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Sacrificing the Shepherd: An analysis of popular constructions of motherhood within parenting and pregnancy manuals

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Sacrificing the Shepherd: An analysis of popular constructions of motherhood within parenting and pregnancy manuals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the existence of the discourse of parenting and the contradictions that lie within it. This paper seeks to outline the ways in which parenting and pregnancy manuals construct various ideals of motherhood, which often contradict one another. These constructions exist throughout all forms of media in American culture, and serve to either oppress or liberate women within their roles of motherhood to various degrees. The bulk of this paper relies on a close textual analysis of two popular parenting books, *Attachment Parenting* and *Bringing Up Bébé*, which each outline opposite sides of the parenting approach spectrum. Through my comparison of the parent-centered and child-centered approaches displayed in each book, I point out the gaps in both arguments, ultimately proving that the conversation surrounding what a mother ought to be is ever-changing and confusing.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The transition into parenthood is undoubtedly life changing. Reality sets in at different points in time depending on each person. For a woman, this typically happens with the appearance of two pink lines, resulting in a positive test. For a man, it might not happen until further along in pregnancy or even birth. However, throughout this wild journey, there are external influencers that sway opinions, shape knowledge, and dictate how and when topics are discussed. These tidbits of advice and expressed norms come in many forms including conversations with family members, doctors, or experienced parents, articles, movies, television shows, books and more. Arguably, any source of information outside of personal thought is all part of this collective conversation around parenting, what we call the discourse of parenting. Within that discourse, as in any discourse, there are rules. There are certain ways people ought to discuss topics, there are certain people who are allowed to speak on certain subjects, and there are certain constructions of what parenting, specifically the mother, should look, sound, feel, and be like.

When a society continues to shape and reshape a discourse on any given topic, the general population is left to tease through the noise by themselves. This makes for a very confusing mess of “Thou Shall Not’s” mixed with a never-ending list of expectations bestowed upon a female caretaker. As will be expanded upon later in this paper, this conversation surrounding parenthood has been in constant circulation for over a century. Within this back and forth discussion of which parenting method proves superior, the discourse often fails to take full account of mothers in all situations. Naturally, one suggested way of mothering will leave several others left in the margins. In addition, some scholars go on to argue even further that the existence of such a discourse plays into a larger patriarchal default. Adrienne Rich, author of Of Woman Born:
Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1976) argues, “There is nothing revolutionary whatsoever about the control of women's bodies by men. The woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected,” (Rich p 26), in regards to the various constraints placed on the pregnant body present in such discourse. She goes on to explain, “Those who speak largely of the human condition are usually those most exempt from its oppressions - whether of sex, race, or servitude,” (Rich p 92), again referring to male creators of the discourse who are exempt from the very experiences they are providing wisdom on.

Illustrating such gaps serves the purpose of showing how these discourses have socio-political consequences, demonstrating that these discourses serve to discipline and mold mothers into ideal Mothers, even over and against the constraints of real situations and real mothers. Likewise, any construction of an idealized mother implies that there is, in fact, one right way. To highlight the existence of both an ever-changing discourse of parenting, and several constructions of what a mother should be and do, I will dive into a list of literature to provide insight into this ambiguous topic.

To guide my research, I have set out with two objectives. My first objective is to establish that there is, indeed, a living, breathing discourse of parenting which continues to evolve, proving in and of itself that parenthood is a massive concern in our society. My second objective is to highlight that the result of this changing discourse has led to shifting opinions of motherhood. I will point out several common constructions of The Mother (capitalized to represent the idealized version) within the continued conversation of motherhood over time. I will also express how two leading ideologies (child-centered and parent-centered parenting approaches) based on opposing constructions of The Mother have taken American culture by storm, and exist to give varying levels of constraint and liberty to women.
In order to demonstrate my objectives, I have pulled from a collection of texts addressing the medical system, pregnancy and parenting manuals, media representations of motherhood, and first-hand experiences. I will review the relevant portions of: *The Rhetoric of Pregnancy*, by Marika Seigel, *Raising America*, by Ann Hulbert, and *Representations of Motherhood*, by Bonna Bassin, et al, as a means to understand the history and previous research done in the area of parenting.

*The Rhetoric of Pregnancy*, by Marika Seigel (2013), addresses questions regarding the ways in which certain parenting discourses empower, restrain, protect, or endanger various groups of people, mostly women. The book also outlines the complicated U.S. medical system, which women must interact with throughout their pregnancy and post-partum experiences. While these questions are geared towards pregnancy, they provide a strong structure and background for my analysis of social constructs.

*Raising America*, by Ann Hulbert (2003), discusses the history of child-rearing manuals and advice about children over the last century. This text walks through the rise and questionable fall of baby “experts” such as Dr. John Watson, Dr. L Emmett Holt, Dr. G. Stanley Hall, and the infamous Dr. Spock. The differing advice bounces between a “child-centered” focus and a “parent-centered” focus- pointing out clear distinctions in the importance of perception.

*Representations of Motherhood*, by Bonna Bassin (1994), et al, breaks down the complex representations of motherhood both in media and everyday life. This text provides an extensive looks at varies topics including: mothers as thinkers versus doers, subjectivity in visual culture, motherhood in the technological universe and more.

Through these texts I have identified five constructions of motherhood. These constructions of *The Mother* include: Mother as Knowledge Seeker, Mother as Worker, Mother as Self-
Sacrificial Reproducer, Mother as Consumer, and Mother as Shepherd.

These constructions will be thoroughly laid out in latter chapters, but have come as a result of my observations from analyzing the various texts of parenting discourse. In no way did any of the texts explicitly point out idealized versions of motherhood, rather, their subtle rhetoric painted a clear picture, which through the use of Critical Rhetoric, I was able to dissect in order to understand what the parenting and pregnancy manuals really say about parenting and motherhood.

For the bulk of my analysis I will examine two books. The first is *Attachment Parenting: a common sense guide to understanding and nurturing your baby*, by Dr. William Spears (2001), founder of attachment parenting. I will also analyze *Bringing Up Bébé*, by Pamela Druckerman (2012), former staff reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, and author of the top ten *New York Times* best seller. The author of *Attachment Parenting*, Dr. Spears, has since been named the “man who remade motherhood” and was featured as the cover story for TIME Magazine in the, “Are You Mom Enough” issue, in May of 2012. These two books represent very different methods of parenting and understandings of both the child and the mother, which create real and distinct differences in the expectations of motherhood. Both techniques vastly oppose one another and approach attitudes, actions, and values of parenting from opposite sides.

For example, attachment parenting (AP), as explained in Dr. Sears’ book, focuses on the intentional and constructed bond between mother and child. AP parents are encouraged to cue into what their babies and children are trying to communicate. Common practices of AP parents include co-sleeping, responding to baby’s needs immediately, “baby wearing,” breastfeeding, and birth bonding. Baby wearing is the practice of carrying a baby in the mother’s arms or in a sling as often as possible as a way to ensure the child can experience their surroundings in the
safety of the mother’s arms. Birth bonding is the belief that the first few hours after birth are
crucial in forming a bond between mother and child. AP parents are also encouraged to be wary
of “baby trainers,” individuals who teach babies to cry less and sleep longer. Instead AP parents
are told to listen to the baby and treat their cry not as manipulation, which Dr. Spears claims is
the view of baby trainers, but as a valid signal indicating the child’s needs.

*Bringing Up Bébé* is an American mother’s reflection on raising children in France, which
outlines a more parent-centered approach. Her experiences point to differences in parenting
techniques, which come as a result of generational advice rather than outside “expertise.” While
the book is written as a guide to “French parenting,” it is not an overall cultural analysis.
Instead, Druckerman makes clear comparisons with parenting techniques used in the parent-
centered model to those of the child-centered model of parenting, which is a common practice in
the U.S. and other parts of the world.

In contrast to the work of Dr. Sears, the parenting methods found in *Bringing Up Bébé*
encourage parents to maintain a sense of self in addition to caring for a child. Some common
practices mentioned by Druckerman include encouraging children’s autonomy with self-play,
designating evening time as “adult time,” teaching infants to fall asleep and stay asleep through
the night autonomously by the age of four months, and teaching children to wait—ie. delaying
gratification, even if only for a minute, in order to teach patients and self-awareness.

The role of the five identified constructions of motherhood listed above will be used to further
analyze these two main texts to point out major difference in the ways in which women are either
oppressed or liberated through societal expectations of motherhood.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

My observations of surrounding family structures first sparked my interest in the discourse of parenting. As a single parent myself, living independent yet still under my parent’s roof, I have been questioned about my true identity as a mother. Concerns about which parenting approach I would/should adopt and to what extreme I should follow the advice of our (fellow caregivers) elders swarmed in the minute two lines appeared on the pregnancy test. To become a mother is to become, in an instant, subjected to an impossible list of “to-dos” and “how-tos” that has become so overgrown in a society of perfection, that even those with unlimited resources cannot escape its entanglement.

The parenting conversation in the United States has become highly populated with opinions on different parenting approaches, each of which leads to different outcomes. Varying ideas of the “perfect mother” and what Donald Winnicott (1953) calls the “good enough mother” battle in the public arena, leaving women left with contradictory messages (Winnicott, 1953, p. 89).

Throughout the history of parenting discourse, these approaches can be grouped into two competing, yet both widely popular styles: “child-centered” and “parent-centered.” Both philosophies differ in their definitions and constructions of what a mother ought to be as well as a constructed understanding of children and their capacity to bond and/or live autonomously. These differences are rhetorically constructed by creators of the discourse, and serve a greater purpose in establishing a societal picture of The Ideal Mother.

Rationale for Study

The obsession with parenting is a strong, tangible force in the United States. As a historian from the 1950’s says, “In no other country... has there been so pervasive a cultural anxiety about
the rearing of children” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 4). Such anxiety has led to a countless number of parenting manuals that offer advice to new parents in order to ease their anxiety and fear. Each manual offers various constructions of the parent, as well as the child, based on assumptions of what a parent’s role is as a caretaker. As Philippe Aries writes in *Centuries of Childhood*, the idea of parenthood has been “reinvented again and again” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 4).

This “reinvention” produces a back and forth discussion traced back through history about which contributor of discourse, or “expert,” opinion reigns true. For instance, Ann Hulbert’s *Raising America* scans across five generations of experts who have risen into power via their rhetorical devices in the form of “scientific” proof, emotional tugs, or logical explanations. These experts, many who shined in the spotlight simultaneously, have shared their views on what The Mother ought to be. The capitalization of “The Mother” is representative of the idealized version that exists within the discourse. These definitions, or constructed ideals, of what is right, logical, and even “scientific” have morphed dramatically since the turn of the twentieth century.

