't talk about, but it's there. So I think women are more into social media then men, but they also put their energy into it. Whereas men use Pinterest and Facebook too, but, they don't put any emotion or energy into it as much as we [women] do. Emotion is probably a big thing.

> Interviewer: What do you mean by emotion or … putting your energy in? What does that really … mean?

> Allison: I think, we care more about what people think--our friends, our family, and people we don't know. I used to make a joke when I was married that if I was getting ready to go out, my husband would say, "Why do you take so long?" and I would say, "Listen, we don't get ready for men, we get ready for women." And I remember him thinking that that was really weird, but it's true. You get ready more for your friends than you do... for anyone else.

Descriptions of creativity and emotionality given by mothers help explain the pressures on women that exceed "just" being mothers. Allison gives an example of the pressures of self-presentation; while she does not explicitly state where a sense of competition and pressure stems from, she does say that social media is an outlet for these feelings.

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Allison's discussion of competition also helps to reveal another characteristic framed as "inherent" to women, emotionality. Emotionality is also often connected to creativity, which participants draw from to help explain why women used Pinterest more than men. While Pinterest may uphold unrealistic mothering ideals, not all participants seemed put off by the gendered nature; some in fact embraced their inherent qualities of womanhood. The shared experience of Pinterest being a "safe space" because Pinterest users are predominantly women leads to explanations of Pinterest as a community. In contrast with a sense of community is the idea of a Pinterest community that perpetuates stressors. On one hand Pinterest upholds expectations for women and mothers, and on the other hand it offers a space to challenge and explore alternative identities. Throughout the interviews women tried to distance themselves from constructions of ideals, while at the same time tried to identify and potentially fulfill gendered stereotypes of creativity and emotionality.

Pinterest provides support from other women, a creative outlet, and a way to express emotions. For example, when asked about her craft and DIY interest Allison replied, "I am not [crafty], but I want to be […] I try, but it doesn't really turn out that way." Pinterest is a place where desires of embracing a role identity can visually manifest. The interviews allow women to explain how their ideals affect their use of Pinterest. For instance, Regina describes:

> I think we [women] are naturally, because we are a little bit more emotional, we are a little bit more creative. There are men who are very creative and I do have a few guy friends on Pinterest who are photographers or you know, more inspired by things, artists--the more creative type of male. But, I think for the most part women tend to be more the creative type. Functionally we are the ones cooking, cleaning, doing our hair a different way, because-- I also think that societally we get a little of our self worth by

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accomplishing certain things. So I think if you're going on Pinterest to come up with this great idea to serve this great party dish at your party, you're wanting some kind of social praise for doing something great, right? So, I think that coming up with a pretty way to do your hair is also the same thing. Some kind of self worth from things that you're doing. So if you did this cool painting off Pinterest, you made the cute cookies for your party, and your hair was great, there's some kind of accolade that women search for. So I think it's some kind of self worth stamped in those areas of life.

Regina compares the "natural" emotional and creative state of women to the "creative type" of male, and although not un-natural, a supposedly rare presentation of self. The gendered specific nature of the community on Pinterest comes to the surface when Lacey claims emotionality as a reason for using Pinterest, specifically regarding the workplace:

The inspiration board, like I said I'm a female in the workplace and though that's changed the norm of men being in the workplace [and] being dominant is changing. Our office has more way more females than males. The "Be Strong" message is still important in your ability to succeed in the work force. So those are where my inspiration pins are coming from because I am sometimes an emotional woman, I start pinning those more to sort of keep focused on my desire to be strong, like have a stronger front at least in the work force.

Lacey says she is using Pinterest to keep a positive attitude in the workplace, which she seems to be struggling with because of gender dynamics in her office. Lacey says that the "be strong" message, which she connects to being "emotional," appeals to her because she is working, and as a female in the workplace it is "important in your ability to succeed" that you stay positive. The "inherent" creative sense also helps to explain why women are on Pinterest more than men.

The difference in male and female interest is brought to the forefront by Laura who thinks Pinterest is gendered because of content, "It might be just because of stuff I look at so, I haven't looked into guy things, and I could swear there are like cars on there, like I automatically think of guys and cars." These views tie back to managing gender ideals in that they establish women's interest in creative, emotional, uplifting things while men's interests are on the practical and stereotypically masculine. When asked what she thought about the gender divide of Pinterest users, Skylar says:

> At first it really felt like all women coming together and then they started to add in the cars and the automotives, like the Men's fashion and stuff, which is nice, but then I still think I would use Men's fashion to find things to buy for Chad [Skylar's boyfriend]. I don't really see a guy going on there are being like, 'Oh My God, I love this vest, let me buy it right now.' Like if my dad had Pinterest that would be weird.

