WORK AND FAMILY: COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN
EMPLOYED WOMEN'S MANAGEMENT OF DUAL ROLES

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WORK AND FAMILY: COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN EMPLOYED WOMEN'S MANAGEMENT OF DUAL ROLES

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Abstract

Recent changes in American families have resulted in an influx of mothers entering the workforce. Research has addressed work and family issues by exploring the challenges people experience in their daily routines and social interactions. Medved (2004) explores married women’s micro-practices in ordinary, everyday life to provide an understanding of how women negotiate work and family. This research extends Medved’s work, by examining the micro-practices of employed mothers without domestic partners. This study employs conversational interviewing as a means of data gathering and an analysis technique focused on identifying routines or micro-practices in daily interaction. This research explores three issues: how women account for the accomplishment of work and family, how women interpret or understand their actions and interactions, and the forms of personal and emotional support they identify. The women who participated in this research accounted for their management of work and family in terms of two broad categories of routines: communicative practical actions and individual practical actions. The women’s understandings of their actions and interactions were examined in terms of accountings they provided in discussing their daily routines and social interactions. The women identified forms of personal and emotional support unique to their situations as mothers without domestic partners.
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CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

1.1 Focus of the Research

Everyday life for the working parent is stressful, and the responsibilities and demands of work and family can be taxing, emotionally draining, and tiresome. Juggling the two responsibilities with ease is not likely to happen. In the management of the dual roles of worker and parent, conflicts may occur in dual-earner households. Research suggests that marital relationships are adversely affected (i.e., conflict and arguments may occur as a result of decisions being made without consultation with the spouse) and family stress may increase (Hofmann, 2003).

It is imperative to analyze how work and family are managed in everyday life because of the complexities that exist in managing the roles. There exists a large body of scholarly research on the management of work and family in the disciplines of Sociology and Psychology; however, relatively few studies have been conducted from a Communication perspective. Medved (2004) explored the dual-earner couple’s daily actions and routines as they interactionally achieved work and family. Medved suggests that future research explore diverse family typologies. A large portion of the scholarly research on managing both work and family uses a sample of white, middle to upper income, married persons. It is imperative that diverse voices (people of color; gay and/or lesbian parents; the employed lower-income, single working mothers; and the employed lower-income, single working fathers) be incorporated in current Communication research on management of work and family. The goal of this project is
to extend Medved's research by examining the actions and routines of employed women without domestic partners as they accomplish work and family. The routines of these women will likely be different than those of dual-earner couples with children, and they may well experience a greater degree of stress as both work and family are managed.

1.2 Everyday Life

Ordinary life, simple and mundane as it may seem, is important to study. The complex routines of daily life become so embedded that they are taken-for-granted, transparent, and mundane. Carefully looking at the pragmatics of daily life illuminates how and why people do what they do. Although most social research takes a macro approach, looking at how individuals live their daily, ordinary lives at a micro level is certainly just as meaningful. Ethnographers interested in exploring the micro practices of cultures place high value on understanding how people interact in their ordinary social worlds, and on interpreting their mundane communicative processes. The "here and now" is, in fact, the essence of life itself. Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology, in particular, is the study of how people make sense of their everyday, normal social activities (Heritage, 1984, p. 103). The routines of everyday life afford individuals pattern, structure, and order, which are created, maintained, and transformed through communication. Examining the "routine nature of the seen but unnoticed" (Heritage, 1984, p. 118) provides an understanding of how actions are co-constituted in interaction and of how people come to understand and structure their lives.

As Littlejohn (2002) notes, "Because communication is the process by which all reality is constructed, it is involved in all things and separate from none" (pp. 164-165).
Parents create, maintain, and transform the routines of their everyday lives through communication. Routines emerge out of interaction, and change may occur when something is not effective and just *simply doesn’t work*, or as a result of some type of conflict, issue, or circumstance that warrants special attention to a situation. That special attention often will result in the creation of a new routine resulting from need or necessity.

**1.3 Work and Family**

Women are more likely to be employed now than they were in the past, which has created major changes in the perception of family and work (Kelly & Sequeira, 1997). Because society’s perception of family structure is changing, Communication researchers are studying family functioning with interest. Carlson and Kaemar (2000) note that research on work and family must acknowledge the interaction between the two roles: “It is this interaction that has become important to understand because how individuals react to and deal with the interaction between the work and family domains has vital consequences for the individual and the organization” (p. 1031). The issues of work and family for dual-earner couples are multi-faceted, including issues such as life role values (Carlson & Kaemar, 2000), role conflict (Doumas, Margolin, & John, 2003), role strain (Elliot, 2003; Golden, 2001; Himsel & Goldberg, 2003; Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, & Miles, 1998), children (Kurz, 2000), boundaries (Garey, 1995; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Yodanis, 2000), and workplace policies (Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith, 2004; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003). Each of these issues needs to be examined.
1.3.1 Life Role Values. Carlson and Kaemar (2000) succinctly state that “the incorporation of values into the work-family conflict literature is important because life role values are central to organizing meaning and action for working people” (p. 1035). Values are principles that guide actions and govern how one assigns meanings to their actions, and influence how work-family conflicts are managed. The choices parents make are guided by values and meanings, which are negotiated in communicative actions. People have different work and family life role values in that they prioritize the importance of work differently. For example, one parent may work out of the necessity for income, while another parent may work to supplement income. Carlson and Kaemar’s (2000) research suggests, “that life role values do make a difference in the way that work-family conflict is experienced, suggesting the underlying process differs according to values held” (p. 1049).

1.3.2 Role Conflict. Role conflict results from conflict occurring between two or more roles (as for example, parent and worker), and one role affects the other role. Doumas, Margolin, and John’s (2003) research participants were 49 married couples with at least one child. The couples wrote in daily diaries and responded to questions about work experience, health behaviors, and marital interaction. The information gleaned from the diaries included daily interference processes (energy and stress level), health-promoting behaviors (time sleeping, eating, and exercising), and marital interaction (marital warmth, withdrawal, and conflict). Their research findings suggest that when men and women work fewer hours a day, they have positive interactions at home. Generally, the day after husbands reported a negative marital interaction, the wives
indicated working and eating more. Their daily routine changed. This study addresses families and the distress that work and family may cause for dual-earner couples, and the results shed light on how work issues may spill over into another context, home, and cause conflict. The research is important because it taps key issues in maintaining multiple roles.

1.3.3 Role Strain. Role strain is defined as an "on-going stressor that is linked to the expectations of a particular social role or roles" (Elliot, 2003, p. 158). Elliot (2003) cites Pearlin (1983) in noting that role strain includes four main themes: "a role that demands more than an individual can give," "being in a role that is against one's will," "conflict within a role with members of one's role set," and "conflict between or among the demands of multiple roles" (p. 158). As a result of value-based choices in both the work and family realms, role conflicts and role strain arise.

Role strain may be an individual issue, but the conflicts and dyadic negotiations that occur are communication issues. Elliot (2003) explores the roots of role strain and notes that as a result of work and family conflicts, organizations experience absenteeism, decreased productivity, and increased turnover. Role strain may create depression, decrease well-being, increase marital tension, decrease marital companionship, and increase distress (insomnia, changes in appetite, and tension-related aches and pains). Moreover, role strain at home occurs as dual-earner couples manage housework, and the unequal division of housework between women and men can create havoc and conflict (Himsel & Goldberg, 2003). Work expectations can interfere with family expectations
and vice versa, which illustrates the bidirectional nature of role expectations (Eagle, Icenogle, Maes, & Miles, 1998).

**1.3.4 Children.** The presence of children “seems to exacerbate” the complexities of managing work and family (Hofmann, 2003, p. 1). Some parents who work prioritize their life around their children’s needs (i.e., being at home when their child(ren) are sick, taking them to extra-curricular activities, and being available for interaction). The age of the child(ren) will influence how work and family are managed. Research on the work and family of employed mothers with teenagers (e.g., Kurz, 2000) will differ from research on mothers with preschoolers (e.g., Campbell & Moen, 1992) because of the additional concerns associated with raising young children (adequate childcare, trust with regard to the child(ren) themselves and those responsible for childcare, and the children being less independent). Teenagers may stay at home after school and are capable of shouldering the responsibility for their own well-being for several hours. Additionally, family stages (new parent, school-aged children, or post-parental family) will influence work and family management (White, 1999) and may result in the decision to focus entirely on the family, leaving the prospect of working open for a future date. Furthermore, regardless of a child’s age or family stage, the presence of children in a home will almost inevitably create additional role conflicts and role strains. Some mothers want to be at home with their children after school, so they work night shifts (Garey, 1995) or have flexible work schedules (Kurz, 2000) to ensure that they are at home to meet their family’s needs. Garey’s (1995) research, for example, shows how night shift nurses socially construct themselves as stay-at-home mothers, which preserves
the cultural norm for mothering (staying at home) and allows them to spend time at home with their children.

Kurz’s (2000) research explores family arrangements for after-school care of children between the ages of 11 and 17. Kurz’s goal was to explore how mothers managed their work and family life to accommodate the needs of their teenagers upon arriving home from school. Kurz’s findings suggest that mothers want to be at home when their teenagers get home from school so they can discuss their child’s school day. Kurz’s sample found that mothers felt that if their teenagers were asked about their day later in the evening, their teenagers would be less open to discuss important events which occurred earlier in the day. Furthermore, the mothers valued afternoons with their teenagers because they didn’t want their children to be lonely, knew their teenagers would be leaving home in a few years, and wanted to monitor their teenagers’ behavior. As a result, they altered their work schedules and priorities to allow for this. Role conflict and role strain occur as mothers manage work and family. Managing dual roles requires special coping skills, but how do working mothers manage the realms of work and family on their own?

1.3.5 Boundaries. The ways in which boundaries between family and work are established affect how parents negotiate, handle, and resolve issues while managing dual roles. Boundary research explores how people create and maintain boundaries “that distinguish and order time, space, or other related constructs into domains that are meaningful for the individual” (Rau & Hyland, 2002, p. 115). Boundaries may help employed parents separate work and family domains, so they can “direct their focus to
whichever domain is currently salient to them," but those same boundaries may also
make it difficult to manage both roles simultaneously because it is difficult to move from
one role to another (p. 115). For example, when a parent brings their child(ren) to work,
they may likely experience difficulty in attempting to work and parent simultaneously.
Issues of boundary control may cause inter-role conflicts to emerge as a parent manages
work and family. Inter-role conflict occurs when there is an “inability or difficulty in
meeting competing demands” (p. 115).

Nippert-Eng (1996) states that, “through everyday choices and practices, we each
continually work toward some level of integration/segmentation, enacting, reinforcing,
and modifying our ideas of what is ‘work’ and ‘home’ and how they should relate” (p. 7).
Such boundary work “is uniquely social” as “each of us engages in it according to
specific sociocognitive and social-structural constraints and draws from a common
repertoire of cultural activities, symbols, and organizing strategies to do it” (p. 7). How a
woman defines and redefines work and home is the process of boundary work;
adjustments and negotiations are made to accommodate the views of the two realms.

1.3.6 Workplace Policies. One contemporary social issue in American society
involves how women should solve logistical complications arising between work and
family: either on their own (individually) or by implementation of social policies and
programs (i.e., paid maternity leave, paid dependent-care leave, and the Family Medical
Leave Act, to list a few). Currently, a number of organizations have hired personnel who
specialize in assisting employees and employers mutually deal with work and family
issues so work and family may be better managed (Sullivan, Hollenshead, & Smith,
2004, p. 24). Research from Communication (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003) and Sociology (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002) explores the related communicative, verbal and nonverbal, interpersonal interactions that occur in the workplace. Although the policies exist, some parents do not use the policies because they fear their co-workers will resent them. This can cause stress for parents at work.

Kirby and Krone’s (2002) research explores the communicative practices relative to work-family policies within a governmental organization. It has been suggested that organizational members who utilize work-family policies experience detrimental repercussions, which affect career promotions. Their study investigated organizational discourse and applied Giddens’ structuration theory as the theoretical framework to examine the communicative phenomenon regarding work-family policy implementation. When someone uses an existing work-family policy, co-workers can become irritated and even angered because their workload increases, norms are violated, and where male workers are concerned, the paternal leave policy questions traditional cultural norms (father as bread-winner and mother as primary care-giver). Two themes emerge from the interview data complied during this study: talk about preferential treatment (inequities, discourse about fairness, and discrimination) and talk about work-family policy (use and abuse of policy utilization and co-worker peer pressure). The researchers noted that annual leave did not produce worker resentment because all of the employees were entitled to that particular benefit, and that when co-workers feared the consequences of utilizing policies, they underutilized policies. As a result, supervisors are being advised
to encourage the utilization of family-friendly policies. Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) research findings suggest employees will use policies when they have supportive supervisors. Although the policies are intended to reduce stress and increase worker retention (Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002), they have, in fact, created inequities and resentment, and having the active support of a supervisor may be able to compensate for such.

Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, and Buzzanell (2003) indicate that employees are asking and negotiating for flexible work schedules so that they can manage work and family, and they say, "communication can serve as a catalyst" and it illustrates the "centrality of discourse" for empowerment when workers negotiate for a work-family balance (p. 2). Parker (1994) suggests that future research explore the relationships between family and supportive workplaces and relate them to job performance and satisfaction.

A plethora of research on work and family issues has been conducted, as the issues are complex and multi-faceted; however, less research has been done on the specific daily practices of managing work and family. Dual-earner couple communication and workplace interaction research are related to work and family, and provide an overall (or macro level) understanding of the management of work and family. Medved (2004) addresses the everyday, ordinary, mundane, and often transparent lived experiences of women who manage work and family from a micro level. Although Psychology and Sociology based research focuses on the individual conflicts and stresses
encountered as work and family issues are managed, Medved explores how actions and interactions are accomplished in everyday communicative interaction.

1.4 Medved’s Study

1.4.1 Introduction. Medved (2004) explores the routines and interactions that comprise the ordinary, everyday communicative accomplishments of work and family. She is interested in understanding how “navigating and negotiating work and family happens” (p. 131). By exploring daily routines and actions at a micro level, Medved makes apparent the normally transparent communicative efforts of managing work and family. Her theoretical perspective stems from Garfinkel’s concepts of accounting (examining experiences), practical action (actions that are situational and practical), and commonsense rules or “schemes of interpretation or ways of explaining particular actions based on our commonsense knowledge or institutionalized understandings of the world” (p. 131). One form of action is speaking, so interaction is a form of action that Medved suggests is essential to examine.

1.4.2 Research Questions. Medved (2004) considers two research questions: 1) “How do women account for the accomplishment of daily work and family routines in terms of practical actions and interactions?” and 2) “What commonsense rules do women use to account for practical actions and interactions shaping work and family routines?” (p. 31).

1.4.3 Participants. Participants were 35 married females who were solicited from daycare facilities, and who were employed at least 30 hours a week outside of the home, and who had a child less than five years of age. Semi-structured interviews were
conducted, in which women were asked to describe their typical day: morning and evening routines, division of work and family responsibilities, and to share difficult experiences encountered in the management of work and family.

1.4.4 Analysis. From the interview transcripts, Medved (2004) formed categories of daily routines, and then “coded for pragmatic actions and interactions” (p. 132). She noticed that as women shared their experiences, they often “punctuated” their actions and interactions with life events (p. 132). They related their experiences to “particular life events,” such as “work situations or family structure” (p. 132). The language about such events and situations helped Medved further analyze the transcribed data and develop three action categories.

