

Deconstructing the “Mommy Wars”: The Battle Over the Best Mom

Toni Schindler Zimmerman

Jennifer T. Aberle

Jennifer L. Krafchick

Ashley M. Harvey

ABSTRACT. Popular press, family policies, and celebrity therapists are a few of the outlets that portray working mothers in a negative light. In this public dialogue, working mothers are blamed for a multitude of social problems, while many of the real social issues related to working families are ignored. In the popular discourse known as the “Mommy Wars,” working

Toni Schindler Zimmerman, Ph.D., is Professor, Human Development and Family Studies Department, Colorado State University. Jennifer T. Aberle, Ph.D., is Adjunct Faculty, Human Development and Family Studies Department, Colorado State University. Jennifer L. Krafchick, Ph.D., is Adjunct Faculty, Human Development and Family Studies Department, and University Honors Program, Colorado State University. Ashley M. Harvey, Ph.D., is Adjunct Assistant Professor, Human Development and Family Studies Department, Colorado State University.

Address correspondence to: Toni Schindler Zimmerman, 119E Gifford Building, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523 (E-mail: Zimmerman@cahs.colostate.edu).

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mothers and stay-at-home mothers are pitted against each other by asking, "Who is the better mommy?" However, this media driven war effectively diverts our attention away from real problems and solutions for working parents. As family therapists we have many opportunities to assist our clients in achieving equality and increased balance in their lives, as well as provide education about what factors lead to overall family well-being. We can place client problems in social context in order to increase awareness and educated decision making about family arrangements that work best for their unique circumstances, that are not based on media generated messages. This paper discusses that social context and offers ways for therapists to work with primarily heterosexual families who are struggling with work and family balance and the question "Should Mom work?"

KEYWORDS. "Mommy Wars," working mothers, stay-at-home mothers, motherhood, mother-blaming, making career choices, feminist family therapy

INTRODUCTION

"Perhaps it is not so much our mothers who have let us down as the yardsticks by which we have been measuring them."

—Monica McGoldrick

Throughout history, blame is a term that has been associated with mothers. For many years, mothers have been blamed for various issues related to families and children. At the center of this public discourse is the question of whether working mothers or stay-at-home mothers are the most suitable mothers for their children. This debate, commonly known as the "Mommy Wars," has been a convenient way to divert the dialogue away from real issues such as affordable health care, quality childcare, gender and racial equality, fathers' roles in parenting, media effects, fair wages and benefits, and family-friendly work arrangements. Rather than a public dialogue seeking to address these real social issues, the popular press has created the "Mommy Wars" by asking the irrelevant question, "Who is the better mommy, the stay-at-home mom or the working mom?" ("Mommy Wars' incited," 2006).

Family therapists are ideally positioned to focus their attention toward issues that are more relevant and significant to the quality of family life for their clients. As therapists, we have a responsibility to look at the "Mommy

Wars” discourse in an effort to offer families solid advice based on empirical findings rather than focusing on the talk show of the day. Therapists must look beyond the media messages and examine the real issues that contribute to the stress on the family system and acknowledge the complexities that face not only children but also mothers as their caretakers. In this mandate for therapists we will situate the media “Mommy Wars” in a larger culture of mother blame, discuss the marginalization of minority mothers in the media and society, contrast media portrayals of working women with the research on maternal employment and childcare, and briefly review the macro-level policies and micro-level strategies needed to support families. It is our mission to expose the myths of the “Mommy Wars.”

In recent years, the “Mommy Wars” controversy has certainly deflected attention from the real issues that have had an impact on a family’s ability to provide good parenting. Important issues such as poverty, lack of affordable, high quality childcare, unequal pay for women, third-shift work by mothers, and low levels of participation in child rearing by fathers are regularly neglected in the contemporary discussion on mothering. The public dialogue also fails to recognize families where there are two mothers involved in the children’s lives, such as lesbian families and binuclear families that consist of both a mom and a step-mom. From *Time* magazine, to ABC’s “Good Morning America,” to Drs. Laura and Phil, the media has created a controversy around the differences between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. There is a continuous image of the mother with a cell phone at her ear and a child clinging to her skirt, or of a child watching longingly from the window as mom leaves for the day. These messages have contributed to the illusion that working mothers are selfish and deny affection to their children. On the other side of the spectrum, the media depicts stay-at-home mothers as dependent women, bearing pearl necklaces and aprons while running the vacuum and oven in the midst of taxiing their children here and there. This contentious debate spawned by the media regarding who is the better mother has created a culture of mother-blame.

