

**The "Shoulds" of Multiple-role Women:
Exploring the Connection Between
Expectations About Self and Emotional
Stress When Roles Conflict**

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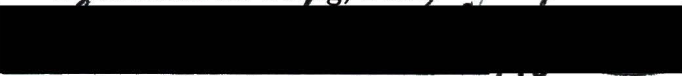
Psychological Foundations in Education

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate ways in which multiple-role women's expectations of themselves are associated with the emotional stress they experience when their roles conflict. Individual, in-depth interviews, exploring self-expectations and role conflict experiences, were conducted with three multiple-role women, mothers who were also full time students. Supported by social role theory using a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, interview transcripts were analyzed and the results presented in two stages. First, a subjective profile of each participant's perceptions of her roles, expectations and conflict was compiled to convey a personalized account of the internal conflicts of multiple role women. Second, common themes reflecting similarities in the women's perceptions and experiences were considered in terms of inner processes connecting their self-expectations and role conflict stress.

The women had demanding, incompatible maternal and academic self-expectations. They expected to function at high performance levels in both roles, simultaneously, and were reluctant to compromise on these standards. Performing the roles separately, at different times and places, prevented overt competition between the women's role expectations. When roles conflicted, however, role performances overlapped and each system of role expectations demanded attention at the same time. To maintain simultaneous participation in both roles, conflicting

expectations had to be ranked, according to current role saliency, and acted upon sequentially. Inevitably some important role expectations were sacrificed for the sake of fulfilling others. This situation created an uncomfortable, and emotionally stressful, discrepancy between the way the women expected to perform and the way they were able to perform their dual roles.

The role expectations relegated to second place continued to demand immediate attention and to exert considerable emotional pressure towards meeting these demands. Student role expectations were normally expected to acquiesce to mothering responsibilities but, under pressure of exams and impending assignments, the women's frustration and anger signalled that a point of intolerance with this secondary position had been reached. It was difficult for the women to continue to behave contrary to their own academic needs. Mothering role expectations were even more inflexible. They were expected to assume priority over expectations associated with other roles and were immediately intolerant of a lesser status. When the women perceived themselves as not living up to their maternal expectations they felt considerable guilt and regarded their behaviour as highly inappropriate and potentially harmful to their children. Role conflict, therefore, consisted of a series of uncomfortable behavioural compromises and unfulfilled role expectations which resulted in an emotionally stressful situation for the women.

An area not directly explored in this study was the significance to the women of unfulfilled or compromised role expectations. On the basis of the women's statements, and supported by social role theories, the self-concept was speculated to

be implicated in the formation and maintenance of high role expectations and affected by negative evaluations of role performances. In view of the diminished sense of self perceived by the women in this study during and after role conflict situations, recommendations were made for further research on this issue.

Implications from this study were included in the presentation of a counselling approach outlining specific steps regarding the exploration of self expectations and also general guidelines addressing the needs of multiple-role women.

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I used to wonder whether long lists of acknowledgements and statements such as, "if it weren't for...", stemmed from an author's sense of duty and hinted at false modesty. After writing this thesis I now realize that this is not necessarily true. If it were not for the guidance and support of certain people I would not have been able to do this and it is with pleasure that I acknowledge their important contributions.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated with my love

to Alan

and to our sons,

James Edward, John Wesley and Jeffrey Alan

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Helping women and men adjust to changing social roles is currently a focus for counsellors (O'Neil, 1981). The difficulties involved in experimenting with new roles, expanding old roles and balancing the responsibilities of both are key issues that require a counselling approach that is an enlightened and knowledgeable. Women often experience emotional stress and confusion when their home and non-home roles conflict and many will seek counselling in their attempts to cope. Counselling, however, has only recently paid attention to their specific needs (Pendleton, Polomac & Garland, 1982) and has not, as yet, provided sufficient research or understanding of the situation to lead to effective counselling guidelines (Amatea & Cross, 1981; Wojciechowski, 1982).

This study was undertaken with these counselling needs in mind. The results of this study are expected to contribute to a counselling approach that would help women to acknowledge and understand the inner, psychological dimensions of role conflict. With increased self understanding, it is assumed that they would be in a position to make clearer assessments of their conflict situation and thus would be able to act and make changes on the basis of their own informed decisions. It is also assumed that the process of learning how to successfully integrate multiple roles contributes to personal growth and fulfillment.

The counselling approach framing this research is founded on a favourable attitude towards the multiple-role lifestyle. A focus on the conflicts and stresses of this choice should not preclude both the satisfactions many women experience and the potential women have to develop multiple dimensions of themselves.

Based on a definition of mental health that includes the availability to the individual of a wide range of roles to choose from and the ability and freedom to move between those roles, Nevill (1984) has predicted that an individual's satisfaction will increase as his or her needs are met through a wider range of activities. Combining several major roles through most of the adult life span enhances an individual's sense of potency (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1982) and leads to higher levels of self esteem than does an exclusive focus on either occupational or familial roles (Barucch & Barnett, 1980; Brinbaum, 1975). Richardson (1981) has pointed out that work and family are the primary vehicles for adult socialization and, combined, have the greatest potential for influencing the development of certain abilities and related behaviour. She suggests that the struggle to master conflicting and complex roles may be a temporary phenomenon which produces a more complex, integrated older adult who is better prepared to cope with developmental tasks in the latter stages of the life cycle.

The study and proposed counselling approach are also founded on the belief that the choices and decisions affecting the multiple-role woman's lifestyle are unique to the individual and lie primarily within each woman. Effective counselling would thus assume a supportive, enabling role. Too often counsellors devise and apply specific behavioural strategies prematurely, based on the assumption that the woman's stress is the result only of external, situational demands (Ama-tea & Cross, 1981). By doing so they inadvertently reinforce passivity, ignore inward conflicts and overlook her capacity to form her own expectations.

If counsellors are to help multiple-role women in a way that is empowering and promotes personal growth, it is important first to help them clarify and under-

stand the inner nature of their conflict. One way of doing this is to help them recognize the potency of their own expectations. For the woman who thinks that she should be able to do everything and do it well, becoming aware of all that she expects of herself can be an eye-opening experience (Amatea & Cross, 1981).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn whether multiple-role women's self-expectations were related to the emotional stress they experienced when their roles conflicted and also to understand the ways they were connected.

This relationship has not been studied, yet it would appear to be a contemporary problem for women and a viable research area for role conflict. Researchers have acknowledged that role conflict involves conflicting expectations. Furthermore, multiple-role women are said to be both "trend-setters" and yet also 'trend breakers" in terms of having to redefine themselves according to multiple roles and, as a result, to show the stresses and strains typical of transitional periods of major social institutions (Pendleton, Paloma & Garland, 1982). At this point in our social history, expectations regarding women's role behaviours are confused and often contradictory (Amatea & Cross, 1981). Multiple-role women may have internalized this ambivalence; the strains and stresses they experience could be a reflection of the confusing and often contradictory expectations they have of themselves. Ellen Goodman (1985). syndicated columnist, has written:

The social argument that has filled two decades is about how women should live their lives and treat the people they love. It goes on and on because, in fact, there is no certainty, no 'right way' to live. In the business of creating our own lives yet caring for our children we are all wildly subjective.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research question:

How are multiple-role women's expectations of themselves connected to the emotional stress they experience when their roles conflict?

Background to the Study

Social Context

Women have increased their expectations of the number of roles they can do well (Gray, 1980). The 1980's popular literature reflects the belief that women should not have to make professional compromises but can be both a professional and a homemaker (Davis, 1984). A major theme emerging from this current research on women who do combine home and nonhome roles, however, is the stress they experience when these roles conflict (Yogev, 1983).

The issue of women's multiple-roles and role conflict is characterized by a great deal of ambivalence which complicates the pursuit of practical solutions (de Koninck, 1984). Women today who combine family and career oriented roles live in two different worlds. The criteria for success in each are discrete and, to a large extent, mutually exclusive (Amatea & Cross, 1981) in that an investment in one results in a concomitant reduction of success, or perceived reduction of success, in the other (Locker, 1984). Conflict for multiple-role women, therefore, centers around dealing with conflicting role expectations. It is a dilemma that exists for them at an inner, personal level but which has emerged in response to confusing contemporary social norms.

Occupational Expectations

Growth of the human potential movement which stresses self-fulfillment and realization as primary values, the dramatic increase in working mothers over the past three decades and the pervasive influence of the women's movement have changed the nature of women's social roles (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a; Wojciechowski, 1982; Yogev, 1983). Maternal employment has become the modal pattern rather than the exception to the rule, regardless of children's ages (Smith, 1981) and paid employment is now an established choice for women (Mann, 1985). Women's choices are now psychological, in terms of level of commitment to work, rather than behavioural, working or not working outside the home (Tittle, 1982) and many are choosing to place higher priority on career advancement (Farmer, 1984). The dramatic increase over the last decade in the number of adult women going back to school (Statistics Canada, 1981) indicates the stability of this trend. As a result of these changes, women's traditional lifestyle of sequential roles, career entry after maternal responsibilities are completed, has given way to simultaneous roles, overlapping career with childbearing and rearing (Locker, 1984).

The new values that these changes represent have gradually gained social acceptance. Yogev (1983) reviewed research and theory literature on professional women and noted a distinct change in attitude during the late sixties. Before this time professional women were viewed as violating sexual stereotypes, as lacking femininity and as having personality disturbances. According to this early view women had two options; to have a family and be feminine or to have a career. In contrast, the contemporary view, offering the option of "both," emerged during

the early seventies. This view suggested it was possible to be a successful career woman and, at the same time, a good mother and wife and thus, also feminine.

Women's occupational expectations have also evolved and changed. The contemporary woman has become more aware of the alternatives open to her (Astin, 1984), of a sense of entitlement (Shainess, 1980), and of the possibility of implementing a positive self concept through the choice of a career (Fritz & Crites, 1980). Vocational expansion is now seen as a way of fulfilling expectations of additional income, enhanced status and power, increased stimulation and self actualization (Scarato & Sigall, 1979). Pursuit of these expectations, however, is complicated for many women by perceived costs to family life, especially to children. In effect, mothers today are subject to ambiguous expectations. Wojciechowski (1982) has concluded that they are the reluctant recipients of conflicting messages, one minute applauded for developing their talents and making impressive contributions to society while in the next admonished for child neglect.

Mothering Expectations

The presence of children is a major source of psychological pressure (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983) which is compounded by the self-regulating mechanism of guilt found in most working mothers (de Koninck, 1984). After reviewing the literature on working mothers, Smith (1981) suggested that stress is a by-product for many mothers who try to combine development of the self through work with attainment of an idealized mothering role. The validity of this claim is borne out by the literature. Mothers today are reported to espouse high expectations for dedicated mothering along with the assumption of responsibility for the child's

success or failure (Johnson & Johnson, 1977) and to subscribe to beliefs which support the social ideal of "the perfect mother" (Locker, 1984; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976; Wilborn, 1976).

There are still widespread beliefs that the quality of mothering is responsible for every aspect of a child's growth and development (Locker, 1984) and that if a mother also has an important nonhome role, by definition, she neglects her children (Farmer, 1984) and her absence has harmful effects on her children, especially if they are under six years old (Smith, 1981). These beliefs persist despite many systematic studies in the past decade which have concluded they have no empirical basis (Johnson & Johnson, 1977; Yogeve, 1983) and which also point out the difficulties of arriving at consistent and conclusive relationships between children's well-being and working mothers in the face of other, highly influential and compounding variables (Smith, 1981).

In addition, current approaches to child rearing which emphasize the internal world of the child, focus on the importance of indirect discipline and stress the children's need for parents who are available, attentive and emotionally supportive (Gilbert, Holahan & Manning, 1981; Johnson & Johnson, 1977), have enlarged and complicated the expectations attached to the parenting role. Several studies have reported wide acceptance of this model of parenting by working mothers (Amatea & Cross, 1981; de Koninck, 1984) even although it contributes to guilt (Gilbert et al., 1981) and has made child rearing more time consuming (Johnson & Johnson, 1977).

Socialization, however, is considered to have the most influential impact on women's mothering expectations. Many women are discovering that what they

thought a mother should be and the kind of mother they are capable of being are quite different (Wilborn, 1970). Conflicts may arise from deep-rooted value systems regarding the maternal role (Gilbert, Holahan & Manning, 1981) because the values internalized by most women as they were growing up do not support their need to spend time and energy on professions, sometimes at the expense of their families (Locker, 1984).