Skylar effectively outlines that it is normative for women to use Pinterest, but it would be "weird" if her boyfriend or father were to do so. Skylar may believe that there are unrealistic ideals being created, but she is using these ideals in order to connect women together.

The process of creating contradicting gender ideals on Pinterest is complex because women create and perpetuate the pins and interactions on Pinterest, as well as consume and reproduce gendered ideals on and offline. This suggests the women interviewed for this research were socialized into a system which fostered certain gendered beliefs and activities which were discussed during interviews. While conducting interviews mothers described Pinterest as a continuation of "scripted" media, magazines, reality TV, and real life mixed into one. There is a general sense that the ideals that are being propagated on Pinterest are unreal, and if someone

appears to have everything together there is something going on "behind the scenes." In the above excerpts are constructions of women as being "inherently" competitive, emotional, and creative. Participants either questioned these inherently gendered characterizations of women, with some participants embracing their gendered differences.

Managing Expectations, Self-Policing, and Medicalizing Social Media Use

In response to the ideals that are being perpetuated through Pinterest, women also expressed a push for continued self-improvement. Women talked about the ideals of Pinterest being unrealistic, yet still construct attainable self-improvement measures. For example, some home improvement projects were out of reach, while there are more feasible weekend projects that mothers conducted, which bridged the gap between ideals found through Pinterest and their lived experiences. Multiple respondents discussed ways of mediating a sense of guilt arising from feelings of not achieving ideals. Often, the importance of maintaining a positive outlook was established through discussions of negative online situations. By highlighting negative happenings mothers were able to define and distance themselves from this undesirable behavior. The process of disassociation from negative technological utilization behaviors becomes important in understanding the ways mothers manage expectations and self-police. Finally, in an attempt to improve the self, technology use—such as cell phone and social media utilization—is reduced in an effort to ensure one does not become "addicted to" or "obsessed with" technology.

Managing Expectations

The ideals of good mothering ask women to conform to stringent standards of prioritizing children before the self, and viewing the task of child-raising as fulfilling in and of itself (Hays

1996). Even while these standards are arguably unachievable, the ideals hold power over mothers in that when they do not live up to expectations there are feelings of guilt. The importance of remaining positive and brushing off guilt from unmet standards is a reoccurring theme and a tool to resist these perfect mothering ideals. For example, Regina says, "Dreaming [through Pinterest] about other things helps you stay positive, and feel... feel happy, and not like the monotony doesn't drag you down. I think as a mom, you can easily just feel like you're exhausted, uninspired." Sonja follows up, "Dwelling on 'Oh, I didn't get an A on that', or ya know if I'm late, […] or if someone's mad at me […] I don't have time for that. […] If I could go to Buddha camp, just meditating and being happy all the time, I would love that. I think that it's so important to be happy." Both Regina and Sonja seem to embrace positive thoughts while brushing off the expectations they did not meet. For Regina, this is being wholly fulfilled through raising her children, and for Sonja it is not living up to expectations in school, being timely, or maintaining relationships with people. Other women manage their negative feelings of unmet expectations by recognizing that these expectations are constructed "first impressions" that are part of her "social face." For instance, when asked about negative feelings from Pinterest, Amber says:

> Amber: But I also feel shitty about it [parenting]! I mean look at me! I'm a full time student and I am involved in multiple like social activism communities and I don't let my kid watch TV and she had hummus and carrot chips for her snack today and I still feel like a bad parent.
>
> Interviewer: Where does that come from?
>
> Amber: Pinterest!

Interviewer: It just seems so conflicting, because...

Amber: What in human nature doesn't? […] it's the same way though all of social media, it's... this is my social face, this is my best foot, this is my first impression. It's like, social media is like trying to make a [good] first impression your entire life […]you always want to look thinner, more productive, have better hair, [use] coincidental witticism and sudden social altruism, and oh, aren't I quirky today Instagram.

Even after listing her positive accomplishments as a person, and her capability as a parent, Amber says she still feels like a bad parent because she hasn't met expectations that she has conceived of because of time spent on Pinterest. Amber lists some stereotypical gendered expectations such as "looking thinner" and having "better hair," which demonstrates the continued influence of gender ideals on members of society. Amber also lists expectations such as appearing "more productive," using "coincidental witticism and sudden social altruism" as well as appearing "quirky" as tools to help create impressions and control her identity on social media. Amber also seems to belittle these unmet expectations by adding a sarcastic, "Oh, aren't I quirky today Instagram," which highlights the light-hearted and fleeting nature of identity construction on some social media outlets like Instagram.

Mothers using Pinterest are operating within the framework of all of their social media personas. The social media sites they are active in inform them of different standards and ideals which the community has constructed. Mothers describe engaging in different management techniques to ensure their mother identity is aligned with these ideals. The ideals may be slightly different for each mother, depending on what specific content she comes across, but the larger process of using Pinterest to glean information is described by different participants.

