Staying home: An ethnography of full-time housewives

Janice Levinsohn Milner

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STAYING HOME:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF FULL-TIME HOUSEWIVES

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This is an interview study of twenty middle class, full-time housewives between twenty seven and thirty eight years old, each with at least one pre-school age child at home. Each housewife was questioned about her career goals, college education, work history, transition from working to staying home, daily life as a housewife and plans for the future in order to draw a multi-dimensional portrait of contemporary housewives. Earlier ethnographies of housewives pre-date the current women's movement. This study provides an updated ethnography which takes account of the women's movement, current economic conditions and the contemporary emphasis on self-realization.

This study was conducted within the framework of qualitative sociology. A snowball sample was employed. Each interview lasted sixty to ninety minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The verbatim transcripts of the interviews constituted the primary research data.

It was found that the role of "housewife" has become devalued, but the role of "mother" has not. Motherhood is viewed as a vocation or calling. Women stay home full-time because they believe that children will not reach their full potential under the care of babysitters or day care centers. Further, it was found that once women leave their jobs to stay home full-time they take on all of the responsibilities of housework and household management. Although most young housewives do not intend to remain at home once their children are in school, a set of constraints develops during their years at home which makes it difficult to re-enter the work force. Because of their responsibilities for home and children, many women hope to find an "invisible job" which will be part-time, conform to the hours children are at school, and be neither too high-pressure nor too demanding.
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I would like to thank my informants for allowing me to come into their homes and interview them. My advisor, Professor Jon Driessen, helped me to get going on this project by insisting that I stop reading and "go out and get an interview." The other members of my committee, Professors Roy Anderson and Mary Birch, offered helpful suggestions on a draft of this thesis. Special thanks to Anita Wilson for many discussions and for much time spent editing drafts. Joanne Oreskovich commented on drafts, from proposal to final copy, and was a wonderful transcriptionist. Mary Trankel is a fast, accurate typist. The faculty and graduate students at the University of Montana supported me throughout my graduate career. I am grateful to them. And very special thanks to Kathy Solberg, Roseann Lloyd, Liz and Debby, and to my husband, Kelsey Milner, and my children, Laura Dawn and Elizabeth Dorothy, for their comfort and support.
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STAYING HOME: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF FULL-TIME HOUSEWIVES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Why, in the 1980's, when the majority of American women are in the work force, do some women stay home? Who are they? What is the quality of their lives at home? How long do they intend to stay home? What will they do next? These were the guiding questions for interviews with twenty full-time housewives at home with young children. Their educational backgrounds and work histories, typical daily activities, attitudes toward motherhood and childrearing and plans for the future were explored in order to draw a multidimensional portrait of full-time housewives.

As Eshleman (1980) points out, housewives have been neglected by sociology as central subjects for research. Iglehart (1980:328) notes, "Studies of working wives are proliferating, but little is being written or studied concerning the qualitative existence of housewives." Within the older tradition in the sociology of the family, the research emphasis has been, following Parsons, on a comparison of the housewife's "expressive" role within the family to the male's "instrumental" role in the outside world of work. This functionalist analysis, developed during the post World War II era when homemaking was considered a woman's primary career, postulated the necessity of the two complementary roles to the well-being of the family. As women have entered the labor force in increasing numbers, driven by both economic
necessity and a desire for self-fulfillment outside the home, this doctrine of separate spheres has fallen into disfavor.

Turning to the sociology of work, we find that housewives have been considered problematic. The role of housewife, as Lopata (1971:139) notes:

lacks the basic criteria of most jobs. It has no organized social circle which judges performance and has the right to fire for incompetence, no specific pay scale, and no measurement against other performers of the same role or against circle members. It is vague, open to any woman who gets married, regardless of ability; it has no union and belongs to no organizational structure.

Nevertheless, as Caplow (1954) observes, the work that housewives do, the cooking, cleaning, sewing, decorating, and child care, would be considered "real work" if done outside the home for pay. However, because their work is done inside the privacy of the home, and because they do not work for pay, qualitative studies of workers include few studies of housewives.

Most studies in which housewives do figure\(^1\) have focused on a specific aspect of the role of housewife -- either housework, such as time-budget studies (Walker, 1969; Vanek, 1974), the conflict between housework and childcare (Olson, 1979); the mental health of full-time housewives (Bart, 1979) or their overall satisfaction with this role (Townsend and Gurin, 1981).

\(^1\)See Nona Glazer-Malbin's review essay, "Housework," in *Signs*, Summer, 1976, Vol. 1, No. 4, for a discussion of the different approaches to studying housework.
Helena Z. Lopata's, *Occupation: Housewife* (1971), was the first comprehensive study of American housewives from the perspective of housewives as occupants of social roles. Lopata explored the ways in which housewives from a variety of racial, ethnic, educational and social class backgrounds experience this role over the life cycle. Among other topics, she questioned housewives about their interaction with husband, children and neighbors, how they and their families divided household labor and how they perceived both doing housework and being housewives.

A second study of the social role of housewife is Ann Oakley's *The Sociology of Housework* (1974). Although she intended to limit her study to interviews about housewives' experiences of housework as work, she discovered that it is difficult to separate housework from childcare and the other activities that comprise a housewife's day. Therefore, Oakley presents a detailed picture, though less comprehensive than Lopata's, of how her sample of British housewives experienced this role.

Although both Lopata's and Oakley's work are valuable and often cited, they are becoming less applicable to an analysis of housewives today. The interviews for Lopata's study were conducted during the late 1950's and early 1960's, thus pre-dating the current women's movement. Although some of the women she interviewed worked outside the home and others planned to work in the future, most continued to define themselves primarily as housewives and to express an "inside" identity (Lopata, 1966:124).

In addition to pre-dating the women's movement, there are other differences between the American and British housewives. The British
women Oakley interviewed lived in greater social isolation than did the American housewives, although they maintained closer ties with their mothers and sisters. They also had fewer of the cars and appliances that middle-class American housewives take for granted.

A contemporary study which focuses on American housewives, and which takes account of the women's movement, is Lillian B. Rubin's *Women of a Certain Age* (1979). Rubin interviewed mid-life women about their "search for self" as their children leave home. The housewives in my study are ten to twenty years younger than those in Rubin's study, but her study allows for fruitful comparisons with a younger generation of housewives who feel the pressure to find something for themselves in addition to raising children long before their children leave home.

The objective for this research is to provide an updated ethnography of full-time housewives which takes account of the women's movement's emphasis on employment as the means to self-fulfillment, women's increasing educational and work histories prior to marriage and childbirth, the declining birth rate, and an economy which makes it difficult to live as a single-income family.

Given these factors, a housewife today performs this role in a social milieu which is greatly changed from that of the post World War II years when most middle-class women expected to stay home to care for large families. In 1960 only 37.8% of women were in the labor force;

\[\text{2 See Chapter Five for a full discussion of the ethnographic procedures employed in this study.}\]
the labor force participation rate for married women with pre-school age children was 18.6%. By 1982, 52.7% of women were in the labor force, 47.8% of women with pre-school children, and over 59% of mothers whose children were between six and seventeen (U.S. Department of Labor).

It is clear that today the role of full-time housewife is not necessarily one that will occupy a woman throughout her life cycle. With the awareness of a shortened child bearing and child rearing period, a housewife may find her primary role truncated and less satisfying relatively early in life. Given the present preoccupation with self-discovery and self-fulfillment, she may begin a "search for self" at a younger age. If this search involves finding outside work, it brings with it such problems as arranging for after-school care for children and involving husbands in household duties. This "search for self" is one of the topics taken up in this ethnography. Other topics are the educational goals and work histories of this group of housewives prior to marriage, the transition from worker to full-time housewife, daily life at home and the notion of motherhood as a full-time job.

Because housewives work at home, outside the public's view, most people would be unable to give a reliable account of a housewife's daily activities. Yet, as common television and comic strip figures, housewives are often stereotypically portrayed as being obsessed with shopping and white washes. Together, the lack of research and the common stereotypes about housewives create a situation in which, as Oakley (1974:91) says, "Everybody in a sense knows what being a housewife is like and in another sense nobody knows." This study was
undertaken to add to the body of knowledge about those women who answered the question, "Do you work?", with "No, I stay home."
CHAPTER II:  THE SAMPLE

There are, of course, full-time housewives of every age, social class and ethnic background, with a full-range of academic and work histories prior to becoming housewives. This study is of a group of housewives chosen because they are part of, in the words of one of the women interviewed, a "transition generation". Their life stories provide a way to examine the impact of rapidly changing norms about men's and women's roles. Raised by the full-time housewives of the 1950's, they were part of the baby boom generation of women who graduated from college in unprecedented numbers and expected to have careers. They also expected to marry and raise children. As they matured, went to college, married and had children, national debates raged over "woman's place", the role of career in men's and women's lives and the proper way to raise children. Understanding how these changing social forces have affected this generation of women can aid in the overall understanding of how "what is out there" is realized in everyday life.

The twenty housewives in this sample share certain characteristics. They are white, middle class women who went to college, married near the end or shortly after graduating college, worked prior to the birth of their first child, and then entered into a period of staying home that has lasted from three to fourteen years. At the time of the interviews, none of the women worked or attended school full-time or held a regular part-time job. They refer to themselves as full-time housewives, or as mothers who stay home.
Their husbands work full-time in relatively well-paid careers. Although many of the women mention that their families do without such extras as second cars, trips and eating out, all of the families are able to live on one income. As long as they remain married and their husbands are able to work these women will not be forced to go to work.

These housewives range in age from twenty seven to thirty eight, with three in their 20's. They have been married from six to fifteen years. (Two are in second marriages with relatively short periods of time between marriages.) Three have one child; three have three children and the rest have two children each. Only two women are considering having another child. Most attend church regularly; four are Catholics, the rest, Protestants.