Medved’s (2004) first category was routinizing actions, or actions and interactions that are repeated over and over that constitute a routine. This category was further analyzed to explore the commonsense rules or “schemes of interpretation” that justified such actions (p. 132). Connecting was the first of four commonsense rules, and can be described as a routine communication event in which some women spoke to their spouse at work at least once a day on the telephone to coordinate who would pick up the children from school or daycare and some women routinely phoned their child’s daycare provider to find out how their child was doing. The second commonsense rule was alternating, which involved couples taking turns with regard to childrearing activities; for example, bathing the children and getting them ready for bed. Women accounted for this action by mentioning how involved their husbands were. The third commonsense rule developed from the routinizing superordinate cluster was prepping. Prepping was
organizing children’s clothes, lunch boxes, and other essentials the night before the items were needed. Women’s accounts described prepping as a way to lessen the amount of stress they would experience the next day. The final commonsense rule was reciprocating. This action involved “exchanging childcare” with friends and family, and this “practical action was described as swapping or trading childcare services” (p. 135).

Medved’s (2004) second category was improvising, as when the women managed interruptions to their routine(s). Medved created three commonsense rules that explained how the women managed conflicts with work and family arrangements by improvising or doing things differently to negotiate a problem. The first of the three commonsense rules was requesting assistance. Women asked supervisors, family members, co-workers, and friends to help. Relational factors were considered when asking for assistance (how others understood the work and family conflict, in particular if they themselves had children). She found that women may ask for assistance with childcare when their child is sick, because they do not themselves have any remaining paid sick days left for the year. Trading off was the second commonsense rule, and it had much in common with alternating; the most important difference was that trading off occurred as a result of last minute, unplanned, emergencies. The women’s accounts contained argumentative interactions involving “language of anger and negative emotions” (p. 138) that were potentially the result of unplanned changes to a routine. This research finding suggests that deviations from the routine practical actions cause conflict in interpersonal relationships. The final commonsense rule was evading. Evading was “altering or withholding particular types of information” (p. 138). Women’s accounts revealed how
evading helped them negotiate and manage work and family, even though evading was not perceived as a positive communication behavior. Evading was prominent in work relationships, as well as in the family. One woman used strategic ambiguity, as her husband would always ask when she would be home. Her rationale was that if she told him, he would have an expectation of her. This woman used strategic communication to help her negotiate to accomplish work and family.

The third and final category was restructuring or reorganizing. Although the previous superordinate clusters, routinizing and improvising, involve a routine or deviation from a routine, the final category, restructuring, is distinguishable from the first two in that it involves restructuring actions that “constitute a process leading to a new set of routinizing behaviors” (p. 138) in order to negotiate work and family. Restructuring was often the result of permanent changes, rather than emergency, impromptu, or temporary changes (as for example, loss of employment, new job location, addition to the family, and/or changing developmental needs). Deliberating, as a practical action, occurred in women’s accounts as they would talk about the decision making process (i.e., exploring all possible options and assessing the advantages and disadvantages of those options). In addition to deliberating, negotiating was a practical action in women’s accounts. Negotiating was a restructuring of actions that was apparent when the women offered alternatives to create a new and “shared solution” (p. 139).

Medved’s (2004) research findings illustrate how these women managed the dual roles related to work and family. The women’s accounts help them and others make sense of their actions, as their descriptions, examples, and stories reveal their realities.
Those realities provide Communication scholars and the broader population with an understanding of how women “do” work and family. Medved explores the “taken-for-granted micro-practices” (p. 140) that these working mothers accomplished as they negotiated the complexities of managing work and family. As Medved suggests, “it is through these everyday actions and interactions that we get a glimpse of the practices that constitute work and family balance, or alternatively, conflict” (p. 140).

1.4.5 Suggestions for Future Research. Medved’s (2004) study participants were white married women in dual-earner households. To garner a better understanding of employed women outside of that sample, Medved argues that it will be important to research diverse family structures, including single mothers, divorced parents, and low-income families. Most work and family research from Psychology and Communication utilizes samples that do not represent the range of family types in contemporary American society. I will extend Medved’s (2004) research to provide insights into the experiences of employed mothers without a domestic partner.

1.5 Research Question One and Two

The first and second research questions are modeled on Medved’s (2004) study. First, how do employed mothers without domestic partners account for the accomplishment of daily work and family routines in terms of practical actions and interactions? Second, how do women interpret or understand the practical actions and interactions they employ in these work and family routines?
1.6 Employed Mothers Without a Partner

1.6.1 Introduction. Parents without domestic partners, who manage work and family without assistance, have complex issues much different from those facing dual-earner families with children and single mothers in an “extended household” (Cohen, 2002, p. 445). One of the most striking differences between dual-earner and single-earner families may be income difference. Most single mothers are “less well-off” economically than married couples (Remez, 1998, p. 3). Whether a mother is unmarried, single, divorced, or chooses to raise a child on her own, this woman works and parents and only has “one pair of hands” (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998, p. 17). Jackson (1993) said, “women heading families must work, whether they want to or not, for financial reasons” (p. 33).

1.6.2 Misconceptions. There are a number of common misconceptions of “single” mothers. There are negative assumptions regarding mothers who are not married, the most common being the belief that they have been through a divorce, separation, or widowhood, or that their male partner abandoned the family. There is an increasing number of women who actively choose to parent alone because of adoption laws, medical advancements (i.e., artificial insemination), and flexible workplace policies. Additionally, the young and “never-married cohort has increased significantly as a proportion of all single mothers” (Figueroa & Melendez, 1993, p. 869).

Mannis (1999) studied ten well-educated, well-supported, and financially secure mothers who chose to parent on their own. Although those women did not represent the majority of mothers without partners, “amidst the most glowing descriptions of happiness
with their children, these women are often quick to say ‘it’s tough’” (p. 126), though they also noted that they “may be better off than divorced women because they never expected any help” (Mannis, 1999, p. 126). Couples can share the responsibilities of household chores and employment schedules, but how does a single parent manage? An employed mother who does not live with a partner is highly likely to assume all domestic responsibilities. Many scholars note the limited amount of research on single parents, specifically indicating that “the voices of lone mothers are largely missing from the research literature on lone parents and their children” (Mason, 2003, p. 41).

1.6.3 Emotional and Relational Work. Since parents who do not live with domestic partners face special challenges that are different from those faced by dual-earner couples, these working mothers may seek personal and emotional support. The literature suggests some women receive support from their co-workers, supervisors, and friends, but this can’t be assumed for all women. According to Medved’s (2004) research findings on emotion and relational work, both are embedded in daily micro-practices. Medved (2004) draws on Buzzanell’s (1997) research in noting that “emotional labor refers to the management of feeling in the workplace for pay” (p. 141). Emotion work (the emotional experiences as a couple negotiates work and family) addresses how employed parents feel and how some actions lead to “emotion filled interactions of work and family” (p. 141). Emotion work is constructed through the process of deliberating and negotiating stressful events and negative interactions. Medved (2004) provides an analysis of the emotional and relational work that is embedded in the process of doing work and family, noting that “doing work and family must also be explained as doing
relationships, not just taken-for-granted as a function of time management or organizational policies” (p. 140). Relational work is an active process that is related to social support; and thus, without social support, there may be relational stress.

1.7 Research Question Three

Social support for the participants in Medved’s study was found predominantly to be between the marital partners. How do employed mothers without domestic partners receive social support? Addressing this query, my third research question is “What are the forms of personal and emotional support that women identify in managing work and family?”

1.7.1 Social Support. Managing work and family can be tiresome, demanding, and taxing, and research suggests that mental health may suffer as a result of such stress. The stress also affects relationships and interpersonal communication; thus, to combat this stress, an employed parent may need some form of emotional support. This phenomenon is not limited solely to employed parents, however; all parents need a good support system regardless of employment status. Parents seek emotional support and adult conversation and in order to achieve these, they will establish a communicative network of supportive family and friends (Hertz & Ferguson, 1998). Research suggests social support reduces role stress and conflict in families (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999). Social support is likely to reduce a person’s perceptions of work or family stress, which in turn decreases family and work conflict (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999). During stressful times, “families provide support through everyday” interactions (Leach & Braithwaite, 1996, p. 201). Because of the geographic mobility of contemporary families, family
members “must develop some way of staying in touch and sharing information about family members’ status, accomplishments, and needs” in order to “provide the necessary physical and/or emotional support for one another” (p. 201).

Roxburgh’s (1999) research explores gender differences and influence of parenthood and social support on job satisfaction. The research results imply that when women received support from their partner, they were more likely to be satisfied with work, but the findings did not suggest that the same was true of men. Participants in Roxburgh’s (1999) study were dual-earner families, hence the question of how a non-married woman would receive support. Social support may come from “non-kin or fictive kin sources” and “friends may provide even more support than in previous generations” (Leach & Braithwaite, 1996, p. 214). In some workplaces, women may receive social support from their co-workers, but this cannot be assumed for all women without domestic partners. Workplace support involves support from “managers and co-workers” (Voydanoff, 2002, p. 142), but there is limited research on the “role of supportive workplaces in the lives of women on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder” (Parker, 1994, p. 168). The importance of workplace support cannot be over emphasized. DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman (2000) refer to Repetti’s (1987) research noting that women employed in “more positive social environments” experience less depression than those not employed in positive work environments (p. 320).

Work environments in which the discussion of children is appropriate may contribute to an increase in organizational morale. Medved (2004) cites Farley-Lucas’ (2000) research findings in noting that women engage in unique conversations with their
co-workers about their children, which is called motherhood talk, and that perceived motherhood talk is “highly valuable” as it “can enhance support networks and organizational loyalty” (p. 130). The concept of global support was addressed by Suarez and Baker (1997). Global support is the degree to which “parents feel supported by others in raising their child, their sources of support, and the availability of these people when dealing with parental concerns about their children” (p. 375). Global social support is critical in single parent families as the parent may experience more difficulties than the traditional family and as such will need a larger quantity, if not higher quality, of support.

With the advances in technology and the Internet, single parents may also get social support from computer-mediated communication (CMC). The Internet is readily available and accessible for a minimal monthly fee. Sources of available Internet support and information are organizations such as Parents Without Partners, Solo Parenting Alliance, Sole Mothers International, Parents Place, The Single Parent Resource, Single Parent Circle of Support, all of which provide “been-there, done-that” support (Walton, 1999).

Again, most research that explores work and family issues has employed samples that are not representative of the heterogeneity found in families in contemporary American society. The majority of research on this topic has studied married, white, and upper-income females. It is imperative that diverse voices be incorporated in current communication research on management of work and family. Medved (2004) suggests that “future research needs to explore micro-practices that would constitute the routines of single mothers, single fathers, divorced parents, and more broadly incorporating the
lives of people of color, gay and lesbian individuals and the working poor” (p. 142). The goal of this project is to extend Medved’s (2004) research by examining the actions and routines of employed mothers who do not live with domestic partners as they accomplish work and family. The research project will provide an illumination of their daily accomplishments, actions, interactions, and routines. This research will provide important insights that will be helpful to many employed mothers, family members, and employers.
CHAPTER TWO

Methods and Design

The first goal of this study is to understand how employed mothers without domestic partners account for the daily accomplishment of their family and work routines. The second goal is to understand how women interpret or understand the actions and interactions they employ in those routines. The third goal is to examine the forms of personal and emotional support these women identify in managing work and family.

2.1 Interviews

From a social constructionist perspective, “knowledge is a product of symbolic interaction within social groups” (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 27). A person’s reality is formed through interaction within, between, and among cultural and social groups. Berger and Luckmann (1966) succinctly state:

Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others.... I also know, of course, that the others have a perspective on this common world that is not identical with mine. My “here” is their “there.” My “now” does not fully overlap with theirs. My projects differ from and may even conflict with theirs. All the time, I know that I live with them in a common world. Most importantly, I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and their meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality. (pp. 22-23)
From the epistemology of Constructionism, Crotty (1998) claims that “...all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Crotty (1998) states, “meaningful reality is socially constructed” (p. 63). Through communication, shared meaning is created, but meaning is also maintained and transformed as those shared meanings emerge in social interaction.

Given the assumptions of social construction, conversational interviews are the most appropriate research data collection method for this research. Such interviews are “used to understand a particular social phenomena” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p. 273), from the participant’s perspective, and the interview “is the raw material for the later process of meaning analysis” (Kvale, 1996, p. 145). “Interview talk is the participants’ rhetorical construction of their experience,” and allows researchers to gather information “about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). Additionally, though this approach to data collection parallels Medved’s (2004) study, it is not a duplication, given that Medved employed semi-structured interviews. Conversational interviews are appropriate for this study because the research focuses on understanding the mother’s experiences as they manage dual roles: work and family.

2.2 Participants

Kvale (1996) suggests 15+- 10 participants for research using the interview method. He indicates that the number of participants should be “as many subjects as
necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 101). Time resources were considered
in this interview research. The interviews were not time consuming, but the transcription
process required an enormous amount of time. In the transcription process, I continued to
analyze the data. I continued seeking participants and conducting interviews until “a
point of saturation” or until new concepts did not emerge (Kvale, 1996, p. 102). I
interviewed six volunteer participants. Although I was not limited to recruiting outside of
the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) vicinity, all participants were employed at the
university. This was not a deliberate choice, but a result of the snowball technique.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest the snowball technique as an appropriate
strategy when studying people who share specific attributes and characteristics (p. 124).
My use of the snowball approach ensured that each participant had “appropriate
experience” that was “likely to deliver a rich lode of information” (p. 179). I asked
people associated with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and among my acquaintances
for potential participants who met the criteria: employed mothers residing with a child
under the age of ten. I told potential participants that I was seeking employed mothers
who do not live with domestic partners, so that in conducting a personal interview with
them, I could explore their actions and interactions as they manage work and family by
conducting a personal interview with them. I mentioned that the goal of the study was to
better understand the nature of how family and work are managed. I specified that the
interview would be audiotape recorded and transcribed, pseudonyms would be assigned
to their names so there would be no link between them and their data, and all tapes and
notes would be locked in the Communication Department for five years.
When I found an employed mother who met the research criteria, I asked her for other acquaintances who met the same research criteria, explaining that I was seeking additional potential interviewees. Upon the participants’ agreement to the interview, we scheduled a meeting at their convenience. Since all participants were employed, one interview was conducted before work hours, another was held after work hours, and the remaining four were scheduled during the participant’s lunch break.

2.3 Procedures

One 60-90 minute, face-to-face meeting was conducted with each participant in Gruening 507, the Department of Communication’s consultation room. I expressed my appreciation to the participants by thanking them for their interest in the research and then informed the participants that the interview would be audiotape recorded with possible supplemental note-taking. Once I received verbal agreement to audiotape record the interview, I unobtrusively turned on the audio recorder.

I read, out loud, the informed consent form (see Appendix A), which provided information on the description of the study, risk and benefits, confidentiality, and anonymity. The participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. Additionally, I indicated that their names would not be used in any report or paper, and a pseudonym would be used for their interview responses as drawn from the interview data.

I asked if they had any questions and if they wished to proceed under all arrangements indicated in the informed consent form. Once I received verbal consent, we engaged in conversation for approximately five minutes to establish rapport. We
spoke about how many children we respectively had, the ages of our children, and then I asked how many hours the mothers worked per week. I inquired about their daily experiences relating to work and family routines and emotional support, and asked follow-up and probing questions to help them share their experiences. These queries were aimed at addressing the research questions. I directed the interviews by asking open-ended questions to help the participants provide stories of their family and work experiences. Open-ended questions provide “rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee” (Kvale, 1996, p. 145). When the conversation led into a non-research-related topic, I diverted attention back to work and family by asking a directing question.

I listened actively and asked interpretation questions (e.g., “What you are saying is…?” and “Do you mean…?”) as a means of “testing the validity of knowledge claims in a dialogue” as “valid knowledge is constituted when conflicting knowledge claims are argued in dialogue” (Kvale, 1996, p. 224). I asked indirect questions so that the participant could “refer directly to the attitudes of others” (p. 134). When necessary, I asked specifying questions (e.g., “What did you think when…?”) and when I wanted to know more about their experiences, I asked probing questions (e.g., “Could you tell me more…?”). These processes of “meaning clarification” occurred throughout the interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 132).

