ABSTRACT

Maternal Memorable Messages in
Understanding Femininity

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The messages a mother communicates to her children play an important role

in the attitudes they develop toward their own self-identity and toward their mindsets

concerning femininity (Bem, 1983; Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Fromme & Eccles, 1996;

Golombisky, 2001; Green, 2003; Heisler & Morrison, 2000; Lombardi, 2013; O'Reilly,

2002; Reger, 2001). These memorable messages provide more than directives at the time

they are spoken. They also provide the basis of social identity. Children of mothers who

role model progressive attitudes toward femininity and communicate these attitudes

through positive messages may develop and value stronger feminine identities in

themselves. Memorable messages about gender role attitudes and self-identity constitute

a large part of communication regarding feminine identity. The idea that "feminism

begins at home" speaks not only to women's equality issues but also to the re-defining of

feminine identity and the role mothers have in this reconstruction. By transmitting

gender attitudes through memorable messages, mothers may play a formative part in a

world of changing gender roles (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Moen, Erickson &

Dempster-McClain, 1997).

Maternal Memorable Messages in Understanding Femininity

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Review of Literature

Decades after the beginning of the feminist movement in the American society, masculinity is still championed over femininity. Masculine traits are valued over feminine traits as mothers communicate the importance of masculinity in order to succeed in a "man's world". In doing this, mothers are communicating the message that traditionally masculine characteristics, i.e. aggressiveness, competitiveness, and dominance, can be performed by females as well as males. Whether because of an absent father or due to societal pressures, mothers have been heavily involved in promoting masculinity in their children (Bush, 2004; Diamond, 2004; Green, 2003; Lombardi, 2013; Morman & Whitely, 2012; O'Reilly, 2002). Meanwhile, femininity has taken the societal back seat. Feminine traits in both males and females have been devalued by businesses, organizations and society as a whole (Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Conradie, 2011; Damean, 2010; Green, 2003; Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Medved et al, 2006). Messages about the irrelevance of femininity and its under-valued role in an individual's gender identity are being constantly communicated by society. Because society is made up of family structures interacting with individual members on a continual basis through communication, this is where an individual's definitions and meanings begin. Maternal influence is the source of the majority of socially learned attitudes and practices toward gender roles and gender socialization within individuals. It is mothers who orient their children to value the diversity in others and communicate these values through flexible

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gender socialization behavior (Rittenour, Colaner & Odenweller, 2014). Well-meaning mothers are inadvertently giving their children the perception that masculine qualities are superior to feminine qualities and are necessary of replication in order to be respected and valued in our society (Frome & Eccles, 1996). If these trends continue, "femininity", i.e. compassion, gentleness, and understanding, may continue to be devalued and under-utilized through social learning (O'Neil, 1981; Schippers, 2007).

The significance of feminine characteristics in both males and females can be understood in a variety ways. A world where inhabitants conduct themselves solely in masculine terms will be authoritarian, competitive, and autonomous. These characteristics lead toward engaging in aggressive tactics for dominance. Feminine traits and behaviors in our children are an important equilibrium in society because of the innate richness they bring to understanding one's inner self. Femininity brings a strong need for connection, relationships, and expressive communication - - adding the warmth and empathy necessary to sustain humanity. When mothers communicate the importance of femininity and the need for it to embody both sexes in order to complete the many roles one performs, sons as well as daughters will witness society's increasing value of femininity. A mother has the opportunity to foster equally in her children the merit of femininity. Mothers have the ability to teach their sons to appreciate the feminine as they form romantic relationships and also as they recognize femininity's place in constructing their own gender identity. Only by communicating messages that femininity is a truly desirable set of characteristics and is equally valued in our society will the dualistic identities remain in balance. The value of this balance is most often communicated and understood in settings and situations with those who play an important part in shaping

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one's self-identity: mothers. With this in mind, the messages communicated by one's mother regarding femininity have abundant influence on the understanding of its place in their lives.

 Examining the role maternal messages play in the development of feminine identity in individuals is important because recalling messages and circumstances surrounding discourse from one of the most influential people in one's life may prove an instrumental source for understanding one's attitudes about their own femininity. Research is lacking in providing this type of information. Few studies have examined the maternal memorable messages regarding social learning and feminine identity of male children. However, the present study will continue the research that will assess the role that mothers perform as they communicate messages concerning femininity to their sons and daughters. Maternal memorable messages perform a major role in the choices made by these children. Their views on femininity will reflect the views they gleaned from these memorable messages. The importance of this study lies in the need to consider and understand the content and context of the messages about femininity as well as the purpose of the message the mother communicates. The manner in which mothers communicate messages about femininity to their children may influence the attitudes these individuals develop about femininity in themselves.