THE MEDIA MOMMY WARS AND THE CULTURE OF MOTHER-BLAME

Through a variety of outlets, the public has been indoctrinated into the debate of who is the better mother. In addition to media images, the perceptions of mothering are also fueled by the cultural norms associated with

blaming mothers for a wide range of adversity that their children may encounter, such as mental health issues. This critique of mothering is being socially constructed on a mass scale, yet the implications of this critique are playing out in the lives of every mother and how she feels about herself, her role as a parent, and her role in the workplace. In addition to the role of the mother, there is an overarching assumption that mothers are heterosexual, which neglects to acknowledge the experiences and lives of lesbian mothers.

Moms in the Media

“Working moms should hide in shame for putting their kids in a filthy daycare center. . . . Stay-at-home mothers waste their education and throw us back to the 1950’s” (Peskowitz, 2005, p. 20). Statements such as these taken from a taping of *Dr. Phil* clearly depict the “Mommy War” binary discourse that is prevalent today. This topic has become such a popular issue that Dr. Phil McGraw dedicated two entire shows to the “debate” of motherhood. The first show aired on November 10, 2003, and the second on September 3, 2004. They were titled “Mom vs. Mom” and “Mom vs. Mom, Part 2.” The audience was physically divided, and each side displayed a panel of stay-at-home moms, working moms, and two experts in the field. There were two moms on the fence about working out of the home and staying home with the children. One working mom said out of guilt, “I fear that I’m telling my children my job is more important because I spend more time at work than I am able to spend with them. I missed the first word he said. I missed the first time he took a step, and I can never get those back.” The undecided mother stated a view that many women who are torn between working and staying at home face: “I have big dreams. I really have this passion inside of me that I feel like I don’t have an outlet for” (McGraw, 2003). The battle between the opposing views became heated, and each panel shared many comments defending their positions. A stay-at-home mom said at one point, “I do not think working moms make an effort to be part of their kid’s life.” Moreover, the battle continued with a working mom saying, “Working makes me feel more fulfilled as a person, and I am happier, and I am a better mother if I’m happier” (McGraw, 2004). The inevitable impact of this type of programming is profound when your clients are exploring their options to balance work and family in their day-to-day lives.

In February of 2006, Diane Sawyer reported on the “Mommy Wars” on ABC’s *Good Morning America* (Sherwood, 2006). The show was designed to be a “Which choice is better?” debate, with experts and

moms being encouraged to take sides and defend their positions. This feature prompted a letter to Diane Sawyer and *Good Morning America* by Kim Gandy, President of the National Organization for Women (“‘Mommy Wars’ incited,” 2006). In her letter, Gandy calls the show an irresponsible and transparent bid to increase ratings, and states that it is the media that is pitting mothers against each other. Gandy also points out that the show ignored poor mothers or single mothers who have no choice but to work. Gandy asks, “What are moms who must work to put food on the table supposed to think about a debate that manages both to exclude and scold them?” (“‘Mommy Wars’ incited,” p. 2). In truth, mothers are not clearly divided into two camps; many mothers move in and out of the workplace in both full- and part-time capacities, and thus the “Mommy Wars” debate neglects to include the experience of most mothers.

Most recently the mommy wars have begun playing out in reality television. The cable channel TLC has recently launched a reality show entitled *The Secret Life of a Soccer Mom* (TLC, 2008). This show invites stay-at-home mothers to explore the career that they opted out of to stay at home with their children while their family thinks they are at a spa. Visitors to the show’s Web site are asked, “If given the opportunity, should women choose to stay at home with their children?” and the accompanying discussion board entitled “The Great Debate” pits working moms and stay-at-home moms against one another. This simplification of the “best mother” discourse is extremely detrimental and only works to fuel the debate about who is the better mother.