Because bracketing personal experience helps during the interpretation process, I attempted to bracket my experiences, especially when they were similar to those of the participant. I found this quite difficult because there were commonalities between the participants and myself. When the participants said something that I could relate to, I
nodded my head, smiled, or laughed with them. On occasion, I laughed with the participants because I, too, had experienced the same event or a similar feeling. At the same time, I attempted to listen to the participants as if I were “learning something new for the first time” (Vandeventer, 2002, p. 40).

In closing the interview, I asked the participants if they had any questions, comments, or anything else they wished to share with me. All participants took this opportunity to express their final thoughts. After the interview, I thanked the participants for their time and interest. I walked the participants to the front door of the Communication Department. Immediately following these procedures, I spent approximately 15 minutes taking notes on the social atmosphere, climate, and nonverbal communication. I personally transcribed all the interviews. I began transcribing the first interview within two hours, so not much time elapsed between the initial interview event and the transcription process. All subsequent audiotapes were transcribed as soon as possible.

2.4 Methods of Data Analysis

Since this was an extension of Medved’s (2004) research, I employed parallel methods of data analysis during and following the transcription of the interviews. It must be noted that unlike many studies that employ conversational interviewing in gathering data, this study did not apply a thematic analysis. I began the analysis at the moment I started the snowball technique and spoke to participants. I made handwritten notes about all interpretations and thoughts during the process. The “reflective thinking” notes and
"asides" reflect my thoughts, questions, and feelings as they emerged in the research process (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 212).

Once I completed the transcription process, I read all transcribed data out loud. This process allowed me to "get a sense of the whole" (Kvale, 1996, p. 194). I continued the analysis by examining the conversations with regard to micro-practices involving actions and interactions (activities, routines, and conversations). I repeatedly examined the interview capta to identify routines, engaging in the process of meaning condensation (Kvale, 1996, p. 194). I then marked those parts of the transcribed text that related to those routines. As I proceeded with the analysis, I re-examined the routines from the broader perspective of human communication as embodied in practices, routines, and interactions. From that process, two broad categories emerged: communicative practical actions and individual practical actions. These two categories addressed my first research question. I then addressed the second research question by describing how women were accounting for their actions and routines, and addressed the third research question by identifying the forms of personal and emotional support the women vocalized.

It must be noted that different categories could be formed by other readers, which demonstrates plurality of interpretations in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996, p. 287). Meaning arises out of "a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader," so the meanings that emerged are not "fixed and universal" as they are a creation which "represents reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). From a social constructionist perspective, interpretation is based on the "assumption of multiple, changing realities" as "meanings of the social
world are constantly changing, and the investigator's own understandings also change in relation to the scene under study" (Lindlof and Taylor, p. 239). The results may yield information that is not generalizable, however, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research. The goal of qualitative research is to understand the particular.

2.5 Researcher as Research Tool

In human science research, the researcher is the research tool (Kvale, 1996). The researcher is accountable for the research design, topic, and processes of analysis. As this was interpretive research, I interpreted what came to my senses. Self-reflection and an understanding of my own experience relative to the research topic were necessary because my interpretations and perceptions influenced the research. Researchers in the interpretive paradigm need to be reflexive and to constantly question their realities, perceptions, and interpretations.

Since bracketing is critical in qualitative research, and Kvale (2000) notes that, "with the variety of conceptions of objectivity, the qualitative interview cannot be objectively characterized as either an objective or subjective method" (p. 64), my biases as the researcher "must be discussed with specific respect to the different conceptions of objectivity and the topic of the concrete inquiry" (p. 64). As this research is an extension of Medved's (2004) research, I was sensitized to her research findings. In addition, and more importantly, my personal life experiences and biases are braided into the interpretations and research findings.

This study gives voice to a group of women who are seldom heard from in research, and I recognize that my lived experiences affected the interpretations in the
research process from its inception to its conclusion. It is essential, then, that I share some of my experiences. I am married to a military serviceman and have two children (four and six years old). Last year, we were both employed, and during that time he frequently was relocated for various time spans, so I often managed work and family issues solo. Currently, he is employed by the United States Army, and I am not employed. My pragmatic communicative activities, dialogic interactions, and routines change depending on his presence or absence.

When my husband is not deployed, he is my main form of emotional and social support. When my husband is deployed, I must continue routines without his help. It is when he is deployed that I really notice how much work he does, how much help he provides, how much he cares for me and our children, and more importantly, how much he provides me emotional and social support. I have often wondered how employed women without domestic partners manage work and family, as I perceive that I have some commonalities with them. On the other hand, I do not have any experience managing work and family on a single income earned by myself.

My single, employed mother raised me for 18 years. My mother had structure-providing routines in her life. Those routines changed on occasion, as she restructured her life. At one time, her work demands increased and this event required that she bring her work home. As far as managing family was concerned, my mother would routinely call me at home to check on me. She would call from work, and as such, there were occasions where I would call her when I needed to ask a question. When I called her, I generally was asking for privileges such as going out with my friends. I was often told
“no,” so some of those adolescent conversations were not harmonious. My mother both worked and maintained our family. This was not easy, as I was a rebellious young child. As I progressed into adolescence, she needed social support. To gain emotional, relational, and social support, she joined the Tough Love and Parents Without Partners organizations.

Not only does my personal experience include being a child in a matriarchal household, I also have experienced the difficulties associated with managing work and family. When my husband is away from home on a work assignment, I am responsible for addressing the needs of my children, as well as those of myself. I know that my mother managed work and family on her own, and I frequently wonder how she did it, so I often phone her for advice, support, and empathy. My mother is my guiding light and because of her experiences, I often seek her assistance, knowledge, and support in the management of work and family. Managing work and family by oneself requires physical and emotional energy, and it is important to me to maintain a dynamic balance between the two roles in order to maintain healthy relationships with my family.

I can certainly identify with Medved’s research findings. I have routines, but try to remain as flexible as I can with what I can and cannot do. I have been a Graduate Teaching Assistant and a student and have been negotiating work, family, and student roles for the past one and a half years. For half of that time, I was on my own, as my husband was deployed. When I was managing the roles on my own, I would often share my conflicts of work and family with my superiors. I did this because I wanted them to know my circumstances before I asked for assistance.
I relate to Medved’s (2004) superordinate clusters of requesting assistance. Special work accommodations were made for me, so that I would teach only during my children’s school hours. I appreciate the employment accommodations, for I would not have been able to complete my thesis project if it were not for the assistance of the Department of Communication’s faculty, staff, and teaching assistants. People have reached out to help me in so many ways and so many times. I feel guilty when I ask for special considerations, as other teaching assistants without children do not get special accommodations. I see how issues of fairness and ethics arise in the workplace as family and work issues are addressed.

Furthermore, I identify with Medved’s restructuring category, as my work and family routines have recently been restructured. Graduate Teaching Assistants must be enrolled in 10 credits and teach two communication classes. With the approaching military commitments related to my husband, as a career soldier, I have had to restructure work in order to manage my family. I was not able to commit the required 20 hours of employed work and write my thesis as a graduate student while my children were at school.
CHAPTER THREE

Description

Conversational interviews were conducted with six volunteer participants in the Department of Communication’s consultation room at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Each interview lasted for one to two hours. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity.

3.1 Loretta

Loretta is employed full-time by the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) and has one child, Callie, who is four years old. In addition to being employed by UAF, Loretta also attends night classes there. Loretta volunteered her time during a one-hour lunch break to speak with me. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

After sharing some information about my family, so that Loretta might feel at ease during the interview, I inquired about her typical morning routine and she asked, “What we do?” Loretta shared her routine by saying that she gets up at 6 a.m., gets partially ready, awakens her daughter, and prepares her daughter for the day before fully preparing herself, “because it is easier to have her ready.” She then turns the television set on so that her daughter can watch cartoons. She feeds her daughter and then takes her to daycare. She indicated that she leaves “by seven and no later than 7:10 a.m., drives to [her daughter’s] daycare (that is about ten or 15 minutes away),” and then drops her off.” Loretta told me that her daughter used to get upset at drop-off time, and that she is “is usually there visiting with her for about ten minutes.” After Loretta leaves the daycare, she goes to work.
When I questioned Loretta about her typical work day routines, she appeared visibly puzzled and asked, “That have to do with her or just me?” My response was, “Both.” She responded by saying that her daughter “always wants me to call her everyday,” and that she calls around lunchtime. I concentrated on this daily phone call because it interested me, and I asked if there were days when she did not make the call. Loretta said, “Yes, she reminds me,” and continued, “Sometimes I do forget just because I have so much going on at work.” I followed up by asking, “When you talk to her, what are some of the things you talk about?” Loretta indicated that they talk about what her daughter had for lunch, what she did in the morning, and how she is doing. I raised a question about the daycare facility’s view on receiving the daily phone call, and Loretta mentioned that the daycare providers usually know that she will call and that they don’t mind. In fact, if her daughter gets upset, the daycare workers tell her that she can look forward to her mother’s call.

We continued our conversation about work routines, but I wanted to find out how emergency situations were handled, so I asked, “What happens when she is sick and you get a phone call saying that someone needs to pick her up?” She recalled a story about being called to pick up Callie because her daughter’s throat was hurting. Loretta picked her daughter up and they went home, only to find out that she had “eaten a chip and she didn’t chew it all the way.” Loretta expressed disappointment and stated, “I was kind of upset about that because I had to get called out of work for that and she wasn’t really sick, but we went home anyway.” She continued to tell me what she does when she receives unexpected calls at work, informing her that someone needs to pick up her
daughter: “If she is sick, I will pick her up and let my boss know and he doesn’t have a problem with it. I will pick her up and take her home or to the doctor.” Interested in Loretta’s response, I followed up by saying, “So, you can do that in your workplace?”

Loretta indicated that her boss is flexible because he has kids and understands the needs that arise as a result. She indicated that she doesn’t miss a lot of work because of her child, and that her co-workers don’t have any problem with her leaving for emergencies because they, too, have kids of their own. She continued by saying, “I mean, the fact that I am not always out all the time makes a big difference. It shows that I am there to work.” I questioned Loretta by asking how the family-friendly atmosphere helps her as a working mother, and without hesitation she replied, “It makes me feel good...if I had an emergency appointment I can walk in there and tell him, and he would be okay with that, and I don’t have to worry about that. That’s the best thing.”

We continued to talk about work, and Loretta indicated that she does not bring her work home. I was curious about her response, so I asked, “How do you set up the two realms, are they separate or are they integrated?” She swiftly replied:

I don’t bring any work home. I just don’t. It is my job; it is not life... my family is probably more integrated into my job and my job is not at all into my family. If I didn’t have that job, I would have a different job. But, my family, that’s number one.

I wanted to discuss work and family conflicts, but Loretta could not think of one situation to share with me. In order to help Loretta ponder issues associated with work and family, I broadened the focus of the question and asked, “Whom do you talk to when
you talk about work and family issues?” She disclosed that she talks to a friend, but they do not talk a lot about work unless “things have gone wrong.” Loretta recalled a story about the time during which she worked in another department, and she noted that she talked a lot about work then because she was unhappy. Loretta would tell her friend “things that happened…or things that I didn’t like in my job…when I talk to her about Callie, just problems I have with her like if she wets the bed.” Loretta enjoys talking to her friend because “she is very good with kids…she helps me…gives me advice on that.” Loretta also indicated that she telephones her mother, who also works at UAF, on a daily basis. They talk about Callie and her mom talks about her work.

When Loretta takes night classes, her mother watches her daughter and Loretta calls to see how Callie is doing. On the nights that Loretta does not have a night class, they usually stay home. At home, Callie plays dress-up while Loretta begins cooking dinner. While dinner is cooking, they play together. She continued to share her evening routine, saying, “I will try to talk to her or see what she did during the day.” Loretta said her daughter takes a long time to eat dinner. Loretta tries to get Callie in bed by eight, but it “doesn’t always happen.”

When Loretta was asked about the evening routines after Callie goes to bed, she noted that she stays up watching television or reading a book. We discussed talking on the phone with friends, and Loretta explained that she doesn’t talk until her daughter is in bed, and specifically stated, “I look at it like that…I only have this amount of time to spend with her.” This interested me, so I followed up her response by asking if she had a lot of stress and anxiety. Loretta mentioned waking up in the middle of the night, feeling
like she has “this internal clock that keeps going and going.” I concentrated on the issue of stress and asked about some of the ways in which she reduces stress. Her immediate response was, “I don’t know. I just don’t do a whole lot. We swim. I usually have Callie with me most of the time. Just take baths or just do something for me, but it is hard to do. I kinda feel guilty sometimes when I do.” We engaged in a conversation about family or friends who could watch Callie, which would afford her some time to herself, and Loretta explained: “I am kind of leery…it is just hard to find people you trust…I usually ask my mom.”

Drawing the interview to a point of closure, I wanted to know if Loretta had any questions, comments, or anything else that she would like to share. Her response alluded to options as she replied:

I talked to another girl… we meet with on Sunday and we talk about our kids a lot, a lot actually, during the day and she said well you could just stay at home and collect welfare…I could never do that…I could probably take more than one class, but I just I don’t want to, and I am trying to take all of my prerequisites so that I can go to dental hygiene school, so it is kinda one step at a time.

As Loretta continued to address her plans for dental hygiene school, she referenced Callie’s father in a low voice: “She doesn’t have that much interaction with her dad.” As Loretta spoke of future plans, I was thinking about when her daughter would start school, because that might alleviate some concerns about childcare. We concluded the interview by talking about children’s educational programs and offering information about such to each other.
3.2 Gabriella

Gabriella works part-time at UAF and is a student, as well. Gabriella chooses her work hours based on her class schedule. Gabriella has two small children and is pregnant. I spent more time interviewing her than I did interviewing any of the other women.

At the beginning of the interview, I shared information about my family and previous work experience. As Gabriella told me about the number of hours which she works each week, she recalled that last year when her kids were sick, she was unable to work and go to class because she had to tend to the “entire sick family.” When everyone was well, Gabriella worked instead of going to class, because she had to pay the bills. She indicated that attending class was more of a want than a need. Gabriella disclosed that her absence at work did not negatively influence her relationships with her co-workers because she was a friend with all of her co-workers. Gabriella explained, “We take classes together, so they completely understood...they would come by the days when I didn’t come to work and they would check in.” Gabriella’s friend, Selena, would come over to her house and ask if she was okay and what was happening in her life. Selena would make tea and honey for her and Gabriella said, “She was a very big moral support for me.” All of Gabriella’s friends have no children and are not married. Gabriella’s friends can be very spontaneous, but she has to plan for a babysitter if she wants to go out.
At one point in the interview, we began discussing Gabriella’s morning routine. Gabriella wakes up 30 minutes earlier than her children and takes a shower. She packs lunches, organizes books, and gets everything together before she awakens her children. Gabriella said, “They will come downstairs all groggy and fussy and so we sit down and we have breakfast. My daughter is an extremely slow eater, so I allot at least an hour for her to eat a bowl of cereal...she eats really, really slow.” Sometimes her children watch television, but that “distracts them and it takes them longer to eat.” She continued by saying that her daughter “knows the routine,” and her son wants to finish all of his tasks, but it takes him “forever,” so she has to encourage him. She said, “Mornings are hectic. Just because you have be somewhere at a specific time and they [the children] don’t understand the concept of being on time and being late.” She added, “Just boom, boom, boom. Trying to get everything done in a timely manner as much as possible.” If Gabriella is late leaving the house, her children will eat at their daycare facility.

After she has taken her children to daycare, Gabriella goes to UAF to study and work. Gabriella shared her work routine and recounted a situation in which her children’s daycare called her at work. Gabriella was notified that her son was biting, and that she needed to go and pick him up. Gabriella illustrated her perceptions about the experience: “My kids are my first priority, so if they need me, then I will drop what I am doing and I will go. So that’s why I have a cell phone...it will take me ten minutes to get there.” She continued, saying that before she was hired, she told her boss, “Look, I really, really want this job, but my family comes first...I need to know that you will understand that.” Her supervisor understood, even though she didn’t have children
herself, and said to Gabriella, “I completely understand. I think that’s very noble of you to put your family first.”