The first wave of experts included Dr. G. Stanley Hall, America’s psychology doctorate and Dr. L. Emmett Holt, who sought to “protect children and mothers from the enervating complexity of city life” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 10). The pair had very different opinions on exactly how that protection would manifest itself. “Dr. Holt and Dr. Hall exemplify contrasting perspectives on the relationships among child, parent, and expert that have coexisted ever since the start of the century and soon enough began to compete” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 28). Dr. Hall was considered the softy, who focused on the “inner currents of growth, especially during puberty,” and existed in contrast to the “hard” Dr. Holt, who focused on the effects of nutrients, especially in babies.
“Holt outlined, in Lockean spirit, the all-important power of paternal nurture especially during the formative period of infancy. Pioneering the “parent-centered” expert, he coolly emphasized rational discipline as the route to self-control in the child and peace for mothers” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 38). Holt’s book Care and Feeding of Children (1894) became the standard yardstick against which well-off mothers measured their maternal success. In contrast, Hulbert explains, “Hall took a more Rousseauian tack. One of America’s first psychological advocates of the “child-centered” perspective, he championed the child’s own natural impulses and rich imagination as the best guide to his (child) growth, promising inspiration in the process for mothers as well” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 38). Hall’s book, Adolescence of 1904 focused on a deeper connected between mothers and the “awkward, often unattractive neophytes.” Both doctors welcomed eager, “scientific mothers” to take hold of their expert advice as they guided women toward maternal success.

The next expert to speak in public was behaviorist John Broadus Watson (1928), author of Physiological Care of Infant and Child, believed so strongly that personality was shaped by one’s environment, that eventually parents would be able to completely control the personality of their children. Watson’s approach falls under the assumptions of the parent-centered approach, which is criticized for its tendency to privilege the parent’s needs and autonomy over the child’s.

Following Watson was a man named Arnold Gesell (1930), author of, The guidance of mental growth in infant and child, who advanced a child-centered approach which set out to understand the scientific laws behind growth and development, assuming scientific understanding could benefit child outcomes. After Gesell, the famous Dr. Spock, who remains relevant today, became known as the next great expert and “ran” relatively unopposed in his theory of parenting until Bruno Bettelheim stepped into the light. Dr. Spock offered a strict parent-centered approach and
had mothers so enthralled with his book, *The common sense book of baby and child care* (1946) that many raised their children according to every word he wrote. As Hulbert articulates, “Dr. Spock had 13,500,000 mothers so unsure of themselves that they bring up their children literally according to his book- and call piteously to him for help when the book does not work” (Hulbert, p 258). Dr. Spock urged mothers to trust their instincts. This advice led to later controversy when others claimed that children had been “Spocked” when they should have been spanked (Hulbert p 6).

The fourth wave of experts consisted of Spock’s successor, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and British child development expert Penelope Leach (1970’s). Dr. Brazelton focused on the capacities of the infant. He has applied his research to support childhood autonomy and the notion that infants, although thought of as highly vulnerable, are actually quite capable from day one. This belief in the capacity of children aligns with the parent-centered approach, which he discusses further in his book titled, *Infants and Mothers: Differences in Development*. Dr. Brazelton argues that the infant’s “competence will call up competence from parents” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 298) and continues to say, “In nurturing a small baby, adults learn as much about themselves as they do about the infant” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 298). This differs vastly from Spock who never called for self-reflection on behalf of the parents, but rather scared them into only trusting the expert, i.e. Dr. Spock himself.

Finally, Dr. James Dobson, of Focus on the Family claimed his role in the public eyes a man who knows a thing or two about mothering, falling within the realm of parent-centered approach. Hulbert explains, “Now that Dr. Spock’s sway has been challenged (by unfavorable child rearing results), any pretense to expert consensus had also vanished, except the calm “trust yourself” ethos and reliance on motherly intuition were passé” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 281). Literature
supporting the child-centered and parent-centered approaches grew “fiercer and more formulaic” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 281). As the author of Dare to Discipline (originally published 1992), Dr. James Dobson “sternly advised taming little hellions with a hard squeeze of the trapezius muscle,” advocating for stricter rules and harsher punishment (Hulbert, 2003, p. 281).

Each wave of experts has brought on new or “renewed” ideas of parenting. Time has told us then, that this “reinvention” of parenthood is a living, breathing discourse that continues to be reconstructed today. As Hulbert concludes, “Our voyeuristic curiosity, we know, is impossible to satisfy: we can’t eavesdrop on the households of others. Instead experts, manuals, magazines, studies, and conferences supply us with ever more informative and normative advice. Public rhetoric is full of exhortations to form deep attachments, to be models of loyal and loving attentiveness- to resist all the corrupting enticements to selfishness and irresponsibility our commercial culture constantly offers... Raising children has rated very near to sex- and to success- as an American fixation” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 4).

In the booked titled The Rhetoric of Pregnancy (2013), Marika Seigel argues that these manuals are “a form of technical communication (p. 23),” meaning they require a certain level of prior understanding or teaching in order to accurately interpret the discourse. With the understanding that women must engage with information throughout their pregnancy and experiences deep into motherhood, Seigel takes a hard look at how women interact with the “technological systems” of parenting advice and the medical field. The book seeks to answer several questions about pregnancy instructions and parenting manuals including:

- Why does each era circulate particular instructions?
- Who originates, maintains, and makes use of them?
- Since they express and serve particular social and economic schemes, whom do they
empower or restrain, protect or endanger, control or liberate?

- How do they become entrenched, routine practice, frozen into a system?
- What makes them change over time?
- Who resists them, who counteracts them? Do users engage with them compliantly, accepting received information, or critically, thus putting themselves at a remove from standard procedures, opening up a whole field of inquiry for themselves and the possibility of seeking the alternatives that will give them choices?
- What is expected of pregnant women these days; what are they told?

These questions are crucial in understanding power structures. In order to skim the surface of these complex ideas, Seigel lays out some key terms, which prove applicable to many aspects of parenting.

Seigel references *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for a Higher Ground* (2005), by Adam Banks, which discusses pregnancy as a technological system and its variations of individuals’ access. “Meaningful access to technology isn’t just about its availability or proximity to us” (Banks 2006, p. 138). Banks goes on to say that technological systems must, “meet the real material, social, cultural, and political needs in their lives and their communities.” Seigel furthers this point in stating, “First, they must have material access to the technologies. Second they must have functional access... Third they must have experiential access, or the opportunity to use the technologies frequently and to integrate them into their lives. Finally they must have critical access. Bank defines critical access as the ability to, ‘understand the benefits and problems of these technologies well enough to be able to critique them when necessary and use them when necessary’ (Banks, 2006, p.138).
This distinction between functional access and critical access is often a wall pregnant women find themselves against. There is very little room to “critique the system” when a mother is lying in the midst of labor or starting out as a parent. Seigel explains through her personal accounts, “When I was in the midst of preterm labor and in a high-risk position, I did not know how and when I could question the system, only hope to comply with the system.”

The questions Seigle addresses in her book act as a response to the implied reality that mothers ought to engage with a greater technological system: the medical system. While this may seem intuitive, it is important not to take cultural norms for granted when analyzing such discourses. I argue, then, that because it is understood that women must seek knowledge from pregnancy manuals, OBGYNs, and parenting magazines, it is crucial that Siegel critiques this construction. Her words act as both a reassurance that the construction exists, because without it she would have no room for criticism.

Seigel begins to question this construction of mothers as knowledge seekers by poking holes through the ways in which information is dispersed—making an argument for a power struggle between mothers and “experts.” “Historical approaches to the study of women’s involvement with technology have focused on the ways in which women have been at the mercy of technology rather than being empowered users or creators of technology, or contributors toward technological change” (Bassin, 1994, p. 220). Understanding a pregnant woman’s place within the technological system of medicine is key in understanding her future role as a mother and the power and influence of “expert” doctors.

This brings up discussions of experts and how they come to be. Seigel points out numerous statistics proving increased intervention by medical professionals has not increased the wellbeing and likelihood of survival for all parties equally. “The fact that mainstream documentation on the
topic of pregnancy and childbirth facilitates functional, rather than critical access to the
technological system of prenatal care would not be such an issue if the system worked well for
all its users; if the system was user centered; and if it achieved what it is supposed to achieve”
(Seigel, 2013, p. 4).

According to the National Vital Statistic Report (2005), by Martin et al, the number of women
suffering from pregnancy-related hypertension “has risen more then 50% since 1990.” The
United States, in comparison with other developed countries ranks “29th” in the world in infant
mortality, tied with Poland and Slovakia,” the rate of cesarean sections (c-section) has “risen
more than 50%” since 1996 (Seigel, 2013, p. 5).

This evolving discourse serves to construct and reconstruct notions of the Mother and the
child. Furthermore, such discourses have important social and political implications. As Seigel
remarks, drawing on an argument from Jane Pincus, “Give the illusion of empowerment and
choice in childbirth but then present those choices in such a way as to ensure women’s
conformance to the status quo” (Seigel, 2013, p. 8). In Pincus’ words, “They inform and guide;
they also indoctrinate in a subtle way. Often are confusing and contradictory. We are
told that we are strong and capable and then cautioned about all the things that might go wrong.
We are advised to fight for that “natural” birth and at the same time confronted with the long lists
of tests and interventions to circumvent, somehow, if possible” (Pincus, 2010, p. 82). From the
beginning of parenthood, the constructions of The Mother are blurred and contradictory, yet
women are expected to be disciplined into the models of Mother offered therein. It is for this
reason that an analysis of the assumed expertise laid out in pregnancy and parenting manuals is
necessary.
Method

I undertake such an analysis following a critical rhetorical approach. Critical Rhetoric, which seeks to outline discourses like those of parenting experts, has resulted from many works by communication scholars. Michael McGee and Raymie McKerrow are two scholars in particular who have contributed to the method of Critical Rhetoric. According to Littlejon and Foss, “The critical rhetorician seeks to understand the assumptions that underlie various forms of discourse in terms of how they function to promote either domination or freedom” (Littlejon, 2008, p. 410). In contrast to traditional rhetoric, which involves an address with a beginning, middle, and end, critical rhetoric “transforms the role of the place and rhetor” (Littlejon, 2008, p. 411) by reversing his or her task. The critical rhetorician “constructs addresses out of the fabric’ of the social world in its fragmented, unconnected and contradictory nature- a ‘pulling together; of disparate scraps of discourse, which when constructed as an argument, illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices” (Littlejon, 2008, p. 411).

McKerrow outlines eight principles of Critical Rhetoric in his essay titled, Critical Rhetoric, Theory and Praxis. Of the eight, four remain particularly applicable to my use of the theory: “Principle #2 the discourse of power is material,” “Principle #3 Rhetoric constitutes doxastic rather than epistemic knowledge,” “Principle #4 Naming is the central symbolic act of nominalist rhetoric,” and “Principle #6 Absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluation symbolic action” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 102-107). McKerrow’s second principle outlines the ways in which discourse creates real, tangible change in the world, both in the way people operate and in the landscape around us. His third principle relies on the assumption that discourse is not only about what is known to be true (epistemic knowledge) but also popular belief and understanding (Doxa). McKerrow’s fourth principle discusses the power of language
as a discursive tool. Finally, the sixth principle takes what is left out of discourse into consideration as much as what is included in it. These principles prove incredibly important to our understanding of the greater body of discourse that is “parenting.”

In his closing, McKerrow summarizes the role of Critical Rhetoric as a method to, “provide an avenue– an orientation- toward a postmodern conception of the relationship between discourse and power” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 109).

Critical rhetoric adopts an understanding of discourse developed by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, discourse is the “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). In other words, discourse is the practices of speaking about and understanding various topics that constitute a body of knowledge like parenting manuals. The discourse I’ve set out to study is that of parenting and parenting manuals which offer different understandings of The Mother, the expert, and their relationships articulated in each book.