All but four graduated from college; two have M.A. degrees. (In contrast, at least thirteen of their husbands have either M.A. or Ph.D. degrees or professional training as either doctors, dentists, or lawyers.) Ten of the women are teachers, nine at the elementary level. The others majored in home economics, nursing, art history, speech pathology, sociology and business.

As a group, these women were family rather than career oriented. Five were in high school when they met their future husbands; the rest met their husbands in college. They entered traditionally female occupations which offered them the mobility to follow their husbands' career paths and, in their words, "something to fall back on". They worked to put their husbands through post-graduate training, and then, as their husbands moved into the labor force, they quit their jobs to stay home and raise children.
The women enjoy being at home with their children, but their families are complete and they will still be quite young when all of their children are in school. Most are beginning to think about what to do next. Many feel that they have never found what it is they really want to do and they don't know how to go about finding out. What follows is their story.
CHAPTER III: THE STORY

Part 1: "A Female Dilemma"

While they were in college, these women came to terms with what is a female dilemma, the conflict between family and career. Men expect to have full-time, continuous careers and to have families. However, because childrearing is assigned to women, women's lives, including their work lives, are characterized by major discontinuities. These women did not make career commitments that would be incompatible with the responsibilities of raising children. When they were quite young, and long before they had children, they sensed that it would be difficult to have both family and career. They felt they had to choose between them.

I think originally when I was a young girl I wanted to be a fashion designer. I wanted to take French and do something pretty sophisticated. I decided that if you're going to have a family that's too nebulous. So I decided on home economics.

I graduated college in Minnesota. I actually transferred my final year. I got married. I think at that point, I don't know if it's typically a female dilemma, but my goals became less clear. I found myself interested in family and children. I wanted a family and children. So I was prepared to follow my husband, to pursue his career and his ambitions, so that I could have my family and have a husband who was happy with his work. That seemed more important to me at that point.

When asked to talk about their college experiences, because "so much has happened since then," many had trouble remembering why they had chosen a particular college major.
So my career started out I was going to be a social worker and I got into sociology. I should have gone into social work, and I can't remember why I got a degree in sociology. I really can't.

I can't remember. I really can't remember. I don't think I aspired to be a teacher and that's why I didn't get a teaching credential then. I don't know what I thought I'd do with an English degree.

However, although they could not recall having definite career goals, only four did not graduate from college. One left school to care for her mother:

I had two quarters left and my mother had gotten quite ill and my father had died. So at that point I quit school and went to work and took care of her. And then I got married.

Another transferred to a new college but was lonely there:

By the time I transferred Jim and I were engaged. So there was a lot of riding back and forth, about 150 miles each way. And I didn't know anyone at the new school and I was terribly lonesome and thought maybe I should just be working and saving for my wedding.

To follow their husbands to graduate school, two left college after their marriages. For them, as well as for the two others who did not finish college, marriage meant the end of their college careers.

I went to college two years. I was studying English with plans to teach. And then I got married. It wasn't hard to quit school. I mean here I was getting married and all excited about that.

Few thought of going to graduate school. Over half became teachers, partly because teaching was professional work that one could do with a B.A. degree.

I started out in math because I enjoyed math and I'd been good at it in high school. I had a lot of trouble with it in college. So I decided if it was going to be this difficult for me to understand it maybe it wasn't for me. And then I changed to social psychology and I really enjoyed the
classes. I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do with it, and when my advisor informed me that if I didn't have a doctorate I wouldn't be able to do anything with it, I sort of abandoned that field. And that is when I went into elementary ed.

Because they were pursuing their husbands' careers, they often found themselves in places where they could not use their academic training. Marriage steered this woman from graduate school. Then, when her husband went back to school, she "ended up" teaching grade school.

I had a degree in art history and studio art. I was interested in museum work but I got married right away. It was sort of understood you needed graduate training to do that. And then when my husband wanted to get his Ph.D. we moved. I taught grade school for a couple of years.

This woman, who has an M.A. degree, found herself in a town where she was unable to use her degree. She also "ended up" teaching.

I majored in psychology. I was really interested in working with kids, but I didn't necessarily want to teach. So I went to grad school in child development. I ended up teaching kindergarten. Well, that was basically what I wanted to do, work with young kids.

Toward the end of college, or shortly after graduation, they got married. Their husbands had several years of training ahead of them, and the wives went to work to put them through school. They had no trouble finding jobs wherever their husbands' developing careers led them. Because they were working to help their husbands, they considered his successes joint accomplishments.

If I weren't connected to him, if we weren't married I would not be so comfortable staying home and just feeling good about what he does. Just the fact that he's a doctor and helps a lot of people makes me feel good too. And if I weren't associated with him I guess I would feel even more of a need to contribute to the social structure on my own. But now it's like vicariously experiencing what he's doing. The family unit, at least one of us, is doing something that is to be applauded. And I worked. I helped get him through school.
I taught while he finished his master's. Then we moved to Wisconsin to get Mark's Ph.D.

As husbands completed professional training and began their first jobs, wives left their jobs and turned their attention to starting families. Working lives over, they were about to become full-time housewives.
Part 2: "A Real Change In Our Lives"

For several years both husbands and wives left home for work each morning. The couples ate out frequently and shared many household chores. But as the women left their jobs to become full-time housewives, there would be many adjustments in their lives. As one woman said, "So then I had to deal with a new baby, a new town, husband with a new job, staying home and not working. A real change in our lives."

Many of the women got pregnant shortly after their husbands finished school and went to work. Although they were looking forward to having children it was not always easy for them to leave work.

The last couple months before I quit teaching I kept thinking, this is real sad to pack something away and know it's not going to be used for ten years or so.

I was concerned about staying home full-time with an infant. I was wondering if I could do it. But I always knew that I would not work when I had an infant. But just to come down to the nitty gritty of writing the resignation and making it final was real hard for me. I didn't turn in my resignation until about two days before she was born.

For those who quit work several months before their babies were born, the transition time was lonely. Before the baby arrived, signalling the start of their new careers as mothers, they were at a loss to know what to do with their time.

Then in December we moved here for my husband's job and I was six months pregnant. That sort of halted my graduate schooling for a while because we didn't have enough money for me to go back to school then anyway, and they didn't have the same program here. And so I just stopped. That was really strange for me to move here from there because we'd
bought a house there and were fixing it up and I was going to school and working full-time and then we moved here and I was doing nothing. There were three months before the baby was due. I just about went crazy. All I did was sleep. I checked out library books and read a lot and slept.

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When we moved to Florida for Dan's job I was just pregnant. I didn't bother to find any work when I found out I was pregnant. I didn't feel like I could go out and get a job and then quit in a few months. But I was really bored because I'd been working for two years. Then day after day with nothing before she was born. Those seven months before she was born were bad.

For them, having a baby did not mean a brief hiatus in employment because they all assumed that they would stay home with their children for an indefinite period of time.

My mother stayed home with me. There was never really any question as to whether I'd stay home. It wasn't a big decision -- Shall I stay home or continue to work?

======

I've always felt that if you have children it's your responsibility to take care of them and to raise them.

However, they were aware that many more women with young children are working and that times have changed since the 1950's when the majority of American women were at home.

I guess in my generation, you know my mother stayed home and it seemed like I got caught in the transition. So while I was ready to have my day at home in the neighborhood with kids women were moving out. So I feel like I got caught. But I still wanted to stay home.

One woman found that moving to a new town made it easier to make the transition to staying home. She left her working self behind and took up her new identity as a full-time housewife in a new place.
You know I've often been really glad that it worked out this way. Because when we were in Seattle the only people we knew were couples with no children. The majority of our friends were working couples. And if I had stayed home there I think I would have been really lonely. I would have been wondering what are they doing at work today. But being forced to move, getting in a new situation, I had to look for new friends, too.

One of the major difficulties in adjusting to staying home is that work in the outside world is characterized by structure and routine to which workers conform and become accustomed. Work at home, however, can be performed in a variety of ways according to the discretion of each individual housewife. It can be difficult to create a schedule for yourself when "no one is expecting you at nine o'clock."

It was hard to go from working to staying home. I think that is because all my friends were working. I felt really alone. It took me months to get to know people who were around in the morning. And also, I like to have a schedule. I like to feel like I get things done during the day and it's hard to create that for myself.

After Kate was born and I was home I almost went nuts. I missed the office. I missed feeling that I was really needed. How much loving can an infant give you? You don't get anything in return. I made a lot of lists. What to do today? Let's see -- clean this, do that. I lived by lists. I lived by the radio for input. I felt really isolated. And I felt bad a lot of the time. It wasn't a question of getting out for lunch with someone or going to a movie. It wasn't that at all. It was the question of the day to day ego building that you get from being in an office. You have to be someplace. Someone is expecting you at nine o'clock in the morning. They're counting on you. Did Kate count on me? Maybe to change her diapers. But no one knew where I was or who I was. I didn't like going out in the middle of the day. I felt like I didn't belong there.

In addition to isolation and learning how to structure their days, they had to adjust to the limitations on freedom of movement that come with full-time child care.
Well I think I had an adjustment problem due to the switch from working to being a full-time parent. All of a sudden if I wanted to go across the street and have a cup of tea because I could see my friends there, I couldn't go. My child would be asleep, and who in their right mind would wake a sleeping baby? It took me a long time to adjust to the twenty four hour responsibility of an infant. I noticed I was really crabby on weekends ... all of a sudden it was the same routine on weekends that it was during the week.