<u>Self-Policing Technology Use</u>

Overuse of technology can lead to critique from observers, as well harsh judgment on oneself. To avoid over using technology some mothers explained instances of self-policing to avoid guilt. This aspect of guilt helps to show how women always feel as though they want to be a better person. Regina and Sarah tie excessive Pinterest use to being selfish, and prioritizing the self over children, which violates mothering ideals. Regina says:

> I think you need to limit your time on Pinterest, Pinterest can be like an addiction, just like Facebook. Because if you're finding your self-worth on Pinterest, then it's all about yourself. I think a lot of social sites have become a way to be a little bit selfish, and so I think limiting use [of] it is important. Use Pinterest for you know, […] inspiring people, helping your kids, feeling hopeful yourself, but don't use it as a crutch to hide within the web and not be actually part of society.

Sarah recalls an online friend, who is an active social media user, who posts content unrelated to mothers. Sarah says, "I feel like as a mother you shouldn't be posting, and I'm not saying she's [online friend] a bad mother but, the kinds of things like that reflect on you as a person and I just feel like it's making her look like... you know she's more concerned about other things than her daughter." On the other hand, Carrie recounts how Pinterest and technology use in general can make her feel:

> I will catch myself on my phone sometimes, and she's [Carrie's daughter] talking in my ear and I realize that I'm not paying attention to her, that I'm on Pinterest or I'm on Facebook, or I'm checking my email, or I'm playing Words with Friends. I think the technology […] I think it gives moms the opportunity to check out from their kids. People don't put the technology away enough. I'm guilty. Totally guilty.

Regina and Sarah's characterization of mothers who take time away from their kids to endeavor into their own interests unrelated to their children as selfish further solidifies the ideology of intensive mothering. By engaging in this activity a mother is admitting that she is not wholly fulfilled by her child, and that she values her own needs before the child's. Additionally, by negatively characterizing mothers who prioritize themselves before their children Regina and Sarah are demonstrating the scrutiny that online mothers face from their followers and online "friends." In contrast to Regina's and Sarah's explanations of what should cause guilt, Carrie seems to be living out and feeling the repercussions from Regina's concept of "selfishness." Regina fulfills intensive mothering standards when she describes an ideal mother as prioritizing her child before herself, and when Carrie does not fulfill this ideal she suffers from guilt. Regina alone is not responsible for the creation of ideals, just as Carrie is not the only one suffering from guilt. The larger process of ideal creation and not meeting those ideals which result in guilt, was expressed by various mothers in different interviews.

Medicalizing Social Media Use

In addition to managing guilt from "selfish" technology use, mothers manage their use of technology to avoid being defined as an over-user, addicted, or obsessed. This medicalization of social media use was language that participants used to describe how Pinterest is used by others and themselves. Rather than viewing the medicalization of social media use as a label that researchers are putting on participants, it would be more accurate—as described by participants-- to view the medicalization of social media as a description of types of usages. Although interviews were designed to explore connections between Pinterest and mothering, the majority of participants told stories about feeling "addicted" or "obsessed" with Pinterest without

prompting by the interviewer. Therefore, although not explicitly connected to mothering, these stories help to reveal an important component to the place of Pinterest within mothers'—and women's—lives, that of information gathering. Whether information gathering was based in anecdotes regarding the number of choices available to individuals (Schwartz 2005), the pressure from a risk society for mothers to make informed decisions (Hays 1996), or feelings of constant comparison expressed by women (Wolf 1991), describing social media with mental illness terminology supports previous research that women are trying to gather information to fulfill intensive mothering standards, while simultaneously trying to manage their technology use to avoid negative identities. Another consequence of technology over-use is defining the self with language that has connotations with mental illness such as "addicted" or "obsessed." Also colloquially used to mean intensely interested, OCD or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is a common way to describe how users thinks about and organize their Pinterest account. However, being "obsessed" with technology has more ominous consequences than just over use, according to particular participants' accounts. Mary a 39 year old mother to three children says:

> How I typically use it [Pinterest]? Well, because of the OCD factor you have to feel like you haven't missed anything. Right? You know? So, I go in and on your homepage-- that's where you see all the people that you are connected to or that you're following--so I'll try to catch up on everything that is new… But, there is probably definitely some OCD obsessive compulsive situation going on there where you feel like you can't miss a single post because it could be life altering.

Mary's description of missing a post on Pinterest as "life-altering" indicates a view of the information as being critical, with the concern that missing a post could have dire consequences, for better or worse. While Mary went on to discuss the practical application Pinterest has in her

life, such as help with cooking, cleaning, decorating the house, and entertaining guests, Skylar went into more detail regarding the addictive attributes of Pinterest:

> Skylar: I don't pin something now unless it's about something specific, but before it was like an addiction, I would just browse. It was just non-stop.
>
> Interviewer: So when was it an addiction then?
>
> Skylar: Right when it started. I'll go through phases. It's like at night, right before I go to bed it was like, oh, what do I want to look at, let's look at clothes, or um, just food, or just anything. It just kept going. And I like couldn't stop looking. And it was the end of the world where I'll never stop looking.