Femininity

Society's traditional definition of femininity includes a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles which are generally associated with girls and women. Femininity is also perceived as a social construct, which is made up of both socially defined and

biologically created factors. These commonly held definitions pose more limitations than potentials.

Throughout history, the features of femininities have not been constructed the same as those of masculinities. Femininity was identified and defined through negations of the masculine characteristics. The absence of masculinity was femininity. This dualistic relationship poses a subordinate association rather than one in equal balance (Paechter, 2006). In defining the feminine and the masculine, society continues to use binary terms: reason/passion, essence/appearance, active/passive. The constructs are interrelated. Femininity and masculinity are socially learned and constructed through methods of contingency. If an individual is this, they cannot be that (Conradie, 2011). Thus the view that the construction of gender identity is predetermined, unchangeable, and not defined on a sliding scale of characteristics.

However, femininity and masculinity need not be viewed strictly as bipolar opposites; but rather as separate dimensions where both are present in varying degrees in both men and women (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975). Ascribing strictly to the group-think construction of femininity will decidedly limit an individual's development in the qualities and traits they cultivate. Instead, an individual's observable definition of femininity can be the combination of these characteristics cultivated through major influences in their lives (Watzlawik, 2009). The fact that one is biologically male or female has little bearing on how their masculinity or femininity is constructed. Instead, they are able to construct and understand themselves in terms of how they socially learn to 'do' boy/man or girl/woman (Paechter, 2006). Consequently through this definition, femininity can be as flexible as the individual itself.

Gender identity development, forming a sense of one's gender, begins early in life and usually peaks after adolescence. Viewing gender as a social structure, constructing one's gender identity is understood as developing a set of practices and performances by which they express themselves (Risman, 2004). Masculine and feminine qualities and behaviors are understood through one's actions. These actions are constituted and realized through communication and discourses (Tolman, Striepe & Harmon, 2003). One's identification with masculinity or femininity is influenced by a variety of ideologically loaded dialogue. Discourse allows one to interpret the definition and identification of one's own femininity through the foundation of communication rather than on the basis of biological sex or gender-typed norms and expectations (Conradie, 2011). The concept of espousing femininity can be equally employed by men and women alike as they learn to embrace both the feminine and the masculine characteristics within themselves. Society as a whole will benefit as behaviors and personality traits are no longer linked with gender, but with individuals 'doing' gender independently (Bem, 1983). Males and females are beginning to evaluate the purpose and benefit of internalizing feminine values and are defining their gender identities in a whole new way.

Studies researching the messages mothers communicate to their children regarding understanding the role that femininity plays in their lives are scarce. Yet evaluating these messages concerning femininity communicated to individuals by their mothers is crucial. Because one of the most influential relationships in an individual's life is the one they have with their mother, the communicated messages between mother and child are remembered long after they are spoken. Few individuals are lukewarm about the relationship they share with their mothers. These dyadic relationships are fueled by

things said or left unsaid as an individual matures into an adult. Actions and reactions to dialogues and discussions help form self-identity.

As a new generation reacts to the modification of masculine/feminine patterns communicated by their mothers, the goal leans heavily toward connections and relationships. With an increase in sensitivity and communication, both sexes will respect and value feminine traits in themselves and each other beginning to equal the value society places on masculinity. The sensitivity and communication components of femininity are not normally found in masculinity. Therefore, fostering femininity in our children is an essential function of mothers as they model methods of negotiating relationships throughout their lives.

Social learning theory argues that the term identification "refers to a process in which a person patterns his thoughts, feelings, or actions after another person who serves as a model" (Bandura, 1969, p. 214). Nawy (1982) added to Bandura's research by studying the social role theory of mother–daughter relationships and the subsequent related effects on daughters' sense of self-efficacy. Daughters imitate their mother's characteristics and mannerisms in order to learn how femininity operates to act and react toward outside stimuli. Mothers who role model independence and self-sufficiency along with caring and cooperation within relationships relay the message of balanced gender to their children. These studies augment the idea that social learning takes place in the discourse of mothering, the relational attention individuals receive from mothers, and the methods mothers use in communicating coping skills to their sons and daughters (Gilbert & von Wallmenich, 2014; Medved & Kirby, 2005; Monti, Rudolph & Abaied, 2014). Other studies on mothering challenge traditional definitions and blur the lines of

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separations between masculinity and femininity. Mothering is viewed as an act rather than an assignment based on gender or biology. By shifting the act of mothering into a task related responsibility of parenting, it is opened up to be performed by the parent possessing the characteristics needed an individual basis.   These studies contest Freud's developmental psychology while strongly supporting Bandura's social learning theory revealing that the development of masculinity is more dependent on sociological determinants such as the social learning that is the result of maternal involvement (Bush, 2004). Thus social learning theory reveals the source of sex typing in the sex-differentiated traditions that are observed and modeled in our families and in society (Bem, 1983). Understanding how children become sex typed is no different than understanding how they become socialized in any other behavior.