The manuals’ ability to shape how we think, feel, and experience parenthood, specifically motherhood, illustrates how “discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). In short, discourses guide who can speak and how they can speak, thereby constituting subject positions for mothers, children, and experts. These subject positions shape the expected behavior of actual mothers, with important sociopolitical consequences, as mentioned above.

Foucault further outlines the ways in which discourse creates certain subjects in his article, *The Subject and Power*: “This form of power (discourse) applies itself to immediate everyday
life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects” (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

By engaging in a critical rhetorical analysis, I aim to piece together the fabric of the discourse of parenting. I will examine the various messages delivered in vehicles of parenting and pregnancy manuals, all riddled with definitions of who and what a mother should be, what a child is, and who holds the status of an expert on parental advice. By doing so, I hope to illuminate the otherwise hidden or taken for granted assumptions and constructions of parenting discourse. Through my analysis, I will examine the various discourses constructed by experts of the pregnancy and parenting world. These constructions manifest themselves as identities of The Mother, the idealized picture of what a mother ought to be, which are then understood as universal guidelines designed for mothers.

Pregnancy and parenting is a complex world of personal experience and medical expertise, wrapped up in a rhetorically bound system in need of deconstructing. Within that deconstruction are representations of motherhood, constructions of the child, idealized methods of parenting, and information-driven power imbalances between professionals and patients. In order to perform this analysis, I will first review scholarly work that has outlined prior constructions of mothers and parenting. This previous work will help give me insight into the history, function, and practices of today’s parental culture as I undertake my analysis.
Review of Motherhood Discourse

“Parents are not passive recipients, but actors of change and agentic beings, both contesting and complying with dominant discourses” - Geinger et al, 2013, p. 498

There is a lot of critical and rhetorical literature that already exists on the representations of the mother and the child, which will assist me in my discourse analysis. The literature I will use consists of a collection of texts addressing the medical system, pregnancy and parenting manuals, media representations of motherhood, and first-hand experiences. These texts are not direct examples of the parenting and pregnancy manuals (such as *What To Expect When You’re Expecting*), but rather, they exist in the greater realm of discourse as rhetorical commentators, analyzing the traditionally consumed literature in the same way I intend to call parenting and pregnancy books into question. After reviewing such texts, I have identified five key constructions including: mother as seeker of knowledge, mother as worker, mother as self-sacrificial reproducer, and mother as consumer and finally, mother as shepherd. These constructions, which I have identified after a close read, will be used to show current shifts in parenting discourse displayed in the books *Attachment Parenting* and *Bringing Up Bébé*.

These identified constructions are part one of a two-fold analysis. By identifying common themes and underlying assumptions in the various texts written about the discourse, I was able to apply the five constructions of motherhood as a framework for my larger analysis of two direct examples of the discourse.
The vast amount of content existing on websites, manuals, and blogs discussing the ins and outs of motherhood can be read as proof for the construction of a mother as a knowledge seeker. By knowledge seeker, I mean one who understands their lack of expertise and/or common knowledge in a subject, and one who exerts time, energy, and money in order to better understand the subject which they are less familiar with. In this instance, motherhood, especially for first time mothers, is often a subject women are not familiar with until they have actively sought out information.

*Parenting as a performance: Parents as consumers and (de)constructors of mythic parenting and childhood ideas,* by Geinger et al. provides a critical look at the disconnect between mothering in the theoretical and mothering in the everyday life. This article examines parenting manuals of Belgium contrasted against the voices of parents in online forums. *Parenting as performance* highlights some interesting trends in information sharing and receiving. The mere existence of parenting and pregnancy manuals in circulation gives weight to the argument that mothers are taught to seek out information. One highly acclaimed source of “necessary” information is the book *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* (1984). This book is currently in its fourth edition, has been named a New York Times bestseller, and is read by 93% of women who read pregnancy books, according to USA Today. The once-deemed “Pregnancy Bible” has transformed into an entire What To Expect (WTE) brand with an avid fan base and now celebrity author, and a movie that first aired in 2012. WTE has become a leader in the commercialized realm of information sharing among mothers.
The large volume of information consumption begs the question of, “Whom are mothers really listening to?” Geinger et al. explain, “Our analysis shows that parents often prefer lay advice to expert advice... Yet it is clear that the advice parents give to their peers remains strongly related to the expert advice in the official advice texts and shows close resemblance to the characteristics of today’s society” (Geinger, 2013, p. 493). Here we see that women clearly seek knowledge in the midst of mothering. While the information remains relatively the same, it appears as if the person delivering the message allows that information to carry more weight. Parents who “prefer lay advice to expert advice” show us that peer-to-peer relationships hold greater value in terms of information sharing. Later, however, Geinger et al. point out that the “lay” advice is actually quite similar to that of what can be found in parenting manuals. The most established point here is that mothers are expected to seek information in regards to best practices. Geinger et al. prove that this “expectation” is met with real life accounts of mothering experiences.

The current parenthood discourse constructs The Mother as a knowledge seeker- one who looks to books, pediatricians, and OBGYN’s for expert advice in their voyage into motherhood. The issue lies in The Mothers access to real information and her ability to question the system and status quo. When The Mother is left only to receive information, and not given appropriate ability to question or critique the information or the system as a whole, she is alienated from the true process.

The discourse constructs other constructs of The Mother in addition to The Mother as an information seeker. Mothers are also understood by the work they do. In an effort to liberate women from their sticking identity as a mother- into all aspects of their life, both professionally and relationally, small portions of the parenthood discourse have constructed women in regard to their maternal work.
The second construction of a mother comes from an attempt to separate women from a primary role of “mother.” Women have tried to redefine this role by turning the word “mother” into a verb rather than a noun (i.e. “to mother” or to “take care of”). By viewing motherhood as a collection of maternal works, women have the ability to step outside of their mothering roles and exist within other definitions of themselves, such as a daughter, friend, wife, executive, and so on.

For instance, *Representations of Motherhood* (1994) by Bassin, Honey, Kaplan, et al., offers an alternative way of visualizing motherhood through the philosophies of Sara Ruddick. Ruddick seeks to expand motherhood by creating a “conceptual framework for representing motherhood.” She begins by identifying motherhood as a kind of *work* or *practice*. Maternal work, or caring for a child, is the foundational similarity between all mothers despite their cultural and individual differences. The benefit of such discourse is to broaden those who can be seen to engage in mothering: “When mothering is constructed as *work* rather than an ‘identity’ or fixed biological legal relationship, people can be seen to engage in mothering with differing expense of time at various periods in their lives and often changing sexual and social circumstances” (Bassin, 1994, p. 35). Adria Schwartz continues to elaborate the benefits of the discourse of motherhood as work because such a definition of motherhood “transcends gender” (Bassin, 1994, p. 250). “She (Ruddick) distinguished between birthing labor, which only women do, and mothering work. Birthing labor remains the special province of women (thus far) and women might choose to celebrate this...But for Ruddick, mothers and mothering work need not be gendered” (Bassin, 1994, p. 250).
Here we see motherhood laid out as a type of occupation. A mother is therefore identified by the kind of work she does. As a laborer, a mother is evaluated, then, by how well she meets the demands of the consumer – i.e. the child. As Bassin states, “To be a mother means to see children as demanding protection, nurturance, and training and then to commit oneself to the work of trying to meet these demands” (Bassin, 1994, p. 33).

This construction of “mother as worker” actually dates back to post- World War I. “The turn-of-the-century of motherhood as a vocation was coming of age in America after World War I” (Hulbert p 98). Shifting gender roles, due to the war pushed the new construction of motherhood forward- giving space for mothers to act outside of their “role” as a caretaker. This construction, however, did not come without resistance. Many, including the editorial staff at the Times found this new division of time as unacceptable. The Times reads, “The modern mother, if we are to believe in the popular novel and the scenario writer, is a pleasure-seeking, irresponsible creature who divides her time among bride and dancing parties where the conduct is ‘advanced’: while the modern father is even less than he used to be” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 98).

The director of the Child Study Association, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, sympathized with the work of a mother as she coined the phrase “smother love” which is used to “describe what happens when an intelligent, trained young woman drops all else to devote herself to the demands of her young children” (Hulbert, 2003, p. 113). Gruenberg’s statement points to the extremes to which the mother-as-laborer discourse can be taken. Indeed, some other discourses of the mother not only see mothering as work, but ask for a tremendous sacrifice from mothers in the form of such labor.

*Mother as Self- Sacrificial Reproducer*
A common construction of a mother is one of a self-sacrificial reproducer, meaning she is to give 100 percent of herself in order to achieve optimized childhood outcomes. A mother is, therefore, completely responsible and able to give herself up for her child.

Motherhood has become a complex role which tends sticks with women even as they enact other identities they possess. As the Mother As Worker construction attempts to break free of this notion that a woman is a mother even in the midst of her professional, sexual, and relational life, there still remains quite a bit of discourse supporting the idea of a mother as a self-sacrificial reproducer.

This singular identification of a mother is represented and critiqued in the artwork and corresponding interview with American conceptual artist, Barbara Kruger. Bassin explains, “Over the past decade Barbra Kruger’s work, consisting of a montage of images and phrases, has produced an ironic social critique of sexuality and politics from a feminist point of view” (Bassin, 1994, p. 198). As Barbra Kruger states, “My interest is in dealing with the way pictures and words have the power to tell us who we can and cannot be- how they construct us as social beings... my work contributes to altering those expectations of how women are and become” (Bassin, 1994, p. 199).

Kruger goes on to explain several of her iconic pieces. One piece is an image of an adult’s hand (assumed to be a mother) holding a baby’s hand, with the words “Your every wish is our command” written across the picture. When asked to explain this piece Kruger said, “The mother is saying, in fact, everything that you wish is something that I have to do, because it is my role in life not only to produce you biologically but to produce you socially, which means to comply with the norms that ask women to play certain roles in and around childbearing” (Bassin p 199).
The interviewer goes on to further inquire about this picture, stating, “These roles unfortunately are connected not only to a subservient placement of woman in our culture but often to a masochistic one as well, a position that is slowly changing” (Bassin, 1994, p.199).

In response Kruger acknowledges how divisions of labor within the household have shifted, but that it remains a slow process. “There is no doubt that the positions still remain relatively fixed” (Bassin, 1994, p. 199). Kruger explains here that there is indeed a slow movement to more equal divisions of labor, however there is still a lot of work to be done. One of the main motivators for this thesis, therefore, lies on this premise that motherhood is still in need of liberation. Women who bare children need to be seen as complex individuals, functioning in society, not only by means of joining PTA and chaperoning for school field trips.

One interesting distinction Kruger makes as she continues in her interview is one of production versus reproduction. A piece that she did not take to print is one with a picture of a man’s hand drawing a young child on a piece of paper. The work says, “Your production Is Divine, Our Reproduction is Human.” Here Kruger argues that man’s production is viewed differently as the reproduction of children done by women. She explains, “To me that brings back what the archetypal division have always been, the binary division between how men produce and create as opposed to the creative arena and the arena of production that women have been relegated to... an opening of that arena so that our definition can be done through all different kinds of productions- not only reproduction” (Bassin, 1994, p. 199).