========

After the baby was born we moved to a small town where I was home all the time. It is a very tiny community -- about 500 people -- and I was shut up there an awful lot. And I hated it. There wasn't anything to do. We didn't know anybody. I couldn't even go to the store to get material. It was too confining. I didn't like being in a tiny town where there is nothing to do and you are home all the time.

To cope with the sense of isolation, they reached out to find other women who shared the same experience.

If you don't find others who are at home you lose the support system which you really need. If you feel like you're alone in this it's terrible. Because women aren't home at every house, you've got to make an effort to reach out to where they are with other children and get involved with them.

They joined Newcomers' Club, babysitting cooperatives and church study groups. In their neighborhoods, they found women who were also at home.

I had a lot of real close friends at work. Basically I just lost contact with them after the baby was about four weeks old. If you don't see people like that daily, you don't go out to lunch with them, you just sort of get away from them. But there were about four or five women right in this neighborhood within three blocks who had had children within four months of each other. So we had a super support system.

In addition to finding new friends and joining new groups, the transition to staying home was accomplished by approaching motherhood as a career and imposing rigid standards of performance on it. The work of raising children took the place of work outside the home and provided a
structure and rhythm to their days. Many of these women had worked with children in institutional settings such as schools and hospitals where they had charted and evaluated their progress. As one woman said about her approach to raising her own children, "It was like I changed jobs ...

I really enjoyed teaching. I loved working with the kids ... And I found myself really hurting putting so much energy into other peoples' kids because I wanted children of my own. I thought, my God, all this time I'm pumping into this little person and I'm never going to see him again. As much as I enjoyed teaching, I wanted to get into my own kids.

I just read everything there was about infant stimulation. It was like I changed jobs and I read up on how to stimulate infants. I think in retrospect I treated it like a job. Part of it is being a nurse and working in that field. I charted every milestone.

I felt like it was exciting to have a baby and if I hired someone to take care of her I would be the one missing out on all those neat little firsts -- first word, first step, all the development. I wanted to see how she developed, since I am in the field of child development. I wanted to keep an eye on her and watch what she was doing.

Following a period of transition, then, they settled into a busy routine that included housework, childcare, meetings and volunteer work. As one woman said:

As soon as I adjusted and got my own act together, what I'm going to do if I'm not at work, I felt like I didn't have time to do all that I wanted to do.
Part 3: "It's Been Very Busy"

Although they have successfully made the transition from working to staying home, it can be difficult for a college-educated, contemporary woman to call herself a housewife.

When I first stayed home I wanted desperately to write in "former public health nurse" on the tax forms. That's really where my identity was. When people would ask me, "Do you work?", I'd say, "Well, I used to be a public health nurse." It's how you can rate people in the world, as opposed to being a waitress for example.

They worry about what other people think of housewives.

I know that when people think well the mother is home all day that she's actually home all day and sitting there watching soap operas. But I don't think I've ever sat down and watched a soap opera.

They worry that they will be "dismissed" because they don't work.

There have been times when I would really feel like -- What am I doing? Mostly when we'd go back and visit families and go to parties. And people would say, "What do you do?" Some of the comments I heard from people were -- Oh, she's just a mother. My husband's brother made a comment about a woman he was talking to -- Oh, her, I talked to her and all she could talk about was babies. That made me wonder if that's what they say about me. I think I went through some real feelings of low self-esteem because I wasn't visibly doing anything.

To be "visibly doing something" is very important to them. As one woman said about herself and her friends:

I work pretty hard ... I don't have any picture of people sitting down watching soaps, reading books by themselves, anything like that. They're either involved with their children or they're keeping the house going.

Because they have gone to college and worked for several years, they are accustomed to "producing." It is important to have "something to show" for their work.
I sew a lot. I did a big stitchery project and got it off to my sister. I've got another one to start. I haven't been reading much. I get tired of just lying there reading. I feel less like I'm getting something done with my time, whereas if I'm sewing I've got something to show for my work.

A well-decorated, clean house is another visible product of their labors. Now that they are at home, housework is their job. Even those whose family incomes would allow for hired household help do the work themselves -- "I feel that since I'm not working why can't I do all the housework myself?" In this new division of labor, husbands become occasional household "helpers" who do some of the outside work and the work on the cars. They are not asked to do chores they don't like to do, because housework is part of the wife's expected duties.

When I quit work and was no longer bringing in money I think I felt a need to compensate for that. Before that, housework was shared. He doesn't do nearly as much of that now, in fact hardly any of it. And I think a lot of it was really my attitude. I'm not doing anything to bring in money so I want to really spiff up my act here at home. If he did the housework I would feel like he was doing my job and saying that I was not doing my job.

In fact, the wives are often amused by their husbands' incompetence at tasks they do well.

One Saturday I was gone for the whole day and evening, so I was really curious about what he was going to do all day. Like for lunch -- if I'm not here he piddles around the kitchen for an hour and the kids are screaming. Of course he always leaves the dirty dishes. He doesn't even put them in the dishwasher. So when I got home the first thing I noticed was that the kitchen was clean and the toys were all picked up, which he doesn't normally do. But then it turned out that they got invited to someone else's house for dinner.
One woman mentioned that her husband's "forte" was making popcorn and grilled cheese sandwiches. Another joked, "He can cook, but we probably all eat a little better if I cook."

Only two women expressed disappointment at the extent of their husbands' participation in the housework. They were especially disappointed when they had to ask for help with chores that they felt their husbands should "do without me asking."

If I'm really grouchy he'll fix dinner. But sometimes I even have to pick up after him. It's not always a volunteer system. That disappoints me. I thought it was going to be different, but he's a little male chauvinistic about some things. He does some housework but I have to ask him to do it, and that makes me real angry. I just think he should be able to do those things without me asking.

The wives encourage their husbands' participation in childcare far more than their participation in housework. Most of the husbands do spend time with the children.

He is a big help with the kids. He does a lot. On the weekends he gets up with them in the morning and feeds them breakfast. He'll take them outside or if he has to go to a store he'll take them along, just so I can stay home and be by myself without them all the time.

On the weekends he feels that any time in the home is better spent with the kids -- either bike riding with the older ones or playing with the baby and helping change her or doing a few things like that he isn't able to do during the week.

What, then, is a typical housewife's day? Their accounts are of busy days that follow the rhythm of their husbands' and children's lives:

I get up and get Bill and Anna off to work and school. Which means cook breakfast -- some mornings I have cold cereal and toast and some mornings I bake muffins or something easy. And Monday Justin goes to school. Two mornings a week we usually have somebody come and play here or he goes to play at somebody's house. Sometimes Anna will bring a friend
home from kindergarten for lunch. She gets home about 11:30 so if we have errands to do like grocery shopping we can either pick her up at school if it is a special treat or we're here when she gets home. Then we do all sorts of things. We do laundry and we mop floors and clean carpets and work in the garden. Anna has piano lessons that we go to on Monday. Tuesday afternoon we take care of another child in the afternoon. Once a month I help at kindergarten. I try to leave two mornings to work on the house or garden. Anna has choir Wednesday afternoon. And I usually take Justin over to church with me and he plays outside and I do preschool work downstairs. We fit lunch in there somewhere. We usually eat soon after Anna gets home from kindergarten. Bill will come home for lunch anywhere from 12:00 to 2:00 so that kind of lengthens our lunch hour out. He comes home for lunch everyday.

If I'm cleaning I probably spend almost a whole day cleaning. Now that Jason is going to pre-school the morning is pretty much taken up by just getting everybody up and off and travel time back and forth and coming home for lunch and in between making beds and picking up dishes and getting lunch ready and probably doing some housework in the afternoon. Sometimes easily half a day can be cooking and making bread. Jim comes home for lunch. I'm almost always here. I don't always have his lunch ready when he gets here, but I'm here. It seems like quite a bit of time is just running errands. Like this morning we delivered flowers to a couple of people at church and took some trays over to another church and it just really takes up a lot of time and even going grocery shopping and Jason usually comes along to all those places. You know even picking up birthday cards which means a trip to the mall seems to really take a lot of time.

They take very little time for themselves. When the children nap they do housework. Their children go to co-op\(^3\) sitters for brief

\(^3\)A Babysitting Cooperative is formed by a group of full-time mothers who have become acquainted with each other. They exchange child care by trading tickets worth a specific amount of time. No money is exchanged. New members are brought into the co-op through an existing member's recommendation.
periods when their mothers have meetings to attend. They rarely use sitters to go out to lunch with a friend or to take walks by themselves. Some have not had a whole day to themselves in years.

Because they are home they are called on to do volunteer work and, as one woman said, "You don't say no to church and school." Most said they and their husbands go out infrequently because of the cost. They rarely go out at night with their own friends. Sometimes they and their husbands go out with friends they have made through his work. They belong to few organizations other than those connected with school and church. Their busy days extend into evenings of housework, and, especially, childcare. At this stage in their lives they can't imagine having the energy to take a job outside their homes. As they say, "But now I'm too busy to even think about work. Too busy with the kids."
Part 4: "Because of the Children"

At the heart of why women stay home is their belief that children need their mothers, not substitute caregivers, for optimum growth and development. They feel that they are "lucky" to be able to stay home with their children, that staying home is a "luxury." However, they feel that society does not recognize or value their contributions.

You know we think we really value childrearing but we're just beginning to realize the importance of the mother and her involvement with her child. And I don't think this country is really that advanced in that respect -- you know, in recognizing the mother's role at home. They are too quick to place all the value on the economic world and how much money you can make. They should see that there are things that are of value that don't involve getting paid.

The feeling I get from society in the job that I'm doing now is it's not that important. I think society is wrong. I think it's the most important thing. Because I have children. If I didn't have children it certainly would be different. I should be out doing something.