Gabriella described how her routine changes when one of her kids gets sick. Gabriella will notify her workplace and teachers at school, and she told me, “We slow our morning down.” Sometimes her sister can help when the kids are sick: “I will leave my kids with family and my friends, but I’m never comfortable beyond that.” Gabriella perceives her co-workers as part of her family. She explained that one of the biggest factors “of being a single parent is making sure you have the support around you and make it as strong as possible.” Gabriella recalled the situation in which she asked her father for assistance: “I need your help. I need you to fly me and the kids up there. Mike and I are no longer together. I have nowhere to go.” She moved in with her parents and soon after, decided that she would “go crazy” if she lived there any longer because she and her mother have different parenting techniques. Gabriella shared more about her relationship with her mother, and I diverted the topic back to work and family by asking about her evening routines.

Gabriella leaves campus at 5:30 p.m. in order to get to the daycare before the 6:00 p.m. closing time. After she picks up her children, she talks to them about their day on the way home. Gabriella asks, “Who did you play with? What did you do at school?” She explained: “I want to know what they are doing while I am paying for them to do it.” When Gabriella and her children get home, she starts dinner and “tries to have dinner done by 6:30 or 6:45.” She prefers home-cooked meals and tries to “figure the quickest home-cooked meal for the amount of time.” Gabriella indicated that her daughter takes a
long time to eat and said, “It is a balance of making sure she gets all the nutrition she needs, the rest time, and play time after school with Mommy.” Then she bathes her children, which is “de-energizing time.” Gabriella does not read to her children at night because she doesn’t want them to associate reading with sleep when they are at school. Gabriella noted, “By that point I am pretty worn out too...so it is okay for me to slow down and it helps them slow down when I slow down.”

I concentrated on the de-energizing time period by asking Gabriella to tell me more. Her response was,

Everything is very fast paced in the morning. Everything is go, go, go, go, go, we gotta get our teeth, we gotta get our coats, we gotta get our breakfast, get dressed, boom, boom, boom. And we just move, move, move, and when we get home they are really wired from school, so they are running around; they are playing; they are doing their thing; and they sit down for dinner. It starts at dinner when I can get them to sit down, kinda sit still for a few minutes, start calming them down.

Dinner is “family time.” Gabriella told me that she plays music and they “start calming down...just relaxing...veg out, take it to the next, and take it down a notch.”

Gabriella pointed out that she reduces the stress of managing work and family by taking her kids to dinner: “They can tell when I am upset and stressed out and my daughter can really feel that.” In discussing ways to reduce stress, Gabriella recalled a story about what happened when her son was injured and needed emergency medical
care, and the people working at the front gate would not let them on base. According to
Gabriella’s narrative:

It is that kinda stuff that really throws my stress level way up there because when
your kid gets hurt, your main focus is to make them not hurt anymore, and that is
so hard when you don’t have any people cooperating with you.

On occasion, Gabriella asks her parents to watch her first child, so she can spend
time alone with her second child and vice versa.

We continued to discuss the stress of work and family. Gabriella recounts that
she will talk to a friend named Beth. She described:

If there is a point in the middle of the day when I am at home because the kids are
sick, or whatever, or I have, just like, a meltdown, or I just feel like I just need to
step back for a minute, I can call her, wherever she is at, she will pick up the
phone.

I followed up on her response by inquiring about the meltdown. Gabriella
disclosed:

I will be like, oh, my gosh, I just need to talk, and then I will be ok. I will talk to
her for five or 10 minutes just to calm down, explain what is going on, and she
always knows just what to say, making me laugh, make it so it doesn’t feel so
bad.

After Gabriella gets off the phone, she will be “perfectly fine.” Gabriella also indicated
that when she has a meltdown, she needs someone to talk to so she can get it off her
chests. I, too, have experienced similar situations, so I followed up, asking if at that point she feels overwhelmed. She said,

Yeah, the responsibilities, I think it is probably the best way to describe it...like you just are overwhelmed. I mean you feel like you... I mean physically your body can handle only so much. Your body can only handle so much before it breaks down, and so I learned that the hard way.

She continued by mentioning her mother, who wants her to get married and stay at home, and Gabriella said she did not want to do that. At one point Gabriella told me:

I was a stay-at-home mom for two years or a little less than two years. I went out of my mind. You can only do so much. At home, I mean, you can clean and clean and clean and clean and clean and then you can’t clean everything when it is already clean.

Gabriella told me about differences between her and her mother and indicated that she went to an informal counseling session. She continued by noting:

It was actually a really revealing thing for me. Because it turns out that the things that I was saying, and when I look back, I really realized what I was saying and what was going on. My mother never had friends. Never had friends growing up. She was always, if she was stressed, out or if she was worried about something, she would come to me.

Noticing that the topic was not focused on work and family, I directed the conversations towards social support and friends. Gabriella asserts that she counts on her “adult friends,” and will not tell her children “the ups and downs of being an adult.” Due
to the differences of opinion between Gabriella and her mother, I asked whom she relied upon most for emotional support: her mother or friends. Gabriella immediately expressed that her mom wants to know everything, though Gabriella will not offer information, and gives “her the answers she wants to hear to a certain point.” Gabriella used to tell her “straight up,” but after long hours of “lecturing and bitching,” she “doesn’t lie but stretches the truth.” Gabriella expressed: “I don’t really see it as lying because it makes her happy, and it makes me not have to worry about her worrying...it kills two birds with one stone.” Noticing Gabriella’s nonverbal gestures and the social atmosphere, I diverted the topic to her father, asking if she calls him about work and family. Gabriella disclosed: “I do, but not to vent about it. Kind of to hint around that I need financial help.” Gabriella expressed that it was a “shot in her pride to ask,” as that was the first time she had asked for help.

In one of Gabriella’s responses, she mentioned, “Burnout.” She elaborated by saying, “It is just wearing on the soul. You lose motivation.” In addition to burnout, Gabriella mentioned venting, and I asked her to explain that a little more. Gabriella indicated that her friend “gets a lot of it...she’s who I go to when I need to vent, when I need to have a laugh, when I get stressed out, when anything happens I go to her.” When Gabriella’s friends are not available, she will sit in her room, and “scream into a pillow or write.” I followed up by asking what she would write about. She answered:

I just write whatever comes into my head. It is just, you know, why have I not found a husband, why don’t I have a domestic partner to help me? Why did God give me all this stuff to handle...if I write it down I won’t worry about it so
much...I am usually very, very, very, very, upset when I first start writing, and it is very irrational thinking.

She indicated that she would write five or six pages. At the end of the writing, she will have answered some of her “why” questions and feels better. Gabriella described what she does when everything is done. She recounted:

When everything is taken care of, I usually just sit. Just sit by myself. And just go over everything and replay everything in my head to make sure everything is done... I can just sit and not have to worry about thinking about making sure everything is covered.

Gabriella explained how the stress of managing multiple roles affects her sleep:

Because I am the protector, I am the provider, I am the both of the roles, the mom and dad, and I can’t let myself sleep because if I actually fall into a deep sleep and I don’t wake up if something happens to the kids, I would never forgive myself.

Gabriella also mentioned headaches, and noted, “I figure it is a trade off right at this point.” Gabriella commented on the trade off and asserted that going to work and school takes time:

...that doesn’t leave a lot of time for rest...so I guess my health is the trade off for making sure ends are met and the goal is in sight and currently that is a trade off that I am willing to make. I would rather have the degree.

Gabriella disclosed about her routines and plans. She explained,

I try to plan and I try to structure and if I do plan something happens. If I don’t plan and kind of go with the flow, that tends to work better for me and my kids.
If things are a little more flexible, there are 10 or 15 minutes, it adds or it takes from the stress.

Gabriella elaborated on what she meant by a trade off, noting, “I am a control freak...that is definitely a trade off for me because that means ...I have to kinda just go with it...I have to let go of the control and let things flow.” Gabriella commented on her cleaning routines after I asked how she prioritizes. She cleans only on the weekends, does dishes every other day, and does laundry as needed. When Gabriella is out with friends at a restaurant, she has a chance to think about her kids and to talk about guys, classes, and “girl talk”; it is “down time.”

At the end of the interview, I thanked Gabriella. She said, “It is wonderful to talk, it is always helpful to talk...it is nice to have somebody to relate, even if you are married, it’s still nice because your husband is not always around.”

3.3 Suzanne

Suzanne is a full-time employee and student at UAF and has one son, who is seven years old and in the first grade. She volunteered to meet with me during her lunch break. After the introductions and preliminary procedures had been completed, I shared some information about my family and we began discussing her morning routine. She gets up around 5:30 a.m. and lets her son sleep in because “he is just a non-morning person.” They leave the house “no later than a quarter after seven.” Her son attends a before-and-after-school program, so if he does not eat at home, he can eat at his before-school program. The person who watches her son in the morning before school is a long time friend. Suzanne described her day in sequence: she takes her son to his before-
school program, goes to work, leaves work, and picks up her son on her way home. They
go home to “unwind”; they eat and then he gets a bath. She indicated that there was not a
whole lot of down time, and that she tries to get her son in bed by nine. At that point, she
will work on school assignments. When Suzanne has a night class, her mother watches
her son. She explained that she had to adjust her work hours to accommodate the night
class: “So I made a deal. I just take a short lunch on Tuesday and leave at 4:30 p.m.” As
I was listening to Suzanne’s schedule, I became curious about the routine. She indicated
a deviation from the typical routine. Suzanne recounted the incident in which her son
forgot something at the house and had to go back. As she was telling me about how her
son reacted to a situation, she told me, “You are just like ‘just breathe’, you will be
alright,” and we laughed together. She finished by saying that “it is things like that”
(unexpected deviations from the normal routine), which “make it [life] stressful.”

Next, I asked Suzanne if she gets calls from the school when her son is sick. She
recalled a situation in which she was asked to pick up her son, and added, “I left work,
you have to leave whatever you are doing.” I followed up on her response by asking how
difficult it was to leave work in order to pick up her son, and her response was, “I just
hang up the phone and I go and I say to my boss, I gotta go, my son is sick.” She noted
that her supervisor knew when she hired Suzanne that she was a single mom, and that
Suzanne’s family and income revolve around that single factor. Suzanne’s mother can
watch her son if it is absolutely necessary. Suzanne told me that she has been fortunate in
that she works with people who understand her situation. She recalled how much more
difficult it was when she worked at a previous place of employment. Suzanne recounted:
You just have that underlying feeling that people thought, oh, like you just take a week off, like you are just out, sunbathing out on the deck. It’s a real degrading feeling, because you are just there, dealing with everything like breathing treatments through a nebulizer every two hours, and medicine every four hours, they are crying, you are trying to sleep, it is certainly anything but a vacation, and to think that you have just had a week from hell, and then actually you would like another week off just so that you could recuperate yourself, and to kind of get the shun by feeling. It makes you mad, it pisses you off, because, like, ‘you have no idea.’ It shows disregard for the fact that my child was sick and that makes me even madder.

Suzanne remarked that she talks to her mother about work and family issues. Suzanne’s mother provides much social support. Suzanne continued by saying she often talks to her friends, but they don’t usually talk about the kids. She described a situation that led her to call a friend: “This is just insane. I just can’t believe one thing after the next, after the next, and I called her. She was really busy, but she knew I was not having a good day.” Suzanne offered an explanation for the positive effects of the conversation by pointing out:

It was like dumping on somebody that doesn’t really care...that is pretty much just like a debriefing...not that you really want any answers ‘cause nobody has any real answers for you, it is just my way of unloading it so I can start over.
Suzanne explained how she feels after she talks: “Oh, usually better... I am a really optimistic person in generally, so usually, if I can do that [talk], I’ll get back to the focus of it will work out one way or another.”

In discussing the demands of multiple roles, she added, “I don’t think it is so much as the responsibilities, I think overwhelmingness comes from a financial point.” She continued to disclose and described her work: “Well, pretty much work is set, I mean, I get what I need to get done.” She elaborated on how she prioritizes work and family:

I think it is prioritized for me. I have to just live within it. I don’t think I prioritize anything anymore. I feel like when I am at work it is almost like a haven because I can prioritize my day at work. But... when I am at home, for instance, I have to prioritize. You know, I think, prioritize.... it, for me, pretty much means taking advantage of the time you have available because not everything I can do.

At this point in the interview, we engaged in conversation about making decisions. Suzanne makes decisions based on importance and constructs all possible solutions. She has family in town, but does not rely on them to watch her son. She noted that her mother watches children all day, so she feels bad asking her to watch her son as well, even though he is her grandson. She continued by saying that she could “drop him off at my sister’s, but he doesn’t really like going there.”

Suzanne described her evening routine. She indicated that her work “gets pushed off to the very last.” With regard to her evening dinner routine, she explained, “There is
not a lot of planning that goes into it. I wish there was more. But I’ve tried before and I can’t adhere to it.” For Suzanne, it is easier to “wing it.” Although flexibility is critical for Suzanne, one of her priorities is to sit at the dinner table four times a week with her son. She explained: “Well, I think at the table we will talk, and if we don’t, then we are pretty much pretty occupied.” She indicated that at the table her son will “be prompted to tell me more about his day.” Suzanne talks with her son about what “he has been working on at school.” Suzanne disclosed a story that related to parenting issues: “We have been working on trust, too, because there was an incident...I knew he lied to me...I turned around and came home, and I said, you don’t get that toy because you lied to me.” Suzanne indicated the difficulties of disciplining her son after a long day at work.

When questioned about her work climate when she has to get her son during work, she offered an explanation by pointing out: “I still feel guilt about doing it.” Since Suzanne leaves to get her son when the need arises, I asked her, “What type of support do you feel that provides you, knowing that you can go tell your boss that you need to go?” She answered: “Well, you know, it is just, it is nice that it is not something that you have to worry about, so I think it relieves some stress associated with that.” Suzanne added that she reduces stress by creating scrapbooks, making wedding cakes, and coaching her son’s baseball team.

Suzanne commented on how she defines her dual roles, managing work and family:
People have asked me that before, like how do you do it? It is like you just do it. I don’t think you really have a choice. We just do what we have to do to get by, I guess. Keep going.

She continued by telling me about her academic plans.

During the course of the interview, she disclosed a story about a previous boyfriend, which lead to her telling me about the difficulties she had when her child asked, “Am I ever gonna get a dad?” She continued: “That is an issue, too, that I have to deal with, that other people don’t have to deal with...There are a lot of, ton of things that you deal with.” I clarified by asking if she meant emotionally and she immediately responded, “Yes. Emotionally...and they don’t know how to understand them.”

When I inquired about Suzanne’s flexibility at home, she expressed her perceptions:

Oh my gosh, you couldn’t survive, you would like be in an insane asylum. If you expected things to be like a certain way. And if they weren’t, oh my gosh. There is no way. Absolutely no way. Everyday is a new different day, and if you couldn’t handle that change and if you weren’t adaptable you couldn’t do it (low voice)...You have to adapt to it otherwise you are gonna be upset and stressed out all the time, and frankly I just don’t like that. I can’t get anything done if I am all freaked out all the time.

According to Suzanne’s narrative,

Work is a haven. It is just secure, there is only so much that can go on at work, I mean anything can happen out there. But in my own little office, my own little
world, I mean, I am in complete control and that is probably what it is because I am kind of like a control freak, which I kinda have to be to make sure everything is going well. But, I like have control over my little world, and then when I leave, I have no control, so for nine hours a day I have some solace knowing that not much can penetrate the walls unless it is like a really big deal. Then, at least I will have time to deal with it.

To wrap up the discussion, I asked Suzanne if she had any comments or insights on what she does. Her narrative reflected strong concerns. She asserted:

You obviously have stressful points and things that come up that are stressful. I do have a really great family and friends… that will listen to you and still like you, even after you have yelled at them for whatever reason. I think my priorities are my son of all!