The Culture of Mother-Blame

These media portrayals bespeak the larger culture of mother-blame that has been pervasive in the field of mental health as well, in which mothers’ interactions with their children have been thought to cause or contribute to a myriad of childhood and developmental disorders. In fact, mothers have been blamed for causing epilepsy, colitis, asthma, ulcers, arthritis, anorexia nervosa, and a multitude of more severe problems in children (Coontz, 1992). For example, in her best-selling parenting advice book, *Parenthood by Proxy*, celebrity therapist Dr. Laura Schlessinger specifically condemns working mothers for neglecting their children and depriving them of the necessary maternal affection which will inevitably drive them to a “life of crime” (Krafchick, Zimmerman, Haddock, & Banning, 2005, p. 89). As mental health professionals, we are all familiar with

terms like “schizophogenic mother” and “refrigerator mother.” These terms indict mothers for causing such disorders as schizophrenia and autism, while never addressing the possible influence fathers might have. It is now well accepted that these disorders are in fact not caused by poor mothering, yet they serve as examples of our society’s long history of blaming mothers. It is not surprising that again mothers—this time middle-class, white, working mothers—are targeted as the source of current social ills. The result of this judgment is that good mothers end up feeling inadequate and guilty about how they are allegedly damaging their children.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE MOMMY WARS

As these discussions of media and mother blame indicate, mothering is clearly a socially constructed phenomenon, one influenced by both popular and political propaganda (Arendell, 2000; Coontz, 1992; Warner, 2005; Williams, 2000). Women’s employment is a current cultural and political debate, in part because of the challenges it poses to gender-based divisions of labor (Arendell, 2000). White and Klein (2002) suggest that the self-help literature is a barometer of areas of transitional roles, and certainly, there has been a plethora of attention in the media and popular press to working mothers and involved fathers (e.g., Chira, 1998; Frank & Livingston, 1999; Holcomb, 1998; Levine & Pittinsky, 1998; Peskowitz, 2005). Given the increased ambiguity regarding norms around the mother and father role in heterosexual couples, it is not surprising that parents, particularly mothers, are experiencing dissonance and strain. As symbolic interactionists would predict, the less societal consensus regarding a role, the more role strain that an individual experiences (Burr, Leigh, Day, & Constantine, 1979). We argue that the media is not only a reflection but also an architect of the social construction of motherhood. Much of the dissonance and guilt that mothers feel is inflamed by the media’s promotion of the “Mommy Wars.”

Universally, the media portrays the average mother as white, affluent, and heterosexual. In general, the messages media projects seem to be that these mothers are harming their children by not being at home full time and by using daycare. Yet over 50 years of research tells us that this is not the case (Hoffman, 2005; Warner, 2005). Although the image of the middle- and upper-class mothers as being selfish and distant is insulting, it is even more insulting to minority mothers and disadvantaged mothers whose

images are not reflected in the media discourse at all. Is the absence of these moms in the dialogue saying that we are only worried about some children and not others, or are these messages simply telling some moms to get to work and some moms to get home? This is particularly disturbing when research suggests that quality childcare is a positive environment for children but becomes negative when factors having to do with poverty are introduced, such as low teacher-to-student ratios and low amounts of educational materials (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001). By implying that working mothers are not good mothers, the myth discourages women from economic participation and achievement. Moreover, by overlooking women of color, it presumes that they and their children are not worthy of being considered in the debate.

Further, mother blaming has focused specifically on white, middle-class working mothers as the kind of mother who puts her children at risk by working outside the home. While one class of woman has been directed to end their reliance on welfare and obtain employment, other mothers have been told that they need to quit their jobs so that they can stay home and care for their children (Chira, 1998). Essentially, the "Mommy Wars" discourse reinforces the idea that some children are just more important than others. This issue has only served to further marginalize working mothers of color into a zero-sum game, where clearly no one mother, regardless of race or social class, can win.

The cultural ambivalence around motherhood is situated within larger dominant discourses around race, class, sexual orientation, and gender. The "Mommy Wars" debate, as well as most media coverage of mothers in general, assumes what has been referred to by Smith (1993) as the Standard North American Family (SNAF). Mothering ideology is inseparable from idealized images of family which include white, middle-class, heterosexual couples with children (Arendell, 2000; Thorne, 1992). The motherhood ideology is one of "intensive mothering," and those who depart from this dominant discourse (lesbian mothers, minority mothers, single mothers, welfare mothers, immigrant mothers, and white, married, employed mothers) are considered deviant (Arendell, 2000) or even invisible. For example, we often think of the 1950s as a time when most all women were not employed, yet more than 22% of white women and 40% of African American women worked outside the home, and many of those married African Americans who stayed at home were very poor (Coontz, 1992). In order to clarify this widespread misconception, Coontz states, "Contrary to popular opinion, *Leave it to Beaver* was not a documentary" (p. 29). Both common sense and clinical experience should tell us that mothering is not

a unitary experience. Its meaning shifts and varies among women, and it is inseparable from larger contexts of race and class (Arendell, 2000).