Hewlett (1986) has written that the modern women's movement changed our image of women, especially, women as workers, but failed to deal with motherhood. As a result, women still subscribe to powerful mothering traditions based on the "ultradomesticity of the postwar period which begat the ideal of complete motherhood" (p. 31). It is these ideals, she says, "that haunt our consciousness to this day. They are the model against which millions of women today judge their performance as mothers...and guarantee a bottomless pit of guilt" (p. 282).

Conclusions

Multiple-role women have been described as women in transition who are experiencing the emotional conflicts common to major role upheaval (Wojciechowski, 1982). Caught between two incompatible but highly influential social systems of expectations regarding their occupational and mothering roles, they have no guidelines for reconciliation. They are a transitional generation who live without a clear precedent (Yogev, 1983) and no body of literature exists to help them adjust to changing roles (Curtis, 1976). There is an absence of role models who have accepted and blended what seems to be disparate parts of themselves and also of theoretical information on how to do this (Davis, 1984).

People's expectations are shaped by personal experience as they try to satisfy basic needs but also by larger social forces (Astin, 1984). For women who have internalized conflicting social expectations, however, the problems of role conflict are more subtle and complex than simply dealing with the logistics of coping with others' expectations. They must also deal with clarifying and reconciling conflicting self-expectations.

Literature on Role Conflict in Multiple-Role Women

In her study of women physicians who were also mothers, Cartwright (1978), concluded that the stress they experienced combining these roles was largely due to an inner sense of fragmentation, that they were trying to participate in two areas but had conflicting expectations of themselves. They felt they should "act like a woman" and give priority to the needs of the family but at the same time felt the need to "act like a man" and give priority to career goals. In the same year, Nevill & Damico (1978) included self expectations in a list of eight role conflict stress areas. The other areas of stress were time management, family relations, household management, financial concerns, child care, guilt, and expectations of others. They asked over 500 working mothers to rate each of these areas on a seven point scale assessing the extent to which each contributed to stressful role conflict conditions (least to most stressful). The women rated self-expectations significantly higher than the other seven areas. Despite the conclusions of these two studies, there has been no further research on multiple-role women's self-expectations.

It is surprising that this area has not been directly researched. Researchers who have studied multiple-role women generally acknowledge that role conflict involves a conflict in role expectations (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a; Myers-Walls, 1984; Sarbin, 1954) and many have come to the conclusion that the focus of conflict for multiple-role women is inward and personal (Cartwright, 1978; Faver, 1982; Gray, 1980; Nevill & Damico, 1978). These are well-established conclusions that have warranted, but not received, further explanation or specialized attention.

In her review of the related literature, Myers-Walls (1984) concluded that a uniting feature in the varied and often inconsistent definitions of role conflict was the prediction that individuals who attempt to fulfill multiple roles which have conflicting expectations involving time, location, energy and behaviours will have difficulty adjusting to those roles. Some researchers have suggested a stronger relationship, linking conflicting expectations directly to role conflict (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979a; Nevill & Damico, 1978) and to emotional stress (Fritz & Crites, 1980; Houseknecht & Macke, 1981). None, however, has gone beyond prediction and suggestion and investigated these connections. There is still a lack of information on the extent to which role expectations affect conflict and on the processes underlying this relationship. Clarity is further obscured in that the concept of conflicting expectations in many of these studies is not uniformly defined. The term is typically used in a general sense with no distinction made between internal, self-expectations and external, structurally imposed role expectations.

According to an early researcher of women's role conflicts, Gordon Hall, long term relief of role conflict is obtained only through negotiating and redefin-

ing the expectations of one's role senders so that objective conflicts are reduced (Hall, 1972). Hall's exclusive emphasis on external expectations, the demands imposed by members of the work place or the home, as the major source of women's conflict, and thus the only viable avenue for resolution, appears unchallenged. His studies continue to be cited frequently in the literature and his theories used as models for counselling interventions (Amatea & Cross, 1981) and coping strategies (Gilbert, Holahan & Manning, 1981).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) reported in their review of the research on home and career conflict that, although role theorists have said that it is the presence of two strong opposing role pressures that produces role conflict, rarely, if at all, have the joint effects of specific work and family pressures been studied. They specifically identified self-sender role expectations as a potentially significant source of pressure within each of the work and family domains and recommended that future research "test the linkages among self-sender expectations, role pressures, and work/family conflict" (p. 84). Consistent with this recommendation, this study explores the inner pressures exerted by women's self-expectations towards their home and nonhome roles and considers how they are linked to stressful role conflict experiences.

CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

This study explored women's expectations of themselves and examined how this ongoing interaction between self and role was connected to their role performances and to their role conflict experiences. Role expectations are cognitive and often must be inferred from subjective report and analysis (Sarbin, 1954). A methodology oriented towards an inquiry that is subjective in nature and which also provides a framework on which to focus and describe interactions between self and role was therefore selected as appropriate.

Theoretical Framework

Interviewing schedules, analysis and discussion of implications arising from the data were guided by social role theories, particularly those founded on assumptions characteristic of a Symbolic Interactionist perspective. Although this study does not represent Symbolic Interactionist research, the concepts of this perspective, a well established type of phenomenological framework that focuses on interactional and interpretive processes, readily lends itself to a consideration of the women's inner world with regard to the interrelatedness of roles and systems of self expectations.

Symbolic Interactionists seek to understand social reality by studying the individual's interpretation of the world through his or her complex network of interactions (van Manen, n.d.). Basic to this approach is the assumption that human experience is mediated by interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). It is the individual's interpretive process that underlies her behaviour (Lauer & Handel,

1983). Through interaction with others, and because of the ability to interact also with themselves, individuals are constantly in the process of interpreting and defining as they move from one situation to another. A situation has meaning only through the individual's interpretation and definition and actions stems from this meaning (Bogden & Taylor, 1975).

At the center of this interpretive system is the notion of "role-making" (Turner, 1970), a creative process that involves people defining their roles and responding to those definitions. Role behaviours are organized according to individuals' perceptions of their role expectations (Sarbin, 1954). Furthermore, people not only respond and conform to expectations but are also actively engaged in the creation of those expectations (Maines, 1977). Thus, how they expect to behave within the context of a particular role is determined to some extent by their interactions with others but, in the final analysis, by internalized expectations that are part of the self (Hall, 1972; Stryker, 1980).

Self-expectations are partly derived from the social expectations of our reference groups that we have internalized. The major point is that persons strive to fulfill their own expectations of themselves, not social expectations. Social expectations are important but only as they are filtered through self-expectations (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 88).

This study acknowledged the effects of external forces on the formation of the women's role expectations. The primary focus, however, was on the women's current experiences; how they themselves had defined their responsibilities, how expectations of self showed up in the present in relation to life roles and how the women responded to these expectations when roles overlapped and conflicted.

Of particular interest to this study was the pragmatic philosophical basis of Symbolic Interactionist assumptions. Reality is said to exist for the individual

only when she interprets and defines what is occurring according to her own use (Ritzer, 1983). Equally important is the emphasis on the dynamic nature of interactions and interpretations as ongoing processes. Meaning is always subject to negotiation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Problems arising from actions based on old definitions and interpretations can cause the individual to alter what no longer works, to form new lines of meaning (Ritzer, 1983) and to choose different behaviours (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The multiple-role woman must integrate the responsibilities and behaviours of several major social roles, a new, unprecedented lifestyle. She is constantly confronted with situations that must be defined and interpreted according to the multiple-role concept. Reinterpreting roles, redefining role responsibilities and making decisions and changes to accommodate the realities of her life are ongoing inner processes which may be confusing and stressful but also subtle and not readily apparent to her. With the support of a knowledgeable counsellor, she could increase her awareness and understanding of these integrating processes thus alleviating her confusion and possibly her stress.

Participants

The participants in this study were women who combined mothering with a full-time student role. In keeping with earlier studies (Beutell & Greenhaus, 1983; Gilbert & Holahan, 1982) mature women students enrolled in university programs were considered representative of multiple-role women.

Women with preschool children were chosen in the interest of examining clear and prevalent examples of role conflict. Mothers of younger children experience high levels of conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and show visibly apparent effects of involvement in nonhome roles (Barnett, 1982).

The women participating in the study were recruited from the University of Victoria Day Care Centre. Twenty letters outlining the general nature of the study and requesting volunteers (see Appendix A) were distributed by Centre staff to mothers, known to be attending school full time. Fifteen women responded and were phoned by the researcher to arrange mutually convenient times for a screening interview. Finding "free" time was difficult for most of the women and, in fact, became a problem that prolonged the entire interviewing process. Concentrated schedule searches, cancellations and then renewed scheduling were common frustrations, yet also common ground. When it was the researcher's turn to cancel several well-negotiated interviews to look after her own sick children, the immediate response was understanding laughter.

Eleven women eventually took part in screening interviews. These meetings, held individually in a Counselling Services office on the university campus, were largely informal and consisted of an exchange of information between the volunteer and the researcher. The researcher explained the general nature of the study (exploration of role conflict experiences) without mentioning the specific focus (self-expectations). She also outlined ethical responsibilities, interviewing procedures, disposition of the data and emphasized the research versus counselling orientation of the interviews. Volunteers then signed a consent form (see Appendix B) signifying acknowledgement of this information and agreement to participate in the study.

After the concept of role conflict was mutually defined and agreed upon, volunteers responded verbally to a questionnaire (see Appendix C) which requested information on personal demographics, family support, frequency and extent of

role conflict stresses, and any other currently stressful life circumstances. To verify the focus of the study, the eleven women were also asked to rate eight stress factors commonly cited in the role conflict literature (lack of time, money, energy, support from others, self-confidence, guilt, other's expectations, self-expectations), in terms of how much they felt these influenced their role conflict stress (high, low, none). All volunteers reported the regular occurrence of role conflicts and found the experiences stressful. Confirming the focus of the study, all 11 women rated self-expectations as having a high (H) influence on their stress, the only one of the eight factors to receive such an unanimous and consistent rating.

Further selection of participants was made by a process of elimination. Three women were involved in demanding legal and relationship crises which the researcher felt dominated their current situation and endangered clear perceptions of general role conflict issues. One woman, a graduate student writing a thesis, anticipated a decrease in her free time. Six women were subsequently selected from the remaining volunteers solely on the basis of covering as wide a range of experiences as possible. Age, marital status, number of children and areas of study were considered. This number was subsequently reduced to three women to accommodate deeper analysis of the data.

The Women Who Participated in the Study

The three participants ranged in age from 24 to 39. All had one preschool age child (two also had older children), were engaged in a wide range of undergraduate programs and felt they had supportive families. Only one woman was

married, a reflection of the predominantly single status of the 15 original volunteers.

Jill had two children, a 12 year old son and a five year old daughter. She was 36, divorced for over three years, and in her final year of an honours program in English. Her goal was a career in publishing, preferably to become an editor of children's books. Towards this end she planned to begin work on a Master of Arts degree after graduation.

Laura was 24 and had been divorced for four years. She had a four year old daughter and had been living with John, her partner, for two years. She was in her third year of a Dramatic Arts program. After finishing her degree, and further specialized training, she anticipated pursuing a career combining theatre and journalism.

Catherine was 39, lived with her husband of 18 years and had a 10 year old son and a five year old daughter. Formerly an interior designer, she was in her final year of a two-year professional development program leading to an education degree. She hoped to teach in the public school system at the elementary level.

All three participants were interviewed by the researcher in a Counselling Services office on campus. Each took part in two audio-taped interviews.

The Interviews

Data were collected through two in-depth interviews, a method that primarily yields subjective descriptions of the individual's inner world and experiences (Good, 1982). Yogev (1983) has recommended the use of in-depth interviews to study role conflict. Consistent with the focus of this study, she points out that

using this approach is important because aspects that are important to understanding how women experience role conflict are internal and not easily conceptualized or described. This study, however, may be one of the few to follow her recommendation. A search of the literature revealed research that has predominantly studied role conflict experiences and perceptions from written responses to questionnaires. In her book on researching women, Beere (1979) has concluded that questionnaires have limited ability to reveal important subjective information. Similar to Yogev (1983), she states that women are not always cognizant of their true attitudes towards personal issues because they are "often so deeply ingrained and at an unconscious level" (p. 385).