Kruger is critiquing a discourse of motherhood we will call the Mother as Self-Sacrificial Reproducer. Kruger’s work illuminates such discourse and the resulting assumptions that women must give up everything in order to achieve their higher calling – being a mother. Kruger’s work longs for more ways than just one to define a mother. She urges another sense of appreciation for
a mother’s role, which would not, as she states, deny “the incredible empowerment and pleasure that motherhood can offer,” but would appreciate motherhood for its worth and still allow women to step outside the confines of that identity and be seen as more than just “mom.” The construct of a mother as a self-sacrificial reproducer spills even into her shopping habits. The pull of a mother’s dying love for her child has been craftily manipulated into an effective marketing tactic.

Mother as Consumer

The next construction of the Mother is based on the ways in which women are targeted as a specific audience for consumer consumption. Parenting magazines, customized store coupons, and the sheer existence of a baby registry all point to the construction of Mother as consumer. From conception (almost) a woman’s thoughts begin to turn around what she “needs” to buy in preparation for her child’s arrival. This is why women register for baby equipment, tiny clothing, and boxes of diapers and enjoy afternoons with their friends sipping decaf at their long-awaited baby shower. In Janelle Taylor’s words, “In the contemporary United States (1) reproduction increasingly has come to be constructed as a matter of consumption; and (2) in the process the fetus is constructed more and more at the same time and through the same means, both as a ‘commodity and as a ‘person.’” (Taylor, 2008, p. 1127).

Taylor goes on to explain that “long before it becomes possible to feel the fetus moving or to see the belly bulging, often before pregnancy is confirmed or even attempted, the transition to hoped-for motherhood may be experienced as a transition to a new, more highly disciplined regime of consumption- it is the movement from being an individual consumer to mother-as-consumer” (Taylor, 2008, p. 127).
Echoing the same consumerist calls, BabyCenter.com, an online epicenter for prenatal and parenting information, claims they understand the “business of parenting.” Prospective advertisers are directed to the site’s information on their target audience (Seigel):

“The connection that BabyCenter makes with moms at each stage provides a unique platform to communicate your marketing message at exactly the right time. BabyCenter is your best entrée into this $2.1 trillion market that’s hungry for information, looking for new products, and forming new brand loyalties during the life-changing event of having a baby.”

(BabyCenter.com). The “$2.1 trillion market that’s hungry for information,” is a market driven by mothers. BabyCenter defines the mother as a buyer of goods in the midst of the vulnerability of the transition into motherhood.

Likewise, the article titled, “Mother as Consumer: Insights from the Children’s Wear Industry,” by Daniel Cook examines the historical spread of motherly consumption. Cook explains, “As mothers, women’s position in a burgeoning culture of consumption necessarily implicated the lives and status of their children. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Americans witnessed the rise and proliferation of mass-produced goods specifically designed, manufactured, and merchandised for children such as toys, furniture, and nursery ware” (Cook, 2005, p. 506). The article specifically outlines the work of George Earnshaw, the man who personally financed the 1917 trade publication titled Infant’s Department. The publication was “devoted exclusively to the line of goods... and to the problems that are peculiar to the Infants’ Wear Department” (Cook, 2005, p. 506).

After this budding new form of marketing to mothers had seen its initial success, market leaders continued to strengthen the pull of motherly consumption. Cook discusses the ways in which George Earnshaw and staff writers “sought to link a social-biological relation
(motherhood) with a new segment of commercial structure (infants’/children’s departments.” He goes on to say, “This particular linkage must be seen as a historically situated convergence of the “women’s sphere” of domestic life, the gradual liberation of children from industrial production, the participation of women in child welfare efforts in the early twentieth century, and the rise of experts on domesticity and motherhood” (Cook, 2005, p. 509). The last mention in the quote above gives us a greater picture of how the combination of consumer culture and the role of the expert work hand in hand in reshaping women’s position in society.

A 1921 Infant’s Department advertisement for Earnshaw’s line of Vanta Baby Garments reads, “A Mother’s First Purchase in any Season is for the Baby”, (Cook, p 513). Cook’s analysis of this Ad explains, “He (George Earnshaw) along with staff writers.... Produced editorial and feature copy that created a profile of the consuming mother- a self sacrificing being motivated by love and instinct to carry out her duty as purchasing agent for the family” (Cook, p 513).

Cook summarizes the work of Earnshaw when saying; “Earnshaw’s vision was to institutionalize infants’ departments as centers of infant welfare work, along side “doctors, the schools, the social settlements, the churches and the governmental agencies” (Cook, 2005, p. 515). The role of consumption, therefore, was intended to take an equal role in influencing the mother-just as churches, governmental agencies, doctors and schools. Each entity in society, likewise contributes to the overall discourse of motherhood, leaving us with a very clear construction of The Mother as consumer. Breaking the trend of the all-consuming motherhood, the discourse offers another construction of The Mother. The Mother as a shepherd depicts a different identity of a woman who strives for autonomy and self-sufficiency within her children.

Mother as a Shepherd
Another construction of The Mother is one of a shepherd—a guiding figure who aims to equip her children with the rules of conduct appropriate to thrive in society, as well as the support and protection of a caretaker. According to Geinger et al. the goal of mothering is for the child to become autonomous. This objective comes from the realization that children are not simply fragile beings in need of constant nurture. Groeimee states, “Punishing and rewarding cannot be seen apart from upbringing as a whole. They are an important part of parenting. Your child learns what it can and cannot do. You guide your child in a specific direction. You teach it to respect your rules. You also teach it to respect the rules in our society. For example, you will tell your child that it is appropriate to say ‘thank you’ when it receives something” (Geinger, 2013, p. 494).

Guiding children in a “specific direction” must be made separate from the all-encompassing work of the self-sacrificial reproducer. There is a clear distinction from “your every wish is our command,” which Kruger expresses through her artwork. The difference lies in the responsibility. Groeimee argues that the responsibility of the mother is to education children so that they may become functioning, independent members of society. Teaching respect both of the household and of society are keys to allowing children to grow into autonomous beings.

In contrast, the self-sacrificial mother ought to take on full responsibility of the child’s destiny. Geinger says, “This advice is regularly legitimated by the child-centered perspective” (Geinger, 2013, p. 493). The child-centered approach here refers to the assumption that focusing on the child’s “here and now” can prepare them for the future. “Feeding your child is an excellent opportunity to ‘build a good relationship with your child...A child wants to be protected and be surrounded with love in a caring and loving family” (Geinger, 2013, p. 493).
The responsibility to “guide your children in a specific direction” is the work of a shepherding mother. The emphasis here is placed on teaching children how to behave and respect the laws of society, rather than sacrificing oneself to tend to the child’s every need and desire. Contrasted against the instant gratification mothers are expected to provide in the construction of a self-sacrificial reproducer, the shepherding mother plays a more future-oriented role, sacrificing only as much as necessary to make the child independent so that the mother can then maintain their own independence.

Summary

Several constructions have been revealed through the analysis of parenting discourse. These constructions, some in stark contrast to one another and some support one another, all provide identities of which The Mother ought to obtain. Previous scholars have examined how the discourse of parenting and pregnancy has been created through doctors, psychiatrists, manuals, and societal norms. I will continue this analysis of today’s current working ideas of parenting: the child centered approach and the parent centered approach. My arguments continue in the comparison between The Mother (the idealized version of the mother) and the mother (everyday woman impacted by her societal context) in order to highlight the ways in which parenting discourse lacks in its service to real women and care giving. Thus the following chapters dive deeper into two representations of modern discourse, each representing the long-time opposing camps of child-centered and parent-centered methods. These books are to be understood in historical context of today’s society, which will allow me to examine their messages through a lens of the social norms, protocols, ideals, and abilities of women in the twenty first century.
CHAPTER THREE: ATTACHMENT PARENTING

As outlined in the literature review, there are a variety of parenting manuals, each with their individual constructs of The Mother. These manuals have, over the past 100 years, fallen into roughly two categories: child-centered and parent-centered. With this basic understanding, I will then outline the child-centered approach through a close textual analysis of one of its most popular parenting manuals, *Attachment Parenting* by Dr. William Sears. The now famous pediatrician has been named the “man who remade motherhood” and was featured as the cover story for TIME Magazine in the, “Are You Mom Enough” issue, in May of 2012. Dr. Sears, born in 1939, practices in California and has written over 40 parenting books. He and his wife, Martha, have co-authored several parenting books including The Baby Book, and The Pregnancy Book, which have been highly acclaimed and read for over 20 years.

Through this analysis I will outline the ways in which Dr. Sears uses the terms parenting and mothering interchangeably, alluding to the fact that they are one in the same. I will also examine Sears’s use of naming as a rhetorical function and his use of science to establish authority. Finally I will uncover his contradictions in his response to claims that his method paints a picture of an idealized Mother and does not represent the existing population of mothers in the United States.

**Child-Centered Approach**

The parent-centered and child-centered approaches stem from the same realms of expertise as the generations before. I argue, then, that a sixth wave of “experts” has emerged adding new guidelines to the discourse of parenting. The tension between expert advice and lay advice is
still prevalent. Attachment parenting (AP) focuses on the intentional and constructed bond between mother and child. AP parents are encouraged to cue into what their babies and children are trying to communicate. Common practices of AP parents include co-sleeping, responding to baby’s needs immediately, “baby wearing,” breastfeeding, and birth bonding. Baby wearing is the practice of carrying a baby in the mother’s arms or in a sling as often as possible as a way to ensure the child can experience their surroundings in the safety of the mother’s arms. Birth bonding is the belief that the first few hours after birth are crucial in forming a bond between mother and child. AP parents are also encouraged to be wary of “baby trainers:” individuals who teach babies to cry less and sleep longer. Instead AP parents are told to listen to the baby and treat their cry not as manipulation, which Dr. Spears claims is the view of baby trainers, but as a valid signal indicating the child’s needs.

Mother as Self-Sacrificing Reproducer

When unpacking the world of attachment parenting, it doesn’t take long to notice the construction of the Mother as a “self-sacrificial reproducer,” as outlined in the previous chapter. For instance, attachment parents (AP) frequently testify to the benefits of self-deprivation and full dedication. In the TIME Magazine article titled, “Are You Mom Enough,” author, Kate Pickert outlines the history and progression of the attachment parenting movement. She starts by describing a couple, Joanne and Daniel, who before children led very active social lives. After having children, Joanne “sat on the couch in her Denver-area living room, nursing her infant from sunup to sundown.” Giving up her career and any time spent alone, Joanne decided to cling onto Dr. Sear’s attachment parenting methods and devote her time to her two children without ever taking a lunch out or an afternoon break.
Dr. Sears also envisions the Mother as self-sacrificing. As Dr. Sears explains in *Attachment Parenting*, attachment parenting focuses on the intentional and constructed bond between mother and child. AP parents are encouraged to cue into what their babies and children are trying to communicate, mostly via crying. Dr. Sears argues that every baby’s whimper is a small plea for help; one that demands an immediate response so as to ensure the child of the mother’s love.

This recommendation is based upon a particular discursive conceptualization of the child. In the early chapters of his book, Dr. Sears explains how he understands the biological make up of the child.

“Babies at birth have in their brains miles and miles of tangled “wires” called neurons… Many of the neurons in the infant brain, however, are unconnected or disorganized at birth… These connections are the way the baby gets organized and learns, storing patterns and memories in circuits of neurons. How well these neurons hook up and how many connections baby makes are directly related to baby’s interaction with his environment” (Sears, 2001, p. 12).