This quote conjures dramatic imagery of the end of the world and reveals the extent to which participants perceived the importance of absorbing all the knowledge made available through Pinterest. The continued relevance of medicalized language as a theme when discussing Pinterest usage continues with terms like "obsessed" and "addicted," revealing women's concerns for a compulsion or need that is out of their control:

> Kaitlyn: I used to be [addicted], but now that I have limited myself... Like, I was really addicted to it.
>
> Interviewer: What about it do you think makes it so...unresistable?
>
> Kaitlyn: When I'm scrolling down like the Everything Page, you don't know what's coming next. And then there's always really cute things, and stuff for like planning out how I want my house to look, how I want to organize something, or if I want to buy something for Ellie [daughter] for her birthday. Obviously she can't use it now … so I'm saving that for later.

Both Mary and Kaitlyn mention that they are "addicted" or "obsessed" with Pinterest because of the large amount of pertinent information can be found there. Kaitlyn reaffirms the seemingly unlimited knowledge available through Pinterest, which creates pressure to absorb, collect, and curate resources for the future. Additionally, Lacey explained:

> It's not really that I obsess about it, well I do obsess about it, like the party location was what you're pinning to Facebook or Pinterest or whatever you're doing… I did obsess about it. … I did like obsess about, we had a party location picked out and then I went and looked at it and it wasn't exactly what I was envisioning and I freaked out about it for...pretty much until the party actually happened.

This participant mentions being obsessed with the party preparation and many aspects of her party were derived from Pinterest. Although not explicitly asked about during interviews, mothers continued to use this language, informing researchers of a potential avenue for further research into how Pinterest is an information gathering tool that mediates and produces risk. These instances of mothers using medicalized terms reveal aspects to mothering that was previous unconnected to social media use.

While some mothers use medicalized language, such as "addicted" or "obsessed," to describe their Pinterest use, one mother shared her experience with what she explicitly described as mental illness with me. Of all the conversations utilizing medicalized terms, there was one mother, Sonja, who explicitly shared her mental illness with me.

> I just think the stress of school, and I was working two jobs, and then obviously the girls' extra-curricular activities, and it just became too much. I was stressed. … And then I had anxiety, panic attacks where my heart would race and I couldn't breathe. And [after] many trips to the hospital and many X-rays they determined it was anxiety. I don't

believe in pharmaceutical drugs and doing it the pharmaceutical way, so I did it completely naturally. Just taking B12 vitamins and healthy eating …So I was able to conquer it on my own, very naturally like no anything, it was horrible.

When asked how her anxiety connected with her social media outlets Sonja replies,

> Sonja: I just didn't use Facebook and Instagram at the time because I was dealing with my anxiety and stress.
>
> Interviewer: So you just didn't have time?
>
> Sonja: No, I had time. My mind was just somewhere else. You know what I mean? I was dealing with the stress, the anxiety, the trying to get over it, and when does this go away, and how does it go away and what do I need to do and I was just impatient.

This respondent went through a period of time where she was struggling with stress and anxiety management, and in response she stopped using various forms of social media. Sonja's case helps contextualize the experience of other mothers' stories by giving a more extreme case.

Increased technology use is viewed as a negative attribute, because it is "selfish" to take time away from the experience of raising children, which according to intensive mothering ideology should be fulfilling in its own right. This results in guilt and feelings of inadequacy for using technology and for not feeling completely fulfilled by the experience of raising children. Furthermore, defining over-use of technology as negative can result in language which links technology with mental illnesses, such as obsession and addiction. The current culture of motherhood seemingly calls for a perpetual state of trying to improve which includes distancing from "selfish" technology use. These stories suggested the ways societal pressures affected the participants.

Compartmentalizing Multiple Identities

The self is comprised of multiple socially situated "meanings" which can develop, evolve, and morph over the course of a person's life (Burke 2006). Amongst the various expectations and pressures that mothers have to meet as established in the mother ideals, the mothers described how they shifted their identities as their lived experiences or social contexts changed (Nuttbrock and Freudiger 1991). For example, mothers described how they like to paint and be creative, do their hair and makeup every day, or cook gourmet meals, when caring for children and managing a family it is through necessity that some of these aspects of their self be put aside. The very nature of Pinterest is compartmentalization, which helps to bring these shifting presentations of self to the surface. Pins are separated into categories; you can make separate boards and organize your pins in ways that suit you. As an escape from mundane life, repeated tasks and unfulfilling child and house care activities, mothers can stimulate and momentarily assume identities which might otherwise be out of reach.