Proposed interview schedules for the two consecutive interviews were tested in pilot studies conducted with two women who were both graduate student and mother. In collaboration with an expert interviewer who was familiar with the purpose of this study, the researcher evaluated audio-tapes and transcripts of these interviews and made adjustments to improve questions and presentation.

Technically, the interviews were semi-structured in that the women were not asked to engage in free conversations or to respond to a highly structured set of questions (Kvale, 1983). The interviewer used a format called the Focus Interview (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956) and followed the same interview guide for each interview. The guide listed the major themes of inquiry needed to cover the research topic and suggested relevant questions in each area. Questions within this type of format are usually unstructured but, as was the case in this study, can be partially structured (Merton et al., 1956). As prescribed by the focused interview, the timing and manner in which the questions were asked was left to the researcher's discretion (Kidder, 1981).

Interviews were conducted according to guidelines for the focused interview. The task of the interviewer in a focused interview is to focus upon, or guide the participant towards, listed themes and questions but to avoid leading her towards certain opinions or specific meanings (Kvale, 1983). The participant is given a large amount of responsibility for the formulation of responses but is expected to maintain contact with the central focus of the interview (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965). Within this format the interviewer brings forth dimensions which are considered important to the research topic (Kvale, 1983), but can explore and probe further in unanticipated directions (Kidder, 1980). She can help the participant describe her experiences and feelings in a context that is meaningful to her yet ascertain how she defines the situation in which she is involved (Merton et al., 1956). Interviews of this type have been found to elicit depth (Richardson et al., 1965) and encourage validity in that they are more flexible and encourage more true to life responses and complete information (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954).

A conscious effort was made to incorporate questions and themes appropriately so that they did not disrupt the general flow of the interview or the woman's natural train of thought. As often as possible, questions were worded to include the respondent's antecedent responses, clarification was used to probe and emphasize topics which seemed likely to yield relevant data and the interviewer avoided expectations of specific responses by maintaining an open, non-judgmental attitude.

The First Interview

The initial interview lasted one hour and was designed to establish rapport and to set the ground for the second interview which focused specifically on self-expectations. The interviewer, without bringing up this specific focus, was guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix D) consisting of three themes, the mothering and student roles and role conflict, with one open-ended question for each. Respondents were asked to describe what each of their roles meant to them and to recall role conflict situations that were typical and "most stressful." Compared to The second interview, the first session was largely unstructured. Within the parameters of the three questions each woman was free to shape the content of the interview according to her own perceptions and preferences. This design allowed for a primary emphasis on building trust and encouraged the woman to speak freely and openly. The interviewer hoped to learn about the meaning and importance of the woman's roles and long term goals or expectations. It was also important to specify her actual role conflict experiences for reference during the second interview.

The Second Interview

The second interview followed approximately two weeks later and lasted two hours. The researcher began the session by recalling that the woman had rated self-expectations as a high influence on her role conflict stress during the screening interview and expressing interest in hearing more.

The interview was guided by a schedule of semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix E). To establish a mutual frame of reference, the woman

was asked, generally, how she had defined the term "self-expectations." She was then asked, separately, to relate this definition to herself as a student, as a mother and as an individual. Within each of these discussions the researcher probed for sources of her expectations (how they were formed, idealized concepts and comparisons to others) and, as suggested by Sarbin (1954), also made sure that two aspects, actions and qualities, were included in her descriptions of specific role expectations.

Participants were then asked to select one of the role conflict situations they had identified as typical and "most stressful" during the first interview. The researcher suggested they become comfortable and take their time as they tried to mentally re-experience this situation, first as a student and then as a mother, and to recall the thoughts and feelings they had regarding specific role expectations. The researcher's involvement in this process depended on the woman's level of awareness and ability to articulate her experiences. If appropriate, specific role expectations described previously by the woman were recalled by the researcher and exploration of her thoughts and feelings were facilitated.

Towards the end of the interview the interviewer gradually moved towards closure by asking questions that required more objective responses. The women were asked for their general impressions on juggling multiple-roles and invited to bring up aspects of multiple-roles or role conflict that they considered important but which had not been covered in the interviews, and to ask questions about the study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed inductively in two stages. The purpose of the first step was to analyze interview tapes and transcripts and to provide a clear and concise yet reliable subjective account of each woman's unique perceptions of her roles, her expectations and her conflict. This distinctive profile of each woman and her experiences was presented to the reader to convey the inward and very personal nature of role conflict, and to establish familiar and complete frames of reference. Issues involved in the difficulties of combining home and nonhome roles cannot be approached in isolation. They are related to each other and must be considered within the context of the whole individual (Kramer, 1976).

The second stage of analysis, answering the research question, required moving the focus away from the individual and looking at the women as a group. Examining the very explicit connections between each woman's expectations and her conflict experiences had quickly proved too narrow and fragmented an approach to satisfy the broader research objective. Concentrating on an overview and allowing common themes to emerge while considering the implications of these similarities, yielded clearer, more cohesive answers to the research question.

Each audio-taped interview was transcribed verbatim. Participants' statements, with the exception of those which were considered redundant or irrelevant to the research topic, were then transferred to file cards and coded according to each individual, each role and specific content. These file cards provided the first line of data for both stages of analysis.

During the first stage of analysis, each woman's set of file cards was considered separately. Cards containing statements describing role conflict experiences were extracted and organized chronologically, in terms of her experiences, and by role. The remaining cards, in conjunction with the original transcripts and tapes, were examined closely to gain an understanding of how each woman brought a sense of self to her roles and her expectations. Guided by the woman's words, by what she chose to emphasize as important and the manner in which she framed her responses, these cards were grouped to reflect patterns of thought and attitudes that seemed characteristic of her point of view and personality. Frequent reference was made to transcripts and tapes to ensure that analysis adhered to total context and to the meanings intended by the women. Profiles were compiled that incorporated each woman's actual words as frequently as possible.

Topics and themes that emerged during the second stage of analysis arose primarily from Jill, Catherine and Laura's experiences. Profiles, cards and interview transcripts and tapes were always the first source and final check of ideas and concepts. The research of role theorists who had incorporated Symbolic Interactionist principles, particularly the interactions between self and role, however, contributed immensely to the formulation and expression of those ideas. Their work introduced the researcher to a perception of role playing that encouraged and confirmed her own speculations. It was highly conducive to exploring and analyzing research data of this type in this area and, invariably, offered a concise, objective reflection of subjective impressions that deepened and clarified understanding.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the size and nature of the sample. Although participants were chosen because of their involvement in multiple roles, they cannot be considered representative of other groups of multiple-role women. Given the small number of women studied, the specific characteristics and context of their roles and the uniqueness of their perceptions at the particular moment of the interview, this study is best viewed as exploratory. It offers a sensitizing concept that may apply to other women in similar circumstances. Further supportive research, however, is needed.

Furthermore, this study concerned only two of the women's major roles, student and mother, and not other roles which may have affected their experiences and perceptions, for example, the role of spouse or domestic partner. The absence of support from a spouse is well-documented as having an important influence on a woman's experience of role conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Smith, 1981). In fact, having a supportive spouse who shares similar values and beliefs about her roles is a major factor in a working mother's life satisfaction (Houseknecht & Macke, 1981). The extent of this influence on the woman's expectations of herself was not explored.

Finally, the study was potentially affected by the researcher's subjectivity. It is for this reason that qualitative researchers are encouraged to examine their own biases and vested interests in the research topic. Because the researcher was also committed to multiple roles: mother, wife, counsellor, student, researcher, and had experienced conflicts between these roles, this was indeed a topic in which she had a personally vested interest. It was as Adrienne Rich has said "I did

not choose this subject; it had long ago chosen me" (Rich, 1976, p. xvii). However, although the researcher had her own perceptions and interpretations of the multiple-role lifestyle and its difficulties, this was not her story. The data must bear the weight of any interpretation, so the researcher must constantly confront her own opinions with the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). This research was based on the stories of Catherine, Jill and Laura. These stories were, as Bogdan and Biklen have described, "a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study" (p. 42). What makes the difference is the purpose of the researcher. The researcher's purpose in this study was to go beyond personal introspection and learn about the inner processes underlying role conflict from other's experiences.

CHAPTER 3

THE WOMEN: INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

The ongoing, reciprocal interactions between self and role proved to be a difficult concept to describe in a linear fashion. To help the reader, attempts were made to structure each woman's story so that there was a clear and similar progression in each case. Each profile has two sections. The first, Roles and Expectations, reflects perceptions and personal characteristics and the second, Conflict, deals with tensions between role behaviours and expectations.

Differences in the way the women chose to respond to the same questions have naturally affected presentation. For example, Catherine provided more personal background and Jill more self analysis to descriptions of their expectations. Both recalled conflict in quite general terms. Laura was less introspective and volunteered less context but had vivid recollection of a specific conflict situation. Also, all three varied in their choice of focus. They concentrated variously on some roles, or aspects of their roles, or conflict. The profiles reflect these choices and differences.

Jill

Roles and Expectations

Jill laughingly refers to her "quest to be a low achiever, my search for mediocrity." The expectations she has of herself are "not very comfortable" and "very rarely mesh":

ideally they mean working up to a reasonable level of achievement in all the things that I do, being a mother, being a student. In reality they're not very reasonable, they're too high. I expect myself to take almost everything I do very seriously, ongoing, nonstop. For me

it tends to level out at this plateau of excellence in everything and I don't take it very well if it's obvious to me I'm falling short.

As the youngest and only girl in an "incredibly accomplished" family "with too many doctorates," Jill recalls a childhood where high achievement was modelled but not expected. Parental encouragement towards professional training "didn't extend to a female child...there was never any sense that I would have to look after myself." She started university early, at seventeen, but left after one year. Earning a degree had no meaning.

When she was in her early thirties her marriage ended and her attitude towards education changed. Faced with the need to support herself and her two children, academic credentials took on strong personal meaning. Going back to university was "a way out of not being able to support my family decently." "At that point in my life I became highly motivated for a really specific thing, a job that I liked and could do happily for the rest of my life if need be."

Returning to school was also an emotional turning point for Jill, it was "a way up for me." She uncovered a powerful desire for independence, control over her life direction. "That's a biggie....I realized I never want to do anything that's not following what my feelings are about where my life will go." She has "moments of abject insecurity about what I'm doing or exactly where it's all going," but has learned to rely on her instincts. "I have to be almost silly about it but I really am following some inner plan" and trust her abilities and potential:

To do the work with this degree of difficulty and still do well at it has been a positive thing for me in many respects...it's been a way of proving to myself that I could do something I thought I couldn't do, had always shied away from. I thought I wasn't any good at it....I don't think I could live with it if I was just proving it to my (birth) family and I'm not. It's become my own thing, I'm really very good at it and I like doing it.

Academically Jill aims for "first class marks in everything--and I've lived up to that totally." To do this she expects to "spend a good part of every day at my schoolwork unless there's some crisis...be hard working and tenacious, sheer persistence...just work my tail off!"

Doing well at school holds practical implications for Jill's future:

there's always in the back of my mind that if I let it slide a little a lot of other things depend on my performance now. If I don't get a first class honours degree I'm afraid I'm not going to get a fellowship and I don't know what I'm going to do. I won't get to graduate school and I've been working for that. Maybe that's not the end of the world but it still functions as a very definite expectation for me and that's what I work with.

There are also strong personal incentives:

I've gotten to the stage where I'm getting A+'s on everything I hand in. I know what I have to do and I know I can do it. I have a good brain and I find the work not difficult it's just finding time to do it, to focus in on it...Sometimes I wish I could say (to myself) how about an A- and then I won't work so hard, like you really don't have to spend this much time or polish it as much as you do, but I'm not capable of doing that anymore. I sit down and write the stupid thing and my own desire to do it properly overrides.

A life that involves an intense, exclusive focus on schoolwork, however, has no appeal for Jill. She wants to be "single minded but not excessively so" and does not want to become "a completely deficient human being" by "zeroing in on academics too much." She speaks admiringly of a classmate who combines intelligence and achievement with "sensitivity to others...and a sense of how good her life is."

Having a sense of balance, of enjoying the moment is essential to Jill. Throughout our interviews her wry wit and ready laughter punctuate even the most intense statements. She quickly finds the humour in each situation, even when it is directed at herself. It is important to her to "grab the high spots," to

enjoy "periodic injections of bliss" and to "try to be more relaxed about things" so that life is not constantly "a pretty grim period":

I'm very responsible but sometimes I'm not very mature and (laughs) I don't care. (son) thinks this is very bizarre, he says I don't behave like a grown-up. I say thank God I don't behave like a grown-up all the time, it's a safety valve.