Moving beyond the Standard North American Family, or SNAF, it is also possible that the mother's employment status has a different impact in a one-parent family than in a two-parent family. However, it is hard to find what effects single working mothers have on their children regardless of their economical situation. When financial conditions are the same, single and married mothers experience similar levels of distress. Research on the effects of maternal employment on children in single-mother families has been scarce, and with only a few exceptions (Duckett & Richards, 1989; Richards & Duckett, 1991; Weinraub & Wolf, 1983), this work has been conducted with lower-class or impoverished samples. This concentration on lower-income populations reflects the social concern for children being reared by single mothers in poverty. To complicate matters, most of the research on single mothers living in poverty has been conducted with all African American samples (Cherry & Eaton, 1977; McLoyd et al., 1994; Woods, 1972), or predominantly African American samples (Heynes, 1978; Kriesberg, 1970; Vandell & Ramanan, 1992). Thus, the moderating roles of poverty, marital status, and ethnicity are difficult to untangle.

RESEARCH ON CHILDCARE & MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

Dispelling the myths and misconceptions about family life, such as those portrayed as fact by the public "Mommy Wars," is an essential role of the family therapist. There is a substantial body of research that explores the effects of childcare and maternal employment on children's well-being. Educating clients to have an accurate picture of these issues will serve to empower them to make more informed choices regarding their own specific circumstances.

Childcare

In contrast to media portrayals of working mothers, the majority of research suggests that "children who receive good- to high-quality childcare do as well or better than children receiving full-time maternal care" (Fraenkel, 2003, p. 78). Negative effects of substandard childcare can be attributed not to the working mother but rather to the system of poverty that enslaves her. Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael (1989) found that nonmaternal care is

likely to be lower relative to the care the middle-class mother would provide but higher than the care the lower-class mother would provide, because of the educational discrepancies of mothers in the two social classes.

The most comprehensive U.S. study to date about childcare is that by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, which has followed 1100 children from birth to seven years. An overview of that study (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001) indicated that family factors such as income, maternal sensitivity, and depression were more consistent predictors of children's social and cognitive development than any factors related to nonmaternal childcare. In general, the type of care (e.g., maternal care, child-care centers, child-care homes, or care by a grandparent or mother's partner) alone had few impacts on child outcomes. When it did, the effect was often that children cared for in centers and child-care homes did better on measures of cognitive development and at some ages displayed better social-emotional outcomes.

Maternal Employment

Maternal employment has increased steadily over the past three decades for all racial and ethnic groups (Arendell, 2000). Contrary to the media's projection, comprehensive reviews of the literature on working mothers (e.g., Galinsky, 1999; Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999) show that maternal employment has either no influence or a positive influence on outcomes for children. In fact, Galinsky's research revealed that maternal employment does not negatively influence the mother-child relationship, the influence of parents on children, or the quality of the parenting as perceived by the child. Interestingly, she also found that the children of stay-at-home mothers and the children of employed mothers report similar perceptions related to the amount of time they have with their mothers. Hoffman and Youngblade found that in general, employed mothers were more authoritative and less authoritarian or permissive than nonemployed mothers, and authoritative parenting was associated with numerous positive outcomes in children. In addition, teachers rated children with employed mothers as higher in peer social skills than children with nonemployed mothers (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999).

The benefits of maternal employment are particularly salient and far-reaching for girls. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to have higher academic achievement, greater career success, more nontraditional career choices, and greater occupational commitment (Alessandri,

1992; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Hoffman, 1979; Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). Daughters of full-time employed mothers had more frustration tolerance than did daughters of nonemployed or part-time employed mothers (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). In addition, Hoffman and Youngblade's findings suggest that girls with nonemployed mothers present a pattern characterized by a more external locus of control; African American girls with single mothers exhibit more shyness, and those with nonemployed mothers less assertiveness. In contrast, and in support of previous research, daughters of employed mothers appear more assertive and have more of a sense of internal control.

Although a child's well-being is certainly essential, the mother's welfare is imperative as well. Regarding the well-being of the mother, research has shown that maternal employment does not tend to have negative effects (Klumb, 2004) and often has positive associations. If married mothers are without sufficient resources for childcare, employed mothers are much more stressed and depressed (see Arendell, 2000, for a review). However, in general, employed mothers experience lower levels of psychological distress than full-time mothers (Marshall, Barnett, & Sayer, 1997), even if they do report more work-family strains. In one study, in working-class families, employed mothers were less depressed and had higher morale than full-time homemakers (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). This greater well-being among employed working-class mothers was associated with more positive parenting styles, which was in turn associated with higher academic achievement and social outcomes for their children.