Expressing Different Hats

Even while Pinterest helped to create pressure on mothers to present themselves in particular manners related to mothering ideals, women discussed how it also helped to fulfill their described need for preserving and presenting other aspects of their self-identities. Pinterest may serve as a space where mothers may negotiate her identities, manage different aspects, and pin content which fulfills the desire to embody those identities.

Many mothers used the phrasing of "hats" to help explain how their Pinterest use differed according to the particular identity they were expressing or adopting when using

Pinterest. Rebecca is a 33-year-old stay-at-home, home-schooling mom, who runs her own website which includes different social media outlets. Rebecca explains "who she is" when she uses Pinterest:

> It depends on what hat I'm wearing when I sit down. I always have the inspiration hat on--I think that's just who I am. […] Then, the mom aspect always comes out, I think. Because I do want to show other moms, and other women that they deserve to take the time, so it's always in my forefront when I'm looking at anything [thinking] who will this motivate and who will this inspire? But as far as the home school, I put that on the backburner sometimes.

In her day-to-day activities Rebecca is switching between the identities of a stay-at-home mom who has to watch her children, a professional coach who is trying to motivate people, and a teaching mom. She says that that having an inspirational hat on is just, "who she is" indicating that this is a primary part of her identity. Rebecca also identifies anticipating, "Who will this motivate and […] inspire," as main criteria for posting things. Each of these roles has a chance to come to the forefront depending on the purpose of her logging on, or what sort of content she comes across. Amber also described the type of hat she wore when getting on social media,

> I strive to have a 'Me Hat' on and to be myself fully in all my roles. I do not separate my parenting from my queer identity, from my sex positive culture, from my dietary habit, you know communities, from whatever. So, I talk about gender discrimination, and I talk about burlesque, and I talk about, 'Oh, look at this cute picture my kid drew' on my feed in any one given day. I think my pins represent that as well. You know, I have burlesque ideas next to Montessori ideas, next to Paleo Diet stuff.

Similar to Rebecca, Amber describes different identities that come to the surface when she is communicating online, but also says that she strives to have a "Me Hat" on. The "Me Hat" is an

allusion to a true self, could be the combination of all her identities into one "meaningful whole" as theorized by Polkinghorne (1988). Balancing different roles comes up again when Skylar discusses the different identities that she must juggle online.

> Skylar: A lot being a mom, a lot being a cop's girl friend. You don't always want to be the mom who's like always going out, but you don't want to be the one who's sitting home. [You] don't want to post pictures of him drinking all the time, I don't want to be like, 'Oh, I'm so hung over', and everyone's thinking oh, Aiden's [Skylar's son] there. You know what I mean?

> Interviewer: It sounds kind of like, exhausting, like you always have to be thinking about sort of who you are presenting.

> Skylar: Yeah, kind of. It's come easy though. I know there are girls who have kids and it's like, I think a lot of it comes from what I see other people doing and I know how I look at them. Like, I can only imagine what some people would think of the things that if I were to put on there....

Skylar explains how she lets each of her roles come forward; being a mom, acting responsibly for the benefit of her partner who works as a police officer, to anticipating the correct way to present herself to friend groups online. Skylar is describing her presentation as dependent on how she wants others to see her, or in the terms of Erving Goffman (1959), she is performing through impressions and gestures (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). This dynamic of dramaturgy highlights the complexity and layering of identities that must be considered when utilizing social media. Anticipating the reactions of followers helps Pinterest users decide what sort of content they would like to share with their followers. Pinterest users describe their

multiple selves, which determine the individual pins that they choose to collect and organize into disparate boards, but the sum of these boards represents a "meaningful whole."

While some mothers explained their identities on social media as many identities coming together into one true self identity, other mothers described prioritizing identities into a hierarchy. This hierarchy of identities helped explain why and when some identities surface more than others. Josie, who moved to central Florida from a corporate job big city in the north east when her husband got a new job, transitioned into being a stay-at-home mom. Josie says, "When I worked as an accountant I was always much more like, my family was my number one, for real […] my career was never my number one, so like my family was. So for me making the shift to stay-at-home, I know I need to support my family, so eventually I'm going to have to go back to work." Her identity as a mother was prioritized over the other identities, and will shift again with the needs of her family. Similarly, Allison says that her mom hat is number one:

> My number one, my number one hat is being a mom, they [children] come first, they come first.... but, life still has to go on around us. So, they know they come first, but, Chris and Austin [Allison's sons] know when I get to school they come first, but school comes first too, when we're there. When we're done with school we leave we come home, I feed them dinner I take care of them, they come first but, we still have to clean up and take showers and take care of yourself too. And then, I need time by myself sometimes, I'm very much like that. So, if they're with their dad's [house] they know that mommy needs--they go to their dad's every other weekend--they know that mommy needs time by herself too. Because when they're not with me I'm going to put myself first. I think that's really the only time I really do, when they're with their dad. But, when they are with me they come first.