Jill would like to consider herself "well-rounded" and has difficulty accepting a different version of her life. She describes her inner anger at a recent job interview:

once they had established that I mostly go to school and say home they said, 'but what outside interests do you have?'...I laughed and said, 'are you joking, I've forgotten'...but really I felt like saying, 'damn it, do you mean am I also a full-time human being? I have lots of interests I just don't have the time to do anything about them!'

Maintaining this balanced, more relaxed, approach to life is particularly crucial to Jill when it comes to mothering her twelve-year-old son and five-year-old daughter. Her children provide strong incentives for working diligently towards a secure financial future, "I really want to be able to support them decently," yet also provide powerful reasons for not neglecting the quality of everyday living. I don't want to end up ten years from now saying if only you'd backed off your schoolwork or whatever and given them this or that, your time, not worrying so much about marks and money and all that." She does not want "any spill over of my own (academic) expectations" to affect either the quality of their lives "it can't be harmful to the children, they mean more than the difference between an A+ and an A on a paper" or her relationships with them, "I don't want them looking at me for things that are inappropriate but I want to be close to them...it's a fond hope that they will turn into my friends":

I'm always aware that this (education) is a finite process but that their lives aren't finite...it's too abstract for them to grasp that my

degree will eventually mean we can have a vacation...kids have different expectations, there's supposed to be more periods of pleasure...I should enjoy spending time with them, just be relaxed, the feeling that there's nothing much I have to do and hey I can play Monopoly for four hours...that I'm not so driven by financial and time pressures that it means we can't have a good time together...just for them to have the sense that we can do something off the cuff...these things matter, they matter to them, they matter to me.

She is very conscious of her mothering expectations. Her list is extensive "do we have six weeks?" but difficult, "I don't live up to all of them unfortunately." It is most important that she give them "enough energy and mental time to work with them on their lives and not neglect them." She expects to "be there for them" and "to listen" so that "I'll know when they need me, I'll be able to pick up on that."

To Jill, family life requires a flexible attitude, "you can't really count on anything, so just go with whatever happens, try and make the best of it" but, "I don't do that part very well." One concession to her hectic schedule has been her decision to limit the number of visiting children in her house, "right now I can't take care of other people's children." Making this decision was "really hard to do":

it's like saying I'm not really...that my kids are not living in that kind of place, everybody's friends are in and out of the house all the time type of ideal. The North American ideal, you know, mum's at home and you can bring anybody home you want.

It is not easy for Jill to outline limits to her parenting role, to describe what is required and how much is "enough." She describes the boundaries around her parenting expectations as "very nebulous, really nebulous."

The school thing is the easy part in a sense. I know that I can work to a certain level and I do. It's the children that really get to me...I live two other people's lives as well as my own.

Jill acknowledges the demanding expectations she has of herself:

I know it should be okay if I don't come up to these expectations because some of them are fairly unreasonable. I should ease up on myself but it all seems so important and so pressing that I can't. It seems like the only way to do it....I do expect to pay attention to being hard on myself and pull back but sometimes there doesn't seem to be any area to pull back in, what can you stop doing, sometimes there's nothing...I don't want to look back and say if only you'd put a little more effort in this or that.

Conflict

For Jill, being both student and mother "has some satisfaction" but "it's the hardest thing I've ever done":

I realize I don't cope very well with my own failures, well they're not really failures, just the times when I fail to keep everything rolling smoothly...it makes me furious because I am doing my best...(laughs) the problem is I'm not perfect, that's the real problem.

There are "fairly predictable stress points." "Christmas exam time is bad but not as bad as from February to April. For some reason it all seems like too much then." As end of term deadlines loom the tension increases between her student and mothering roles. "Inside I start to panic, how am I ever going to get it all done and yet dealing with the guilt if I ignore them (children)."

She can become "excessively single-minded" when she is working on a paper:

The difficulty is that I do get very involved in doing it, it's a fairly intense kind of thing and I hate to stop. It's just a mind set, once I get going I can't think about other things. I'm aware that this has to be done in a limited amount of time and I would really dearly love to have the time without interruptions to just get it done.

At these times mothering involves "periods of benign neglect" when "I know that I'm not going to be as good a parent as I'd like to be." Relaxing and playing with her children becomes "an absolute luxury," family pleasure "drops considerably," and she feels regret, "I know it's not good enough, it's just not good enough."

There is no hesitation as Jill lists her priorities "we go mother and then student." Normally she will not "even attempt to work when (daughter's) around" and tries to remain conspicuously available to her son. "I know there are times when he'll need to talk." When schoolwork and children's clash, "most of the time I just stop working." Mothering expectations "always override":

probably more than 90% of the time the schoolwork goes...rarely do I put the student role above a demand for me to be a mother, I shouldn't say demand, I mean a reasonable demand, when it presents itself I ordinarily do not ignore it...even if I'm dying to work on my word processor I shelve it if it has to be shelved.

Yet, although she knows "that this is the right thing to do" she is also aware "that my feelings are not in line with what the right thing to do is":

it's not a very happy transition...I feel quite angry about it even though I do it...I'm doing it because I should do it...I'm saying (to myself) I'm doing this because I know I should be a responsible mother, this is where the line is, in the long run the quality of my children's childhood is more important than whether I spend the next two or three hours working on a paper...but I'm not feeling very good about it, I feel angry, annoyed...there doesn't seem to be a way emotionally around that because there is no alternative.

There have been times "maybe half a dozen in three years" when Jill has felt "really, really pressured" by assignments and, "except to take care of meals and bedtimes," has not stopped working:

they (mothering expectations) still override but I don't do anything about it. The payoff for that is to work away and feel tremendous guilt so I'd rather not do it very often.

This was the setting for a recent "blow-up" with her son:

there was some emotional problem that I missed entirely and he came down on me, you don't love me...he wasn't thinking clearly, I can't expect a twelve-year-old to be very reasonable when he can't even identify his own feelings...I handled it really badly...I kicked myself later, I thought you idiot, you did that to yourself, you should have deflected it, it was as plain as day...if I'd just said let's play cards for half an hour and THEN said I have to do some work why don't you read a book in my room with me he would have gone to bed

happy...I should know better but I didn't...I felt dreadfully guilty and spent the rest of the evening tearing my hair out...I reacted badly and he caught the flack for it.

Then comes the emotional "payoff":

it makes me mad that I have to fail because I don't have enough time...these are the times when I just feel I'm bombing out with him and sometimes feel I neglect (daughter) because she can do without, she's competent...I'm wrong, I know I'm wrong yet how many of me are there?...It's not a rational thing in their minds, it's a gut thing...I can say to them, look there's a bind, not enough of me to go around, do you understand? I don't think they can really, perhaps intellectually but, when it comes down to feeling you need someone there with you...no amount of intellectual rationalization overcomes that feeling of need...I know that feeling so I know what that must feel like.

When Jill is struggling to keep up with overlapping mothering and student responsibilities, "there's times when I get depressed." She says her "sense of self sometimes gets eroded":

I know it's directly related to the sense of who I am and what's important to me and how much I can take before I lose my self of self worth and that hasn't been permanently lost but it has its really low moments.

Laura

Roles and Expectations

What Laura expects of herself are essentially "the things I want to achieve or should eventually achieve and the things I should be doing now about them." She has "lots of dreams...places I'd like to go and things I'd like to do...the big one is to be happy, make a good life for myself and my daughter." She approaches her dreams tentatively, describing them as "sort of unreal expectations...when you think about how to do it, they're totally unrealistic." A career in theatre, however, has been a long standing dream that "might not be so unreal." "It's what I've

always wanted to do but something I've always pushed aside and pushed aside." Three years ago she "finally decided to do it." She gave up a secure secretarial job to work full-time on a four-year Dramatic Arts degree:

It's not all that easy all the time but in the end it's going to be worth it. I think how good it will feel when I've got my degree. I'll have done this and then I'll be able to do more things, do something constructive with my life.

An important part of returning to school is being able to offer more to her four-year-old daughter:

Doing what's best for her comes down to what I'm doing with my life. I'm here doing this to make a better life for her too and trying, in my behaviour, to set a good example for her.

Laura takes her student role seriously, "it's important. I realized there was no sense going back if I wasn't going to do well, just sort of coast." She expects "to earn" her degree, "it's being self disciplined. I should apply myself, concentrate and work hard," and has high standards she struggles to temper:

I set quite high expectations as far as marks are concerned. I'm trying not to do that so much. If I have to put so much work and time and effort into getting A's maybe it's better to be with (daughter) or to relax and get an A- or B. I'm working on it but it's still there though. It's funny though, when I do get an A- I'm disappointed.

Laura has a clear picture of what it takes to maintain high marks "always studying, doing homework, spending every spare minute in the library." She dismisses this picture as idealistic "It's just not realistic, to meet all of those you'd never have time for anything else," yet adds, "but I guess if I was totally perfect I'd probably stick to them more":

you see someone else at school who's the type of student you think you should be and you don't match up then you feel like you've let yourself down, you haven't lived up to your expectations. I guess it's self-worth, your self-esteem goes down.

There are two demanding sides to Laura's education. Her program involves full-time academic activities, "classes, assignments, exams," and also active participation in ongoing campus stage productions "you're supposed to audition for everything":

it's particularly hard because if you want to be really involved it means that on top of being in school all day you have to go back and rehearse at night and then sometime get your homework done. If you have a child on top of that when do you see her?

Laura's daughter is a primary consideration when it comes to planning activities and setting priorities, "I'd do anything for her." It is important to her to prevent the student role from becoming too dominant, from taking too much time and attention away from her mothering responsibilities. Becoming "too involved in everything," in both the production and the academic work, is "too stressful both on myself and (daughter)...having (daughter) on top of the schoolwork is really a big thing." For Laura it means having to make choices. "You really have to make a decision. Am I going to be in a show or let my grades go down, let the homework go or let the show go, which is it?" Her career goals reflect similar compromises:

My reason for knowing I'll never be a professional actress is having her. I don't want to subject her to that kind of existence, no money, having to travel here and there. My mother says if I make that decision because of her I'll resent her for the rest of my life but I won't, I don't resent her now, I just want to do what's best for her.

Laura describes her mothering role in terms of her feelings:

there's a lot of responsibilities, concrete things, more money, a bigger place to live, all these things come in to it but mostly when I think about being a mother I think of the feelings...this incredible amount of love, feeling closer to her than to anyone else, feeling very protective of her and her needs.

Protecting her daughter, "emotionally," is a strong expectation that Laura refers to frequently but never fully explains. She alludes to her own childhood, "it's a lot to do with how I was brought up, you're not always happy as a child," and to "a lot of problems with her father that's had an influence" but does not elaborate further:

I always want her to feel safe and protected. I should, well obviously, love her but also protect her, make sure she doesn't feel threatened in any way. That she feels loved and comfortable and safe enough at home that she can be free to talk to me about anything that's bothering her.

Her mothering expectations center around being present and available to her daughter:

I should spend as much time with her as I can but often I feel I'm not spending enough time with her or I should be doing more things with her, taking her places, doing things...I know she really misses me when I'm away but lots of times I think I'm taking it worse than she is. It's more like me feeling guilty, like I should be home with her when I'm not.

For Laura "there's still always that ideal mum figure you've got to live up to...I try to, I think I DO." As she "get's more confident in myself as a mother," this has become an internal ideal. Mothering expectations are "more something that I set for myself rather than what other people set for me." When she feels her behaviour compares unfavourably to this idea image, however:

it's the same thing as being a student, lack of self-esteem. You feel like you should be doing more, something better than you're doing it. You feel less of yourself. I get depressed also I start cutting back. You have to make decisions.

Conflict

Last year was very stressful for Laura. Her roles collided and she has no trouble reliving and describing the confusion and doubts she felt. She was selected to stage manage a major on-campus stage production "the biggest involvement you can get...it's the highest paid job in professional theatre." It became very important to her "to show I could handle it all, stage manage the show, go to classes, do all the assignments and still be a mum, I was obsessive about it."

Stage managing was "a really big responsibility...I put a lot of pressure on myself because I wanted to do well." On one level there were academic expectations to live up to, "it was an assignment so I had to get a good mark," and on another, a need for reassurance and reinforcement, "I wanted to prove to myself I could do it":

I was there at 8:15 for early morning warm-up, which isn't mandatory, then I'd work on the show till midnight or even later and be there at 8:15 the next morning again.