After outlining the “scientific” brain development pattern, Dr. Sears uses his explanation to make one of his most influential points. He explains that as a child’s brain is developing, the patterns developed by his caretaker aid in forming neuron connections. “After rehearsing hundreds of cue-response interactions during the early months (I’m hungry, I get fed; I’m frightened, I get held), the infant stores mental pictures of these scenes” (Sears, 2001, p. 12). This repetition of expectations and fulfillment allows children to trust their caretaker. The key here is consistently reacting to the child’s cry by picking up or tending to the child at the first sign of discomfort. “Being able to replay an expected attachment scene and have the expectation
fulfilled appropriately by a sensitive caregiver reinforces a sense of well-being that will forever influence future relationships: the ability to trust” (Sears, 2001, p. 12).

It is no surprise then that the first element outlined by Dr. Sear’s research for the most development enhancing environment is: “1. sensitivity and responsiveness to infant’s cues” (p 13). “Tiny babies cry to communicate. Feeling manipulated is the mind of the parents. Think of your baby’s cry as a signal to be listened to and responded to rather than immediately clicking into the “What does my baby want from me now?” mind set” (Sears, 2001, p. 83).

Here, in relation to the child, Dr. Sears constructs the Mother as an all-inclusive, baby serving being, a “self-sacrificial reproducer.” Much like the stigmas and oppression real mothers felt, which led to critiques like Barbra Kruger’s in the form of her contemporary art work, Dr. Sears adds to the list of commandments for mothers everywhere. Her work titled, “your every wish is our command” could almost exclusively come from the suggestions of Dr. Sears who encourages women to become “hooked” on their babies. Some practices which illustrate the depth and expanse of these commandments include co-sleeping, “baby wearing,” breastfeeding, and birth bonding. Baby wearing is the practice of carrying a baby in the mother’s arms or in a sling as often as possible as a way to ensure the child can experience their surroundings in the safety of the mother’s arms. “The beauty of babywearing is that you are, literally, attached. Baby is held in a baby sling and goes around the house with you as you sort through the junk mail, make beds, or start supper,” says Dr. Sears (Sears, 2001, p. 65). Birth bonding is the belief that the first few hours after birth are crucial in forming a bond between mother and child. AP parents are also encouraged to be wary of “baby trainers:” individuals who teach babies to cry less and sleep longer. Instead AP parents are told to listen to the baby and treat their cry not as manipulation,
which Dr. Spears claims is the view of baby trainers, but as a valid signal indicating the child’s needs.

**Sear’s Use of Naming**

**“Baby trainers”**

Aiding in his attempt to separate AP parents from other forms of parenting, Dr. Sears utilized the rhetorical function of naming. In Kenneth Burke’s, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, the famous scholar lays out the ground rules for identification and its relationship to naming. He says, “The *Rhetoric* deals with the possibilities of classification in its partisan aspects; it considers the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another, or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another. Why “at odds,” you may ask, when the titular term is ‘identification’? Because, to begin with identification is, by the same token, though roundabout, to confront the implications of division.” (Burke, 1945, p. 22). Here, Burke points out that with any form of identifying one’s self, you are also saying you are *not* something. For example, to say that you identify with a certain political party also insinuates that you do not identify with its opposition.

Kenneth Burke’s outline of the tension between identification and division offers a clear grounding point when understanding Dr. Sears’s rhetorical use of naming. Burke uncovers the reality of identifying oneself by arguing that with each identification individuals are also distinguishing themselves as “not” something else. For Dr. Sears, this means that mothers who identify themselves as an Attachment Parent, are also saying they are *not* any other form of parent. He argues, as Burke’s insights predict, that you cannot be both an attachment parent and not an attachment parent. For this reason, Sears’s use of naming has been incredibly impactful.
Similarly, David Leary, author of *Naming and Knowing: Giving Forms to Things Unknown*, explains the significance our use of naming, even though most names are metaphors:

“Metaphor… is no mere grammatical or rhetorical device. It is one of the major means by which we steer our way through life, gaining as much traction as we can on a roadbed of partial similarities… This potential for multiple references accounts for the power of metaphor- the power of comparing, comprehending, and communicating” (Leary, 1995, p. 1).

Dr. Sears utilizes the power of naming, mainly the power of the metaphor in chapter 10 titled “Beware of Baby Trainers.” Performing an act of division that goes hand-in-hand with identification, he essentially identifies two types of parents: attachment parents and baby trainers (BTs). These baby trainers are defined as individuals who do not ascribe to Dr. Sears’s attachment parenting. They, instead, believe in letting children “cry it out” when necessary, sleep in different beds or rooms as their children, and advocate for structure and schedules. Dr. Sears explains, “We call them the baby trainers, because their approach to parenting is similar to the way you might train a pet. They seem to be more interested in showing you how to get your baby to fit conveniently into your life than they are in showing you how to raise a happy, healthy, well-balanced human being” (Sears, 2001, p. 119).

Here we see the distinct use of the metaphor. Sears directly compares non-AP parents to pet trainers, alluding to poor child rearing and a lack of sensibility. He goes on to say, “To a BT, a baby’s cry is an annoying, inconvenient habit, which must be broken to help baby fit more conveniently into the adult environment” (Sears, 2001, p. 119). Dr. Sears even goes as far as to label the baby trainer technique as the “detached” style of parenting, directly pitting it against attachment parenting.
The use of calling out the “other” in this sense produces a very real rhetorical consequence. Mothers everywhere would cringe at the suggestion that their child rearing method is simply that of training their dog or cat. By pointing out the “other” in such a concerning manner, almost implying negligence, Dr. Sears has adequately used the metaphor to divide baby trainers from the preferred identification—attachment mothers.

**Parenting as Mothering**

In the AP method, parenting is most often assumed to be done by the mother. Therefore, the most accurate title for Dr. Sear’s book is *Attachment Mothering*, rather than *Attachment Parenting*. This distinction is small, but speaks very clearly to the societal bias that the role of a caretaker is primarily female.

The first reasoning for my suggested new title of Dr. Sear’s book is due to his use of the two words interchangeably. My second reason is that he has dedicated an entire chapter (12) to “Attachment Fathering” as to suggest the other 13 chapters are exclusive to attachment *mothering*. By designating a single chapter to “attachment fathering” Dr. Sears then establishes the rest of his advice as mothering advice. This is important to note it points to a very clear reality in other parenting manuals. Parenting is almost always assumed to be a job for the mother.

This conflation, then, outlines yet another construction of The Mother as the sole caregiver. While this may seem intuitive, it is important to remember that these constructions have been created, originating from something outside of nature. The idea that The Mother carries more responsibility to rear the children than the father does should not be understood as natural or
even “the way things ought to be.” An entry by Joseph Pleck, Laura Sanchez, and Elizabeth Thomson in the *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* sheds light on this very issue. It explains, “It has been well documented that fathers, compared with mothers, spend only a small portion of their time in day-to-day child-rearing activities, including supervising children, feeding children, transporting children, and so forth” (Pleck, 1997; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). This is an important distinction to make when discussing the discourse of parenting. Discourse that conflates parenting with The Mother highlights the mother as the primary parent, thus changing the topic to the discourse of mothering.

Despite this reality, studies have also shown that more paternal (fatherly) involvement leads to better child outcomes. “As noted earlier, many studies conclude that children whose fathers spend a significant amount of time taking care of them exhibit positive psychological adjustment and cognitive and intellectual development, strong academic achievement, ability to empathize, flexible gender-role orientation, and competency at problem-solving tasks” (Malti-Douglas, 2007, p. 84).

All of this begs the question, why has “mothering” been mislabeled as “parenting”? At what point did the mother become understood as the sole parent. Pleck, Sanchez, and Thomson dive into how the ways in which parenting has been influenced. “However, many contemporary scholars now cite a growing body of empirical evidence that parental behaviors are not simply the consequence of biology and human nature, but rather are informed by cultural, historical, and social values, circumstances, and processes.” Parenting manuals are a significant example of those informing cultural practices, and thus Dr. Sears approach further advances the misleading and harmful conflation of parenting and mothering. Dr. Sears reinforces and echoes the reality that mothers do indeed take on the majority of the child rearing responsibility.
Sears the Expert and the Self-Sacrificial Mother

The advice given by Sears clearly stems from his adherence to the construction of the mother as a self-sacrificial reproducer. The wide range of expert discourse that supports this construction helps bolster his arguments—suggesting parenting tips that are clearly only meant to serve a small portion of society. Considering, “mothers are now the sole or primary income provider in a record 40% of households with children” according to Forbes, Sears’s advice to be a self-sacrificial reproducer seems to no longer suit the population of mothers in the United States (Forbes, Philips). After receiving backlash from critics in regards to the practicality of his method, Dr. Sears added chapter 9, “Balance and Boundaries” to address questions about the time and effort demanded from his approach. In the section titled “Is Your Parenting Out Of Balance? - How To Tell” Sears “answers” the response of mothers by suggesting various solutions to each problem. The first problem reads, “My baby needs me so much I don’t have time for myself” (p 107). Here Sears says, “Solution: Okay, so maybe you don’t need a shower every day. But you do need time to yourself, even if it’s just fifteen uninterrupted minutes in the bathroom. Be sure to take some time for yourself every day. If baby won’t sleep, have Dad take him for a walk while you hit the easy chair or lounge in the bathtub) (p 107). The first assumption in his solution is that mothers simply do not have anywhere else to be but home. To suggest not “needing a shower everyday” suggests these mothers are staying home, not working, or simply willingly giving up their time for personal hygiene in order to meet the demands of their baby. The second assumption, which carries throughout his entire book, is that these mothers have the ability to rely on the father of their children. Family dynamics vary so greatly in this day in age, it is almost impossible to assume the majority of mothers have a father or spouse to rely on.
Chapter nine continues as Dr. Sears warns mothers against burnout. “Mother burnout can be one of the side effects of attachment parenting, especially in families where there is a high-need baby” (Sears, 2001, p. 120). Sears suggests that mothers should fill their emotional tank via bonding and loving on their baby in order to avoid burnout. He closes this section by saying, “Learning how to be your baby’s mother is a more-than-full-time job. When too many other demands are placed on a mother, giving her more to do and less time to care for herself, she is in danger of burnout” (Sears, 2001, p. 112). “Too many other demands” in this instance refers to work, social life, and household responsibilities as Sears mentions earlier in the chapter. This again points to an unfair assumption that mothers have the luxury to ignore “other demands” and focus on their children. He solidifies his bias towards women who give up everything- including typical seasons of life- when he suggests, “Learning how to care for and respond to your baby is a big project. The first year of your baby’s life is not a good time to tackle other projects, such as remodeling, moving, or changing jobs (unless its scaling down to a less demanding job. If there are other problems in our life competing for your attention, such as financial pressures, a parent who is ill, or a demanding toddler, do whatever you can to get help. Reduce your stress level as much as possible, so that all your energy can be channeled to your baby and to the other people in your family” (Sears, 2001, p. 115). Again, the suggestions for attachment mothers prove time and time again to be impractical for the majority of the population. Mothers, according to Dr. Sears, are to delay moving, avoid a career change unless it involves demotion, and “channel all their energy to their baby.” This impracticality sets up for unrealistic expectations which often leave mothers feelings less than.