They deeply believe that children need to be with their mothers and that it is a mother's duty to take care of her children -- "I've always felt that if you have children it's your responsibility to take care of them and to raise them," -- and they feel that raising children is a full-time job. In fact, they feel that both mothers and children "miss out" if the mother works.

4They also deeply believe that fathers should be involved in raising their children. However, since their husbands are at work all day, they hold the primary responsibility for childrearing.
We had a neighbor and I thought he was probably making a healthy enough salary ... but I always felt like his wife was really missing out on a lot by working. She was only with the kid from about six to eight. The time I've spent with my children, even though they were a lot of trouble, was real special.

They endorse the notion of home as a "haven in a heartless world". High divorce and crime rates are often mentioned as signs of our "unstable" society. They feel that by staying home and providing "stability" for their children, they are equipping their children to cope with the world's problems when they are grown. Day care centers are not viewed as satisfactory substitutes for care at home. One woman, a former social worker, mentioned the problems of child abuse and neglect she had seen in even licensed day care homes. Most said that they would be comfortable leaving their children with family members, but not with someone they didn't know. Since most of them do not live near family members, they found that a neighborhood babysitting cooperative was a good family substitute.

I love the coop because it is so supportive. The same parents that are in the coop go to the same church and I know a lot of them. We are in the same neighborhood and I get to know the children. It's nice. And that is something that working parents don't know. A lot of working parents have their children at the same daycare every day. So when they pick them up they hear so and so had a nice day today, a good nap. But not that "so and so did a good job with a painting or was having a hard time getting along. You might try this, or ..." That's the type of thing I really appreciated with the coop. People giving your children support -- not just a babysitter but a friend.

However, they rarely leave their children for an entire day, even with trusted coop sitters. All were asked if they had considered using daycare or sitters even part-time so that they could take classes, work,
or take more time to pursue their interests. This woman's answer typifies the feeling that children are better off at home.

I never wanted to do it. I'm sure timewise I'd be better off. But I didn't want to ... I can't see dropping them off in the mornings and picking them up at 5:00. I couldn't do it. Because I want to know what they're doing. I want to take care of them, to make sure they're cared for properly. At daycare I feel like they would probably get pushed off into a corner. As far as stimulation and that sort of thing, I don't think they have that much in those day care centers. I think they're kind of left to their own devices. And they play. And that's good. But it's not what I want for Susan and Kevin.

In fact, these women do know what their children are doing virtually all of the time because typical days for their children are spent with them. Many of the children have no regular, daily contact with other children until they start pre-school, which meets for only a few hours a week. They plan their children's days carefully, and they control outside influences on their children. For example, many do not allow their children to watch anything but children's programming on educational television.

In many ways, they have continued their former jobs as elementary school teachers, social workers and recreation leaders, organizing play groups for their children in which the children do activities that require planning and preparation on their mothers' part. Most studied child psychology texts which emphasize the critical development which takes place during the first six years of life. As parents, they still refer to these texts and to popular child care experts. All of them read a great deal about child care, because they feel almost totally responsible for how their kids "turn out", and they worry about whether
or not they are doing "the right thing," particularly when new or
difficult situations arise.

Sarah is going through a phase where if she gets reprimanded
she says, "I hate you." This is a new thing for her and it's
really hard for us to deal with. I was going through my
childcare books trying to find out if there was anything
about why she is saying it. I'm sure she is just mad at
herself and is projecting herself or the hate she feels to
other people. I'm still looking for the explanation for
that. I have a hard time dealing with that, you know it's
hard not to take it personally.

In fact, the responsibility for doing the right thing, for responding in
"the right way" to all of the childhood phases and situations, is felt
as a very great one.

I think the biggest problem is the feeling that because I'm
home and not working there is even more of a responsibility
to my children in that I should be giving my best and that
how they turn out, how they grow up, is really not
completely dependent on me but certainly is related to all
these years. I feel the responsibility more than if I were
working. I feel like I have less of an excuse if I'm here
than if I were working and didn't have as much time.

As the children reach pre-school age, they are enrolled in parent
cooperative pre-schools that require the parents' direct, regular
involvement in the classroom. Several of the mothers serve on a pre-
school's board of directors, which has the responsibility for hiring
teachers and overseeing the operation of the pre-school. In this way,
they remain very directly involved with their children. Those who
already have a child in school maintain a high level of involvement in
the public schools. As one woman said, "It's not like you can just send
them to school and forget about them."
I've had the opportunity to be a room mother and library mother. That way you get to know what goes on in the classroom a little and how your child behaves and relates to the other children. And sometimes you can see the children who are problems and you think -- his mother should be here seeing how her child is behaving. She'd be surprised because I know she wants her child to behave and if she were here she would see that he is having difficulty, which maybe is not obvious at home.

Former teachers, especially, emphasize the importance of being involved in the classroom. And all of the mothers believe that they should be home when their children come home from school.

I had always, before I even wanted to have kids, wanted to stay home when I had my own kids. Especially being a teacher, because I see so many of the parents were working, the mothers were working, and they didn't help with the kids' classes. And the kids really felt neglected and left out a little bit when their moms weren't able to come. And I really feel strongly about getting in and seeing what's going on in the schools and helping out.

I think having been an elementary teacher for so many years, God forgive me for saying this, you could spot the kids whose moms worked and those whose moms were at home when they came home from school. There was just such a difference. I find with little people that when they come home from school they have so much to tell right now and by 5:30 or 6:00 when mom comes home it's old news. It just doesn't wait. It gets dumped on somebody or it just doesn't get told at all.

They feel that it is important, even for teenagers, that "somebody is there who cares about what you did during the day." As one woman said:

A parent's role at home becomes increasingly important during the teenage years. A mother that works during the teenage years can still miss out on vital times. When the school day is over they've already relied on someone else.

In these single-earner families, following a rather strict sexual division of labor, childcare, then, is woman's work, and how the children turn out is the mother's responsibility. However, these women
worry that if they are over-invested in their children they will not be able to handle the stress "if their children don't live up to their expectations." Therefore, they emphasize the need to maintain adult contacts.

I think you invest a lot in your kids. Then if anything happens with those kids, things aren't going right, then you don't have any release. It's like what your job is, taking care of those kids. So if the kids aren't right it's like it's a slap against you because that's all you're doing. That's why I think it's real important for me to be involved in other activities. To have some stimulation other than kids.

However, since they dwell in the home world, much of their adult contact is with other mothers at meetings of the pre-school board, or in the park, or over coffee, while the children play. The talk tends to be "about our kids." Husbands hear about childrearing from their wives -- "When we go on car trips I read childcare and parenting books to my husband or he probably wouldn't." Because they spend their days in the work world, men don't talk about the kids. One woman put it this way.

When women have kids that's what they talk about. That's what they think about. Maybe the men think about their kids as much but they don't dwell on them. When the guys get together they don't talk about the kids.

Then, when these men and women come together at parties, they each, quite naturally, "talk shop".

Sometimes I've caught myself -- whenever I go somewhere it seems like all I talk about is her. And then I realize how boring it must sound to other people to talk about your kid. But then if you go to a company party the men talk about their jobs. You know you talk about your interests and what you've been doing all day long.
Part 5: "Something For Myself"

What happens to these women when they begin to sense that what they have been doing "all day long," for many busy years, will come to its natural end as their children get older? They may realize they have been out of the work force longer than they worked. They are getting older. Years earlier, they left work to stay home with only the vaguest thoughts toward a future "that would take care of itself." Suddenly, that future will be here soon, and they begin to ask themselves, "What am I going to do?" For years they have tended to others. Soon it will be time to search for "something for myself."

I'm not wasting away, because the time I spend with my family is important, but there should be more to my life. I'm still making stuff for other people. I'm still sewing for other people. But not really doing something for myself. ... I feel that there are potentials and abilities and talents that just aren't going to be used if I don't.

I didn’t feel that I was giving up something to quit school and get married because I wasn’t really in heavy pursuit of anything. I think more and more as I get older there is that pressure to feel, "Well, exactly what am I going to accomplish?"

Thoughts about what to do next are often triggered by an older child entering kindergarten. Next year, they know, that child will be gone all day and the second child is not too far behind. Most of the women will still be quite young when their children are in school all day. However, by the time their children start school, they will have been out of the work force for years, and they realize that going back to work can be "a little scary because you do lose touch of what's going on in whatever field you are in." They also worry about discrimination.
I don't know that I'm going to do when the kids are old enough to go to school. I need to start thinking about it. ... I don't want to wait that much longer if I do decide to go back and go to work. I don't want to wait 'till I'm 40 to get back in the job market. I think there is still real discrimination against people who are older and starting a career. I know there is not supposed to be, but I think that's still a factor.

They are painfully aware that their years at home may not count for very much when they go job hunting.

I just don't think I can get in the job market with what I've got. I just hate to even fill out an application because I just don't have that much. It's been nine years since I even worked. And what I did do wasn't that much. It just doesn't look like much to an employer.

Motherhood has been very satisfying to them. Most describe themselves "groping" to find something which will be as satisfying and which will result in self-fulfillment or self-realization. Looking back to college, some wish that they had been more "serious" or that they had "figured out earlier what I wanted to do that I could do all my life."

How, they wonder, do you find out what you want to do?

How are you supposed to find out what it is you want to do? I mean, do people just suddenly have this light go off inside of their heads? Oh, yes, you want to become a nuclear physicist and go to school and do it. How do you even know what the options are?

Although they do not all automatically assume that the search for self-fulfillment will lead to a job in the outside world, most do turn their attention to the practical question of finding something satisfying to do for pay.