Additionally, she explained her perceptions of the idea of taking night classes in addition to working and raising a child:

Going to school does take away time from him and everything, but I think the sacrifice is worth it because it is not a great sacrifice. It is like a night class I am gone from six to nine, but then he does get to spend three hours with his Grandma and I think that is beneficial to him, so I think the payoff equals out right now.

At one point Suzanne remarked that she does not cry and perceives crying as an “emotional breaking point.” Noticing the time, I asked Suzanne if she had any questions, comments, or anything to add, and she expressed that life skills (self-confidence, experience, assertiveness, and dealing with people), social support, and age are factors
critical to being an employed mother who does not live with a domestic partner. Single parenthood, she replied, “isn’t only just a burden to and difficult to manage as the mother and the child involved, it is also, it is really hard sometimes on the extended family.” Sometimes she will hire a babysitter if she wants to go out, to keep her life “private.” She remarked: “Boundaries are important.” As the interview closed, Suzanne shared her perceptions regarding her understanding of what it means to be a single parent:

You definitely do that more as single parent; you don’t have the luxury of saying, you know, when your father gets home I gonna tell him what you did. You have to be both, and my son has some emotional distress over the fact that I just yelled at him, and now I want a hug, and you have to balance the two and it is hard to do that. There is no one to blame it on; you are just the sucky guy all the time. No matter what you do you are never not gonna be the bad one.”

3.4 Veronica

Veronica is employed full-time at UAF. She has one child, who is 18 months old and who attends a home center while she is at work. We met during her lunch break, so she ate lunch during the interview.

At the beginning of our interview, we shared information about our families. She then indicated that her son would be switching to a different daycare, and offered an explanation. Since Veronica’s son spends the majority of the day with someone other than herself, she wants to ensure his caretaker holds similar values. To be certain that I was interpreting her answers correctly, I asked her if she was looking for consistency and “Right. Right.” was her response.
When questioned about her morning routines, Veronica told me that she wakes up at 5:30 a.m. and writes for a half an hour. She elaborated by saying that her writing is a flow of consciousness that she does everyday to get everything “out,” to reflect on dreams or whatever is on her mind. Throughout the interview, she continued to offer explanations by describing what she writes about. She explained that she considers it a chance to express: “Any worries that I am having as a parent, any worries that I am having as a person. I am a big fan of positive affirmations, and I try to write some affirmations for the day.” After her writing, she takes a shower, heats up breakfast, and feeds her son. She continued, by saying she will “chase him around the house for a little while and try and get some quality time there in the morning.” They then leave the house. Her son goes to daycare and Veronica goes to work. When asked about her routine, her response included many activities, so I asked about multi-tasking. According to Veronica, mornings are a “balancing act: just figuring out times and how you’re going to make it all balance and be the least stressful.”

When Veronica is running late, “the best route I have found is to just stay as calm as possible, and it flows, either we eat breakfast or we don’t.” She notes that when she sleeps in, “something gets kind of thrown by the wayside a little bit...It doesn’t stress me out that much. I have had learn to just take it as it comes.” Veronica will change her own routine, but not that of her son.

Veronica indicated that she likes to get to work ten minutes early to “sort of breathe for a second, take a couple of deep breaths, cite a couple of affirmations.” She continued by saying that it is much like her writing in the morning; it gets the “negative
energy out” so it does not “come out of me in becoming mean to someone trying to register [for classes].” Veronica perceives that when she does not write or take five minutes before work to “switch roles going from mom to work,” she will internalize others’ behaviors and take them personally. Specifically, Veronica said that the time before work “is like a decompression time.” She also takes five minutes to sit down after she cooks dinner and before she eats, and said her thought process is something along the lines of “okay now I have to....”

I wanted to know more about the morning writing, so we spoke about that process. She recounted:

If I don’t [write], I tend to internalize things...I can think about things as much as I want, but until I have gotten them out either through speech or through writing, it’s much like I can’t really analyze and look at them from an outsider perspective until I have gotten them out, until I can look at them, or hear them, or some kind of tangible something, and if I don’t... I have a lot of anxiety and it just doesn’t work very well. Times in my life when have had the most turmoil have been the times that I haven’t been writing, of course, in hindsight I can see that, but so I just try and keep up on it. Otherwise things seem to go crazy.

In my inquiry about Veronica’s day at work, she noted that she goes to Jazzercise three days a week during her one-hour lunch break. It makes her feel good, gives her energy, and “It is Me time.” She continued to disclose other routine weekly events. On Thursday nights, she has dinner with her book club friends, who talk about “everything or absolutely nothing: gender roles, who is dating whom, and issues surrounding a lesbian
couple that is part of the book club.” She went on to tell me that missing a weekly meeting would have the same effects as not being able to write in the morning.

According to Veronica’s narrative, she has a lot of opinions and wants to talk about them with others, since she doesn’t have a spouse at home. Work is not the appropriate place for her to express her thoughts, so she talks to her friends and gets “input” from them.

We talked about the relationships she has with her co-workers. Veronica does not have much in common with her co-workers; they lack the similarities which a “normal friendship would be based on.” She indicated that she has support if she has to leave work because of her son, and noted that her co-workers are friendly. Veronica does not feel it is appropriate to self-disclose at work. At this point in the interview, we engaged in a discussion about events that would require her to leave work and her co-workers’ potential reactions to such. She explained: “If he’s gotta be picked up from day care somebody has to go pick him and there is no choice. I don’t think I have ever actually asked. I’ve said John is sick, I have to go.” Veronica continued to share information about her supportive network. She mentioned calling friends from her book club, and added, “To vent to someone who at least will listen to your side, they don’t even have to agree with it, but just listen to it. You at least feel like you are not completely alone.”

Veronica described the two roles that she fulfills as she recounted: “I had this thing going for a while. I would write mom as warrior woman. VERONICA AS WARRIOR WOMAN. Be all, do all. I am warrior woman.” She continued: In my mind I always wanted to be a parent and I knew what kind of parent I wanted to be. It goes back to that warrior mom kinda thing…It makes me feel
good. It makes me feel like no matter how hard it is, like I can still do the things that I think are important… I can still be a successful working person, a successful parent, a successful role model, and all the things that I want to be successful at. When I say ‘I am warrior Mom,’ it is a whole encompassing, like I can work, be a parent, be a good parent, be a good cook, a good student, and list keeps going on. That is what it is about. It certainly is not easy at all.

She recalled the time when a friend asked her about all the things that she routinely does. She told him that:

I can’t ever feel like it’s too much. The day that I feel that it is too much is the day that like it … it overcomes me and it beats me… If I feel like it’s too much then I am going to give up or I am going to feel like a failure. I can never do that. I can never feel like a failure. I have to succeed at this, like it is my life, and my son’s life counts on me succeeding at this…the only choice is to succeed, which is somehow keeping up with the laundry. I don’t know how these things work.

During the course of the interview, Veronica disclosed events in her evening routine. Veronica’s son usually takes a nap on the way home from the daycare or when they arrive at home. At home, she starts cooking dinner and he does minor chores. After the “insane rush is over,” she sits down, has a cup of tea, and takes a deep breath before eating dinner. During dinner, they talk about their day. After dinner, she reads to her son. Later, he goes to bed, and Veronica reads, watches television, and does school work. She noted that she enjoys taking a few minutes after her son falls asleep to reflect upon the day and think how much she loves him. Veronica explained that those five
minutes spent drinking tea and sitting are used “to decompress, like okay...next.”

Veronica noted that she does not prepare for the next day by laying out clothes: “The last thing that I want to start talking or thinking about is the next day.”

We continued talking about evening routines and cooking. Veronica spoke about cooking:

I am just... It gives...as stressful as it can be it gets me ... I am focusing on something and John is doing his thing. I am doing my thing...we have been away all day. So, I get so much more satisfaction out of cooking a meal and sitting down and eating it than a microwave meal, and don’t get me wrong some nights are forget this, here is a ‘Smartone’ for me and here are chicken nuggets for you. That is what we are having.

Veronica related an appreciation for the support offered by her mother and her friends in the book club. When Veronica needs to talk, she calls who ever is available. She does consider who would be most interested in the topic or could offer the best advice, but she usually talks to her friends in the book club because “everybody knows parents can be a little judgmental.” She continued, saying that she needs encouragement and input to know she is on the “right track...I need to keep going. When I am stressed out about it, when I want to complain about the fact that when I sweep the floor, John spread the dirt around on me.” Veronica continued:

I need somebody...I need somebody to say that this is really hard. I need to go to somebody and to say I am having a really hard time with this. I need them to say *that's understandable*. Then, I feel better about it. My feelings are warranted.
Veronica indicated that married couples support each other, but she looks to other people. Veronica asserted:

I don’t really have anybody to argue with me on how I am raising my son. It is my decision, my discretion, and certainly if I am doing something obscene my friends would call me on it, there is no way it would work without them, no way. You’d fall apart. I would fall apart.

When Veronica has someone over to help, it is amazing...like I will do the dishes while you are playing with John. I am like I don’t have to do the dishes. Or he will go play with John and I am like.... huh. It is so much easier when there is someone here. It is such a sharp contrast between nothing and having even that little bit of help.

3.5 Julie

Julie is employed part-time at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and has one son, who is three years old. She is a full-time student in Business Administration. We met during her lunch break, so Julie had lunch while we talked.

Early in the interview, we shared information about our children. We talked about how busy boys can be and the different phases kids go through. As we spoke about work and family, Julie commented, “There is always something coming up.” We continued to talk about work and family and I mentioned that it was “hard to keep things going.” She agreed with my statement.

Julie disclosed her morning routine. She gets up at 7 a.m., and awakens her son. They both get dressed, and then usually they sit on the couch and have tea together.
After that, she leaves to drop her son off at daycare and goes to work and classes. She also shared her evening routine. She picks her son up, goes home, and feeds him a snack while she makes dinner. During dinner, they will “talk about what he did at school and try to get something in” (e.g., reciting the alphabet or counting together). She added that she feels badly because she feels that she is a little distracted, like it is “not totally him...I am always thinking about, oh, I should throw the laundry in. I should do this. I have homework to do, so there is always something, so I always feel bad about that.” Julie figures a “little bit is better that nothing.” She wants her son to go to bed by nine, but he usually goes to bed by ten.

I was curious about the time spent drinking tea in the morning, so we discussed that routine. She recounted: “It is good morning, how is your morning, and just him being close knowing that he has to go to school: it is just bonding time.” We continued to discuss daily routines. Julie indicated that she tries to be organized, but that it doesn’t always work. Julie remarked that it “makes things easier” to have things ready the night before because she goes “crazy in the morning looking for clothes,” as she wants her son to look nice. Julie describes how she keeps everything going: once she remembers something, she immediately does it. When Julie’s schedule is off in the morning, she said that it affects her entire day; it is “rush, rush, rush...I just get frustrated. And everything just gets crazy.”

We began discussing her routine at work, and she recalled phone calls that she receives at work about family. Julie has a cell phone so the school can get in touch with her. If Julie has to pick up her son, she just says, “I have to go. I have to go.” I asked
about her co-workers’ reactions when she leaves. She recounted: “She [her supervisor] is pretty good about it. She’s got kids and she went through a divorce also I know that, so yea, I know that was a part of it. Julie recalled that prior to being hired; she told her manager that she wanted to work, as she needed the money, but that she mentioned that her son comes first.

We talked about the people with whom she communicates regarding work and family. Julie indicated that her co-workers are polite, but they are not her friends. Julie talks to her family in New York at least once a week about issues related to work and family. She has two friends in Alaska (one in Fairbanks and one in Anchorage), and they talk to each other every other day to say hi, to talk about anything that was stressful, to discuss how their day went, and “encourage each other.” Julie visits with her friends when her son is with his father, which is every other weekend. She also indicated that she likes to catch up with her schoolwork, and added, “There is always something that I could be doing.” I was interested in her son's scheduled visits with his father and how she spends her "alone time," so I asked for her to describe it in more detail. She told me that she sleeps a lot, catches up on household chores, and “goes at a slower pace” when her son is with his dad. The arrangement started last year and she explained:

I want to say in some ways it helps, but...then there is this other stuff that I have to deal with, like my son, whenever he comes back, he has to readjust, and then I have like discipline problems. It is like a trade off.

Julie said she wants her son to spend time with his father, but wants his father to be more responsible, too. To be more certain of my understanding of her response, I asked if their
parenting styles were different and she told me that they were. I asked Julie if there was a period when the routine of her son spending time with his dad changed, and she told me there was. She said, “I guess he took a break.”

Julie will listen to music and dance around the house to “relax.” She doesn’t get together with her friends much because she doesn’t have “time right now.” Julie described herself:

I am plain Jane... it doesn’t take much of anything to entertain me. I am fine with reading a book and watching TV. When I feel like getting out there, I will do that to. I will go out and party.

We spoke about others who may watch her son. When she feels like going out, she makes sure it’s on a weekend when her son is with his father. Julie has a friend in town who will watch her son if she has something “important to do,” because they “help each other out.” They have dinners together and “hang out” and do each other’s hair about once a month.

We engaged in a conversation about social support. Julie’s friends and her cousin provide her with a lot of emotional support, but her co-workers do not because they are “not really that personal at work.” I asked whether work or family came up most often when she talked with her friends, and she told me that she doesn’t talk about work because “work isn’t too bad at all.” She continued, “It is usually things like staying focused and making the right decisions. Like financial issues, stuff like that, or if something is going on: I want to work more or I need more money.” She recalled that
the previous night she had talked to her cousin about getting a second job. Julie shared with me some thoughts from the conversation:

I would be more stressed out in school, not able to do homework and stuff, because that’s another thing that is stressful. Of course I could do it. I would be tired all the time. I would pretty much be a zombie, so I had to make that choice, and I had to look at things. I was like it is not worth it because the two most important things that I am saying… I would be putting those last. And that just wouldn’t be the right choice, so it is just always stuff like that.

Julie makes decisions by reminding herself that her son comes first.

I asked Julie how she felt after talking to her cousin, who is also her close friend, and her response was that she felt “a lot better.” She elaborated by saying:

It is just good because sometimes you forget these things. You forget everything. Things get so crazy and everything gets jumbled and you forget what you’re doing, and so it is good to have somebody else that listens to you, that they can remember ‘oh, Julie said this and she wants to finish school’ and she reminds you that you said you wanted to finish school.

Julie’s cousin is like a mentor to her. Additionally, Julie told me she talks to her family as opposed to her friends when she is “really feeling the heat…the heat of the days and nights and moments. Anything…the stress.” Julie calls her father if she needs to talk about really serious issues and she calls her cousin if she wants to talk about personal issues and girl talk.
When Julie is out of work because her son is sick, her schoolwork piles up, and she usually gets sick as a result. "It is emotional," she said, "it is just a drain, and you just feel so bad." When questioned about her roles, she disclosed: "Mother figure is definitely at the top. Then, school is a priority. I try to keep a balance between all of them." Julie explained what balance means to her:

Like as a mother, you want to be there, and I wish I could be there with him, and do more stuff with him, but at the same time, I have to sacrifice a little, well actually it is a lot of it. It is a lot of it that I do sacrifice, so I can be a student and work, too, just because it benefits him if I succeed in school, and it benefits him if I work and we have a little bit more money in our budget. That's what I mean by balance. You just have to give a little.

When the balance is off, Julie disclosed:

Like the nights when I am like I am too tired and if I go and lie down in there with you and read to you, I am going to fall asleep, so please tonight let's just sing a song and say good night. I feel like I need to read to him, and I feel bad and then pulled in all sorts of directions. It is like I am sorry just go to sleep please.

Because if I don’t go I will lie down and fall asleep and my English [paper] won’t get turned in tomorrow. So please. It is something that is always coming up.

We were talking during her lunch break, so when I noticed that it was getting close to an hour, I asked Julie if she had any questions, comments, or wanted to share anything about work and family. She immediately responded:
I just have to stay really positive and stay really motivated. I definitely think if you are going to do it right, it takes a lot of self-coaching, self-motivation, and you definitely need friends and family to help you out because it is a hard job. It is a hard job, and somewhere to enjoy.