Clearly, attachment parenting is designed for the stay-at-home mother. Most of the basic principles of attachment parenting work best for women who do not have to divide their time
between work and baby. In order to appeal to the working mother, Dr. Sears has written Chapter 11, “Working and Staying Attached,” in which he outlines tips for AP mothers to stay attached while at work. His suggestions include “6. Think of your baby while at work,” “Search for an AP-friendly job,” and even suggests mothers ditch the traditional career track and start a home business. Sears continues chapter 11 by explaining the natural lifestyle changes that occur when mothers adequately attach to their children; “Because they got so hooked on their baby, these mothers make changes in their lifestyle and in their career ambitions… Such is the power that a baby has over a sensitive mother…Baby showed mother how important she was” (Sears, 2001, p. 142). This “power” constructs the mother as a subject to the child’s needs and seeming irresistibility.

In chapter three titled, “What Attachment Parenting is Not” Dr. Sears explains that attachment parenting is not “martyr mothering.” He says, “Admittedly, a mother who has no help may come to feel tied down by constant baby tending. Mothers need baby breaks” (Sears, 2001, p. 30). He goes on to explain that attachment parenting actually frees up mental space because of your sensitivity towards your baby. “Because they are so naturally tuned in to baby, attached mothers can also pay attention to jobs, projects, or other children, knowing that they can trust their own sensitivity to bring their focus back to baby when he needs it, even when parents’ needs and baby’s needs collide” (Sears, 2001, p. 30). This statement, when contrasted with Sears’s suggestions later in the book, falls flat. His call for mothers to “think of your baby while working” and to change jobs or career goals directly contradicts his argument that attachment parenting is not “martyr mothering.” For women working outside the home, Sear’s method clearly proves unpractical to those who look with a more critical eye. By arguing the counter, however, he checks all his boxes and gives the assumptions that he hears the criticism and he
accurately corrects it. When one takes time to dive deeper into his method as a whole, evidence that attachment parenting indeed constructs the mother as a self-sacrificial being is clear.

**Expert vs. Lay Advice**

*“Science says” – Constructing the Expert*

Another rhetorical device employed by Sears is his use of “scientific fact” as an argumentative back-up. Throughout each chapter in *The Attachment Parenting Book*, little call out boxes are scattered across the pages with the words “Science Says.” Within each box is a quick fact or scientific mention supporting Dr. Sears’s claims. For example:

“SCIENCE SAYS good science backs AP, As you will see throughout this book, there is essentially no research supporting the advice of the baby trainers” (Sears, 2001, p. 120).

“SCIENCE SAYS carried babies cry less, Researchers at Stanford University found that babies settle best when held by caregivers who move in all planes of motion, and they cry less than babies who are only rocked side to side” (Sears, 2001, p. 71).

“SCIENCE SAYS Early response means crying less, In 1974 a group of researchers met to review studies on what makes competent children. In analyzing attachment research, they concluded that the more a mother ignores crying in the first half of the first year, the more likely her baby will cry more frequently in the second half” (Sears, 2001, p. 83).

Ironically there is no “science says” box in chapter 8, Bedding Close to Baby, only a “Dr. Sears’s SIDS Hypothesis” box in which he explains his belief that “in most cases SIDS is a sleep
disorder” and that co-sleeping actually decreases the risk of SIDS despite the majority of modern research (Sears, 2001, p. 102).

Sears’s use of scientific, i.e. expert, advice contradicts the main mantra of “trust your instincts” parenting which he employs in previous chapters. Sears repeatedly calls upon the authority of science to perform the dual act of identification and division – casting out other types of parenting for being too unscientific and promoting identification with his more scientific and hence authoritative approach. Sears sets up a very clear distinction between expert advice and personal experience, which he typically labels “lay advice.” Because of our tendency to trust expert or lay advice, science over opinion, Sears is able to utilize seemingly factual evidence to support his entire approach and critique other approaches.

The use of expert “scientific” authority is another key way that Sears constructs The Mother. As defined earlier in my review of current literature, mothers are often portrayed as individuals who seek out information, and Sears’ assertions of scientific authority hail such mothers. Mother’s interest in science and their interactions with it are very much constructed and often predefined. In other words, mother’s interactions with the medical world are relatively preset before ever stepping foot into a doctor’s office. The paperwork allows for the same, uniform information to be shared in similar language, the patient is placed in a position of the subject with the doctor as the authority, and the research or years of schooling is recognized as an acceptable qualifier to be told what to do. “Take this pill,” “cut out dairy,” “let him rest.”

As seekers of knowledge, then, Mothers are expected to approach science as a superior body of knowledge that should not be questioned. Dr. Sears’s use of scientific fact, skewed or not, is a
strong rhetorical device used to gain credibility and conceal his image as an authoritative figure who knows best.

Summary

Dr. Sears has heavily influenced today’s discourse of parenting via his numerous books and practice as a pediatrician. For these reasons, it is important to understand the specific messages he sends in regards to what a mother “ought” to be.

After close textual analysis of his famous Attachment Parenting Book, it is clear to see contradictions within his arguments. First, Dr. Sears calls for parents, mostly mothers, to trust their instincts and “go with the flow.” After diving deeper into the biography of Dr. Sears, an M.D. who practices as a pediatrician in California and uses science to justify most of his arguments and also recognizing the repeated use of the “science says” trope, you can see why one would be confused by his call to ignore “psychologists or pediatricians with lofty degrees and academic appointments in high places” (Sears, 2001, p. 120).

Dr. Sears’s claims that attachment parenting does not require the same level of self-sacrifice as his critics claims is also contradicted within his book. As he constructs the Mother as a woman who, because of her deep connection to her child willingly gave up her career to focus on breastfeeding and baby tending, he claims in the same breath that he advocates balance.

Working mothers can benefit the most from attachment parenting, according to Sears, and can do so by thinking of their children at work or finding a job that is AP friendly. While in theory, these arguments may seem coherent and true, in practice AP mothers must, according to his suggestions, be self-sacrificing. They must sacrifice their career, social life, personal space, and privacy in bed. In short, Sears’ approach disciplines the Mother to fit into patriarchal molds in
which the Mother is confined in private life and expected to sacrifice her public self for the good of family and child.
CHAPTER FOUR: BRINGING UP BEBE

The second text chosen for my analysis is the book titled, Bringing up Bébé, written by Pamela Druckerman. The book follows Pamela through her journey in France, as a new mother. The former Wall Street Journal journalist moved to France to date, and eventually marry her husband, Simon, with whom she began to have children. After experiencing the vast difference in parenting advice of her friends and family back in the States compared to the mothers in France, Druckerman decided to study the methods of “French parenting.”

One unique feature of Druckerman’s book is that she is both an outside observer of French Parenting, but also tells the account of her personal experience with pregnancy and motherhood. This dynamic provides us a window into both the testimony of a real woman and mother, and the outsider (American) perspective of how the French society has seemed to get a few things right when it comes to parenting. On the cover for her book she writes, “Motherhood itself is a whole different experience in France. There’s no role model for the harried new mom with no life of her own. French mothers assume that even good parents aren’t at constant service of their children, and that there’s no need to feel guilty about this.”

The New York Times Best Seller discusses parenting approaches that greatly differ from the advice given above by Dr. Sears. Druckerman’s observations, personal experience, and interviews with world-renowned child psychologists shed light on yet another piece of the discourse of parenting.

The Rise of Parental Obsession

As mentioned in pervious chapters, the obsession of child rearing is a relatively new phenomenon in entirety of the world’s history. Druckerman begins her book by uncovering
some of the historical factors that have led to this new parental mindset, and explains how her personal experiences in France come in stark contrast with other pieces of discourse on parenting. What Druckerman does in this section in similar to Sears’ use of naming to create identification and division. She begins by distinguishing her approach from other approaches, which, according to her, are obsessed with parenting.

In her introductory chapter, titled, *French children don’t throw food*, Druckerman writes, “I hadn’t thought I was supposed to admire French parenting. It isn’t a thing, like French fashion or French cheese… Quite the contrary, the American mothers I know in Paris are horrified that French mothers barely breast-feed, and let their four-year-olds walk around with pacifiers” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 3). She continues by saying, “French parents are concerned about their children… But they aren’t panicked about their children’s well being. This calmer outlook makes them better at both establishing boundaries and giving their kids some autonomy” (p 4).

Druckerman begins to question why there is such a distinguished difference in attitudes surrounding parenting. She looks to history to explain the rise of irrational parental obsession in America:

“First, starting in the 1980’s, there was a mass of data and public rhetoric saying that poor kids fall behind in school because they don’t get enough stimulation, especially in the early years. Middle-class parents took this to mean that their own kids would benefit from more stimulation too. Around the same period, the gap between rich and poor Americans began getting much wider. Suddenly it seemed that parents needed to groom their children to join the new elite. Exposing kids to the right stuff early on- and perhaps ahead of other children the same age- started to seem more urgent” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 4).
Druckerman’s firsthand accounts of French parenting have left her with the much more balanced approach of parenting; “… The French have managed to be involved without becoming obsessive” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 7). While it may appear to be a cultural difference, Druckerman explains, it is not.

“The French have all kinds of public services that surely help make having kids more appealing and less stressful. Parents don’t have to pay for preschool, worry about health insurance, or save for college. Many get monthly allotments- wired directly into their bank accounts- just for having kids. But these public services don’t explain the differences I see. The French seem to have a whole different framework for raising kids” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 7).

As Druckerman defends her stance as a neutral observation, lacking any cultural influence over the distinctions between American parenting and French, she also glosses over the issue of class. This oversight creates a huge gap in the discourse of parenting. So often, practitioners and psychiatrists give advice while ignoring the context of each family. Monetary means and location are major influencers in the outcomes of parenting approaches, yet experts and personal storytellers often dismiss their impact. Druckerman is not the only offender; Dr. Sears leaves class out of his discussion of parenthood as well. Specially, in the instance of the stay-at-home-mother, Sears assumes families have the financial stability to live off of just one income and he completely disregards instances of single or widowed mothers.

Although both texts ignore issues of class, differences in basic parenting advice and constructs of the mother remain clear and worthy of attention. With this understanding, we can assume both texts are speaking to middle class families, and therefore, we can compare them side by side in the disagreement over what The Mother truly is.
Druckerman further divides her parenting approach from others like Dr. Sears by emphasizing its basis in empirical reality and common sense instead of expertise and studies. She closes her intro by saying, “I haven’t got a theory. What I do have, spread out in front of me, is a fully functioning society of good little sleepers, gourmet eaters, and reasonably relaxed parents…It turns out that to be a different kind of parent, you don’t just need a different parenting philosophy. You need a very different view of what a child actually is” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 7-8).

Here Druckerman lays out a clear construction of a “good child.” While the bulk of this paper discusses the constructs of The Mother, it is almost impossible to leave out the constructs of a child in the midst of this discussion. A society must agree, in some degree or another, on what a “good child is” in order to establish reasonable child outcomes, and therefore appropriate parenting methods. For Druckerman, a “good child” is one who sleeps through the night, eats a variety of foods- i.e. not picky, and one who behaves accordingly. Therefore, a good mother is one teaches her child to eat, sleep, and behave well all while keeping her life balanced and relaxed, which stands in stark contrast to Dr. Sears approach which critiques training the child to avoid such behaviors and instead sees such behaviors as natural and beneficial. Common sense would seem to side with Druckerman. After all, what parent wants a baby who cries or cannot sleep through the night? Even in the construction of the child, then, Druckerman is performing an act of identification and division. The Mother should listen to common sense, not obsess over parenting expertise, and should aim for a well-behaved child, not an overly-attached one.