She was not prepared to let the other, academic, side of her program suffer. Classroom work "became even more important" and her expectations towards exams and other assignments "got even stronger." As she describes her behaviour she unwittingly matches her earlier description of "the perfect student":

I didn't want my other marks to go sliding, in fact I was probably the only person in the department that's ever gone through being in a show and missed only one day of classes. Usually people just drop out while they're in a show...I had to always make sure I spent enough time in the library. I'd spend every single moment I had over there getting papers done and I'd start working on assignments earlier than I normally would.

Successfully stage managing the show was "an incredible high" for Laura professionally, but privately, it was also a very painful experience. She says her

mothering expectations "just weren't there that's for sure. I was feeling really guilty because I had these standards and I wasn't living up to them":

it was very hard because I'd see her in the morning, pick her up after school, be home for a little while, and then be off again until after she was in bed.

Laura's mother and boyfriend looked after her daughter in the evenings and reassured her that "she was fine at home and was always happy":

but it didn't seem to matter that she was taking it very, very well me never being around, I felt bad...I was saying I shouldn't be doing this, I'd go over and help her at the day-care or bring her over to the school to sit with me and try to spend some time with her that way and on the weekends. That made me feel better.

Towards the end of the show her daughter developed problems, "not at home but at school...temper tantrums, acting out." Laura finished working on the show but "felt depressed" and "terribly guilty." In her mind there was no doubts that her daughter's problems were a result of her intense schedule and her absences. "I was convinced that's what it was":

mostly I thought it must be because I hadn't been spending time with her...there were other things happening in her life, it could have been a culmination of other pressures on her, but I was thinking it must be because I was working on the show.

Her daughter's difficulties at school eventually disappeared. "We had a psychologist working with her. She was bored so they moved her up to the next center and that helped a lot." Laura, however, did not want to take chances on a recurrence. After the show finished she "made the decision to cut back" on stage production work. With the exception of occasional lunchtime productions, "this year I haven't been as involved":

this worked out better. It wasn't so bad because the rehearsals were right after school so I could still see her and put her to bed. She seems to be adjusting well.

Laura also learned that there are limits to her willingness to compromise. At the beginning of the present term her classwork increased and Laura felt she "had to make the decision not to audition for any shows at all." Shortly afterwards her motivation dropped and, for the first time, she began asking herself "why am I doing this, should I quit school?":

I knew it would have been extremely stupid at that point to drop all my courses but I felt like I was doing nothing for me. It's like the things that you do for yourself are the last on the list of priorities and always the last things to get done....It felt like there was no time for me which isn't true because there's always time to do things for yourself...but in my mind it's usually not as important.

Laura did not quit. Faced with giving up her future goals she reaffirmed their importance to her, "I always would have thought what if I had stuck to it." Not only did she become "resolved to stay" but also, "doing things for me became more important." The last time we talked she hesitantly volunteered that she had reconsidered her earlier decision not to work on any shows:

I'm auditioning for a lunchtime show this weekend even although I've said I wouldn't. It won't be for course credit or anything it's something I've decided I want to do for myself. I know I'm going to feel badly that I'm missing time with (daughter) and I'll have to work harder to keep up with my schoolwork but I really miss it so I want to be involved in a show even if it means there's going to be more pressure on me. When I was stage managing I guess it was something I was doing for myself.

Laura summed up her experiences with conflicting roles as "predominantly feelings of guilt and doubts, the sense of is this all worth it or should I just forget it." She hesitated before adding:

it's probably because I set myself up. If you set yourself too high an ideal and then you can't meet up with that ideal you're going to feel these things.

Catherine

Roles and Expectations

Catherine projects strength. The eldest daughter of five children, she was "put in the role of pseudomother...the calming influence" in a family "that stamped their feet a lot." She learned early that "if you wanted to survive you had to be strong and powerful...or no one was going to listen":

I do present a very strong image but that's something that's always been there...I think I know who I am fairly well and I know what I want, I'm very determined...what it comes down to is control, I very much like being in control.

To be strong and to appear to be strong are important expectations Catherine has of herself. "Saying I can't cope is very difficult for me it's like admitting I have a weakness." Her strength serves a useful purpose. She is a tall woman but, "when I get overwhelmed I feel about (age) four in size, a very small self-image physically, perhaps that's why I feel I have to portray this big image...it's a mask that protects me from the world." It is also troublesome and "very perverse. The more that gets dumped on me the more I feel I have to try to be strong. If I don't I'll crumble completely."

Being considered strong is isolating, "like a room and nobody really walks through the door." She is admired for her ability to "be calm and manage so well" under stress but "this drives me crazy...it never occurs to people that maybe I'm buckling under the weight." Yet, she is unwilling to clear up this "misconception" and ask for help. "I'm not good at the asking part until I'm right on the edge...saying I can't do it is hard because of the other things I expect of myself."

It's also important to Catherine to care. She says "I cannot care, not be concerned about things." She has very firm, outspoken views about social and moral

issues, "I have rather passionate points of view on some things and a strong moral sense." She also has what she describes as "an overactive caring system" about the people in her life. "I have a bad trait, I figure I have to be all things to all people."

Caring for others is Catherine's opportunity to reveal and portray her nurturing side, "to show all those feelings that are behind the mask." Being a mother "gives me that outlet." Her children are "a way and means for me to love and hug and touch which are things that are very important to me" and she "feels an obligation" to listen to the problems of her younger classmates "because I'm seen as something of a mother figure."

Caring deeply about issues is often time and energy consuming and overwhelming, "some things matter too much to me, I don't feel I can walk away from it":

It's just one more thing on top of everything. I'm angry that it should be that important and frustrated because there can't always be a focus about it.

There should always be a focus about things for Catherine, a clear rationale to organize her actions and her feelings. "I have to have a focus, a self realization sort of thing, knowing me and what I want, in order to survive." Going back to school provided "a focus, a way of using my brain, working towards something and making the most of my life." Planning her children with an "entirely intentional five year split" between them was a way "to enjoy each one of my kids as two individual children."

Focusing is also the way Catherine describes the way she prefers to deal with her different roles. She calls it "the layer approach":

it's like peeling back layers of Kraft Cheese, one at a time, that's how I operate. I have to take the first and when that's done, fine, I can take the next one. As long as I keep functioning that way I'm fine, one layer at a time.

Separating each responsibility allows her to concentrate on her role performances. It is important to understand, in her own terms, what is required, "if you haven't got a very clear image of the idea, the purpose in each situation, it can all become so cloudy and muddy so quickly."

A large part of Catherine's image of herself rests on meeting certain standards of performance in the important areas of her life. "I do have high expectations of myself, they're my own shoulds, I must do them if I am to be a good person." Being a mother and a student were not roles she took on lightly. They were end products of lengthy deliberation and involve deep commitment and strong expectations:

I decided that if I was going back to school I was going to do it right, the way I wanted, it was the same with my children, very much a personal decision, I didn't want to be a mother unless I could find a good way of doing it...(laughs) it's a super mum syndrome, I've not only got to meet all the needs and wants of my children but I've got to somehow get all of my work done well. It's very important to me.

Returning to school at the age of 37 began a career change for Catherine, from interior design to teaching. Working as an interior designer had been "a parental decision. I liked to draw and I went along with it":

I had never really set expectations for myself, really pushed myself, tried really hard for myself before...I think the force was always there I had just never identified it and I'd never done it for me...it was a nice feeling suddenly realizing I could put myself into something and that I could do it.

Although she acknowledges drawbacks to adopting the student role, Catherine enjoys the opportunity to learn, "the learning process is very important to

me...I can explore ideas, I love that." She sees her academic work in terms of "obligations to myself...really feeling that I have gotten what I need":

I do feel an obligation to pad out whatever I don't get (in class), something I need to know about for me. I feel the library is calling to me all the time and, I suppose illogically, that I should have read this or that. It's a strong compulsion.

She cares about her work, "it's important to me and I have the responsibility to do it," and about meeting her own standards:

I expect to get things done on time, if I don't meet due dates that has strong implications for me....Assignments must be complete so that I have a sense of pride in whatever it is I'm putting down. It has to meet my criteria and it has to do that according to what I've laid out in my head...it's very much how I feel about it, as long as I'm comfortable about what's inside I don't care much about the packaging, it's more thought and organization.

Living up to the strong expectation "that I should be learning something all the time" can be "very frustrating" for Catherine. Academically she serves two masters, her own learning requirements and also "the system," classes, assignments and deadlines required by her program. Though she sometimes considers the latter irrelevant to her own "focus," she will expend the same energies and expectations trying to fulfill both, "a double whammy":

I'm here to learn, it's an expectation I have of myself so I must go to all classes, pay attention, take copious notes even in a class I consider a waste of time. It's very annoying but at the same time I can't cut it...I also realize some assignments don't matter, the time I put in is not worth what I'm getting out but even if it has no value for me I still have to make it complete, it still has to meet my criteria because there's that sense of pride involved.

A strong sense of pride is clearly involved when Catherine talks about her children, "I like them and I like to spend time with them." Her mothering expectations, are, again, seen in terms of strong obligations "that's what makes it (mothering) so hard":

They're far higher than for a student because then I'm dealing with me, I can handle me, but once I start dealing with them I'm aware that my actions affect them.

She "feels guilty over small things like if I lose my temper" and "upset if they have problems" with friends, or at school or at home:

I feel somehow there should be some way I can make that better for them and of course there isn't, they have to suffer their own pains but I really would desperately like to make it easier...I feel a strong need to try and do that and I don't think I will ever accept that it isn't possible.

Catherine's children mean "everything...I love it all." She enjoys "watching them grow and learn" and being able to show them a lot of emotional, and especially, physical, caring, "I can love them to death and they love it." Physical contact is important, "I need it, they need it."

She wants to "enjoy my kids each one...love all the quixotic twists and turns...not expect them to be the same" and expects to be "non-judgmental" towards them. It is important "to give them time to be as they are...once I can expect they will be fine then they will be fine." To do this, "patience, a lot of patience, is necessary" and "the humour has to be there...as long as I maintain the fun."

Catherine is very firm about maintaining her mothering standards. They are "what I'm trying to live up to," and internal, "coming from inside out":

I don't want my children to be a yoke, I don't want them ever to feel that I don't want them, that they shouldn't take my time...they have to know I'm glad they're here and that I couldn't bear it if they weren't...I feel I have to fulfill that because they wouldn't be here unless I made the decision to have them.

She also recognizes that the expectations she has of herself, especially those connected to her mothering and student roles, exert uncomfortable pressures:

I have to sometimes be forced into a way of being easier on myself, lowering or changing my expectations but I have to be driven to do that, I fight it tooth and nail, I fight the feeling that it's not perfect enough. It usually takes a long time for me to come to terms with those changes but once I shift to a different level I'm glad when it happens, I'm much happier.

Conflict

Catherine is able to handle her roles when she is able to deal with each separately:

Normally I can cope with them but when there's one more thing happening than I can deal with...I end up feeling overwhelmed, there's too much going on and I can't do it.

Overlapping role performances, "it's most difficult when I have deadlines, especially if someone gets sick before something's due," affect her emotionally and physically. "There's a lot of guilt in trying to deal with all the different aspects and a lot of anger":

there's no control and I can, at times, get into a real dither. My heart starts beating too fast, my respiration rate goes up, I begin to sweat, the eczema on my hands breaks out, which it's beginning to do now because it's just before exams, and my nails are gone.

When Catherine is faced with major assignments she would "like the time to think...sit down and spend three days in total immersion to work it out. Trying to formulate the ideas, figure out what these assignments are all about, is the hardest for me." Her husband is cooperative and she is usually able to arrange the time to focus in on her studies "he takes over, there's no argument there." Giving herself permission to do this, however, can be a problem. Sometimes she can "simply tell them they'll have to fend for themselves" but other times, she gets feeling "very pressured and very guilty" and has "a minor case of hysterics":

The hysterics aren't necessary I suppose but I feel they are. They're there for my benefit, I've got to yell so that I know that I deserve the time. There's nothing concrete I can show them to demonstrate what I have to do.