When I was at the University I took those battery of tests that's supposed to help you make a decision on what you want to do. But I thought it was kind of too general. And there was nothing that really stood out there either. So I don't know how you'd go about it. I like art very much but you can't really earn a living at art. If I'm going to work outside the home I want to make some money. Well for a long
time, even still, I've been trying to figure out what I want to do if I did go back to school. And that's a real problem, too. As far as finding out what I would like to do. And the job market -- making it fit so there's a feasible job.

If, while in college, they did not discover what they really wanted to do -- when, as one woman said, "I was just myself then" -- they know it will be that much more difficult now, with husband, home and children to consider. Commonly, then, the search for "something for myself" begins at home.

I would love to write or paint and I can't really do either one. You know that's something you can do and stay home. It's socially acceptable. It counts as working. You don't have to apologize for yourself.

Some are thinking of writing articles on mothering to submit to women's magazines, or of writing children's books, or, as the women's magazines say, "turning their hobbies into cash."

However, just as they have been concerned with "visibly doing something," and having "something to show" for their work at home, they have the same feelings about what constitutes "work" in the outside world:

You feel like you've got to be working or doing something that people can see that you're getting something done. If you're sitting around painting or something like that it somehow doesn't seem as purposeful as going to school or working.

In fact, going to school or working are what most of them are beginning to think about doing. Immediately, however, their first thoughts are of the ways in which an outside job would affect their children. Currently, these mothers at home provide support for working mothers by sitting with their children after school. If they
found outside work, it would be the other way around. What if, as one asked, "I'd have to find a place for my kids?"

In addition to worrying about "latchkey" children, they worry about "setting a goal" before committing time and energy to college or job training. They hope that the answer to the difficult question of what it is they really want to do will somehow "come to them."

In the early stages of trying to "visualize the future" they think about what constitutes the "perfect job" outside the home.

If I were to see advertised the perfect half-time job that would have good pay, the perfect hours, was stimulating and in a field I liked, I think I would probably take it now. But it would have to be perfect.

The perfect hours are part-time, and only while the children are in school. These women have been the dependable room mothers and library helpers at school. Part-time work would allow them to continue these activities. Their families have become accustomed to home-baked bread, hand-made clothes and sauces that have simmered all afternoon. Part-time work would leave them the energy to continue these activities on their days off work. If they worked part-time, they could still chauffeur children to play practices and soccer matches.

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5"Latchkey" children are children who come home to locked, empty houses and have to let themselves in and stay home alone until their parents come home from work.
In addition to being part-time and allowing her to be home when the children come from school, the "perfect job" would not be "just any job." It would not be clerking or waitressing. Since they do not have to work, they would rather stay home than work at something which would not fully engage their talents and abilities.

Although many were teachers, teaching jobs are hard to find now. Since they would have to go back to school to update their certificates, they are reluctant to commit that time, energy and money without some assurance of a teaching job. So they turn to the classifieds and think about preparing for jobs which are advertised there — jobs in computer science or dental hygiene, or as secretaries. However, the availability of jobs in these fields is the attraction, rather than a belief that these jobs are "stimulating". In particular, these occupations may seem "perfect" because they are perceived to be neither "high pressure" nor "too demanding." These are important features of any future job because they worry about "balancing what you have to put into school or work against the family time." "Family time" means everyone sitting down to eat together, or taking leisurely walks together, and they are the ones who make certain family time occurs. If their husbands work extra hours or on weekends, at least they are not "taking time away from the family."

When work gets involved Jim sometimes doesn't make it home for dinner. We don't have family time for days on end. We don't eat together even and I get very frustrated and I finally put my foot down and say look, this is how it is. You've got to be here for meal time. Then he'll make the effort. ... And what if I were working, too? Then what would happen? I don't know ... You get used to not having to work and cook and look after your kids and your house as well.
Worries that they don't have the "energy" to work all day and "come home and have to cook and do everything else" are common. As one woman said, "I know I'm always going to be the one responsible for the house and the children." One woman, who had substituted at pre-school for two weeks, and was thinking of applying to work there permanently, reconsidered:

When I substituted for two weeks I just felt like I was really strung out, trying to take care of the kids and dinner. All the normal things that go along with running a household and prepare for teaching and teach. And have enough energy to do all that and still feel good about what I was doing.

Most of the women said that they have spent very little time talking with their friends about their future plans. They also have not talked about them very much with their husbands, perhaps sensing that their husbands might not understand:

I think I spend more time worrying about it than we spend talking about it. And I still don't think Lee is very concerned about it. He'll flippantly say, well then you know go out and get a job and I think he, well I think he's comfortable in his job and feeling good about what he's doing and maybe has a hard time really knowing that I would have those same yearnings. And also just thinking that I shouldn't have to even have a full time job or do anything really professional, you know, that if we're just having trouble making ends meet that I could go out and there are several things to do and I could take a typing course from the vo-tech and do secretarial work or something like that, but if I really had something in mind, if something really mattered to me I'm sure that he would be supportive and go along with me and that I would go back and get a degree or whatever.

They need to discuss their thoughts with their husbands, because they have not yet decided what they want to do. When they do broach the subject of future plans, husbands typically respond with, "Whatever you want to do is fine." However, the women sense that their husbands are
hesitant about change in the family's balance. Some men express this hesitancy in the form of reservations about the children.

I know there are times when he's said he really feels like somebody should be home with the kids. But on the other hand he wants me to be happy. If I were real unhappy with staying home and really wanted to go back to work and we could find suitable arrangements for the kids, I think he'd be receptive to it. But I think deep down he really feels like, not the woman's place is in the home, but he really feels like one of us should be home. And I don't think he's willing to sacrifice his career to stay home at this point.

They feel that their husbands are satisfied with the status quo.

Husbands don't mind helping with the housework, but they may not want to "take the responsibility."

John would probably have less time because he would be doing whatever needs to be done. I'm not going to say that he is perfectly liberated because I don't know any man yet ... they are willing to help but they are not willing to take the responsibility. And until you take the responsibility you are not really doing it. John is very good about doing anything but he doesn't assume the responsibility for it. And until he does that ...

This husband doesn't say he wants his wife to stay home, but:

He keeps saying he doesn't want me to work unless I find something I really want to do. He says it's not that important. So I'm not being pushed either way. He doesn't push me either way on what to do. He's very nice about that. ... I have a feeling he would rather not have me work. Because he knows that if I went back to work I would expect more from him in the house. And I would. And I don't think he wants to do that.

The wives anticipate additional conflicts such as this:

Part of my hesitations would be that I'm not sure he really would, for example, if a child were sick and I had something important that day at work, I have a feeling that he would assume that I would be the one who would stay home. Because his job would be making more money and I think that would be a source of conflict to try and figure out who stays home and who goes to work.
Overall, while they feel that whatever they want to do may be "fine" with their husbands, they will still "have to work out all the details and make all the arrangements."

And that is where this portion of their story ends. With one child still at home, they are just beginning to try and "visualize the future", a future in which they want to find something for themselves that will not jeopardize their relationships with husbands and children. The second half of life, without the daily care of small children, will be upon them soon, and with increasing urgency they are asking themselves, "What do I want to do?" As this woman, who has stayed home for more than ten years, said:

As I get older I think more and more about things that I haven't done. And I think back to younger days when you have oh such high ambitions. You know you're just going to take on the world. You just really feel like you could be the best piano player or whatever and you get more realistic as you get older, but still there are yearnings there.
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

The story of these housewives has been told without embellishment. The goal of this section is to discuss the implications of "The Story" for the lives of these women and others like them as well as for the social role of housewife in modern society.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a housewife as "a woman who manages or directs the affairs of her household." At one time, in both the middle and the upper income classes, a housewife might have supervised servants who carried out the household duties. Today, at least in the middle and working classes, a housewife performs the household labor herself. Oakley (1974:1) lists these features of the role of housewife in industrialized society:

1. Its exclusive allocation to women, rather than to adults of both sexes;
2. Its association with economic dependence, i.e., with the dependent role of the woman in modern marriage;
3. Its status as non-work -- or its opposition to "real", i.e., productive work; and
4. Its primacy to women; that is, its priority over other roles.

Because women maintain responsibility for running the household even when they are employed outside the home, it can be said that virtually all women are housewives. This study, however, has focused on those housewives who do not also work outside the home.

As Oakley noted, "becoming a housewife is synonymous with becoming a mother". These women became housewives, not following marriage, as was customary in times past, but following the birth of their first child. In fact, an important feature of the lives of these women is that they all had considerable work experience prior to staying home.
full-time; they understood the rhythm of life in both work and home worlds. Following a sometimes difficult transition period, they adapted to the familiar world of their stay-at-home mothers and became adept at their new routines. Their husbands, on the other hand, had always identified with their fathers' continuous full-time employment, and had difficulty imagining what it was like to stay home.

When I first quit teaching he'd say, "What are you going to do all day?" And if I didn't have about three things listed he just couldn't figure out what I was going to do. I guess he thought I was going to sleep all day. He asked that for a number of years -- "Well, what are you going to do all day?"

When these women began to stay home, a process was set in motion that resulted in husbands and wives living in separate worlds. The lack of what Schutz (1962:12) called "reciprocity of perspectives" becomes critical when, after years at home, these women begin to think about leaving the role of full-time housewife. Returning to work is one avenue to self-realization which has appeal. They feel out of touch with the work world, but they do remember the self that enjoyed working. With their husbands, they broach the topic of returning to work very hesitantly, full of the uncertainty that comes with years of being at home. Commonly, their husbands do not know how to respond to their wives' uncertainties. They have never stayed at home and do not understand that after years at home it is very difficult to pick up old dreams or to pursue new ones; it is almost impossible without active support.