Julie finds time to enjoy with her son. “Like my son, he is fun,” she indicated. “He is funny really. It is like you get to be a kid again: singing and dancing.”

3.6 Jacqueline

Jacqueline is employed full-time and is a student at UAF. She has two sons, ages six and eight years old, both of whom are in a before-and-after-school program while Jacqueline is at work. In the beginning of the interaction, we shared information about our families. Jacqueline disclosed her typical morning routine, but prefaced it with her working hours: 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and a half-day on Friday. She gets up at 5:30 a.m., gets herself completely ready, and then wakes the boys up at about 6:30 a.m. They get themselves dressed and they all have breakfast together. Jacqueline leaves the house around 7:00 a.m. to 7:15 a.m., and then takes them to their before-school program, which transports the boys to school. Jacqueline said that it was “convenient” for her to not provide that first round of transportation herself. In the evening, Jacqueline picks up her children at 5:45 p.m. every day, and notes that it is “very routine.” I was increasingly curious about her Friday schedule, so I asked if she would elaborate. She pointed out that on Fridays, she has time to see her boys at school, and added, “It is very convenient that my work lets me do that.” She continued, saying that she is “very much a scheduled person... and very family oriented.”
Jacqueline negotiated her work schedule with her supervisor. "It was something I had come up with when the eight year old was in kindergarten," she said. Jacqueline wanted to spend time in the classroom and the normal workday did not allow for that arrangement. She asked her supervisor if she could do a swing shift, and that arrangement was acceptable: "It has worked out wonderful." Jacqueline also indicated it gives her time to spend with them before they go to their father's house every other weekend. She added:

Because they both play sports...there is hockey, soccer, and grocery shopping has got to get in there for the week somehow, and it just gets a little chaotic, so Fridays are just dedicated to hanging out and doing nothing or something fun together.

She indicated how fortunate she is to have family in town, in the event that her routine is derailed, though she also addressed the downside:

It is an added stress. Because if something does happen, then you are trying to rely on other people...I don’t want to have to do that, if I don’t have to...I look at it as the kids are my responsibility, and to ask somebody else to share that responsibility is hard. I sit here and mind boggle with myself.

During the course of the interaction, Jacqueline indicated her dislike of jobs that require travel, recalling a situation from the prior week in which she had to go out of town and her parents watched the boys. She said her parents are a wonderful support and that she "is very fortunate." When Jacqueline's parents watch the boys, she gets everything done before leaving herself (laundry clean and homework planned out), shares
all the weekly routines that the boys have, and makes sure that her parents have her contact numbers. Jacqueline noted that she had to take such a trip during the week prior to the interview, and indicated that she had been very meticulous, making sure that everything was done before she’d left.

Jacqueline noted that her job is “wonderful” and that she could take a sick day if her kids were sick. She explained:

I think [I’m] very fortunate my boss has kids of her own, so she knows what happens if something was to happen. I think, too, as long as you are not abusing the system, I think it is fine. Most of the people in the office have kids or will soon have kids, so they know the responsibility of it. They are very supportive and obviously it [the divorce] is fairly new, it has only been a year. They are very supportive, and they know I have full custody of the kids, so they are very flexible. So very flexible in that I don’t know how people do it, if they don’t have that.

Additionally, if Jacqueline is late arriving to work, she will make up for lost time during lunch. Jacqueline indicated that she gets along well with her co-workers and they know about each other’s home lives, though outside of work they don’t “hang out.”

Because Jacqueline described her morning routine only briefly at first, she elaborated. She told me the family returns home at six. They have dinner and do homework: “We either start our homework while I am cooking, depending on what I am cooking or right afterwards. We just keep the TV off, and start our homework, and then it is play time.” The boys get a bath every other night, and if they have a lot of
homework, there is little playtime. When the boys have evening soccer practice, she likes to have fast food. The boys go to bed at 8:00 p.m. or 8:30 p.m. “depending on how their attitude is, of course.” We laughed together. To make sure I understood her, I commented, “It seems like you restructure your routine based on what is at hand and you don’t really know,” and she agreed with that statement.

Jacqueline prioritizes her life around her children’s needs. Specifically, she said:

My kids are number one...they come first in my life, so I am a very family oriented person so family values comes first. Kids are priority, so when they are awake they have my full attention. When they go to bed, then it is breaking out the books and studying.

She takes web-based classes and has attended classes on campus during her lunch break, making up for any missed work time.

At one point, she told me that she often calls her cousin (who is also her best friend) about parenting or work issues. Since Jacqueline’s cousin is a schoolteacher, she “leans on her a bit.” Jacqueline asks her cousin questions such as, “You have probably seen this, what can I do? What have you seen? What works, what doesn’t?” Jacqueline “did do some counseling” in May to “find out what I could do” to help her boys. She said that it was very hard for her to do. She expressed her perception and stated:

I felt like bad mom because I didn’t know what to do, but let me tell you- it was the great! It was the greatest thing to have somebody encourage. It was like WOW. It was so nice to hear.
During the interview, I asked Jacqueline if she calls her cousin about work issues. She replied:

Yeah, she probably knows if something was stressful that day or I would probably tell her. I have pretty good work relationships with my managers. I feel are very close, they have an open door policy, so I feel I can tell anything, so if there are issues or problems at work it is usually resolved right at work. I am fortunate in that aspect.

Jacqueline said her cousin is a great part of her social support as are her parents. Specifically, she said, “I have my family. We are a very close family, so my parents have been there. Holding my hands, so to say, through it all.” Jacqueline indicated she would also include her co-workers in that. She described her reasoning:

Because they have been, most all of them have been there almost as long as I have, so they have been right there through missing work, getting the divorce papers through and court systems, and then afterwards the hardships we had with the kids.

Jacqueline mentioned trial and error as we spoke about children, and she elaborated, saying that she is “trying to figure out what does work.” When asked what it would be like without support, she replied “if you didn’t have a support group, whether it is family or friends, it…would be pretty lonely,” she replied. Jacqueline explained that her boys go to their father’s house every other weekend. She remarked:

I have every other weekend “OFF” off and I am not used to that. It is very…you get lost. That right there is my stress reliever, and by having them go see their
dad they’re in heaven and awe because they get to see their dad, and two, it is my relaxation time. Anything I do for myself, whether it is the movies with a friend, or whatever, I schedule it on the weekends that I don’t have the kids. So that is my tension relief too.

On those weekends, Jacqueline sleeps in and “goes with the flow and if something pops up, it is like yeah, I can go and do that. Wow! I can go [I] can do that.” As the interview was coming to an end, Jacqueline offered some insights:

Time management skills that you start to learn because if it wasn’t for my rituals in the morning, it would be hard... Yeah. It is the rituals. I have to make sure I am up in the morning to get myself completely ready before I get them up because there is no way that would work.... You have to be flexible. I guess it goes back to prioritizing. The kids and their schedule have to come first and the other stuff has to kinda fall into place. That is the best I can do.
CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis

The purpose of the current study was to explore how employed mothers without domestic partners account for the accomplishment of their family and work routines, how they interpret or understand the actions and interactions they employ in those routines, and to examine the forms of personal and emotional support they identify in managing work and family. In this analysis, I will present my findings as they relate to the research questions, provide a comparison of my findings with those of Medved (2004), and give a summary with possible points of departure for future research in the discipline of Communication.

The process of data analysis began the moment I initiated the snowball technique. I immediately began taking “reflective thinking” notes and “asides” that reflect “commentary,” thoughts, and feelings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 212). Some of my journal notes are presented in Appendix B. This “in-process writing focuses on a theme or issue found in several incidents pulled together from fieldnotes and transcriptions” (p. 213).

The transcripts of the audio-taped conversations served as a textualized, visual, and representational hard-copy of the actual lived human communication experiences or “living conversation[s]” (Kvale, 1996, p. 182) held between me and the participants. Kvale states, “the interviewee’s statements are not collected-they are co-authored by the interviewer” (p. 183). The participants, thus, became my co-researchers, as meaning was co-created in the communicative process. My analysis reflects the interview as a social
co-construction between my co-researchers and me. The emergent categories were derived from the meanings that were created and embedded in the dialogues. I will use participants’ words as natural language from the transcriptions as a tool to help illustrate the lived conversation. These analytic approaches to “the transcripts involve entering into a dialogue with the text, going into an imagined conversation with the ‘author’ about the meaning of the text” (p. 182).

4.1 First Research Question

Two broad categories emerged in addressing the first research question and exploring how employed mothers without domestic partners account for the accomplishment of daily work and family routines: 1) communicative practical actions and 2) individual practical actions. Within each category, there are several routinized actions and interactions. The routines in the communicative practical actions category are: making connection, seeking help, managing boundaries, maintaining routine, and maintaining family priority. The routines in the individual practical actions category are: finding personal time, making decisions, providing self-support, and maintaining optimism.

4.2 Communicative Practical Actions

First, communicative practical actions are the interactions that take place on a daily basis in the management of work and family. The narratives revealed many social interactions that took place as the women accomplished their routines at work and home. Five routines emerged through the analysis: making connection, seeking help, managing boundaries, maintaining routine, and maintaining family priority.
4.2.1 Making Connection. Making connection involves interactions that serve to enhance and maintain the parent-child interpersonal relationship. Such interactions may be active dialogues or simply being together. All co-researchers described routines or rituals of sharing and communicating as integral factors in managing work and family. Bruess and Pearson (1997) draw on Bossard and Boll’s (1950) research in suggesting that rituals are “repetitive, communicative enactments that pay homage to a valued person and “occur routinely in relationships” (p. 25).

These women clearly accounted for connection throughout their daily routines. For instance, Loretta tries to call her daughter every day after lunch and before her naptime. When she calls the daycare, her daughter “will talk to me about what she is doing at that time because she is usually playing or doing something.” Julie has tea in the morning with her son, saying, “It is just bonding time” and “It is good morning, how is your morning, and just him being close.”

On occasion, connection was apparent later in the evening. For example, after Veronica and her son get home, she cooks and they sit down at the dinner table together. She asks him “how his day was. He babbles back to me a little bit. I tell him something about my day. We talk about whatever. We talk to each other a lot.” Suzanne also mentioned trying to routinize sitting at the dinner table at least four times a week. She indicated that when she sits at the dinner table with her son, “he will be prompted to tell me more about his day.”

Jacqueline indicated that when she gets home from work, she cooks and the kids start their homework. Sometimes she will play with the boys, “whether it is watching a
movie together or playing indoor hockey.” She further told me that on Fridays when the boys are going to their father’s home for the weekend, they will spend time after work “to play or hang out.” She said, “Fridays are just dedicated to hanging out and doing nothing or something fun together.” The social presence of her children accomplishes being together, as “one cannot not communicate” (Bavelas, 1990, p. 593). Gabriella, a mother of two, explained that when she picks up her children, they “talk about their day all the way home” and after dinner her daughter often asks, “What did you do at work?” Gabriella said, “She really wants to become part of what I do.”

The mothers shared their experiences of structuring social interaction with their children as “quality time” (Hochschild, 1997, p. 13). These patterns of communication were predominantly scheduled and planned. The tension between spending time together and accomplishing other obligations at the same time was evident in some capta. Julie disclosed:

When I read to you, I am going to fall asleep, so please tonight let’s just sing a song and good night. I feel I need to read to him and I feel bad and then pulled in all sorts of directions. I am always thinking about, oh… I should throw the laundry in there, I should do this, I have homework to do. There is always something, so I always feel bad about that. I figure even a little bit is better than nothing.

4.2.2 Seeking Help. Seeking help is the act of asking others, family and/or friends, to provide assistance with childcare and/or finances. As my co-researchers discussed whom they would ask for help with childcare, both trust and the importance of
similar parenting styles were discussed. The women were very independent and self-reliant, and took full responsibility in raising their children, but when absolutely necessary, they asked for help. Jacqueline indicated, “If something does happen, then you are trying to rely on other people.” On occasion, she has asked her parents to watch her two boys. Gabriella called her father to ask for financial assistance and said it was a “shot in her pride.” Julie, whose family lives out of town, can call her friend “if she had to do something important.” Two of the women, Loretta and Suzanne, have their mothers watch their children while they attend classes at night. This situation was expressed positively as focusing on the grandmother-to-grandchild relationship. Suzanne noted that “single parenthood isn’t only just a burden and difficult to manage as the mother and the child involved, it is also, really hard sometimes on the extended family.”

4.2.3 Managing Boundaries. Managing boundaries encompasses the ways the co-researchers create, recreate, and transform the realms of their family and work life. “Boundary work” is a term frequently used to describe the communication actions that occur in maintaining the two realms of family and work. When I asked Loretta to tell me what she did at work, she asked, “That has to do with her or just me?” She also told me that her daughter is somewhat integrated into her job, but that her job is “not at all into my family.” She clarified by saying, “I mean if I didn’t have that job, I would have a different job. But this is my family, so that’s number one.”

The women manage their family boundaries with their extended family by either self-disclosing or not. Suzanne indicated that sometimes she will hire a baby sitter instead of asking her family to watch her son because they will “know everything that is
going on.” She continued to tell me that boundaries are important and that her family respects her for having her “own boundaries” as she is “less reliant upon them.” Gabriella has very close relationships with her co-workers, but Julie and Veronica indicated that their co-workers were cordial and friendly at work, but that they did not necessarily consider their co-workers to be their friends. Some women mentioned not having any commonalities with co-workers. Most of the women said that when it came to family, their supervisors “understood,” and the co-researchers went on to say why they felt they understood (i.e., they have children or they have been through a divorce). When women had co-workers who “understood,” it appeared that they were indicating feeling more comfortable talking to co-workers about the issues or conflicts between work and family. The co-researchers made it clear that they were cautious in selecting the person with whom they shared information as a means of managing work and family.

4.2.4 Maintaining Routine. Routines are repetitive actions that typically occur everyday. In all cases, the women told me what they did on a daily basis using temporal and relational language. Routines were linked specifically to time, as in getting to work on time, as well as getting children to bed. For example, Gabriella explained:

Everything is very fast paced in the morning. Everything is go, go, go, go, go. We gotta get our teeth. We gotta get our coats. We gotta get our breakfast and get dressed. Boom, boom, boom.

The women also established and maintained routines to make things easier and more stress-free. Veronica said, “Just figuring out times and how you’re going to make it all balance and be the least stressful” is critical to her morning routine. Many women
indicated they would get “completely” ready before getting their children up in the morning because it was easier. Although most women had usually followed routines, they also indicated a great deal of flexibility and deviation in their schedules. Jacqueline said her mornings were “very routine…making sure everything goes smoother…and you have to be flexible. You have to.” When Suzanne told me about her routines, she said numerous times that she was sharing the activities which she “typically” does and that “it just depends.” She indicated that she had tried to follow a schedule, but said, “when I can’t meet the schedule that I have set forth, I feel like I am doing something really poorly, so it is easier for me to just wing it.” Many of the women adjust their own routine, but not their child’s, because they are responsible for their child and it’s not the child’s fault if the schedule is disrupted. Veronica said, “There is not much that completely disrupts it [the schedule] because I try not to keep it so rigid that it is completely inflexible.” Suzanne offered an explanation and pointed out:

You have to adapt to it otherwise you are going to be upset and stressed out all the time and frankly I just don’t like that. I can’t get anything done if I am all freaked out all the time.