Focusing in on her studies is also often a problem:

it's very difficult to keep extraneous material out of my head instead of knowing I can go one thing at a time. I'll suddenly find myself thinking that I have to pick my son up, that my daughter didn't seem well, I wonder if she's okay. That I can't manage my family. It's like being on a carousel, I lose focus and I need to get it back.

And losing her focus invites doubts:

Instead of concentrating and saying this has to be done I'll start thinking the assignment isn't important, I'm not learning anything from it...and I'm thinking I can't do it, a lot of I can't do its, I'm not going to get it done I haven't got the time, I'm not going to do well in it which usually means upper average, I get very perturbed if marks are down around B's. I really get a feeling of panic.

Catherine regrets this reaction. She says, "I spend a lot of time feeling bad about it. I really need to try and slow down, take deep breaths, say meeting deadlines isn't important" then adds, "but I've never been late with an assignment, never."

While she is concentrating on her schoolwork, Catherine is not attending to her children the way she feels she should:

I really veg out and I don't like that. I'm feeling guilty but I just haven't got the energy or don't feel I have the time to do that.

It becomes "hard to be patient, to laugh at every joke." Also, "that play aspect goes right out the window, my willingness to play goes before anything. I feel badly about that, like somehow I should be able to but I just cannot do it."

When the physical contact decreases "we all tend to suffer":

my daughter may not sleep at night. A lot of this is that she's in sympathy with me, when I get more stressed she gets more stressed and I feel bad about that and must spend more time with her, rub her

back until she goes to sleep and try not to develop a sweat over the hours of work waiting. My son floats off, never gets angry, never loses his temper and I worry about what's going on in his mind, what I'm imposing, is this going to give him ulcers in two years? I have to remind myself that he needs to be hugged a lot.

As pressures mount and her attention is directed more and more on her schoolwork Catherine is very aware of letting go of her mothering responsibilities:

I'm saying (to myself) this isn't right, they don't deserve this, they're only going to be at this point once and I'm throwing it away for something that really isn't as important as them but I can't necessarily act on this.

She is feeling "pretty frustrated and very angry." Some of her frustration ends up directed at her children:

and there's more guilt because I don't think it's fair to get angry with them because they haven't done anything. I feel bad when the words come out and I try to catch them. I do a lot of apologizing.

Or directed at her extended family:

and I'm not in a situation where people leap in and say what can I do to help. But to turn around and say please help, I can't do it, is very hard because if I say it then I'll go phewt and it will all fall apart.

Catherine has a very vivid impression of her internal conflict:

The pressures are coming in from all those sides. It's like being a ping pong ball. The minute one thing hits you with a paddle you've got to change direction and then another hits you and you've got to change direction again. When you're constantly being shunted from one area to another you get spinning so fast it's kind of like being in a black hole, it's more and more difficult to pinpoint or focus on what you're there for, you get smaller and smaller.

CHAPTER 4

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question was: How are multiple-role women's expectations of themselves connected to the emotional stress they experience when their roles conflict? According to the experiences of the women interviewed in this study, the answer lay in expectations that were incompatible with each other and incompatible with the behavioural requirements of role conflict situations.

Great Expectations

The women in this study acted and reacted on the basis of personal role expectations. They readily acknowledged that others, family, friends, the media and society, had influenced and helped shape their self-expectations but personal ownership was firmly retained. What they expected of themselves as mothers, as students and as individuals were their "own thing," their "own shoulds coming from inside out" and very much, "what I work with."

All three had high expectations of themselves. As mothers and as students they expected to be and do the best possible. As Jill says, "it tends to level out at this plateau of excellence in everything." They expected to put a great deal of time and energy into both roles and spoke about their dual responsibilities with intensity and deep commitment. Asked if they could give up either role, their responses were unanimous. Giving up the mothering role was laughable, giving up the student role was unthinkable.

Verbalizing their role expectations was a way of expressing who they were and what was important to them. Doing so helped them define how they wished to

see themselves being and acting out crucial parts of their identities. High standards motivated a high level of role performance, "I don't want to look back and say if only you'd put a little more effort into this or that."

For the most part, the student role involved a responsibility to themselves. All were working on degrees to acquire the credentials to start or to change careers. For Jill and Laura as single mothers, these credentials meant substantial benefits for the children, "supporting them decently" and "being a good example." When all three women talked about what it meant to them to be a student, however, it was primarily in self-actualizing terms. Being a student was an important step towards actively taking charge of, and expanding, their lives.

It was also an opportunity to discover and affirm ability and potential. Jill found she has "a good brain" and that she enjoys, and is good at, intellectual work, "something I thought I couldn't do." Catherine "suddenly realized I could put myself into something and I could do it" and "it's a nice feeling." Laura "felt this incredible high." She was able to cope successfully with a challenging stage manager position, "the highest paid job in professional theatre." Consistent with the conclusions of other studies involving mature women students, for the women in this study the process of becoming educated appears to have served "to develop an emerging sense of personal identity...a means to create a new, positive self-image" (Kaplan, 1982).

The mothering role involved a strong responsibility towards the children, "they wouldn't be here unless I made the decision to have them." When the women talked about their parenting expectations it was with an emphasis on their children's emotional and developmental well-being. They were concerned about main-

taining "the quality of my children's childhood" and about shielding them from harm, "I always want her to feel safe and protected." They were also aware of the impact they had on their children's lives, "my actions affect them."

Mothering expectations were seen as obligations, "I live two other people's lives as well as my own" and to require ongoing, attentive participation in the mothering role, "I don't want them ever to feel that they shouldn't take my time." Time was central to their maternal expectations. The quality of their child care was contingent on spending "enough" time "to work with them on their lives and not neglect them."

The women were aware that their expectations were demanding, "they're not very reasonable, they're too high." They also knew they were hard to live up to and "uncomfortable":

Laura: If you set yourself too high an ideal and then you can't meet up with that you're going to feel these things.

Yet, they had a strong reluctance to lower or change them. It was difficult to expect less of themselves:

Catherine: I have to sometimes be forced into a way of being easier on myself but I have to be driven to do that. I fight it tooth and nail.

Jill: I should ease up on myself but I can't. It all seems so important and so pressing that I can't.

The women talked about lowering expectations only in reference to their student role. Mothering could only be improved upon, there was no ceiling imposed on how much they expected themselves to do as mothers. Mothering expectations may have been described as a "super mum syndrome" or "very nebulous" but they were always seen as "strong obligations" and "what I'm trying to live

up to." In contrast, they did talk about a need to modify academic expectations. They tried to place very firm boundaries around the student role and to impose limits on how much time and energy they should spend meeting high academic expectations:

Laura: I'm trying not to do that (expect high marks) so much. If I have to put so much work and time and effort into getting A's maybe it's better to be with (daughter).

There was a strong expectation that academic aspirations should not intrude, "spill over," on to mothering responsibilities, "it can't be harmful to the children, they mean more than the difference between an A and an A+." Compromising academic expectations, however, was not a simple matter:

Catherine: It's a double whammy...even if it has no value for me I still have to make it complete, it still has to meet my criteria because there's that sense of pride involved.

Jill: I wish I could say (to self) how about an A-, like you really don't have to spend this much time or polish it as much as you do but I sit down and write the stupid thing and my own desire to do it properly overrides.

Laura: It's funny though, when I do get an A- I'm disappointed.

Making concessions with regard to important role expectations, however, on occasion became a difficult but necessary aspect of the multiple role lifestyle.

Role Conflict: Confronting and Coping With Conflicting Expectations

Compromise and cooperation between roles became essential strategies as the women's roles began to overlap and conflict. The student role intensified and grew. As academic pressures escalated some of the time normally allocated to

family was gradually shared and then pre-empted by schoolwork. Mothering responsibilities, however, still had to be addressed. They continued to require ongoing, uninterrupted responses, "this is finite but their lives aren't finite." Both roles demanded attention yet attending to both separately, using Catherine's "layer approach," was no longer possible. The women's time and energy were stretched to the limit, "there's a bind, not enough of me to go around." Attending to both at the same time was also impossible, because role expectations conflicted. Undivided, concentrated attention and effort was expected in two opposite directions:

Catherine: I decided if I was going back to school I was going to do it right. It was the same with my children...I've got to meet all the needs and wants of my children...I'd like to spend three days in total immersion to work it (assignment) out.

Laura: I realized there was no sense going back (to school) if I wasn't going to do well. I should apply myself, concentrate and work hard...I should spend as much time with her as I can.

Jill: (school) unless there's some crisis, I should be hardworking, and tenacious, sheer persistence. Just work my tail off!...(children) I should enjoy spending time with them, just be relaxed, the feeling that there's nothing much I have to do and hey, I can play monopoly for four hours.

To move through the conflict without abandoning either role the women established priorities and organized and adjusted their role behaviours to accommodate these choices. Role theorists unanimously endorse the deliberate separation of role performances to avoid or resolve conflict between incompatible roles (Brown, 1965; Myers, 1983; Sarbin, 1954). Ideally this strategy means physically separating the roles by time and space as the women had always tried to do. When this physical separation is not possible, role conflict dilemmas can be resolved by separating the roles psychologically, following the principles of hierarchization

(Sarbin, 1954). Roles are ranked in order of current salience, according to how prominent they are to the individual at a particular time. Role behaviours are then organized and performed sequentially, on the basis of this hierarchy. Inevitably, however, some self-expectations must be sacrificed for the sake of fulfilling others (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

Sacrificing important expectations of themselves, even temporarily, was difficult for the women in this study regardless of which role had priority. Having to let student expectations go produced frustration and, eventually, anger yet letting mothering expectations go meant feeling "dreadfully guilty."

The Process

Establishing role priorities at first did not present a problem. The women already had a role hierarchy. It was assumed that the mothering role would continue to take priority, "rarely will I put the student role above a demand for me to be a mother." Mothering expectations and behaviour would "always override." This was considered "the right thing to do."

As pressure from schoolwork intensified, academic expectations "got even stronger" yet it was difficult for the women to change this accepted organization of role behaviours. Mothering expectations were very resistant to competitive behaviours. Regardless of how strong the pressure was from another role, caring for the children should still come first. "There doesn't seem to be a way emotionally around that because there is no alternative":

Catherine: ...when I get more stressed, she gets more stressed and I feel bad about that and must spend more time with her, rub her back until she goes to sleep and try not to develop a sweat over the hours of work waiting.

Jill: I've got this work to do but no matter how rotten I feel it can't be harmful to the children. I still have to shelve it if it has to be shelved.

The women, however, were anxious about their academic performance. They were concerned about not succeeding, "I'm thinking I can't do it, a lot of I can't do it's, I'm not going to do well," and about facing the consequences, "there's always in the back of my mind that if I let it slide a little a lot of other things depend upon my performance now." Under this strong pressure, acting on maternal expectations and suppressing sensitive academic expectations became "very frustrating":

Jill: My feelings are not in line with what the right thing to do is...I'm doing it because I should do it, because I know I should be a responsible mother...I feel quite angry about it even though I do it.

There was also an expectation to swallow frustration and anger and feelings of remorse if the children "caught the flack for it":

Catherine: ...and there's more guilt because I don't think it's fair to get angry with them because they haven't done anything. I do a lot of apologizing.

If the student role did take priority over mothering the situation was even more painful. Women usually talk about the stress of conflicting roles in terms of their maternal guilt (Gilbert, Holahan & Manning, 1981; Johnson & Johnson, 1977). Consistent with other studies, the women in this study described as "most stressful," role conflict situations which eventually led to unfulfilled mothering expectations. Anxiety and pressure to live up to academic expectations pushed the student role into the foreground to the point that it became, temporarily, most salient in their lives: "Laura: I was obsessive about it...I put a lot of pressure on myself because I wanted to do well...I wanted to prove to myself I could do it."

Schoolwork became "a mind set, a fairly intense kind of thing" and acting on important mothering expectations gradually slipped to second place. The women were no longer able to spend the quantity or quality of time with their children they felt they should. It was no longer possible to focus so attentively on their emotional needs, to feel satisfied that they were giving them "enough energy and mental time to work with them on their lives and not neglect them." Those important mothering expectations, however, were "always there" and not easily sacrificed. They were persistent, "I was feeling guilty so I'd rather not do it very often."