Maternal employment has not been associated with the degree of marital satisfaction for either mothers or fathers, and maternal employment has positive implications for father involvement, as well as child outcomes (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). In Hoffman and Youngblade's study, fathers in dual-wage heterosexual families were more active in traditional female household tasks and childcare, and when fathers were more involved in childcare, test scores were higher among children. In addition, for dual-earner families, the father's involvement in childcare predicted higher marital satisfaction for both parents, particularly the mother. Raising children in families where both parents take an active role in the parenting process is beneficial to parents and children. For example, research shows that when children are encouraged to resist gender norms, they do better in multiple areas including school, friendships, self-esteem, and future relationships (Coltrane, 1998; Gottman, 1997).

However, despite advances in the workforce, married, employed mothers are still carrying the bulk of the household labor and childcare

responsibilities (Coltrane, 1996). After returning home from work, mothers get busy with their “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2003). In fact, single and married mothers spend approximately the same amount of time in family work and childcare (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). This domestic and relational inequality contributes to maternal stress and marital dissatisfaction. For example, researchers (Burns & Homel, 1989; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Wille, 1995) find that mothers are the primary caregivers of children in the U.S. In fact, according to a study of 860 business professionals, mothers who were employed spent over three times as many hours per week on childcare activities than did fathers (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). In recent years, the fathers’ involvement in childcare and household labor has increased, but most fathers still do not spend as much time as mothers caring for their children (Arendell, 1997; Coltrane, 1998). There are significant relational ramifications in families where fathers are not carrying their load of domestic duties.

Beyond the second shift, women are also doing what is known as the “third shift” (Bolton, 2000). This shift involves the constant self-doubt that all that is being done for their children and family is inadequate. Beyond the second shift, women are also doing what is known as the “third shift” (Bolton, 2000). This shift involves the constant self-doubt that all that is being done for their children and family is inadequate. This self-doubt is aggressively fed by the messages we are forced to consume on a daily basis about how employed mothers are damaging their children. For instance, the well known “Dr. Laura” Schlessinger (2000) informs listeners and readers that children of employed mothers will experience behavioral, psychological, and relational problems. During the “third shift” mothers internalize this message which leaves employed mothers questioning, doubting, and uncertain as to the short- and long-term effects of their mothering (Bolton, 2000).

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

As Family Therapists become informed about the ways in which the “Mommy Wars” debate plays out in a public arena, there is a growing recognition of how public policy and discourse influence perceptions of motherhood and work and how that can influence their clients’ experiences with balancing work and family.

Macro-Level Changes via Public Policy and Discourse

Though the “Mommy Wars” discourse is highly debated and research on the subject offers no concrete solutions, it is interesting to examine what it succeeds in doing: It takes the focus away from equality and shared parenting, which have been identified by marriage and family scholars as crucial for the development of happy families and children. It also takes the focus off of real issues such as unequal pay for women, even more unequal for mothers, or the economic distress experienced by many single mothers (Arendell, 2000). This narrow viewpoint, in effect, allows us as a society to ignore the more compelling issues. The government has failed to offer help for mothers of children who need quality childcare. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; welfare reformed) has a documented decrease in serving families who qualify, despite a rise in child poverty (Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, 2006), which is particularly prevalent among single-mother households. In 2006, over half of children under six years old living with a single-mother were in poverty, as compared with less than 10% of such children in married-couple families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007).

As Gandy pointed out in her letter to Diane Sawyer and ABC (“Mommy Wars’ incited,” 2006), what we need from the media is not a blaming of working mothers and stay-at-home mothers, but attention to the economic challenges to raising children for today’s parents, and how society can better support families so that parents can choose to work inside or outside the home without extensive guilt and stress (“Mommy Wars’ incited”). Because the media ignores the real issue, it becomes difficult to discuss the actual problems that families really struggle with. For example, real help to families, such as the Family and Workplace Balancing Act of 2004 proposed by Congresswomen, and former welfare mother, Lynn Wooley, received virtually no attention (Peskowitz, 2005).