When a full-time housewife begins to be seriously involved in outside interests, there ensues a process of renegotiating the taken-for-granted division of labor within the family. A husband's typical
response, "Whatever you want to do is fine," throws the burden of the negotiation onto the woman alone. Since she doesn't know what she wants to do, this response has the additional effect of ending the conversation.

"The Story" of these women ended there, with the beginning of a search for self that may or may not take them out of the home. The seeds of their current dilemma were planted years before when they felt that they were presented with a choice -- the choice between family and career.

A Female Dilemma

During adolescence, boys begin to think about their future identities in terms of what occupation they will hold. For girls, the situation is not so clear-cut. In their efforts to envision a future for themselves, they do not focus specifically on occupation. (O'Leary, 1977) Thoughts of marriage and children intermingle with thoughts of work, so that by the time the women in this study entered college, they exhibited what some have called a "lack of career commitment" or a "motivational deficit".

However, the psychological term "motivational deficit" does not take into account what Dannefer (1984:107) identifies as "three major kinds of sociological principles ... crucial to an adequate understanding of human development:"

(1) the malleability of the human organism in relation to environments;
(2) the structural complexity and diversity of the social environment;
(3) the role of the symbolic -- of social knowledge and human intentionality -- as factors mediating development."
If we posit an unexamined "lack" in women, we run the risk of failing to examine the environmental conditions which facilitate and those which impede attachment to the labor force.  

Two conditions which impeded this group of women's attachment to the labor force were marriage and childrearing — and these were impeding conditions even before the women actually married and had children, as can be seen in their responses to questions about their goals as they entered college. Clearly, they were well aware of the gender system (Ryan, 1983:3) in this society, two features of which are the expectation that married women subordinate their goals to their husbands' and the assignment of childrearing exclusively to women. It makes sense to examine their choice of traditional female occupations as a rational assessment of, and a realistic adjustment to, the "definition of the situation" for women.

Because of these features of the gender system, this group of women felt that there had to be a rather clearcut choice between commitment to family and commitment to a full-time career. However, for middle class girls in the baby boom cohort, it was not customary to marry and begin a family directly following high school. Rather, like so many young men and women of their generation, they went to college. However, five of

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6See Laws (1976) for an excellent article on the work aspiration of women.
the women had already met their future husbands before they started college. The rest met them in college, so that at this early stage in their lives they began to engage in contingency planning. That is, they attempted to align their career choices with their future husbands'; by doing this they conformed both to the expectation that they would go to college and to the expectation that family comes first. In some cases counselors and professors contributed to these "aligning actions" by subtly "cooling" (Goffman, 1952) the women out of occupational choices that required graduate training.  

Ultimately, the advantages of elementary school teaching became obvious to them. It was a respectable, middle class profession for women; at the time they became teachers, jobs were available almost anywhere. Teaching was seen as a job which could accommodate time out to have children, and it provided time off when children were out of school during the summer. Teaching made sense in terms of the expectation that a husband's career was the more important career.  

It was all right, too, if a woman did not finish college. She could always find clerical work. When asked how her husband felt when she left college to work and save money for their wedding, this woman said:

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7In an instance of a not-so-subtle "cool-out", a college advisor said, "You'll never find a husband if you go to medical school." (Her husband became a doctor and she a social worker.)

8Half were elementary school teachers. The others chose professions which offered the same advantages as teaching. Teaching is used here as representative of the professions they chose.
I don't think he was really that concerned about it. He had already decided he was going to medical school. ... So I'm sure he felt pretty secure in that, so it seemed like things were under control and there was some kind of plan.

The plan was that he would always work and she would, eventually, stay home. Therefore, it made sense to choose work which did not "lock you in."

A Real Change In Our Lives

The transition from working to staying home was difficult for them because the value placed on the role of housewife had changed. Following World War II the role of housewife was held to be a woman's true calling. Women who had been called to the labor force during the War were urged to go back home and find fulfillment as wives and mothers. They were expected to devote themselves to cleaning and decorating their new homes filled with modern appliances. Women of this era married young and had large families.

Betty Friedan documented women's growing dissatisfaction with their assignment to the exclusive role of full-time housewife in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The women's movement which grew in the following years stressed that self-realization came from outside employment. The role of housewife became devalued and was replaced by a new cultural ideal -- the Superwoman who combined family and career. However, the structural changes which Friedan called for, the flex-time and daycare centers at work places, did not follow with the changing notions of "woman's place." Nor did the division of labor within families change significantly as women went to work. Housework and
childcare remained women's work. Women who worked outside the home had, in effect, two full-time jobs.

However, full-time, continuous employment did not become the new norm for women. Women's work histories continued to be characterized by discontinuities because most women took at least some time off after their children were born. Those who were committed to their careers and those whose families depended on their incomes took less time off than the women in this study.

Once these women decided to have children, the decision to stay home followed automatically. Staying home was not a decision over which they agonized, since both they and their husbands believed that children need full-time mothering until they start school. They did not, however, think of themselves becoming housewives.

An important difference between the full-time housewives of the post-war era and the full-time housewives of this study is the way in which the role of housewife was embraced. The women in Lopata's (1971) study "became" housewives when to do so was expected and applauded. Although many women found that they were dissatisfied in this role, the statement, "I am a housewife" could be said with pride. Most women expected to raise large families and to spend a substantial portion of

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9 See Becker (1953) for a discussion of the necessary steps in "becoming" a marijuana user; and Lopata (1971) for an application of the concept "becoming" to housewives.
their lives as housewives. When the women in this study left work to stay home with their children, they were becoming not housewives, but mothers. The role of mother was far more acceptable to them than the role of housewife. Saying that one stays home to care for her children while they are young can still be said with pride. In addition, it leaves open the option of returning to work when the children are older.

These women expected to have two children and to stay home at least until their children started school. However, when a woman stays home and is no longer earning money, she feels that she must take on all of the housework in addition to caring for the children in an effort to demonstrate that she is not the stereotypical housewife who does nothing all day but sit around and watch the soaps. How does she do this? She does it by becoming very busy.

"It's Been Very Busy"

Since there are no objective standards for housework, housewives, as Oakley (1974) noted, often set very high standards for housework and then judge their success against those standards. The accounts of daily life at home are filled with the detail, the "busyness", the "craziness" of days taken up with housework, cooking, volunteer work, chauffeuring to music and dance lessons. While mothering was the primary reason they decided to stay home full-time, the other activities followed naturally. Since they were at home, and not bringing in money, they felt required

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10 See Lopata (1968), "The Life Cycle of the Social Role of Housewife."
to take on all of the household duties in order to, in a sense, "justify" their leisure in a society which values work. Therefore, they made lists and, as one woman said, "kept score" on themselves, so that at the end of the day they could tally their list of accomplishments. While the nature of housework has changed over the years due to technological advances, women today still spend about as many hours at housework as did their grandmothers (Walker, 1969). In some ways, women at home today are engaged in labors which reproduce those of earlier generations. They grow large gardens and can and freeze the produce; they hand-make clothes, knit, weave and quilt. They shun convenience food in favor of cooking everything "from scratch;" they bake bread. Their families come to depend on the amenities that a full-time housewife can provide.

Beyond the old adage that "a woman's work is never done" is the tendency for a housewife's time to become continuous "family time." As we have seen in the interview excerpts, housewives get very busy and take little time for themselves. Some lament the fact that when the children nap, they often end up doing housework rather than reading or other leisure time activities. Housewives take less time-off for reading or solitude than they might if they worked at jobs with regularly scheduled vacations and holidays. Without wages to show for their labor, it becomes difficult for housewives to claim the right to time-off. When housewives explain why they did not take a class or substitute teach, for example, they often say that they did not want to "take time away from the family", particularly from the children.
Because of the Children

This group of women stays at home "because of the children." They consider childrearing "a full-time job". However, as Chodorow and Contratto (1980) point out:

This idea of motherhood as a "job", akin to other jobs like being a doctor or plumber or salesperson, is a relatively recent innovation; limited to Classes of Western Cultures sufficiently affluent to keep women out of the wage labor force. In no other time or place (to our knowledge) has childcare been considered a full-time occupation for adults except for those hired to do that specific job (i.e., nursemaids, teachers.)

How does it come about that the care of one or two small children is an activity that should occupy an adult full-time? This notion could not have come about without the concomitant idea of home as a haven from the world, a safe, protected place that served as a refuge for the man who had to "go out" to work.

Before industrialization, work took place in the home. Both men and women engaged in productive labor which supported the family, and both participated in child rearing, especially after a child's infancy. Children grew up watching their parents work, and they, too, worked as soon as they were able. With industrialization, work was taken out of the home, and women were left at home to care for the children. In time, a wife who did not work for wages came to be seen as a male status symbol. In addition, childhood came to be seen as a special time which

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See Oakley (1974) for a complete discussion of the historical development of the role of housewife.
required protection and attention from mothers. Mothers and children were isolated at home, where it became the mother's task to, in a sense, create morally perfect children.

Later, post-Freudian psychology emphasized the critical importance of the early mother-infant relationship to the later psychological and emotional well-being of the child. A great deal of developmental research has focused on early infancy. Other child-development authors have popularized the idea that the critical period of dependency, when a mother should be with her children full-time, extends far beyond infancy. For example, Selma Fraiberg (1977) states that a good mother does not use substitute childcare until her child is at least three years old. Therefore, a mother who chooses to work when her children are very young is guilty of depriving them of the attention that is crucial to their development as healthy adults. Since mothers are often blamed for their children's failings, leaving a child with a babysitter or at a daycare center could engender a great deal of maternal guilt.