Allison maintains that her mothering identity is number one and then goes on to give examples of how she manages her identities of mom, teacher, and an adult person who needs time alone.

Escaping the Present

Pinterest helps some respondents clarify who their true self is and plan for daily tasks of motherhood like cooking and children's activities, other respondents used Pinterest for the exact opposite, escape. Respondents explained a process which unified their multiple selves or expressed their true self other respondents described uses that allowed for an escape from the present moment's identity. After considering the different roles mothers must assume and the identities that she must call on based on day-to-day needs it is no surprise that escaping the everyday monotony or forgetting about stressful responsibilities was highlighted by some respondents. The daily pressures that mothers face can be "put on hold" when they spend time developing other senses of self on Pinterest. Pinterest is a unique space where mothers can experience multiple identities at once, and in the process favor those identities which are otherwise ignored. Often times, Pinterest allows mothers to 'escape' their current identity and entertain another.

When thinking into the future it is easy to envision changes in appearance, house, family, and leisure time. Pinterest can act as a bridge between the present self and potential future experiences, offering an "escape" into possibility. Pinterest allows users space to dream about the future, anticipate change, and can serve as an escape from menial labor. For example, Sarah's partner travels frequently for work, so she is often alone with her 15 month old son; she describes her Pinterest use, "You know, I should be cleaning the house, or doing homework, and

I'm like, let me just check Pinterest for just 5 minutes and then it turns into like half an hour."

Using Pinterest presented a space for her to consider other topics of interest rather than the obligations of house and school work. Elizabeth is a mother to three elementary school aged boys, who returned to college after the economic recession in 2008. She now attends nursing school full time. When asked about her work and school position, Elizabeth describes her situation:

> The economy just kind of turned us upside down. And we were in a position where we were at dead end jobs, didn't really know what we were going to do, I was a stay-at-home mom and he was at a job that was a dead end job and we just really needed to figure out something else. School was the answer, everything has fallen into place ever since. It's been a struggle and it's been challenging, but it's definitely been the right answer. And we've made it through, we're almost there. So it's nice to have those little loopholes of reprieve to, escape reality for just a little bit, and then get back to focusing.

This participant categorizes her social media use as a reprieve from reality, which she characterizes as stressful. She told me when she was a stay-at-home mom her family lived in a larger house, and she was able to do crafts and activities with her children. Since returning to school she now lives in a small apartment, sees her children for only a few hours a day, and studies for hours a day for nursing school all stressors that she previously did not deal with. Pinterest has allowed her a 'reprieve' from these stressors. Additionally, Stephanie delves into different boards and describes their differences:

> I mean yes, some of it is for real life, but I have specific boards that are not for real life. You know, 'Take Me Here' is one of my boards and it's just these beautiful, exotic random places. Realistically, I'm probably never going to go to the fields of Spain, and run in the mountain fields, but it's beautiful to look at…Then there's my DIY that I'll

never do. Yes, I would I if I could, absolutely. Realistically, no I don't pin them because it's an agenda, there are just fun and they are entertaining to me.

Stephanie explicitly notes the difference between boards with pins that she plans on or could potentially use in the real world, versus those that are specifically not realistic goals for her life. Through the process of pinning these different beautiful destinations it is as if she is consuming and participating in those experiences.

Mothers use Pinterest for varying reasons. One theme that different mothers talked about was using Pinterest to escape the immediate moment. By using Pinterest as an escape, mothers were able to inhabit other identities that they otherwise would not have been able to. Additionally, by using Pinterest as an escape mothers were able to feel more inspired in their real lives.

Many participants brought up the fact that Pinterest serves as a stimulant as compared to their normal mundane thoughts. Through the act of logging onto Pinterest and seeing other users, whom are presumably women and could be mothers, creating innovative ways to improve small problems, or excelling in a pastime that they enjoyed before children creates a sense of potential and escape. Regina is a stay-at-home mom who has an infant and toddler, she discusses her escape from pressures or that include being a mom who can "never do their hair":

We never do our hair as moms, always in a pony tail, you're lucky if you get a shower when you have a newborn. So, it also gives you a little bit of a way to dream about what you're going to do when you have a little bit more time. So you're like when I lose the baby weight I'm going to wear that outfit. Or, when I have time to do my hair I'd like to put my hair up that way. It gives you a little bit of a way to dream and feel creative, so it's

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a combo. It starts out as a function, because moms are all about function. And then, it ends up being more of a way to dream about other things--which everyone likes that, right?