The women indicated that evening routines were primarily centered on eating, bathing, getting the children to bed, and then having personal time. The women described this as a time to de-energize, wind down, or “take it down a notch” as Gabriella said. After the children are asleep, most women indicated relaxing either by watching television, reading, or studying for their classes.
4.2.5 Maintaining Family Priority. Family priority entails communication that directly indicates that the children are main focus of attention and all decisions made are in direct relationship to that factor. The women communicated that the needs of their families takes precedence over their work relationships. Suzanne said, “My priorities are my son most of all.” When I asked her what she would do if she needed to pick up her son during working hours she said, “I just hang up the phone, and I go and I say to my boss I gotta go, my son is sick...that is a pre-arrangement.” Additionally, Jacqueline said, “My kids are my number one priority.” Gabriella, also a full-time student, missed work and classes when her children were sick last semester and went through financial strain as she was at home, unable to go to work. She received incompletes in her classes, but her supervisors “understood” and her co-workers knew she had to take care of her kids; they knew that her family had to come first. Most of the women worked in family-friendly work environments. Most women said that their bosses understood when they asked for special assistance or considerations, and followed-up with a reason (“she has children,” “she has a family,” or “she has a small child”). Most co-researchers were the only ones who could pick up their child if the need arose, so they told their supervisors clearly and in advance that if their child became sick, they would need to leave work.

4.3 Individual Practical Actions

Individual practical actions are activities women perform independently from others, and the narratives revealed many individual actions as women spoke about their daily routines. Although the women in this study performed individual tasks, those tasks were indirectly “social, affected by interaction with others” (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 165).
Littlejohn (2002) draws on Harre's (1979) ideas in noting that "self is both individual and social," (p. 166) as person is public and self is private. The individual practical actions provide further understanding of how these women negotiate work and family without the help of domestic partners. Four routines emerged through the analysis: finding personal time, making decisions, providing self-support, and maintaining optimism.

4.3.1 Finding Personal Time. All of the women noted the relative lack of personal time, or time spent doing things independently from work and family obligations. The language used to reflect personal time was "me time" and "my time." Most women noted that such time in their routines was essential to their well-being. For example, after Loretta's daughter goes to bed, she said, it is "my time." Loretta told me what she does to reduce stress and included that she "feels guilty when I do" take time. Jacqueline illustrated her perception:

I have every other weekend “OFF” and I am not used to that. It is very...you get lost. That right there is my stress reliever and by having them go see their Dad they’re in heaven and awe because they get to see their Dad.

Dialectical tension became apparent here as women described the push and pull of oppositional forces in managing the needs of their child(ren) and their personal needs (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Turner (1968) notes that "the idea of self underlying growth of a self-conception requires at least the vital sense of distinction between self, other selves, and not-selves" (p.98), and Lynd (1968) succinctly states:

Openness to relatedness with other persons and the search for self-identity are not two problems but one dialectical process; as one finds more relatedness to other
persons one discovers more of oneself; as the sense of one’s own identity becomes clearer and more firmly rooted one can prove more completely go out to others (p. 226)

Wood (1994) notes, “We all need to feel we have both personal freedom and meaningful interrelatedness with others” (p. 197). These women value personal time because it offers them an opportunity to take a break from the demands of work and family. Personal time enables these women to momentarily separate and allows them to act independently.

My co-researchers used temporal language when I asked about personal time. Suzanne mentioned that she likes to scrapbook, “but we haven’t had much time for that.” Veronica goes to Jazzercise three times a week during her lunch break, but continues by saying “there is not any other time. John is in daycare for already ten hours. There is nobody else that’s going to watch him, so it is not like I can get up early and work out.” Veronica also explained her choice to go to Jazzercise in indicating that it is her only chance to devote time solely to herself, but she attends during her lunch break due to her parental obligations, much like Gabriella, who said, “I just can’t go and run anytime I want to.” Parental obligations are clearly a factor in how often these women are able to indulge in personal or “me time.”

4.3.2 Making Decisions. My co-researchers are responsible for all of the final decisions in their lives, often with some consultation or input from others. Their use of “I” was prominent as we engaged in conversation, something that may have been more evident to me than to other researchers because in my marriage, most decisions are
jointly agreed upon. When Suzanne and I discussed priorities, she said, "I have to just decide what is more important." When Loretta told me about her future plans for daughter, she said to me, "I want to put her in there." Similarly, Veronica told me, and very confidently so, "I don't really have anybody to argue with me on how I am raising my son. It is my decision, my discretion." These women were generally autonomous in their decision-making processes. Occasionally, they do would ask others for their opinions and guidance—for example, Jackie calls her cousin, who is much like a mentor to her—but they make the final decisions.

4.3.3 Providing Self-Support. As the women shared how they coped with and managed stress related to family and work issues, I began noticing how they support themselves emotionally. Proving self-support is engaging in individual actions that generate emotional support. When someone was not available to talk or when they chose not to talk, some women engaged in forms of self-support to help them deal with the situation (i.e., writing, crying, or yelling into a pillow). Veronica enjoys writing in the morning. She recounted:

I write for about a half hour, just flow-of-consciousness writing. Every morning I try to, just because it helps me make it through my day if I can get all of everything out...whatever is on my mind, if I am stressing out about something, if something happened, if I had a dream about something, any worries that I am having as a parent, any worries that I am having as a person.

Similarly, Gabriella indicated that sometimes she will "go sit in my room, close the door, turn the light off, and cry, or scream into a pillow, or write" when she has a
meltdown. Depending on the time and situation, the women may not have someone to talk to, so they have constructed ways of handling their emotions, concerns, and worries which get them “out,” as Veronica indicated. Gabriella shared what happens in the process of writing: “Irrational thoughts become more structured” and “I know what I need to do to take that next step and to move on.”

Veronica likes to have ten minutes of quiet time before she begins work, during which she will say a few positive affirmations and “breathe for a second” as a preparation to switch roles. That time is “decompression time.” She noted that when she does not write, it adversely affects her. She offered an explanation:

The [frustration as a result of the spilt] bowl of cereal might come out of me in becoming mean to someone trying to register [for classes]. It is something that I have to deal with in the same sense that when I cook supper, I sit down take a breath and then start eating.

Suzanne said that she does not cry often, but if she does, it is an “emotional breaking point.” Instead, she indicates that she cleans because she can “tune everything out, organize, and clean.” She is able to soothe her emotions while finishing household chores, a wonderful example of multi-tasking.

4.3.4 Maintaining Optimism. Excitement about plans for the future was evident in the women’s accounts. Optimism entails positive beliefs, goals, and thoughts. The women indicated plans for the future that would improve their situation and mentioned various options for the future that would enable them to achieve their goals. For instance, Jacqueline continually used positive language such as “I think it is great,” “it is
wonderful,” and “I am fortunate.” Loretta mentioned future educational and financial options. Suzanne indicated that despite the fact that she can’t control everything, she is really an optimistic person. She focuses on the idea that “it will work out one way or another.”

Veronica used a metaphor from her writing and thoughts:

I would write Mom as warrior woman, like VERONICA AS WARRIOR WOMAN, like everything, like be all do all. If I feel like it is too much, then I am going to give up or I am going to feel like a failure. I can never do that. I can never feel like a failure, I have to succeed at this. My life and my son’s life counts on me succeeding at this. The choices that I made got me here, they are my choices, and I would never take them back for anything. So, the only choice is to succeed.

The optimistic perceptions of the co-researchers appeared to keep their motivation high and served to help them handle the difficulties and stresses embedded in the management of work and family. Peden, Rayen, Hall, and Grant’s (2004) research suggests that single mothers who are employed and educated may experience fewer negative thoughts than their uneducated counterparts. Jones, Forehand, Brody, and Armistead (2002) suggest that maternal optimism is associated with positive parenting. My co-researchers clearly indicated their desire to think positively about situations and to have optimistic plans for the future.

These communicative and individual practical actions represent the micro-practices that these women do as they manage work and family. These commonsense
micro-practices are ways these women account for their accomplishment of work and family in their dual roles of mother and worker. These daily patterns in the interactions of ordinary life present their lives as social interactions, and it is through these interactions that work and family are managed and negotiated.

4.4 Summary and Comparison to Medved (2004)

Comparing Medved’s (2004) research findings to the current study’s findings highlights how married couples differ from employed mothers without a domestic partner. It must be noted that the purpose of this study was not to generalize to all employed women without domestic partners, but rather to identify potential similarities and differences from how married couples manage work and family. Three clusters or categories of practical actions and interactions emerged in Medved’s analysis: routinizing, improvising, and (re)structuring actions. Within those categories, several “schemes of interpretation” or subcategories emerged, given the ways the participants justified their micro-practices (p. 132).

Medved’s (2004) routinizing category includes practical actions that address reoccurring routines such as, “household, paid work, and childcare duties” (p. 133). She identified four practical actions: connecting, alternating, prepping, and reciprocating. Medved’s connecting practical action includes interaction between spouses or with the children’s caregiver. In the current study, my co-researchers made connections with their children. These women indicated the necessity of communicating with their child on a routine basis and of making time to engage in social interaction with their child(ren). Given the time pressures of work and family, the women indicated that they routinely
planned to converse with their child and their childcare provider. Women noted their availability for such contacts at work and described the use of their cell phones in order to maintain constant accessibility for social interaction with the child or caregiver.

*Alternating* was Medved’s (2004) second practical action, which involves routinely taking turns with childcare responsibilities between the marital partners. In this study, women did not have a partner at home with whom to share responsibilities, so this routinizing action did not present itself. Medved’s participants indicated taking turns with their spouse in giving children baths and getting them into bed. Women without domestic partners manage all such responsibilities by themselves.

Nightly preparations for the next day, such as packing lunches and picking out clothes, were Medved’s (2004) third practical action, which she calls *prepping*. In this study, some women indicated the need to prep for the next day, as it would make things easier and less stressful. Others were not concerned with such activities, as that would add to the stress of the day. Suzanne indicated trying to prep for the next day, but she remained flexible to the concept of just winging it. Veronica indicated that getting ready for the next day was the last thing she wanted to think about at the end of the current day. Essentially, at the end of the day, these women want to relax because they are tired from meeting the challenging demands of work and family.

*Reciprocating* is the fourth practical action Medved (2004) addresses, which involves exchanging childcare services with family or friends. The women in the current study generally did not have time to engage in exchanging childcare with their friends on a routine basis, but it seems likely they would do so if there were an emergency. In fact,
Julie indicated that her friend would watch her daughter if she had “something important to do.”

Medved’s (2004) *improvising category* involves temporary solutions to “solve an immediate conflict” such as a sick child, parent, or caregiver. She identifies three improvising actions: *requesting assistance, trading off, and evading*. Medved’s *requesting assistance* action involves interactions that ask for assistance from supervisors, family, and friends without the “potential for exchange” (p. 136). This category is similar to the current study’s communicative practical action of seeking help. Women asked friends, family, and co-workers for assistance when absolutely necessary. Although women had family and friends upon whom to call for help, they often indicated that they did not want to rely on them and that they wanted to handle things on their own.

*Trading off* is Medved’s (2004) action that entails arrangements between spouses to trade off staying at home to take care of the child(ren). This category was different from her practical action of requesting, as this action was exclusively dedicated to unexpected childcare emergencies. In the current study, the women did not have a domestic partner with whom to trade off. When an emergency presented itself, such as their child needing emergency care, my co-researchers were the ones to handle the unplanned childcare arrangements. If they received a call at work that indicated they needed to get their child, they told their supervisor what they had to do and then they left. They did not indicate trading off in emergency situations, as they were the sole providers.

Medved’s (2004) *evading* action involves interactions in which persons altered or withheld information from co-workers and family to “manage an interruption” (p. 133).
Women in this study did not withhold information from their employers or co-workers. My co-researchers directly communicated to their supervisors about issues concerning work and family; they did not skirt around the truth. However, some women did manage information with their family. Suzanne indicated that she did not want some family members to know everything, and Gabriella mentioned that she would not tell her mother everything, so as to avoid a long lecture.

The final category in Medved’s (2004) study is restructuring, which involves processes “leading to a new set of routinizing behaviors” (p. 138). Restructured routines often were the result of events such as changing job location, changing daycare providers, or the birth of a baby. Medved identifies two processes: negotiating and deliberating. She describes negotiating as interactions that offer proposals and that result in a “shared solution” (p. 139). Women in this study sought input and possible suggestions from their family and friends or through reflective thinking or writing, but they were the final and ultimate decision-makers regarding family issues. However, the co-researchers in this study did negotiate with supervisors at work. These women told me that if they were late to work, their supervisor would allow them to make up the time during lunch. Women who attended night or day classes explained their class schedule to their supervisor. Through that process, a solution emerged. For example, women could take classes during work hours if the class was related to their job, or they could arrive at or leave work early. Jacqueline negotiated with her supervisor to work a half-day on Friday and work additional hours Monday through Thursday.
Medved's (2004) *deliberating* subcategory describes the processes of making decisions and exploring alternative options. In the present study, women deliberated by asking others, such as family, friends, and sometimes co-workers, for their input on possible solutions, and analyzed options through thinking and writing about how routines could be restructured. Through the process of writing, Gabriella answered unresolved questions. Some women described the ways in which family and/or friends helped them in their decision-making process. Having someone else to communicate with about alternatives and choices appeared to be important. For example, Loretta recalled talking to her friend about options; Julie perceived her cousin as a mentor and consulted her for ideas; and Jacqueline called her cousin and asked questions as she made decisions about her boys.

4.5 Second Research Question

The second research question concerns how women interpret or understand the practical actions and interactions they employ in their work and family routines. From the perspective of the social construction of reality, it is evident that understandings, "meanings, norms, roles, and rules are worked out interactively in communication" (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 163). As my co-researchers shared their routines with me, they provided accountings for their practical actions and interactions. These women's accountings centered around five key issues: difficulties and hardships, financial considerations, children as the top priority, the need to think positively, and the need to be flexible. In short, these women's understandings of their situations were apparent in their accounting for their actions.
The difficulties and hardships of managing work and family without a domestic partner emerged as an important issue in these women’s accountings. There were several indications of worry, lack of sleep, anxiety, and frustration. Several co-researchers spoke of daily decisions, and indicated that these decisions involved a “trade off,” or will “pay off,” or that “this is the sacrifice.” Julie stated:

You have to give a little…actually it is a lot of it...so I can be a student and work, too, just because it benefits him if I succeed in school, and it benefits him if I work and we have a little bit more money in our budget. That’s what I mean by balance. You just have to give a little.

Suzanne said that her school attendance is worth the effort because her son gets to spend three hours with his grandmother. She concluded, “I think the payoff equals out right now.”

Being the sole financial provider for their families, these women also accounted for their actions and interactions in terms of financial considerations. Income was a recurrent issue. Gabriella recalled when she had to prioritize her work and school:

I would skip class and work because I have to pay the bills…there has to be a point to where I have to miss class to make sure those bills get paid…I really want to go to class, but that is more of a want than a need…I need to pay my bills.

Additionally, Suzanne provided a self-reflective response:

Whatever happens, happens. That is usually what it boils down to. There is only so much you can do and then you don’t have any control over it. That is just the
way it is. The fact is that we have a roof over our head, a car, food, a job, and we are both alive.

She indicated monetary issues several times in our interview:

I mean, my income is obviously extremely important to me because it is a single income family and pretty much everything we do revolves around that single factor... Is getting things met when they need to be met on a single income... Especially when it seems like more and more obligations come through than you have... Christmas time, which is always a financial burden, just because it is... Christmas, and then summer time, and there is baseball registration fees, and soccer fees and uniform... It is just like one thing pretty much after the next, so we basically have to pick and choose.

Uniformly, the women's accountings acknowledged *children as the top priority* in their lives. Time constraints were evident in the women's accountings, but they do devote time to their children on a daily basis. Gabriella takes advantage of the time in the car by asking her children about their day. Julie has tea with her son in the morning, and she explained: “it is just bonding time.” These women have to work, as they are the head of their household, so they negotiate work by prioritizing their child(ren) as the top priority. Jacqueline said, “My kids are my number one priority,” and Veronica stated, “I can never feel like a failure. I have to succeed at this, like it is my life, and my son’s life counts on me succeeding at this.”