The overriding concern of women who stay home full-time is with being good mothers. Because full-time housewives and their husbands live in the separate spheres of home and work which grew following the Industrial Revolution, childcare is primarily the mother's

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12 Chodorow and Contratto (1980) point out that this research has "led to a psychological determinism and reductionism that argues that what happens in the earliest mother-infant relationship determines the whole of history, society, and culture."
responsibility. In addition to the physical care of the children, mothers, as can be seen clearly in the interviews, feel responsible for their children's emotional well-being. The children are the products of their labor.

These views of motherhood are based on deterministic theories which view children as passive recipients of a commodity called "mothering." The mothers in this study learned current child development theories in college and internalized the idea that mothers are all-powerful in determining their children's futures. The women in this study shared the intense feeling of responsibility combined with the belief that this responsibility should not be shared with babysitters or teachers at day care centers. Day care directors are not viewed as child care experts, nor is experience with a group of children at a day care center seen as potentially beneficial to children. Rather, these full-time mothers focus on their one-to-one relationships with their children. Children of these mothers are rarely "left to their own devices" in a group of children at play. Rather, their days are planned and directed, and their homes are equipped with the latest educational toys in an effort to provide them the proper stimulation.

As more and more women have gone to work, those women who stay home have often felt that they must defend their choice. They feel that since society does not value their work as mothers and housewives, "society is wrong." Typical of attempts to defend staying home are articles in women's magazines featuring interviews with women who explain why they have chosen to make "careers" in their homes because of their strong beliefs that children should be raised solely at home.
A recent newspaper article tells of the formation of a support group for full-time mothers -- Mothers at Home. The women who founded this group feel that no one is speaking in support of a mother's choice to stay home. One of the founders of this group said, "Raising kids is the most intellectually demanding job you can have. You're instructing your kids to guide their life, how to deal with bad situations, injustices, people who don't like you." The women interviewed for this study would concur with this assessment of the importance of staying home.

Something For Myself

These women followed a sequential pattern of childrearing (Daniels and Weingarten, 1982:211) in which work and family commitments are separated. They worked for a period of time and then put aside their work, with a vague intention of returning to work "someday", to devote full attention to their children. Lillian Rubin (1979) describes an older group of women who followed a similar pattern, with the difference that they began to feel the urgency to find something for themselves around the time that their last child left home, while the younger group of women begins to feel the pressure earlier, around the time that their last child is no longer an infant. This change has come about because the younger women have more education and work experience and fewer children than the older women, and because the women's movement has urged women to make use of their educations in the job market. None of the younger women felt that they would be housewives all of their lives, but, at the time they left their jobs to stay home, they gave very little thought to what would be involved in going back. Instead, they
became fully involved in their new roles as full-time housewives, and time passed.

Now, after years at home, most are beginning to think seriously about what to do next. As they envision a future without the daily care of small children to occupy their time, their thoughts turn to the search to find something for themselves. Dreams that were set aside years before are taken out and re-examined. Some begin to feel the need to "get back to somebody who gets up every morning and puts on nice clothes and goes to work and has some stories to tell when she comes home at night." However, there are no guidelines that a woman in this situation can follow in making the journey to self-realization outside the home. Each woman feels alone with her thoughts. While the popular literature on homemaking and mothering is extensive, there has been very little written for full-time mothers who are considering re-entering the work force. Neither have sociologists attended to this re-entry process. "Indeed," as Laws (1976:41) says, the issue of preparing for the second thirty-five years of life is one that cries out for serious study and planning."

As the interviews reveal, this process is not one of simply going out and finding a job. During their years at home a powerful set of constraints has developed that works against a housewife's smooth

13 Other dreams arise from having spent years at home responding to a house that sometimes, as the poet Roseann Lloyd says, "talks too much". As one woman said: "I guess I think oftentimes about all kinds of things that could be different and I think about outdoors more and more, just not having a house, a yard, just hiking all the time."
re-entry into the work force. Some of these constraints revolve around the structure of the work world, some around social psychological factors, and some in the relationship between the woman and her husband and children.

None of the women wants to go directly from home to a full-time job. Therefore, the first requirement of the "perfect job" is that it be part-time. Part-time work is seen as a way of gradually re-entering the work force and becoming readjusted to it without leaving all of the old routines behind. Some of the women would consider working before their youngest child started school if there were good part-time jobs available. However, they correctly perceive that in most cases they would have to choose between working full-time and not working at all, since good part-time jobs are very difficult to find. Secondly, it would be easier for them to work if jobs conformed more closely to the hours that children spend in school. Many jobs begin before children leave for school and end after they come home, necessitating making special arrangements, along with generating guilt at not being home themselves.

As mentioned in "The Story", the perfect job would not require night or weekend work and would not be "just any job." The latter stipulation is particularly important to middle class wives who do not have to work and who look upon work as a means of self-fulfillment. This view creates a bind for women who, if they did not finish college, or if they cannot return to their former jobs, do not possess the qualifications to enter the work force at a professional level. They
are likely to stay home rather than to take what they perceive to be menial, working-class jobs.

When full-time housewives begin to think about the next stage in their lives they are plagued with self-doubts. Generally, they have not attempted to keep up in their fields; they have not read professional journals or joined professional associations. After they had been out of the work force for a time, they stopped referring to themselves as "former" teachers or nurses and, instead, referred to themselves as housewives. Therefore, they confront the future with a sense that they are out of step with their former professions. Those who did not graduate from college are at a particular disadvantage since they do not consider returning to their former clerical-level jobs and are faced with finishing college or re-training before looking for work. In fact, many of the women who did finish college are considering going back to school, but those with B.A. degrees can at least enter the University with a graduate non-degree status.

Along with feeling out of touch come feelings of inadequacy because they do not know what they want to do. They tend to feel that the answer to this difficult question should "come to them" if they think about it hard enough and they are disappointed when it does not. They berate themselves for "not having figured out earlier what I could do for the rest of my life." Some feel that their husbands are somehow "more motivated" because they "always knew" what they wanted to do, when, in fact, husbands and wives had simply followed their separate gender role expectations. A woman who is further along in the re-entry process describes it this way:
It's a fear of getting out there and trying something else. You know how to do this. And you're important to society because you're a mother. You're sort of important in a way to society. I mean you do have a certain place or slot that you fit in. But if you have to go out and do something different, that's scary. Why do you think it took me two years to decide to go back to school? Because it's scary. You have to go over there and you have to talk to people and you get out of practice doing that stuff. You forget how to talk to people and how to think. I worked for two years to overcome that fear of jumping in and doing it.

And, of course, a full-time housewife contemplating her future has more than herself to consider. She is not "jumping in and doing it" alone. Perhaps the strongest constraint comes from her feeling of responsibility to the family. Children of full-time mothers depend on their mothers to make lunches and play with them and take them to the park. As a rule, they have not been encouraged to be particularly self-sufficient or to rely on other adults and children for help. Husbands of full-time housewives do not do much housework and do virtually none of the cooking. They rely on their wives to "keep track" of schedules and to arrange for sitters or home repairs. These arrangements have been part of the balance they have developed on both sides of their separate spheres.

If this situation is to become "unbalanced", it will be at the wife's initiative. The tendency on the husband's part to not participate in conversations about changing the family's structure can be seen as a way of exercising power. Power, in this sense, is not defined as one person imposing his or her will on another by forcing him or her to do something; rather, "Power is the ability to impose one's definition of what is possible, what is right, what is rational, what is real" (Fishman, 1978:397). Without a commitment to renegotiating the
division of labor in the home, for example, it is less possible for a woman to feel that she would have the energy for an outside job. Without a stated willingness on the husband's part to change his work schedule to share in the care of the children it is less right for the wife to consider being away from home when, for example, the children come home from school. If money is the only consideration, then, given the cost of sitters, it may not be rational for her to work; it may be, as one husband said to his wife who was considering substitute teaching, "more trouble than it's worth." And if, although he feels good about his job, a husband "maybe has a hard time really knowing that I would have those same yearnings," as one woman said, then perhaps she may believe that her own longings are less real.

Given the list of constraints, social psychological, structural and familial, that operate on full-time housewives, it is not surprising that, as they think about "the perfect job," they conceive of a job that would fit unobtrusively into the day's interstices. The perfect job is, in effect, an invisible job, a job that goes unnoticed, a job that allows one to pass through these constraints as a spectre passes invisibly through a wall rather than to confront them head-on. As Rubin (1979) points out, a housewife's decision to renegotiate long-standing family arrangement can be a decision that is potentially threatening to

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14 However, they are aware that most "invisible" jobs are not the answer to the quest for self-realization.
the marriage. One way to avoid conflict is to go to work so unobtru-
vely that nothing has to change.

Epilogue to "The Story"

The yearnings that these women speak of are not likely to go away. Although they have no intention to cease caring for their families, they yearn to develop an authentic "language of the self"\textsuperscript{15} (Rabuzzi, 1982:176) that will carry them through the second half of life. It is difficult to say where their searching will lead them. Some may find the invisible job and search no further. Some may have another baby and postpone the search. Others will continue searching until they clarify their goals, confront the constraints head on, and go on to satisfying work outside the home.\textsuperscript{16} For some, it will be impossible to find even the perfect "visible" job and the search for self-fulfillment may lead to greater participation in church or school organizations or to volunteer work in the community.

\textsuperscript{15}Full-time housewives often answer questions that might logically begin "I ...", with "We ...". They will need to learn to articulate their desires by making reference to themselves apart from their husbands and children.

\textsuperscript{16}Because these women belong to the huge post-war baby boom generation, they face stiff job competition from those in their own cohort, as well as from younger women who have not been out of the work force for extended periods of time.
CONCLUSION: The Social Role of Housewife

The story has been told and retold. The goal of this concluding section is to move beyond the lives of this group of women to an examination of what it means to stay home, what it means to be a full-time housewife today.