Countless work-family academic publications end with a call for changes in workplace and governmental policies: paid maternity and paternity leave, flexible schedules, affordable and high quality after school programs and daycare, benefits for same-sex partners, and benefits for part-time workers. Countless publications compare the United States to other industrialized countries and find us lacking in supports for working families and family-friendly policies in general. These calls for changes have recently made it into the popular press in a highly accessible DVD and book entitled *The Motherhood Manifesto* (Blades & Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2006). Additionally, Warner (2005) and Bennetts (2007) argue that woman and men benefit when the discussion and choices made available

are family friendly with emphasis on offering moms and dads equal access to employment and time with their children.

Micro-Level Chances via Therapy

So, what can a couple and family therapist do? Difficulty balancing work and family is among the top reasons people seek therapy (Haddock & Bowling, 2001), but these issues seem to need change at an immense level. Our job as therapists is not to change policy. However, we can help frame clients' struggles as a larger issue in society rather than just a need for one person (often the mother) to become more efficient. MFTs can also help externalize a mother's guilt as resulting from societal ambivalence regarding mother and father roles, as well as a lack of societal supports for working families. As therapists, we can let our clients know almost all industrialized nations provide more support for working families than does the U.S., and so their struggles are not due to personal deficiencies but instead a lack of family-friendly policies.

Although changes need to be made at the macro level, micro-level strategies can help too. There are a small number of sources in the therapy literature documenting or suggesting strategies for working with dual-earner families (see Haddock, Zimmerman, Current, & Harvey, 2002; Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Current, 2001; Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, & Ziemba, 2003) and single-parent families (Anderson, 2003) but almost none that we are aware of for two-parent, heterosexual, stay-at-home mother families. Therapists must make themselves aware of the existing research-based strategies and intervene at the couple and family level, rather than conceptualizing the strain at the individual level of the mother. For example, a primary strategy for all overstressed parents is more even distribution of childcare, be it with a spouse, partner, grandparent, or noncustodial parent. MFTs are crucial in the work of conceptualizing work-family balance as a relational, rather than individual issue.

What if both the public discourse and therapeutic discourses about juggling work and family in heterosexual families shifted to include the fathers' role in the "second shift" and offered strategies for men to take more initiative in the essential demands of running a household? Equality between partners involves sharing responsibilities. When both partners are employed, this means responsibilities both in and out of the home are divided in an equitable fashion. If men were more involved in the childcare and household responsibilities, could men then naturally recognize the "third shift" and take on some of the responsibility in this realm as

well? This could alleviate the “madness” that many employed mothers experience as they are constantly being told that they are ruining their children.

CONCLUSION

The media has tended to promote many myths about gendered roles, such as exaggerating the differences between men and women, and boys and girls, all the while making no mention of the wide variance within gender difference (Barnett & Rivers, 2004). Similarly, the media repeatedly has promoted what has been called the myth of the “opt-out revolution” or the idea that women are leaving work in droves to be at home with their children, when in fact the research statistics do not support this (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2005, November). It is not surprising that the media is staging a war between employed moms and stay-at-home moms, when in fact, many women are both at different times and many women do not have a choice. The media likes difference; difference is “sexy” and easier to sell (Harvey, 2005). Imagine, for example, how odd it would be to hear news stories such as “Boys’ and Girls’ Math Scores? More Overlap than Difference” or “Emotional Expression? A Wide Range Among Both Men and Women” or “Women Continuing to Remain in Workforce” or “Every Mother is a Working Mother.”

Throughout this paper, we take a position that we, as family therapists, must be educated regarding the “Mommy Wars” culture. The purpose is to bridge the gap between what the media portrays and what is factual by portraying research-based facts and statistics. As therapists, we must be aware of personal biases developed through exposure to the media’s messages of working mothers and recognize that there are several factors in the development of families. If therapists buy into or are not aware of the ramifications of the “Mommy Wars” culture, they may unwittingly take a narrow view of the problem and fail to address the real social issues facing families. We, as family therapists, have a responsibility to be educated on contextual factors such as ethnicity, class, and marital status when understanding mother-blame. When mothers are forced into inaccurate categories, the ability to strategize creative solutions is gravely compromised.

If we continue to perpetuate the “Mommy Wars” myth, we are adding to the already too-vast measuring stick that is used to rate mothers. Essentially, as therapists, the future of the family lies in our hands. When families

seek therapy, we have the obligation to acknowledge all roles and factors involved in the raising of children and the health of the family as a whole. The mandate: know the facts, examine the research, do not let personal biases cloud your vision, and recognize that there are many factors that parents face in relation to raising their children and working. We must expose the “Mommy Wars” myth for what it is: an unfair judgment aimed at women that creates a false dichotomy between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers.

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