All women indicated the importance of their children and the importance of being available for their children during working hours. Gabriella shared with me: “I bought a
cell phone...my kids are my first priority, so if they need me, then I will drop what I am doing and I will go.” She continued, “My entire life is structured around them. Everything I do is for them, and if they are not in the equation, I don’t have the motivation to do it.” Loretta recounted: “It just...if I didn’t have that job, I would have a different job. This is my family, so that’s number one.”

The women’s accountings also reflected the need to think positively in order to handle the stresses and difficulties that arose. Suzanne offered an explanation: “I am a really optimistic person in general, so usually, if I can do that [talk], I’ll get back to the focus of it will work out one way or another.” The women indicated their plans for the future, which explains why they commit to education, to work, and, most importantly, to their family. For example, Loretta recalled a telephone conversation she had with a friend. She repeated parts of the conversation:

You could just stay at home and collect welfare...I don’t know, I could never do that. I don’t think...like right now I am trying to take classes. I could probably take more than one class, but I just don’t want to. I am trying to take all of my prerequisites, so that I can go to dental hygiene school. It is kinda one step at a time.

Veronica frequently takes five or ten minutes throughout the day (after she wakes up, before she starts work, and after her son goes to bed) to say positive affirmations:

Cite a couple of affirmations about how much I love my job...get any stress that I am feeling out before I start the day...taking a couple of deep breaths and telling myself no matter what happens today, I am doing everything in my life the way...
that it needs to be done, no matter what goes wrong, no matter if anybody’s angry.

It is because they are having a bad day, but just not let myself internalize it.

Veronica addressed how much she needs social support. She acknowledged: “There is no way it would work without them, no way. You’d fall apart. I would fall apart.” Talking to others and having positive thoughts is important to these women.

My co-researchers accountings also indicated that in their routines of work and family there was a clear need to be flexible. Their routines are dynamic social creations that emerge in their practices and are recreated and transformed based on the situation and context. These women’s morning routines are based on what was easier and less stressful. The routines are restructured if the context was changed. They understand what works and what does not work based on trial and error and in relation to past events or ways of doing things. For example, Jacqueline appreciates the flexibility her son’s teacher has regarding his homework. She recounted: “I get them in the routine of doing that, but it is nice to have the flexibility...to say it is just a terrible week and we can’t do it...so you have that flexibility and I think it is great.” As the women spoke of their routines, they indicated what was typical or normal, although they followed up with alternate routines. For example, Loretta said, “I am usually there visiting with her for about 10 minutes,” and Gabriella noted that if she gets up late in the morning, her kids have the option of eating at daycare. Suzanne consistently used words such as “typically” and “usually.” For example, she said, “…start our morning out a little earlier typically get up about 5:30 a.m., and I have coffee set in the morning for when I get up. I usually let my son sleep in.”
Being flexible enables these women to better manage stress. Veronica told me she likes to keep her mornings as “stress free as possible...and in turn keep John’s morning as stress free as possible. In the morning nobody likes to have a crazy morning.” She has learned to:

[j]ust stay as calm as possible, and it flows. Either we eat breakfast or we don’t and we are both gonna live and survive it all...I have had learn to just take it as it comes...I guess there is not much that completely disrupts it [the routine] because I try not to keep it so rigid that it is completely inflexible.

These women’s accountings provide important insights into how they understand and perceive their routines and interaction. Harré (1979) claims, “accounting ultimately depends upon on the existence of reflexive consciousness” (p. 388). Through the process of talking about their lives, the women reconstructed their lived experience. These reconstructions provide important insights into how employed mothers without domestic partners perceive their situation as they manage work and family.

4.6 Third Research Question

The third research question asks, “What are the forms of personal and emotional support that women identify in managing work and family?” The information gleaned from the narratives indicated three broad categories: social support, absence of social support, and stress relief routines.

4.6.1 Social Support. Social support is interactive communication with others that may or may not be goal oriented and that serves to enhance a person’s emotional and personal well-being. All women reported talking with either family and/or friends when
they needed support. After the women spoke to someone about their issues, they indicated feeling better and feeling encouraged. These women sought counseling, phoned friends and family, and went to other people’s houses as a means for social support and encouragement. In some cases, the discussions did not focus primarily on the children, but on life in general. For example, Suzanne said,

It was like, oh, I had the worst day today…it was like one more thing…this is just insane…I called her, kinda dumping on somebody that doesn’t really care or that you know is like, oh, gosh, shut up already, that is pretty much just like a debriefing kind of a thing, not that you really want any answers because nobody has any real answers for you, it is just my way of unloading it so I can start over. Having someone listen to the day-to-day issues provides support to these women.

Veronica also indicated that:

To some degree everybody needs encouragement…input on everything that we are doing. And without it you don’t know that you are on the right track. I mean it can certainly feel that way. But for me they give me the support that I need to keep going when I am stressed out, when I want to complain…I need somebody to say that this is really hard. I need to go to somebody and say I am having a really hard time with this. And I need them to say ‘That’s understandable,’ and then I feel better about it. Just that my feelings are warranted…I look to other people. I am looking to my friends. Or to my mother to say, ‘you are doing a great job Veronica!’
Julie goes to the home of one of her friends, who is herself a single mother, and they have dinner and do each other’s hair. Suzanne goes to her friend’s house to scrapbook and talk. Julie prefers to call her father instead of her friends if she is “feeling the heat of the days, nights, and moments.” She continued, by saying that the “heat is the frustration.” Gabriella, who is close to her co-workers, will call one of them when she is having a “meltdown.” She explained:

I just need to talk, and then I will be ok. I will talk to her for 5 or 10 minutes just to calm down and explain what is going on...she always knows just what to say...making me laugh, make it so it doesn’t feel so bad. I can get off the phone and be perfectly fine.”

Gabriella and Jacqueline recalled experiences where they received counseling. Jacqueline received family counseling during the interim period following her divorce. She needed some input and suggestions from the counselor on how to deal effectively with her and her two boy’s emotions through the divorce process. Gabriella indicated that she had “informal counseling” to receive extra-credit for a class. She found it to be very beneficial and noted that, “It was actually really revealing for me. Because...when I look back I really realized what I was saying and what was going on.”

“Listening,” “venting,” “debriefing,” “unloading,” and “telling” were terms commonly used to describe communication with family and friends. These women know they have a difficult and complex lives, and they desire someone to listen to them talk about the everyday stresses of such, but they do not necessarily need the listener to suggest solutions. Suzanne indicated that she has a lot of family and friends who “will
listen to you and still like you even after you have yelled at them for whatever reason.”

Communication as venting may appear unidirectional, as one person talks about their thoughts with another, but it is not. Communication involves “both reflection and analysis, listening and speaking (Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004, p. 37). Active listening provides social support to women because meaning arises from social interaction, even if only one person is speaking. These women want encouragement, which seems to come from active listening by an interested other. Through the process of talking and telling stories, the women come to understand themselves and their realities.

4.6.2 Absence of Support. All but one woman indicated lack of support from either a family member or a co-worker. Gabriella told me about how her mother wished she would find a husband and be a stay-at-home mother and how their parenting styles and life goals differed. Gabriella indicated that she does not lie to her mother. She elaborated by saying:

I stretch the truth. It makes her [mother] happy, and it makes me not have to worry about her worrying about us. It kills two birds with one stone. Basically, my mom gets the satisfaction of knowing well this, this, and this is getting done, and I don’t have to worry about her bitching at me about what I am not doing that she thinks I should be doing.

Suzanne recalled a situation from her previous workplace where she did not feel support from her co-workers. She was away from work, as her son was sick. She said that:
I used my leave and there was nothing said about it. You just have that underlying feeling that people thought, ‘oh, like you just take a week off, like you are just out sunbathing out on the deck.’ Sunbathing for a week, and I felt that in the past too. It’s a real degrading feeling because you are just there …dealing with my son, like breathing treatments through a nebulizer every two hours, medicine every four hours, they are crying, you are trying to sleep, it is certainly anything but a vacation. Then, to think that you have just had a week from hell, and then actually you would like another week off, just so that you could recuperate yourself.

Gabriella and Loretta indicated lack of support from their children’s fathers. Some women expressed the difficulties with their child not having contact or having limited contact with their fathers. Loretta appeared disappointed when talking about this issue. The lack of support, which my co-researchers experienced, affected them negatively. I could see their disappointment as they told their stories. Their voices were congruent with their dissatisfaction. Lack of support adds to their stress in managing work and family.

4.6.3 Stress Relief Routines. Stress relief routines are practices women engage in to reduce distress. In this study, finding personal time and providing self-support emerged as routines within the category of individual practical actions. Additionally, the women indicated that reading books, watching television, taking short breaks, and writing were activities they used to relieve stress. Some routines were scheduled and some were not. For example, Veronica exercises three times a week, which is stress relief and gives
her energy, and she also meets with a weekly book club. Two women indicated that when their child(ren) visit with their fathers every second weekend, their routines slow down and they are able to sleep in, relax, catch up on chores, and have an opportunity to be spontaneous.

The three broad sources of support identified in this study suggest a broader pattern these women employ. As they do not have a partner at home with whom to communicate, the women seek encouragement and emotional and personal support through family, friends, and/or co-workers. Each of the women generally chose just one of these three sources from whom to seek encouragement, advice, or emotional support, and the chosen source is extremely important to them. The women want encouragement and actively seek social support, but when such support is unavailable, they engage in individual practices such as self-talk, writing, cleaning, taking a five-minute break, or yelling into a pillow to get feelings “out” and get themselves back on the right track.

4.7 Summary

The interviews with the six co-researchers provide an “up-close view, as if under the microscope, of a small social unit or an identifiable activity within the social unit” (Bickman & Rog, 1998, p. 478). This micro level of analysis focused on daily routines in order to highlight how these women communicatively and individually practiced the management of work and family. My co-researchers and I created shared meanings regarding their routines, and Kvale (1996) notes that empathetic dialogue “may contribute to empowerment” (p. 70). These dialogues give voice to a group of women that are seldom considered in research. This research was conducted by a woman on the
lives of women, and "centers on women’s diverse situations and the frames that influence those situations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 72). Crotty (1998) argues:

We need to recognize that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities. At the very least, this means that description and narration can no longer be seen as straightforwardly representational of reality. It is not a case of merely mirroring ‘what is there.’ When we describe something, we are, in the normal course of events, reporting how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community or sets of communities. (p. 64)

Through the analysis process, I became aware of how my perceptions of myself in relationship to my family have been transformed. In particular, I became amazed at how much flexibility these women have in managing work and family. As a result of their expressed flexibility, I have become more flexible in how I handle various situations. I can quite honestly say that flexibility does lower the stress in handling multiple roles.

My co-researchers in this study perceive both work and family as priorities, and both are integrated into their everyday experiences. Napier and Gershenfeld (1999) describe work and family as a dichotomy; however, these women without domestic partners must work to support their child(ren), and appear to perceive work and family not as polar opposites, but on a continuum in which work and family demands are in constant flux. These women negotiate the dynamics of work and family through interpersonal communication.
It was my interest in work and family topics that initially led me to Medved’s (2004) study. I agree with her that communication research needs to “incorporate diverse voices” and to “explore the micro-practices that would constitute the routines of single mothers, single fathers, divorced parents, and more broadly incorporating the lives of people of color, gay and lesbian individuals, and the working poor” (p. 142). I chose to examine single women, excluding employed men not living with domestic partners because as a researcher, I did not feel I could “give voice” to these men. Future research needs to examine single men as parents.

Because all six participants in this study were employed by UAF, and all participants were students, their responses may not have been typical in two ways. The women in this study identified working in the relatively family-friendly work environment found at UAF; hence, future research needs to examine women who self-identify as working in non-family-friendly workplaces. All of the participants were students, as well, so future research must also explore parents without a college education.

The current research findings regarding employed mothers without domestic partners are different from Medved’s (2004) findings regarding dual-earner couples, which emphasize the need to explore other family typologies. For example, some parents are in a “sandwich generation,” in that they are caring for their children and for their parent(s) at the same time. Exploring how employed parents without domestic partners take care of elder parent(s), their children, and manage careers at the same time appears important.
In this study, women expressed the importance of social support from family, friends, and/or co-workers. They also indicated conflicts within some family relationships as a result of the choices they make as working mothers. With the diversities between traditional and contemporary families, it would be beneficial to explore the conflicts that arise within such family relationships. The women in this study also indicated that their extended families could provide help, but that they choose to not ask for assistance unless it was absolutely necessary. Since mothers may need to ask for help, human communication research needs to explore the complexities of asking for such support. What is the experience of the social interaction when one asks for assistance? In what ways does the relationship change after help has been granted?

Again, Napier and Gershenfeld (1999) present work and family as a dichotomy, which involves the “push and pull demands of home and family versus work” (p. 388). I think this is a false dichotomy in contemporary American society. Many families are “doing” work and family simultaneously and do not perceive family versus work, but rather as a continuum that is addressed, not by devoting equal effort to each, but by addressing what needs to be done at any given time. Scholars need to explore these tensions as they examine how work and family are negotiated and managed through communication.
References


Appendices
Appendix A

Informed Consent Statement

IRB # 04-79 Approval Date: 12/17/04

Work and Family: Communicative Actions and Interactions in Employed Women’s Management of Dual Roles

I am going to read the following statement into the tape recorder and then give you a copy of the statement. Your continuation with the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this research.

You are being asked to take part in a study about working mothers. The goal of this study is to explore communicative actions and interactions of employed women who have at least one child living at home with them and to understand how family and work is managed. You are being asked to take part in this study because you meet the criteria.

I am conducting this research under the guidance of Dr. Arundale. All the information collected is for the purpose of the completion of my master’s degree thesis project. The research findings from this study will be published and presented as part of graduate thesis and work.

If you decide to take part, you will spend approximately one to two hours of your time for an interview about your experience as an employed mother managing work and family. Interviews will be audio recorded. Audiotapes, interview notes, and transcriptions will be kept in a locked office for the duration of the research process in order to ensure confidentiality, and then will be destroyed.
There are no apparent risks or discomforts involved in this research study to participants or researcher. However if you become uncomfortable for any reason please tell me. You are also being provided with a list of counselors and their contact information should you find that after the interview you have a need to talk with someone. Please note that this study will not pay for any care or services. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reason.

Your name will not be used in any report or paper. A pseudonym will be used for the narrative responses from your interview. Strict ethical guidelines for participants are being adhered to in respect for all persons regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. My thesis advisor, Dr. Robert Arundale, and I will be the only persons allowed access to the information; all information will be kept in secure files.

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You are free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time without penalty to you. During the interview you can just tell me that you don’t want to continue and we will stop the interview and not include any of the information collected. After the interview the tapes will be anonymous and therefore withdrawal will not be possible. If you have any questions now, please feel free to ask me.

If you have any questions later, you may contact me at 474-1876 or e-mail at ftcrp@uaf.edu or my thesis advisor, Dr. Robert Arundale, at 474-6799 or e-mail at ffrba@uaf.edu.
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Coordinator in the Office of Research Integrity, at (907) 474-7800 (Fairbanks area), or 1-866-876-7800 (outside the Fairbanks area), or by e-mail at fyirb@uaf.edu.
Appendix B

Journal Notes

Questions and comments that I asked of myself, the conversations, and the narrative responses:

1) These women invited me into their personal lives for an hour or so. I wonder how they felt after the interview because they self-disclosed so much information about their experiences with work, family, routines, and support. I shared my experiences, but they shared more than me. Do they feel I have violated their personal life? I hope not.

2) I enjoyed talking to all the women.

3) Most women indicated after the interview that they enjoyed talking and felt it was a noteworthy topic. I actively listened to their issues about work and family.

4) During the conversations, we laughed together. I seemed like we were laughing together as an expression of similarity that indicates that our perceptions and thoughts may be similar.

5) Through talking with the women, I have learned different routes to handle time constraints. These women are courageous!

6) Some active duty soldiers from Ft. Wainwright will be deployed soon. This will leave many mothers at home to manage everything. Some are young, new to Alaska and to the military lifestyle, and may have lots of children.