Identity theory focuses on "the internal process of self-verification" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284) as an individual's self-identity is constructed. Postmodern identity is constructed by combining an image with a social role. This definition affords flexibility for individuals to change and model their identities according to personal choice (Damean, 2010). Identity formation is seen as a process of using experiences from our past to develop our own sense of how we define who we are to ourselves and to others (Grotevant, 1987). This theory may be examined through maternal memorable messages as well. The development of identity exploration, including the use of discourse in the construction of identity and the use of a mother's verbalized experiences in an individual's identity strivings, points to the strong maternal influence in the construction of the feminine identity in individuals (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Henwood, 1993; Smith, Mullis & Hill, 1995). This research which is specifically focused on feminine

identity, also touches on feminine personality therapy, the construction and development of feminist identity, and even the conception of the "mommy identity" (Chodorow, 2001; Golombisky, 2001; Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Reger, 2001; Wolfe & Munley, 2012). All of these studies speak to the role of influence that a mother has in the formation of her children's identity.

The patterns of interaction and communication in the construction of identity within the family communication studies field have been explored extensively (Floyd & Morman, 2006; Floyd & Morman, 2013; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Schrodt et al, 2009; Sillars, Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2005). Messages in family stories that are handed down through generations set standards for family relationships and for role expectations in families (Vangelisti, Crumley, Baker, 1999). These standards and expectations are the foundations for identity formation in individuals. Within these familial units it is parents who play the major role in the socialization process as well as in an individual's personal development (Jackson, 1998; Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2012; Medved, et al, 2006). As American families become increasingly diverse, they must rely on discourse to re-define the multiplicity of kinship identity. An individual's identity is highly discourse dependent as well. Families reflect on their self-conceptions and continuously re-configure themselves as members communicate their changing identities and roles (Galvin, 2006). Just as families depend more and more on communication with each other to construct their flexible identities, individuals also rely on family to understand the construction of their own identities. Studies indicate that mothers have considerable influence on their children in areas of social support and relationships; with the interpersonal relationship between mother and child being especially noteworthy.

Mothers influence their children in meaningful ways including the modeling of prosocial behavior and development of empathy and concern for others. The quality of the relationship between two people is indicated by the closeness and meaning they share involving "significant moments of experience and interaction" (Morman & Whitely, 2012, p. 24). These significant moments may be the footprints mothers involuntarily embed into their children's subconscious through memorable messages that are later used by sons and daughters to form definitions and identities of femininity.

To create their identities, individuals utilize the information received from those they consider significant in their lives. Adolescents assume the perspective of their parents when forming their identities by drawing from their parents' experiences as a way of understanding how events in the world unfold and their consequences (Fivush, Bohanek & Zaman, 2010). Research of extant literature supports the thesis that a mother's role modeling and attitudes toward the perceived characteristics of femininity is formative in the understanding of feminine identity in daughters and in sons. Whether by absorbing attitudes toward sexuality, dating, and careers or understanding the importance of incorporating both the feminine and masculine domains as a valued part of their daily activities, mothers are the answerer of the questions posed by their children and an instrumental character in their understanding of the world in which they live (Boyd, 1989; Colaner & Rittenour, 2015; Heisler, 2014; Morman & Whitely, 2012). Literature also denotes the importance of maternal influences in the use of these characteristics in the construction of an individual's femininity. Mothers communicate gender schema as they role model how one's gendered self is integrated with identities of parents. Mothers reinforce family values and challenge the belief that children must disconnect and detach

psychologically in order to develop successfully (Bem, 1983; Bernstein, 2004; Bush, 2004; Green, 2003). Through communication with each other, mothers and their children discursively construct realities about life and relationships which will in turn influence attitudes about the place femininity holds in one's own life. Gender schema theory states that as a child develops, they observe the definition of femininity and masculinity from those closest to them. As they grow, they engage in communication from which they learn to evaluate and assimilate information. From these experiences individuals learn to encode and organize information in terms of their individually developing gender schema (Bem, 1983). As mothers communicate beliefs and values to their children they are either reinforcing or weakening the dominant ideology of society through discourse. The social construction of experiences, identities, and relationships, specifically between mothers and daughters, reflect closeness and the "discourse of femininity" for which women are known (Henwood, 1993).