Guilt is said to be the perception of failing to perform a role adequately (Kelly, 1955). When they did not act on their mothering expectations the women in this study experienced this sense of failure, "it makes me mad that I have to fail with them because I don't have enough time." Performing contrary to their expectations was inadequate mothering and believed to be highly inappropriate, "I'm wrong, I know I'm wrong...I should know better but I didn't" and harmful to the children, "I worry about what I'm imposing, will this give him ulcers in two years":

Catherine: I'm saying (to self) this isn't right, they don't deserve this, they're only going to be at this point once and I'm throwing it away for something that isn't really as important as them.

If anything happened to the children while their attention was diverted these beliefs were reinforced and blame readily accepted:

Laura: When I found out about the problems at day care mostly I thought it must be because I hadn't been spending time with her. I was convinced that's what it was.

The Self

When their roles conflicted the women's role behaviours became a series of uncomfortable compromises. What they did was never completely in line with what they expected of themselves. Acting on the expectations of one role meant neglecting important expectation in the other role. Catherine compared herself to a ball in a ping pong game, constantly having to change directions, "and then another hits you and you've got to change directions again." When role pressures "are coming in from all those sides" she says "it's more and more difficult to pinpoint or focus on what you're there for."

During the role conflict experience, personal expectations the women had of themselves as individuals were also endangered. Qualities such as strength, humour, and competency were clearly important to Jill and Catherine. They expected to be able to define themselves in terms of these characteristics. When their roles conflicted and life became hectic, however, they could no longer do this. Laura had a more tentative sense of self and of purpose. She was not completely convinced that her dream, "to do something constructive with my life," was realistic and compatible with "doing what's best" for her daughter. Conflict intensified her fears and added to her lack of confidence. She felt, "predominantly guilt and doubts...the sense of is this all worth it."

All three women talked of times, during and after conflict situations, when they felt depressed and personally diminished. Catherine's imagery is physical, "when you're constantly shunted from one area to another you get spinning so fast it's kind of like being in a black hole, you get smaller and smaller." Laura felt as though spending time on herself was not important anymore, a sensation Jill

described as "the self thing, always dangling on a thread." Jill gets depressed at these times because her "sense of self gets eroded."

I know it's directly related to the sense of who I am and what's important to me and how much I can take before I lose my sense of self worth and that hasn't been permanently lost but it has its really low moments.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summing Up

The women in this study had role expectations which, at times, were conflicting and mutually incompatible. Furthermore, they expected to function, as mothers and as students, at high performance levels and were reluctant to compromise on these standards. When they were able to perform their roles separately, at different times and places, role expectations also remained separate and did not present a problem. Expectations became a significant problem, however, when their roles conflicted.

When their mothering and student roles began to overlap, demanding attention at the same time, Catherine, Jill and Laura were forced to confront and deal with conflicting expectations regarding their role behaviours. It was impossible to act on both systems of expectations simultaneously; they were mutually exclusive. Role behaviours were therefore ranked according to immediate saliency and acted upon sequentially. If a role did not have top priority in this hierarchy then behavioural expectations could not immediately be acted upon. They were sacrificed in favour of meeting those of the other, more primary, role.

This situation created a disparity between the way the women behaved and the way they expected to behave. They readjusted role behaviours as each role became prominent but had difficulty adjusting the strong role expectations they had of themselves to conform to this behaviour pattern. Contrary to the flexibility demanded of the situation, the role expectations attached to the less primary role, particularly those of the mothering role, resisted compromise. They remained

intrusive and difficult to ignore. A role may have been relegated to second place behaviourally but, psychologically, it remained tied for first place. It continued to demand immediate attention and to exert considerable emotional pressure towards meeting these demands. It was very stressful for the women not to be able to act on important self-expectations and this stress was signalled emotionally. When they had to suppress student expectations they felt frustrated and angry. It was even more painful for them not to act on mothering expectations. They felt depressed and very guilty.

The roles had different levels of tolerance regarding neglected expectations. The student role had a higher threshold than the parenting role. Behaving less than expected as a student was relatively more tolerable than behaving less than expected as a mother. Academic expectations were expected to take second place and were deliberately modified to accommodate the mothering role. However, they were only flexible up to the point where it seemed that continuing to do so might jeopardize the student role and all that it represented. Once that point had been reached it was extremely frustrating for the women to continue to behave contrary to their own needs.

The mothering role was far less flexible. It was not expected to respond to another major role much less take second place to it. If mothering expectations were neglected a point of intolerance was reached almost immediately. The women felt guilty. They considered their actions, or non-actions, highly inappropriate and potentially harmful to the children. This reaction supports other studies which report that women who acknowledge placing a nonhome or career role over their family role are significantly more anxious and depressed than women who rate them equally or place family first (Light, 1984).

Judging from the experiences of the women in this study, displacing the mothering role from its customary primary position is stressful even when the situation is only temporary. This is a dilemma which mothers who take on another major role need to consider and prepare for. As Wojciechowski (1982) writes, "it's no easy task to assign the role of mother to second place but, while multiple-role women may not realize it, it is a choice they sometimes have to make."

The other side to the dilemma, however, is the difficulty many women have putting their own needs first. In order to give herself permission to attend to her schoolwork, Catherine said she sometimes has a minor case of hysterics, "so that I know I deserve the time." When Schill, Adams and Ramenaiah (1982) asked two hundred working mothers to write nouns describing themselves the women had difficulty putting "self" roles high on the list. The authors concluded they were unaccustomed to putting personal roles ahead of universally respected female roles.

Role conflict is an inevitable part of the multiple-role lifestyle. In order to accommodate these situations multiple-role women need reasonable role expectations that acknowledge the presence of other important roles and are flexible and resilient enough to occasionally accept a secondary--or primary--position.

Speculations and Implications for Further Research

The results of this study were based on a very small number of multiple role women. Substantiation is needed, of course, with larger and more diverse samples of women. In keeping with the study's exploratory nature, however, there were questions arising from the results which need to be addressed to present a clearer

understanding of the connection between women's self-expectations and the stress they experience when their roles conflict. These are questions which strongly suggest further lines of research.

It would have been useful and enlightening to have also investigated what it meant to the women to expect less of themselves. What practical and, especially, psychological, consequences did they anticipate by not living up to their own expectations of themselves? This area was not included in the interview schedules and therefore never questioned or explored directly with the women. In retrospect, it seems to be an unfortunate omission that might have shed light on several related but confusing issues. For example, why did the women set such high expectations of themselves in two roles that are widely acknowledged to be very demanding? Why, when they were aware that these expectations were high and that they compounded their difficulties, were the women unwilling to adjust these standards? What mediated levels of tolerance, determined the point of intolerance, for each role?

Rapoport & Rapoport (1971,1976) have written extensively on the strains dual role couples encounter. Aspects of their research and conclusions may provide useful parallels for the women in this study and impetus for further, associated research on multiple-role women and their expectations. The Rapoports reported that many individuals they interviewed, males and females, were only able to go a certain way towards establishing and modifying self-directed role behaviours before reaching a point of psychological discomfort the researchers called the Identity Tension Line. A dilemma was observed to arise within the individual about fundamental characteristics of the self. According to the Rapoports

and a colleague, confronting the Identity Tension Line was like saying, "this is as far as I can go in experimenting with new roles and new definitions of my roles without having it spill over into my own psychological sense of self-esteem" (Fogarty, Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976, p. 357).

There may have been similar lines of tension for the women in this study, attached to a preferred identity or a desired concept of self, that helped trigger emotional reactions to unmet role expectations. After interviewing over 500 working mothers, Nevill and Daminco (1978) concluded that the struggle for multiple-role women centers around a self-image and that those areas that touch more directly with this image are more stressful.

It would be reasonable to speculate that the self-concept may have been an underlying issue for the women in this study, an important link in the connection between their expectations, their conflict and their stress. Role expectations are filtered through an individual's self-concept (McCall & Simmons, 1978). and people generally strive to act in ways that are consistent with this view of the self (Lauer & Handel, 1983). The women verify this as they talk about their expectations. Catherine says "I must do them if I am to be a good person" and when Laura senses she is not coming up to what she expects of herself as a mother or a student she feels as though she has let herself down, and thinks less of herself, "I guess it's self worth, your self-esteem goes down."

The women were strongly invested, psychologically, in their roles. As one writer puts it, "the actor usually plays to the hilt only those roles in which his ego is strongly involved" (Turner, 1970, p. 216). Is it possible that holding a positive image of themselves, as nurturing mothers and as self-actualizing students, was

the impetus for creating high and demanding self expectations? Yet, what sustains such high standards in the face of situations such as role conflict that require compromise and flexibility? Self expectations have been called "the empirical gambles on which the individual stakes his self conception" (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 90). They not only motivate behaviour but are also an important frame of reference for evaluating role performances. William James has said that "our self feeling in this world depends entirely on what we BACK ourselves to be and do" (1961, p. 54). Is it also possible that the women resisted altering or letting expectations go, even temporarily, to maintain a positive self concept?

As we have seen from the experiences of Jill, Catherine and Laura, a positive self-concept was one of the unfortunate casualties of their role conflict experiences. They talked about a diminished sense of self and lowered self esteem. It would be an irony if expectations that were designed to build the self-concept also sabotaged it by contributing to its breakdown. This possibility underscores the need for women to examine and clarify the part that expectations play in their role behaviours and in their experience of role conflict.

Implications for Counselling

Each of us is his own most important audience for, unlike other audiences, this one cannot be escaped. In the end, it is ourselves that we have to live with and the role support that we accord ourselves is most important.

McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 71

This study has supported the possibility of a gap between the way women expect to perform in their roles and what is actually possible that becomes emotionally stressful when roles conflict. It is hoped that clarifying this discrepancy

will sensitize counsellors to the need to address the inner processes and conflicts implicit in women's experience of role conflict and also recommend to them the exploration of self-expectations as a feasible way of approaching this need.

Asking women about their self expectations was a fruitful way of exploring inner processes. Because it was a concrete and readily accessible concept with which the women were already familiar, an inward exploration was quickly facilitated. Self expectations also emerged as a concept that was central to their experiences of their roles and their conflict.

By talking about their expectations of themselves, the women in this study were able to verbalize and acknowledge that they had created certain conditions within the context of their roles and that these conditions were important to them. They were also able to verbalize the process by which these conditions were carried through to stressful role conflict experiences; however, due to the limitations imposed by a research situation, they were not able to explore this process. A knowledgeable counsellor would be able to help women complete this exploration and consider possible connections. He or she could help them to assess the effect self expectations may have had on how they approached and evaluated their role performances and also clarified the part self expectations may have played in their inner conflict and emotional stress.

The following section looks at specific steps counsellors can take to help women explore and assess their self expectations. The final section makes general recommendations on how to approach the counselling needs of multiple-role women.

Exploring Self-Expectations

The specific direction and format counselling sessions would take would, of course, depend largely on the woman's ability and readiness to interpret her own situation. Clients will begin with different levels of awareness and needs for safety and vary according to the ease with which they are able to articulate expectations and experiences. Keeping this in mind, the counsellor would be prepared to proceed at the woman's preferred pace and also to facilitate exploration by clarifying, by probing and by asking questions.

Sessions would begin with the woman describing her actions and emotions in typical or current conflict situations, preferably those she acknowledges to be "most stressful emotionally." This beginning allows the woman to tell her own story and also to establish concrete examples of conflict as future points of reference. After successfully conveying an understanding of her experiences, the counsellor can initiate discussion and exploration of her self-expectations. On the basis of this study, responses to questions and subsequent analysis of these responses, three separate but progressive areas of exploration are recommended: the meaning and goals (long term expectations) attached to each role, the immediate expectations of ongoing role behaviours, and the meaning attached to not acting upon or living up to long term and immediate expectations.

1. The meaning and goals (long term expectations) the woman attaches to each of her roles. It is important to establish a personal context for each role. By investigating this area the woman and the counsellor are able to come to a shared understanding of how salient each role is to the woman and what motivates her performances. How committed is she to each role? What are the directions she

expects each role to take, where will her performances lead her, or others? How does each role reflect her beliefs and her view of herself?

2. The woman's immediate expectations towards ongoing role behaviours. It is important to determine what actions and qualities she expects of herself in order to consider her role performance satisfactory and to fulfill long term expectations. Also, is she able to recognize and acknowledge points of satisfaction and, at least partial fulfillment of expectations? If there are expectations that seem too vague or abstract the counsellor can help her clarify and specify them.

When exploring immediate role expectations there are two issues to consider: Compatibility and Realism. Compatibility looks at the cooperation between multiple roles. Has the multi-role concept been adequately addressed and accommodated by each system of role expectations? In other words, is the importance of other major roles acknowledged and have accompanying responsibilities and expectations been taken into consideration?