She relates her physical life, one of not having time to do her hair, or having a post-pregnancy body which has more weight than pre-pregnancy, to a life more similar to that before her pregnancy. In this interim period she uses Pinterest as a way to dream about the future. This theme of staying inspired continues with Amber.

Amber: Pinterest is great imagination fuel. Pinterest is great what-if fuel. Pinterest is great... just you look at stuff you would never see normally, you would never think of normally and it is fantasy, it is fanciful. It's like a magazine, it's like a dream, it's like... you find photographs that are you know, another reality. There's a Pinterest **reality** and then regular reality, and Pinterest reality is just like ours but with cute cappuccinos...with cats drawn on them.

Interviewer: A cat-achino?

Amber: Yeah! Exactly.

Interviewer: Do you think that it's an escape, like you said there's our reality and then Pinterest reality.

Amber: Yeah, I think people definitely escape within it, for better or worse. I think some people use it positively like to inspire themselves, or to be valuable. Or people use it to feel inferior and feel bad about themselves.

Amber brings to the forefront how Pinterest serves as "imagination fuel" and is separate from "regular reality." This concept of different universes exemplifies the escapist nature that Pinterest can play in a mother's life.

The notion that people are escaping the physical world through technology is not a new one. Television, video gaming, and now the Internet all have histories of people becoming engrossed in another world. The alternate reality that can be constructed through using Pinterest carries situated meanings for different people. For many mothers it is a way to escape the daily responsibility and expectations that motherhood entails. Other mothers describe using Pinterest as a way for them to more fully experience their different identities or "hats."

In the excerpts above women describe how they are using Pinterest in different ways based on situated needs and interactions. Some women create their accounts of ideal mothers by drawing on gendered ideologies, revealing how patriarchal society continues to affect mothers' lived experiences. Mothers' stories help to demonstrate how they define these ideals as 'unrealistic' to the point that even a 'supermom' could not attain them. Based on these perspectives, women go on to distance from these ideals and draw from explanations, varying from vague, pinning recipes and children's activities, to more specific explanations of "scripted," "unrealistic," and gendered parenting, to then situation themselves in relation to ideals. In order to deal with the gap between Pinterest unreality and attainable goals, mothers give explanations and justification for why expectations are unrealistic, and undermine those who appear to be achieving them. Additionally, striving for continued personal improvement by avoiding technology over use and negative labeling, is identified as an important aspect of Pinterest use. Finally, Pinterest is a place where mothers can "escape" the daily grind of parenting responsibilities and exercise their other identities that may have become less valued upon having children. It is clear from the excerpts above that the online interaction occurring on Pinterest, and subsequent construction of mothers, reveal the inner processes of motherhood.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Pinterest is a complex and contradictory space that women use for varied reasons. For example most aspects of Pinterest seem to be dualistic. First, on the one hand, users distance themselves from "perfect mothers" who seem too good to be true, while on the other hand, their descriptions also create and reproduce intensive mothering practices online. Participants' stories suggest that women perceive social media as simply an additional avenue by which other women perpetuate mothering ideals, yet also an outlet by which to escape from everyday pressures from family and career responsibilities. Participants' use of gender ideologies helped to explain why Pinterest is a community of women, based on their gendered similarities, even as they distanced from mothering ideals.

In addition, this research contributes to a more complex understanding of embracing and distancing from identities. While research has explored each of these processes separately, few researchers have analyzed both, or identified the subtleties and interplay between these processes. This research contributes to understanding identity embracement and distancing through discussions of identity construction through women's use of Pinterest. While previous research suggests that the transition to motherhood involves complete identity transformation and full embracement of the intensive motherhood ideology, this research suggests that creating a mother identity is a complex process that women negotiate in the context of multiple self-identities. Furthermore, this research contributes to understanding this negotiation process through discussions with mothers who may embrace certain traits of intensive mothering, but explain how they continue to manage and uphold other identities. While prior research might emphasize a complete transformation of a woman's identity as she becomes a mother, this

research suggests that women have tactics that they use to maintain—even if fluidly or privately—their other identities.

Second, in a complex manner, just as women distanced from mothering ideals, they also at times distanced from Pinterest itself, as technology overuse was defined as a negative "addiction." Through medicalized terms, they tell stories that reveal instances when pressure does affect them and yet how they feel it is necessary for them to cope with these pressures themselves, and therefore better themselves, through distancing from technology. Last, women also cope with these pressures through compartmentalizing their identities. They can "set aside" their mothering identities to "work on" their self-identities or to minimally escape from the real pressures temporarily through technology. Additionally, it is important to remember that these sections are only analytically distinct as the Pinterest process, and indeed the creation of mothering culture is varied and overlapping.