Druckerman’s Emersion in Parenting Discourse
Even as Druckerman comments on the discourse of parenting, it is clear she is still influenced by it. As with any discursive analysis, it is almost impossible to take a full step back and provide a unscathed opinion or argument regarding a topic because of discourses’ ability to perpetrate even our deepest conscious. Despite this challenge, Druckerman does a good job of comparing her initial fear-filled reaction to pregnancy with her observed learning of how the parent-centered approach constructs The Mother.

Druckerman begins her first chapter telling the story of her pregnancy. It appears as if her experience with pregnancy results from her immersion in American pregnancy discourse; “Hours after telling Simon the good news, I go online to scour American pregnancy Websites and rush to buy some pregnancy guides at an English-language bookstore near the Louvre. I want to know, in plain English, exactly what to worry about” (p 17). In clear connection to the constructions of a mother outlined in the literature review, here Druckerman demonstrates how mothers become knowledge seekers. Her immediate response is to educate herself of the scary, seemly “unnatural” nine months ahead of her.

It’s also apparent that Druckerman, as a result of growing up on American soil, has embodied the fear of pregnancy and parenthood even before digesting the texts directly. This example implies that the influence of America’s obsession on parenthood is so permeable it affects even those who are not yet pregnant. She continues her reflection of her first experiences with pregnancy, “Within days I’m on prenatal vitamins and addicted to BabyCenter’s online ‘Is It Safe?’ column… What makes ‘Is It Safe?’ so compulsive is that it creates new anxieties but then refuses to allay them with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Instead, expert respondents disagree with each other and equivocate” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 17). Once again we see Druckerman tapping into the same confusion and contradiction mentioned in the chapters above. Her personal accounts
validate previous scholar’s arguments that parenting and pregnancy manuals serve to induce fear, panic, and anxiety in the minds of women. As Siegel argues, the pregnant body is constructed as a dangerous body (Siegel, 2013, p. 92).

Fortunately for Druckerman, she has seen the error of this way, benefitting from cross-cultural exposure. Druckerman continues in her accounts of French versus American parenthood; “The Americans I know also believe that pregnancy- and then motherhood- comes with homework. This first assignment is choosing from among myriad parenting styles. Everyone I speak to swears by different books… But instead of making me feel more prepared, having so much conflicting advice makes babies themselves seem enigmatic and unknowable. Who they are, and what they need, seems to depend on which book you read” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 17).

Druckerman continues to take on the role of a knowledge seeker, accepting some form of “homework” as an obvious preparation for motherhood. She has clearly clued in to the reality of discourse and its ability to construct the identities of both mother and child. As she says in her last line from the quote above, who babies are and what they need vary from book to book, linking us back to the many waves of experts in the 20th century, and the ways in which they defined children and mothers. These constructions don’t only exist in American discourse. Druckerman also seeks advice from French books and magazines, which give a very different image of The Mother.

**Mother as a Sexual Being**

A new construction of The Mother, not often found in American discourse, is the mother as a sexual being, and this construction contributes to an overall parent-centered approach. Decades of tension surrounding mothers’ appropriate levels of sexuality have aided in split views on the
subject. Often, the breast is a central focus. On one hand, it is a sexual body part, attractive to many and objectified in society. On the other hand, the breast is a survival tool, providing infants and young children with nutrition and sustainability via breastfeeding. This contrast means that, for many Americans, a mother is not a sexual being: the sexy breast is different from the feeding one. Such perceptions have been documented in research done by Ariella Friedman, Hana Weinberg, and Ayala Pines, titled *Sexuality and Motherhood: Mutually Exclusive in Perception of Women*. The researchers asked male and female participants to rank women with varying levels of sexuality (highly sexual, moderately sexual and non-sexual). They then asked the participants to rate the described woman on 4 dimensions of mothering. These four dimensions included, “good mother,” “concerned and investing mother,” “egalitarian mother,” and “rejecting mother.” After gathering the data, the researchers found that perceptions of motherhood and of sexuality were contrasting. The researchers explain, “The findings in the present study strongly support the existence of the split between motherhood and sexuality. Both the quantitative and the qualitative analyses concur- sexuality and motherhood are mutually exclusive in the perception of women. The more sexual a woman is, the less motherly she is perceived to be” (Friedman, 1998, p. 769).

Through this extensive study, the researchers were able to verify their hypothesis one: “1. Sexuality and motherhood are perceived as mutually exclusive in the perception of women. It is therefore expected that the more sexual a woman is perceived to be, the less she will be evaluated as a good mother” (Friedman, 1998, p. 784). This separation between sexuality and motherhood is laden with preconceived ideals of what a mother is, what a mother should be, and what a woman is limited to as a mother. The researchers make another interesting distinction involving the specific constructs of a mother. “It is equally noteworthy that it is enough to
describe a woman as someone who does not enjoy sex at all, and who performs it only as a duty to her partner, to unleash a whole set of attributions related to good mothering. Thus, the non-sexual woman was perceived as an overall good mother who takes care of her children’s needs, gives them much attention and never views them as a burden” (Friedman, 1998, p. 769). Therefore, the seeming antithesis of a mother is a sexual woman.

This disconnection is striking for two reasons. First, in order for a woman to become a mother, she must engage in sex. This obvious but necessary point means that the very act that allows a woman to conceive, is assumed to be non-existent after the child is born, or in many cases, once the pregnancy is known. Second, the tension between sexuality and motherhood limits women to choose between being sexy or a “good mother” instead of sexy and a “good mother.”

In contrast to the results above, Druckerman is confronted with clear messages from the French regarding their ideas of appropriate levels of sexuality for mothers. She writes, “A photo spread in Neuf Mois (Nine Months) magazine shows a heavily pregnant brunette in lacy ensembles, biting into pastries and licking jam off her finger. ‘During pregnancy, it’s important to pamper your inner woman.’ Another article says, ‘Above all, resist the urge to borrow your partner’s shirts.’” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 23). This particular pregnancy magazine constructs pregnancy as an inherently female experience. The depiction of the woman in “lacy ensembles licking jam off her finger” is a clear representation of “sexy” pregnancy. The blending of pregnancy (and motherhood) with sex/sexiness is both controversial and proven to be a topic of internal dissonance.

The depiction of pregnancy in the French magazine, however, provides another construction of the mother; one who is both sexy and motherly. Druckerman recounts a tour of her French
neighbor, Semia’s, apartment. Semia casually shows her several photos she had professionally taken during her pregnancy. “In this one I was pregnant, and here I was pregnant. Et voilà, the big belly!’ she says, handing me several pictures. Its true, she’s extremely pregnant in the photographs. She’s also extremely topless” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 24).

Druckerman continues to explain her shock after seeing, first hand, the confidence of French women in pregnancy. She writes, “Granted, Samia is always a bit dramatic… Nevertheless, Samia has merely embraced the conventional French wisdom that the forty-week metamorphosis into mother shouldn’t make you any less of a woman. French pregnancy magazines don’t just say that pregnant women can have sex; they explain exactly how to do it” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 24).

In contrast to the mutually exclusive attitudes regarding sex exemplified above, the French have embraced the 9 months of gestation and made it into its own form of sexuality. The French woman, therefore, is encouraged to embrace her femininity in a time in which she enacts the most inherently feminine stage of life- pregnancy.

Unlike the construction provided by Dr. Sears and other contributors to the discourse, Druckerman’s analysis of “French Parenting” outlines mothers as simultaneously caring and independent of their children. This parent-centered approach provides mothers with the ability to maintain some separation from their children by having necessary space to keep up with their personal and professional lives. One of the most salient examples of the difference in the parent-centered approach is the management of sleep.

**Mother as Independent Being**
Bringing up Bébé continues as Druckerman move past her pregnancy, and begins to tackle the stage of the infant. In Chapter 3, *doing her nights*, Druckerman begins her long dive into French parenting advice. In stark contrast to Dr. Sears, Druckerman is advised to teach her first child how to “do her nights” aka, sleep through the night, at the young age of 6 weeks old. Advice from other French women discusses their collective shock by notion that a four month old would still wake through the night.

After her daughter was born, whom she refers to as “Bean” in order to keep some level of anonymity, Druckerman begins her emersion into parenthood and parenting advice. She compares the stories of her friends back in the States, to the stories of the French. “I take comfort in hearing about parents who have it worse than we do… The worst story I hear comes from Alison, a friend of a friend in Washington, D.C., whose son is seven months old. Alison tells me that for the first six months of her son’s life, she nursed him every two hours *around the clock*. At seven months old, he began sleeping four-hour stretches. Alison- a marketing expert with an Ivy League degree- shrugs off her exhaustion and the fact that her career is on hold. She feels that she has no choice but to cater to her baby’s punishing, peculiar sleep schedule” (p 38).

Here, Alison embodies the construction of a self-sacrificing reproducer, discussed earlier. She admittedly sacrifices her sleep and career because she feels she has no other choice. On the contrary, the French parents Druckerman speaks with have very different opinions on their child’s sleeping habits. “I talk to French parents about sleep, too… They all claim that their kids began sleeping through the night much earlier. Samia says her daughter… started “doing her nights” at six weeks old” (p 39). Other accounts from French parents echo the same claims made by Semia. It appears as if the French have mastered the art of baby’s sleep.
Although many French babies are bottle-fed, Druckerman says the breast-fed babies do their nights early, around 3 months, too. She explains, “At first I figure I’m just meeting a few lucky French parents. But soon the evidence becomes overwhelming: having a baby who sleeps through the night early on seems to be the norm in France” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 40). The parenting discourse in France, follows the same trend by saying, “He’s going to sleep complete nights, of eight or nine hours at a minimum. The parents will finally rediscover the pleasure of long uninterrupted nights” (Le Sommeil, le rêve et l’enfant (Sleep, Dreams and the Child) cited in Druckerman, 2012, p. 40).

In trying to understand why French babies sleep so well, Druckerman seeks out French pediatrician, Michel Cohen, who practices in Tribeca, New York. Cohen’s practice, Tribeca Pediatrics, has experienced rapid expansion to five locations. He has also published “a pithy” parenting book titled, The New Basic, making him a strong contributor to the discourse of parenting. Cohen’s advice is almost the exact opposite of Dr. Sear’s advice in Attachment Parenting. Both men are pediatricians practicing in the United States, both are published writers, and both have a slew of mothers following their suggestions. One, however produces strict guidelines that restrain the mother’s capacity to operate outside of her role as a caretaker—fostering feelings of inadequacy, sleep deprivation, and the sacrifice of their own social life. The other argues for clear boundaries, preservation of mother’s sanity via fulfillment from outside the child, and a looser approach meant to help baby and mother equally. Cohen says, “My first intervention is to say, when your baby is born, just don’t jump on your kid at night… Give your baby a chance to self-soothe, don’t automatically respond, even from birth” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 45).