"To stay" is from the Greek work *stasis*. It means to stop, to halt, to remain without change. To stay implies a negative condition, a condition of stagnation, undesirable in this society which emphasizes personal growth and change. In a society in which people are on the move, from town to town, and from lower to higher positions on occupational ladders, a woman who stays home does not receive much appreciation. Staying home is a socially devalued role.

In spite of the slogan — Every Mother is a Working Mother — work in this society means going out to work for wages. Women who stay home are not financially compensated for their "labors of love". Housework is not part of the social security system, nor is time at home counted as work experience by potential employers.

Unless they are heavily protected by savings or insurance, a husband's death throws housewives onto a labor market which has few places for them. Divorce can be even more financially devastating than death, since alimony is rarely awarded and child support payments are often ignored by fathers. Given all of these factors, staying home also means placing oneself in an economically vulnerable position.

Another definition of "to stay" is to pause or to postpone. Women stay home with the belief that they will "go back" someday, but the way
back is often, as we have seen, obstructed. After years at home, it is difficult to change. An older returning student reflected this way, "It's hard to let go of that old idea that the kids need you even when you can look at them and tell that they don't need you like that anymore." When feelings such as these combine with self-doubts, husbands' objections and the lack of satisfying jobs, what began as a "stay" at home can become an undesired permanent condition.

Given these negative factors, why would anyone choose "housewife" as an occupation? As we have seen, it is actually mother which was the chosen vocation; becoming a housewife goes with the territory of mothering. Many women continue to feel that motherhood is a full-time job and they feel they have no choice but to accept the costs which accompany it. Hoffnung (1984:126) details the costs thus:

The conflict between individual achievement and feminine responsibility, therefore, is not just internal. It helps to determine women's life activities. It pushes women to limit the careers they consider possible, to give up what they have accomplished for mother-work, or to spread themselves very thin. Motherhood, as we know it, has substantial material costs for women.

Unless motherhood "as we know it" changes considerably, the costs of raising children will continue to be born disproportionately by women.

\[17\] For these women motherhood can be viewed as a "calling". In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber (1958:80) says this about a calling: "The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling."
As we have seen, the notion of motherhood as a full-time job is based on theories of child development which focus on the importance of the early mother-infant relationship. Chodorow and Contratto (1980:70) suggest that the dominant cultural assumptions about child development need to be critically challenged before new theories of mothering will be developed. They suggest some new directions for research:

We would suggest that feminists draw upon and work to develop theories of child development that are interactive and that accord the infant and child agency and intentionality, rather than characterize it as a passive reactor to drives or environmental pressures. ... We should look to theories that stress relational capacities and experiences instead of insatiable, insistent drives; to theories in which needs do not equal wants; in which separation is not equivalent to deprivation, and in which autonomy is different from abandonment; in which the child is thought to have some interest in growth and development. ... We must begin to look at times other than infancy in the developmental life span and relationships over time to people other than the mother to get a more accurate picture of what growing up is about.

If this research agenda leads to changes in notions of child development, changes in the notion of motherhood as a full-time job may follow.

Motherhood may be the contemporary conflict for women. If mothers stay home as full-time housewives, they slip into what can be called the invisible occupation staffed by forgotten workers. To remedy this situation, some voices have called for "wages for housework," others for the role of housewife to be abolished in favor of shared work and parenting.

There are signs of change. Traditional sex role norms which prescribed a familial division of labor by sex are giving way to new options. Joseph Pleck (1977:8) has introduced the term "work-family
role system" to take account of these changes. As he says, "The workfamily role system is composed of the male work role, the female work role, the female family role, and the male family role." Analyzing these roles as components of a role system allows new questions to be raised; questions that might have been ignored under traditional sex role assumptions. For example, Pleck (1980:13) observes:

... maternal employment has long, and incorrectly, been thought to harm children psychologically. Despite decades of clinical stereotypes about psychologically absent or "weak, passive" fathers, it was rarely asked whether or how paternal employment might harm children.

Raising these new research questions is important in these changing times. If mothers continue to feel that they must choose between work and family to ensure the psychological well-being of their children, the result, for them and for society, will be a great loss of human potential.
CHAPTER V

Methodology

This is an interview study of the lives of a particular group of young, full-time housewives. It belongs within the framework of qualitative sociology developed by Garfinkel (1967), Schatzman and Strauss (1973), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Schwartz and Jacobs (1979), and is informed by the approach to the generation of grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Qualitative sociology is a particularly fruitful approach to the study of housewives. Because the social role of housewife has been relatively neglected by sociologists, it was deemed necessary to ask those who occupy this role to talk about their lives, thereby providing data for further exploration and discovery.

Sampling

Preliminary interviews were conducted with six full-time housewives. These women provided the names of other housewives who were subsequently interviewed and the sample "snowballed" (Bailey, 1978:83) in this fashion.

Thirty housewives were interviewed; ten interviews were dropped, to make a final sample of twenty. Six interviews were considered exploratory and were used to formulate an approach to subsequent interviews. These six interviews were not directly quoted in "The Story."
Two women were found to be staying home because of their religious beliefs that it is a woman's role to do so. Each had three children and expected to have more children and to remain at home indefinitely. It was decided that women who stay home because of religious beliefs require a separate study; consequently, transcripts from these interviews were excluded from this study.

Another two women were excluded from this study because they were found to belong to the category of housewife which Lopata (1971:66) called "career-oriented" or "society-oriented", focused upon a role or set of roles outside the family institution." The two women were midwives who had developed a deep ideological commitment to providing families with an alternative to hospital births. This commitment grew out of their own unsatisfactory experiences with hospital births. While these women did not hold regular jobs outside the home, it was decided that their strong career commitment placed them in a different category from the majority of housewives interviewed. This category of housewife calls for its own study. (Lopata found this category of housewife to be very rare, almost totally missing from the hundreds of women she interviewed. The fact that two of the thirty women in this study were identified in this category may be an indication that this category has increased as a result of social and political commitments developed during the 1960's.)

The twenty women who formed the final sample hold many characteristics in common. It was felt that their story needed telling. (Since the six preliminary interviews were of women much like these
twenty-six of the thirty women interviewed had much in common.) Therefore, it was decided to draw on these twenty interviews of members of a group who can be called "traditional housewives."

**Interviews**

The primary research data for this study consisted of the verbatim transcripts of interviews conducted with twenty full-time housewives. An unstructured interview (Denzin, 1970:126), in which open-ended questions were posed in no particular order, was used during the preliminary interviews. Among the questions posed were, "What can you tell me about yourself?" and "What is it like to stay home?" Following the transcription and analysis of these interviews, a more focused interview was developed for subsequent interviews.

It was decided that the analysis of the interviews would be facilitated if questions were grouped according to informants' stage of life. Therefore, the first set of questions focused on the period of time beginning when the informant graduated from high school and covered such topics as career goals, college education, marriage, work history, first pregnancy and the transition from employee to housewife. The second set of questions dealt with daily life as a housewife and covered such topics as housework, membership in organizations, friendships and, especially, attitudes toward childrearing. The third set of questions concentrated on future plans, including plans for returning to school or work and arrangements that would facilitate this return.

As a control, it was decided to limit the interviews to a maximum of ninety minutes. All of the taped interviews were pre-scheduled and
took place in the informants' homes. Children were present at all of
the interviews and, while they were often distracting, they provided a
good opportunity to observe the informants engaged in childcare. (If
the informants had children near the age of my youngest daughter, I
brought her with me to the interview for two reasons. I found that
discussing our children was a good ice breaker prior to the interview
itself. Secondly, if my daughter played with the informants' children
there were fewer distractions during the interview.)

In addition to the scheduled interviews, it was often possible to
make use of the "prolonged interview" (Denzin, 1970:237), "in which
subject and sociologist continuously interact and reflect upon the
subject's statements". Follow-up questions were asked during casual
conversations whenever the informants were encountered.

Supplemental Research Methods

One method which was particularly useful in "thickening" (Geertz,
1973) the description was to use my personal experience as a full-time
housewife as a guide in knowing what to ask. As Glaser and Strauss
(1967:252) point out, "... the researcher can get -- and cultivate --
crucial insights not only during his research (and from his research)
but from his own personal experience prior to or outside it." I began
to formulate many of the questions that I asked this group of housewives
while I was acquainted with a similar group of full-time housewives
following the birth of my first child.
A second method involved observation of mothers and children at such locations as neighborhood parks, swimming pools, and babysitting cooperative meetings. Often, the observation was accompanied by a third technique, "listening in" to conversations. Several times a week, I walked through a neighborhood park frequented by many of the informants, knowing that I might "run into" one or more of them. If I did, I would engage them in conversation. (However, at times I felt constrained to say, "Anything and everything you say can and will be used as data.") Notes taken following these observations, eavesdroppings, and deliberate conversations were treated as data.

A final research technique involved enlisting a friend as a key informant. She had been a full-time housewife for many years, was newly enrolled in graduate school, and could reflect on her experience as a full-time housewife from the perspective of one who was in the process of making the transition to employment via a return to school. Her insights were invaluable, since while she had been at home she had fully embraced the role of housewife. Schwartz and Jacobs (1979:66) recommend the use of respondents as research subjects. She was both a respondent and a colleague.

Data Analysis

Following Glaser and Strauss, interviewing and analysis of interviews proceeded simultaneously. Approximately four interviews were conducted in a set, followed by a pause for analysis of and reflection on transcripts of the previous set of interviews.
Analysis was facilitated by asking informants to talk about their lives following the usual time sequence of a story. The separate parts of "The Story" emerged as the interviews proceeded. Closure was achieved when, following the last set of interviews, the stories felt familiar and complete.
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