Relatedly, women expressed a concern for appearing too involved in technology, and thus checked out from mothering duties, while at the same time expressing enjoyment of the space for more creativity and an escape from the everyday life. These contradictory accounts of Pinterest bring forward the constructed nature of the site. It appears that of the aspects some of the respondents identified about Pinterest as being positives, other respondents identified these same aspects as negatives--two sides to the same coin. Finally, it seems from these stories that social media outlets, including Facebook and Pinterest, may have so much information that the abundance of information creates a sense of urgency and risk that could exacerbate preexisting stress. This could be a symptom of a risk society as outlined by Beck (1992), and mothers are

trying to gather information because they feel responsible to make correct "choices" for themselves, their family, and their children. Using the theory of risks society to research Pinterest, and social media in general, opens a new thread of research questions.

This sample contains women who make up the main group of Pinterest users so future research can further explore how racial or social economic class affects mothers' use of Pinterest. In so doing, this research can reveal additional layers of complexities to how and when women draw on Pinterest. For instance, as demonstrated by these mothers' stories, women may escape realities or use Pinterest as a resource by which to plan events. Depending on the social stability of women, or minimally the perceived social stability, women may use Pinterest for different reasons and to differing extents. Beyond this, participants also discussed a sense of a gendered community. Based on this, future research can specifically address how women feel a part of a community through Pinterest, a sense of connectedness or distance from other Pinterest users, and how Pinterest may be used to address issues they otherwise feel cannot be addressed through everyday personal interactions.

The results of this research contribute to knowledge of identity construction in online spaces, which can be used to contextualize the experiences of mothers online. Additionally, this research opens a new site for formal research, which up to this point has mainly been discussed in informal settings. Further, the findings of this research give researchers a better understanding of how the culture of motherhood is constructed online and specifically what experiences mothers have while using Pinterest. Beyond this, our research findings acts as a launching pad for future, more informed, research.

In conclusion, seventeen qualitative interviews were conducted with mothers who use Pinterest. Following grounded theory, themes emerged from the data. Mothers described Pinterest in conflicting terms, exemplifying the complexity of the site and the social interactions taking place. First, respondents described Pinterest as embodying conflicting reactions to gender. Specifically, mothers described distancing themselves from ideals which were perceived as too perfect and "unattainable." At the same time respondents were distancing themselves from gender ideology mothers are participating in the reproduction of gendered ideals online. Secondly, data reveal that mothers have a tumultuous relationship with using technology. Mothers navigate the boundaries between overuse of technology and using technology to protect against excessive guilt. Respondents say that Pinterest allows them to engage in self-improvement tactics that are protective against feeling like an inadequate mother. However, Pinterest users also must balance Pinterest use so as not to be seen as an 'obsessive' or 'addicted' user of technology. Finally, Pinterest allows mothers an escape from the responsibilities of mothering reality into an alternate "Pinterest Reality," where they are free to engage in otherwise ignored identities. Conversely, some mothers described a Pinterest which helped reify their roles in real life.

APPENDIX A- IRB APPROVAL

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

University of
Central Florida

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Kate M. Griffin** and Co-PIs: **Amanda J. Koontz**

Date: **July 19, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 7/19/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Pinterest, Motherhood, and Online Identity
Investigator:	Kate M. Griffin
IRB Number:	SBE-13-09490
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Patria Davis on 07/19/2013 04:23:54 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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APPENDIX B- INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Topics from each question were covered in the interview, but questions followed an order according to the participants' responses.

1. What does being a 'mom' or 'mother' mean to you?
    a. When you think of the word 'mom' or 'mother,' what do you think of?
    b. Have your thoughts changed from before to after having children?
    c. How do you think women are held to standards differently?

2. Describe some of the expectations for mothers.
    a. Could you describe to me a time that you felt you were held to certain expectations? (Were trying to live up to certain expectations? How did you handle that situation?)
    b. From who? (Friends, family, media…)
    c. How realistic do you think these expectations are?
    d. Do you think fathers face similar pressures?
    e. How do you deal with those pressures in your day-to-day life?

3. Tell me about how you first started using Pinterest.
    a. Why? (What made you interested? What are some of the reasons you chose/ became interested in Pinterest?)
    b. How did you first hear about it?

4. Tell me about the last time you logged onto Pinterest.
    a. What device did you use to access the Internet?
    b. Was this a typical session? (If not, can you describe a typical session?)
    c. What are some of the main reasons you repin or like posts? (What are you thinking about as you repin or like posts?)
    d. What do you like most about being on Pinterest?
    e. When or how do you think of your family while using Pinterest?
    f. What is the most important part of your experience when you are using Pinterest?
    g. Do you think that Pinterest and the Internet in general affect your day-to-day family life?

5. Describe your computer skills.
    a. Do you feel comfortable using the computer to get things done?
    b. How often do you use a home computer?
    c. Do you use your mobile device to access Pinterest?

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