Druckerman says, “Cohen is reluctant to credit France for the innovations he’s brought to
lower Manhattan. He left France in the late 1980s and remembers it as a country where newborn babies were left to cry it out in the hospital… But some of Cohen’s “advices” are exactly what today’s Parisian parents do. “Like the French, he starts babies off on vegetables and fruits rather than bland cereals. He’s not obsessed with allergies. He talks about “rhythm” and teach kids to handle frustration. He values calm. And he gives real weight to parents’ own quality of life, not just to the child’s welfare” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 45).

Here, we see French parenting summed up in the words of a French pediatrician who claims not to be influenced by France; however, the Parisians Druckerman encounters are parenting by the exact same guidelines. Jumping back to her cover introduction, Druckerman explains there is no such thing as “French Parenting.” We see this to be true in the case of Dr. Cohen. He is not hailing from a greater body of “French” discourse; he merely gives balanced advice with respect to both the child and the mother.

**Mother as Trainer**

Dr. Cohen’s advice on parenthood stems from a general construction of a mother as a trainer. The word “trainer,” used as a derogatory term for Dr. Sears in his rhetorical efforts to separate mothers by naming two sides of the spectrum, has a new meaning with Dr. Cohen. Cohen does not compare children to pets, as Dr. Sears would hope, but instead suggests that parent’s role is not to curb their child’s every appetite.

For instance, Cohen suggests parents pause before immediately responding to their child. Druckerman explains, “For Cohen, this pause is crucial. He says that using it very early on makes a big difference in how babies sleep. ‘The parents who were a little less responsive to late-night fussing always had kids who were good sleepers, while the jumpy folks had kids who
would wake up repeatedly at night until it became unbearable” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 45). Cohen says, “I’m not saying let your baby wail” instead, as Druckman writes, “What he’s saying is, just give your baby a chance to learn” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 46).

The pause is a tactic used to instill the feeling of delayed gratification. Instead of fulfilling baby’s needs immediately, the French give their children room to grow and learn through the temporary discomfort of waiting. “The Pause” as opposed to Dr. Sears’s call for instant response to the child, offers insight into the differences in parenting approaches. It is the difference between the self-sacrificing parent, who responds to every beckon call, and the shepherd mother who teachers her child to delay gratification, ultimately resulting in a more positive outcome for her child.

Mother as a Shepherd

The concept of “The Pause” referred to only as such by Druckerman, who says the French consider it common sense and see no need to brand it, sparked her interest in how French children come to delay gratification. Beyond sleep, French babies also learn to feed less often and wait patiently even when hungry until mom tends to them. This distinction taps back into the construction of the mother as a shepherd; one who lovely guides her young to listen, respond, and self-soothe.

As referred to in my literature review, the mother as a shepherd construction is about encouraging autonomy in children. It is quite opposite of Dr. Sears’s self-sacrificial reproducer construction. The mother as a shepherd is very well represented in Bringing Up Bébé through Druckerman’s personal interactions with French parents and through the work of pediatrician, Michel Cohen, “the world’s expert on how children delay gratification.” All of these experts and
non-expert testimonies offer a discourse that constructs the mother as a shepherd, especially through training children to delay gratification, thus enhancing their autonomy.

Yet there are other ways the book constructs a discourse of the mother as shepherd. After interviewing Cohen, Druckerman is clued into some remarkable research by Walter Mischel, the researcher who developed the famous “marshmallow test” at Stanford. Mischel’s marshmallow test included 653 four and five year olds who were led into a room by an experimenter lead and were presented with a marshmallow on a table. The children were then told that experimenter lead was going to leave the room, and that if the child did not eat the marshmallow, and instead waited until the lead returned, they would be rewarded with two marshmallows. “Only one in three managed to resist eating the marshmallow for the full fifteen minutes that the experimenter was away,” reports Druckman. “Most could only wait about thirty seconds” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 59). The interesting result of this study came much later: “In the mid-1980’s, Mischel revisited the kids from the original experiment, to see if there was a difference between how good and bad delayers were fairing as teenagers. He and his colleagues found a remarkable correlation the longer the children had resisted eating the marshmallow as four-year olds, the higher Mischel and his colleagues assessed them in all sorts of other categories later on. Among other skills, the good delayers were better at concentrating and reasoning. And according to a report that Mischel and his colleagues published in 1988, they “do not tend to go to pieces under stress” (Druckerman, 2012, p. 59).

This study suggests that the practice of delayed gratification used in much of French parenting has great potential to produce stronger, more resilient children and young adults. As suggested by this study, resilience comes, not when children’s needs or wants are met instantaneously, but when they are asked to practice self-control and self-discipline. These
concepts are greatly represented in the observed French Parenting by Druckerman and in parent-centered approaches. This building of autonomy is now scientifically backed by the research done my Mischel, proving the tension felt by children when they are not immediately tended to can actually produce better life skills in the long run.

Summary

As with any construct of motherhood, there are blind spots and generalizations that make theories and advice not applicable to all. Bringing Up Bébé does the work of distinguishing its parental advice from the child-centered approached, however, this discourse still has many gaps and blind spots in comparison to real mothers. One issue with attempting to address such a wide audience, such as mothers, is that context is removed, taking away any consideration of socioeconomic status and so forth.

As Druckerman researches, she continues to shape her construction of The Mother, not only by personal observation, but also via interviews with “experts.” Her inquiries alone reinforce the role of a mother as a knowledge seeker, which, as pointed out in the literature review, butts against the issue of critical and functional access. How can a mother reading Druckerman’s book truly question the arguments made between its covers? In the same way mothers are left to accept medical advice and wisdom from doctors, nurses and OBGYN’s, mothers are also left to accept the suggested life principles in Druckerman’s book. Bringing Up Bébé offers different insights than Sears, yet it still doesn't teach mothers to question or have a critical eye to information both in her book and from authorities, putting women in a subservient position to experts and thus contributing to the very obsession that she critiques.
Issues of practicality arise with Druckerman’s reiteration of French Parenting, just as they did with Sears’s advice. Maybe letting children “do their nights” by braving a few weeks of a screaming child is not a possibility for families sharing a home with others or living in an apartment complex. Mothers of children with disabilities may also not be able to subscribe to Druckerman’s call for independence and separation from a child. This is not to criticize Druckerman’s account, but to merely point out that even in the more “liberal” construction of a mother, certain populations of motherhood are still marginalized and left out of the discourse.

With any assertion of differences, there are implied “right” and “wrong” ways of living life. In Bringing Up Bébé, Druckerman brings up a discussion of motherhood and sexuality. She explains the messages sent to her from the French in contrast to the seemly sexless norms of American parenting, leaving the reader wondering if there is anything truly wrong with either. This is just one example of how Druckerman’s implied sense that the French are doing things “right” leaves some readers questioning their different, yet still working methods for no reason at all.

All in all, constructions of The Mother, on either side, imply a simple “right” answer. The two parenting methods of child-centered and parent-centered approaches create their own versions of how The Mother ought to be. The child-centered approach, as exemplified by Dr. Sears, has a history of leaving mothers feeling inadequate and sleep deprived. The parent-centered approach, however, can be criticized for placing more weight on the adult’s life satisfaction than caring for young children.

I have argued that one approach, child-centered, is clearly more constrictive than the other, however, to call out one side of parenting discourse over another is only to perpetuate the ongoing obsession with parenting advice, privileging the words of experts. The purpose of this
thesis is to call out how experts have used their rhetorical devices to mold idealistic versions of motherhood. Representing both extremes are the two methods I have heavily outlined for the purpose of comparison. I aim to encourage mothers not to choose one over the other, but to think critically. Ask yourselves, who is forming this idea of motherhood and whom do those constructions serve? By maintaining a critical eye in a world so saturated with suggestions, mothers can construct *their* idea of what motherhood means to the individual, taking into consideration their personal context, values, and comfort.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As we’ve seen from the close textual analysis of two very different approaches, the discourse of parenting exists as an ever-changing, contradictory body of work. Because of such strong opposing sides, mothers are often left feeling like they cannot fully measure up to either method of parenting. This issue stems from the discourse’s inability to address all potential parental outcomes: single parents, mixed cultures, dual incomes, disabled caregivers, etc. Therefore, since the discourse claims its advice is suited for all, it does the population of mothers and fathers a great disservice.

Instead, it is my point to make clear that there will always be a marginalized group of caretakers, left out of the discussion of parenting ideology because their circumstances have not been considered. Likewise, the assumptions of what a mother ought to be will continue to transform over time, creating more dissonance among the body of texts.

In the case of Attachment Parenting and Bringing up Bébé, there is some overlap in the constructions of The Mother. Both inherently believe in the construction that mothers are knowledge seekers. For one, to write a book and distribute it with the intent of informing other beings relies on this assumption. If Druckerman and Sears did not assume that mothers consume knowledge in the form of written texts, they would not put their effort into writing these books.

Both texts also place high value on the expert, which continues the assumption that all mothers must not turn to themselves in their time of pregnancy and parenting, but rather seek outside information. Sears, who established himself as the expert, gives a very clear message that his scientific research and understanding is not only the right way of parenting, but also trumps all other ideas of what a mother should be. Druckerman, however does not establish herself as an
expert by any means, but rather makes a point to seek out the advice of experts along her journey of discovering French parenting.

With the use of an expert as an authoritative voice of reasoning, the discourse of parenting and pregnancy exhibited in this paper ties into a larger trend to put women in a subservient position. The discourse of parenting relies on the assumption that natural knowledge is to be held below that of studied doctors and published authors (the experts), causing for a greater assumption that mothers need this discourse.

While these texts overlap in their most basic assumptions, they do not agree in other constructions of motherhood. Most of Sear’s advice is entrenched in the idea of a Mother as a self-sacrificial reproducer. He calls his AP parents to forego their life before children and tailor every activity to meet the needs of their child. Sears is wary of parents who attempt to fit their kids into their life with fewer interruptions than he prescribes. His understanding of a good mother is one who sacrifices for the wellbeing of her baby.

In complete contrast, Druckerman calls for mothers to be more like a shepherd, guiding autonomous children to become self-actualized and not overly attached. Her methods give room for mothers to enjoy aspects of life outside of their role as a parent. She even encourages women to create some distance between themselves and their children.

These examples of discourse have served well as two sides of a very mixed body of literature. Though geared towards all, when analyzed through the lens of Critical Rhetoric, both texts establish their own versions of the idealized mother, both are grounded in deeper assumptions of women and family structures, and both exist as small voices in the louder conversation of parenting and motherhood.
Limitations

Though this research has demonstrated inconsistencies within the larger discourse of parenting and pregnancy, it is limited by the amount of texts used in the critical analysis. The larger body of parenting discourse involves several other constructions of The Mother, which were not addressed in this paper. This is merely a small snapshot of opposing methodologies, which are currently popular in the United States. This study excludes the consideration of greater cultural discourses involving pregnancy and parenting, as well as marginalized, less mainstream approaches. This study also excludes other constructions of the child as well as constructions of the father. It is written with an emphasis on motherhood to reflect the subtle assumptions of the United States that parenting is mostly a responsibility of the female caretaker.

Future research should address these other areas to give greater insight to women’s role in society as a caretaker. Because motherhood is presumed to be a permanent role, sticking to the woman even when she enacts other roles such as an employee or wife, I would be interested to study these external identifications and how they are effected by her identity as a mother. Future research has potential to understand how identifying as a mother shapes the constructions of female members of the society in all aspects.
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