Realism looks at whether expectations are practical and based on factual assessments of ability, opportunity and valid role requirements. One of the most pervasive and yet difficult tasks for the individual to handle is the persistent gap between self expectations based on an idealized concept of self and the actual course of events (McCall & Simmons, 1978). It is important to bring to light any contradictions between what she believes she should do and what she realistically can do. Such contradictions can result in expectations that are too low and invite feelings of frustration and anger, or can result in expectations that are too high and invite feelings of failure and discouragement. For many women the former may apply to nonhome roles and the latter to domestic roles. The mothering role,

for example, is particularly susceptible to unrealistic self-expectations that are frequently found to be more demanding than the expectations or needs of the children involved (Gilbert, Holahan & Manning, 1981).

3. The meaning the woman attaches to not acting upon or not living up to immediate and long term expectations. To understand the strength of the woman's self-expectations, the extent to which they will affect her actions, her thoughts and her emotions, this area of exploration is vital. It was not part of the interview schedule for this study. As a result of this omission a clear picture of the nature and function of the women's expectations did not completely emerge. All three women made spontaneous allusions to their own impression of what it meant to them not to act in expected ways but this was not followed up. The consequences they implied seemed connected to a deep sense of self, to the self-concept. This apparent connection lacked clarity and specificity, however, and thus could only be speculated upon.

Exploring the significance of unmet expectations has strong implications for role conflict situations. Two key issues must therefore be considered as it is explored: Flexibility and Objectivity. The importance of flexibility has been emphasized in this study. It is essential that multiple-role women have role expectations that are not rigid but can allow for times, such as role conflict situations, when it becomes necessary to compromise. Maintaining a flexible attitude towards role performances contributes to the successful management of multiple roles. Women who were rated as best able to cope with both career and family responsibilities accepted the fact that at certain times they could not do everything well (Gray, 1983), demonstrated a high degree of ability to tolerate ambigui-

ty and weakness in themselves (Robinson, 1982), and could decide which role would dominate at a particular point and then forget one while involved in the other (Paloma, 1972). The women in this study did not seem able to consider or accept, without strain, courses of action that deviated from their high mothering expectations. How willingly does the client entertain alternatives? Can the expectations of each role be consciously modified to adjust to an increase in pressure from another role?

It is also important that the woman is able to be objective about her role performances. Scarato and Sigall (1979) point out that multiple-role women often must learn to attribute sources of problems to characteristics inherent in their situations and not to personal inadequacy. Is she able to give herself realistic feedback and evaluate her actions on the basis of this reality? Multiple-role women must also learn to accept occasional interruptions in routine and unfulfilled expectations as inevitable (Scarato & Sigall). Are interruptions and unfulfilled expectations an inevitable part of multiple roles and role conflict for her or do they pose a serious threat? Do they have an impact on how she assesses her role performances--or herself?

Approaching the Counselling Needs of Multiple-Role Women

Alexandra Symonds (1979), psychiatrist, researcher and author, has made the observation that the women she has treated and studied excelled in supporting others' growth but did not appear to have the same sense of entitlement when it came to their own personal growth. This appeared to be true of Laura, Jill and

Catherine. They were women who valued growth and development. It was important to them to continually nurture their children in a way that fostered and promoted these values, to help them develop and grow physically, emotionally and spiritually. It was more difficult for them to do the same for themselves. When their roles conflicted their sense of confidence, and entitlement, was challenged and shaken. It was important for them to act upon their values in both their roles yet difficult and discouraging to try to maintain this balance and not sacrifice their own needs. Helping multiple-role women to create and maintain this balance requires an understanding of their dilemma and a knowledgeable approach to their needs.

Counsellors must first examine their own values about women's roles and have bias-free attitudes. Society has repeatedly defined women's roles primarily in terms of the bearing and nurturing of children. Consequently, the shoulds a multiple-role woman carries with her about how women ought to be or feel are often the source of guilt feelings as she tries to make her own choices (Scarato & Sigall, 1979). It would be valuable to assist the woman to explore and clarify the effect of such issues as traditional assumptions and myths about appropriate female role behaviours on her perceptions. It would be important, however, to do so without implying endorsement of stereotypical sex-typed attitudes. On the other hand, mothering has been, and will continue to be, an extremely important aspect of the female experience. The counsellor should also be prepared to share with her in considering family roles an important and vital part of her identity. This balanced viewpoint would facilitate the fullest possible range of choices and alternatives.

Secondly, conflict should be presented as a healthy though painful part of personal growth and not as a sign of failure (Scarato & Sigall, 1979). Paloma (1972) has concluded that women who successfully combine motherhood with a career have a favourable definition of multiple roles and conflict situations. It is important that counsellors bring with them an optimistic attitude towards integrating multiple roles and are able to view role conflict as a valuable part of the learning process.

Finally, counsellors should be prepared to create an atmosphere that is both encouraging and enabling. Providing this environment means offering the woman a delicate balance of support and challenge to restore and reinforce a belief in herself and in her ability to take control of her own life. Positive feedback is vital as the multiple-role woman attempts to implement new behaviours and new ways of coping with her roles (Wojciechowski, 1982). Often, however, this emotional support from others is noticeably absent from their support structures. They are frequently without a social network or readily accessible reference group (Scarato & Sigall, 1979). All three women in this study considered social isolation a major problem:

Laura: I feel alienated...the thing I really miss the most is having a really close woman friend to talk to.

Catherine: It's very much like living in a no man's land. You need support systems or groups, just to meet other women in the same boat.

Jill: It's so important to hear about others' experiences, just finding other people even if it's only for five minutes. It makes you feel so good to find out that what you or your children are doing is par for the course and so what.

Counsellors are in the position to supply this needed supportive contact. Even more valuable, counsellors can help the women develop the critically important ability to become self-nurturing and self-supporting.

By encouraging the multiple-role woman to acknowledge her strengths and accomplishments, by helping her to explore and clarify her goals and expectations and the part they may play in the way she experiences her role and her conflict, and, especially, by respecting her ability and need to govern her own life, counsellors can help her grow. They can help her reach a point where she can make choices and changes based on her own individuality with implications she can fully understand and accept.

It is said that, as women who are at the forefront of social transition, multiple-role women face the long and arduous process of role redefinition and image reconciliation (Wojciechowski, 1982). The counsellor can help facilitate this process but, ultimately, it is the individual woman who must reconcile imagery with reality.

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APPENDIX A

INITIAL REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

My name is Susan Bryant and I am a Master's student in Counselling Psychology here at the University.

Under the supervision of Dr. Geoff Hett of the Department of Psychological Foundations, I am presently working on a thesis in the area of role conflict in women who juggle commitments to the mothering and student roles. I'd like to reach a deeper understanding of this issue to present to counsellors so that they can be in a better position to help women who come to them for help. As a mother of three sons, the youngest attended UVic Kindergarten last year, and a counsellor, I am aware of the pressures from the two roles and recognize the need for more complete information in order to deliver better counselling service.

Would you be interested in sharing your experience with me? If you are a full-time student at UVic and presently feeling the pressures of being a student and mother at the same time I'd like to explore the issue together. Your participation would involve taking part in two interviews, one hour and two hours respectively, scheduled, at your convenience, within the next month.

All our conversations will be held in the strictest confidence and your name will NOT be associated with any of the information you give to me. As a volunteer you are at liberty to omit any question you do not wish to answer and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without reason. The results of this study will be made available to you upon completion.

If you are interested please put your name and phone number at the bottom of this letter and I will contact you to talk about your participation and to arrange a meeting time and place. If you have any questions before signing up I can be reached at home at 598-2961 and would be happy to discuss this further.

Thank you for your consideration.

Susan Bryant

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

In this study I am interested in women's experience of combining the roles of full-time student and mother. You are asked to participate in two audio-taped interviews with the researcher, Susan Bryant. The first interview will last approximately one hour and the second interview, one week later, approximately two hours.

You will be asked about your perceptions and general experiences only. None of the questions are designed to cause discomfort, nor are they harmful in any way. Nonetheless, if you wish, you may withdraw from the study at any time. The information you contribute will be given anonymously and at no time will your name be attached to recorded and printed data. If you wish you can adopt a pseudonym.

Audio tapes containing recorded interviews will be erased at the completion of the study. Should you be interested, you may request a copy of the written results of this study. AT the end of both interviews the researcher will answer any specific questions you may have about the study and, if you wish it, help you to secure counselling assistance from University Counselling Services to deal with any problems arising from your role conflict experiences.

* * * * *

I hereby agree to cooperate and participate in this research project. I acknowledge that the researcher has informed me about my participation and that the nature of my participation has been fully explained to me. Should my participation in this project be altered in any way, I will be duly informed by the researcher of the changes. I understand that I have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCREENING INTERVIEW

Name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Age: _____ No of Children: _____

Ages/Sex: _____

Married/Single: _____ How long married: _____

How long single: _____

Extended Family: _____

Family in Town: _____

Family Support:

Immediate: _____

Extended: _____

Year/Program: _____

How well doing: _____

When finished: _____

Career plans/grad. school _____

How long worked: _____ As mother: _____

At present, any crisis or unusual circumstances other than being student/mother:

When you are juggling the different obligations attached to being a mother and being a student:

How often do you experience conflict between the two roles?

All the Time Very Often Sometimes Hardly Ever Never

Generally, how stressful to you is this conflict?

Extremely Stressful Somewhat Stressful Mildly Stressful No Stress

Please rate the following in terms of how much you feel they influence the stress you experience when your roles conflict. On each line mark an H (High Influence), an L (Low Influence) or an N (No Influence).

Time _____

Others' Support _____

Energy _____

Self-Confidence _____

Money _____

Expectations:

Guilt _____

- of others _____

- of self _____

APPENDIX D

SCHEDULE FOR FIRST INTERVIEW

Themes

1. Meaning and importance of student role.
2. Meaning and importance of mother role.
3. Specific examples of most stressful role conflict situations.

Suggested Questions/Approaches

1. and 2. Can you tell me what it means to you to be...?
Long term goals.
Ever considered giving up this role?
3. I'd like to hear about the times when being both mother and student conflict.
Are there some situations that are more stressful to you than others? What happens?

APPENDIX E

SCHEDULE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW

The first time we met you indicated (on the verbal questionnaire) that the expectations you had of yourself had a high influence on the stress you experience when there's conflict between your mothering and student roles. I'd like to hear more about that. This interview will look at your self-expectations for your roles and yourself as an individual.

Themes

1. Definition of self expectations.
2. Student self expectations.
3. Mothering self expectations.
4. Individual self expectations.
5. Re-experience role conflict situation(s).
6. Overall impressions of situation(s).
7. Further additions/questions.

Suggested Questions/Approaches

1. When you talk about the expectations you have for yourself can you generally define for me what this term means to you?
- 2., 3., and 4.
 - Tell me about the expectations you have for yourself as... (include and differentiate actions/qualities/obligations).
 - Do you have an idea of where these expectations came from?

- Picture/concept of ideal...? (actions/qualities) ever compared self to this picture/concept? If do, what happens?

5. (After asking participant to become comfortable, relax)

- During our last interview you told me about times when your different roles typically conflicted and you found it most stressful to try to be both mother and student. I'd like you to choose one of those situations.
- I'm going to ask you to describe that situation to me, to tell me what's happening inside you, in your mind, what you're saying to yourself and what you're feeling.
- What I'd like you to do is to try to put yourself back into this situation, not like looking at a picture but actually feeling the sensations, the thoughts and the feelings of that moment...close your eyes if you like, take your time.
- Some of what we talk about may seem a little repetitious, like we're covering the same ground over again, bear with it and try to add to experience if you can.

(After reviewing selected conflict situation generally but briefly:)

- As a (mother/student) you've said you expect to..., anything else? Are you still aware of these expectations? What's happening to them? What are you saying to yourself? What are you feeling?

6. Do you have a general impression of what it is like to juggle different roles, to experience the conflict you've described?

7. Is there anything you'd like to add about your experiences of having multiple-roles/of role conflict that we haven't talked about?

- Are there any questions you'd like to ask me about this study?

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Title of Thesis:

**THE "SHOULD'S" OF MULTIPLE-ROLE WOMEN: EXPLORING
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS ABOUT SELF
AND EMOTIONAL STRESS WHEN ROLES CONFLICT.**

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