Socialization strategies that are derived from maternal memorable messages in constructing these attitudes are described in a host of academic research. In early literature, social learning and feminine identity development is heavily weighted with mother-daughter relationship studies. Themes of self-disclosure, romantic relational schema, and mothers' influence on women's sense of self all reinforce the social role theory of mother-daughter relationships (Bishop, 1992; Boyd, 1989; Kellas, 2010; Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). The influence of mothers in their daughter's attitudes toward romantic relationships and toward their attitudes about sex speaks to the construction of femininity through the mother-daughter relationship. The mother-daughter dyad is the most significant relationship in families and the mother's example of

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femininity will be the most important influence in their children's understanding of their own femininity (Boyd, 1989; Floyd & Morman, 2006). Mothers' generativist identity is associated with flexible gender socialization of daughters serving as an important motivator in instilling prosocial values and behavior (Rittenour, Colander & Odenweller, 2014). The mother who communicates and role models the variety of ways to construct femininity and the flexibility of gender socialization has the opportunity to equip her children with the freedom to redefine how femininity fits into their own lives. By understanding the socialization of femininity as an ongoing construction with flexible boundaries, rather than a strictly sequential construction to be replicated, individuals are unrestrained in the interpretation of their own feminine identity (Medved et al. 2006).

Literature on socializing strategies points toward the differences in maternal messages that are gender specific. Maternal emotional awareness is reflected in the coping socialization strategies she suggests to her children. Strategies and communication on dealing with conflict differ according to the sex of her child (Beaumont, Vasconcelos & Ruggeri, 2001; Monti, Rudolph & Abaied, 2014). For example, while male children are encouraged by their mothers to engage stressors, female children are oriented away from stressors or instructed to avoid cognitive or emotional reaction. Gender differences are derived from early mother-child interaction. Sons are given more verbal stimulations than daughters and are encouraged to separate and individuate as they mature (Weitzman, Birns & Friend, 1985). Girls are encouraged to remain in a "matrix of connectedness", while boys are urged to branch out and become independent (Olver, Aries & Batgos, 1989). Yet, when mothers keep their sons relationally close they provide their sons with strategies for overcoming adversities, for relating with others, and for expressing

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emotions in positive forms. Boys whose mothers communicate the value of incorporating feminine qualities into their self-identity are better able to navigate the ever shifting world of gender identification (Lombardi, 2012). As male children are reared to respect the talents and to value the contribution of the feminine identity, they become aware of the place it holds in their own lives. Mothers who guide their sons into understanding the important contribution of both genders point him toward the exploration of "doing" male in a whole new way (O'Reilly, 2001). The benefits of the close relationship compound as mothers communicate gender neutrality despite society's assumptions about sex and gender which remain embedded in culture and individual discourses. As mothers consciously or subconsciously convey prosocial behaviors toward femininity, they are instilling in their children the use of the "lenses of gender" (Bem, 1993). These lenses give individuals a unique viewpoint by which to see through the eyes of another, begin to understand their experiences, and will shape how they perceive and discuss how aspects of femininity fits into their lives (Greenbaum, 1999). As these sons grow into men and begin to father children of their own, these flexible gender values and behaviors that were demonstrated for them through a close relationship with their mother are called upon to guide relationships in their own family as well as in their professional lives.

Analytical psychologists have stated the significant role mothers play in the maturing process of their sons by helping him construct a sense of masculine identity in part due to the son's determination to distance himself from his mother and her femininity (Freud, 1961). However, not until more recent years have actual studies been conducted on the mother-son relationship that reveal a mother's positive influence in understanding femininity rather than merely serving as an anti-role model for

masculinity. These studies show that closeness in the mother-son relationship actually prepares boys and men for the world of increasing femininity (Morman & Whitely, 2012). The days of turning boys away from their mothers to promote masculinity have diminished. The forced subjectivity of mothers in the mother-son relationship has given way to studies which show that sons who stay close to their mothers are relationally stronger, have an increase in pro-social behavior, and develop empathic concern for others (Diamond, 2004; Heller, Robinson, Henry & Plunkett, 2006; Schwartzman, 2006). Research also shows that the affection from the mother can and does help to fill the void created by the absent father, indicating the importance of a mother's role modeling both femininity and masculinity to their male children as well as their female children (Lombardi, 2013; Davis & Haynes, 2012; Green, 2003). For example, a qualitative study examining the role mothers play in the healthy development of a son's manhood and masculinity revealed that African American mothers play a vital part in raising their sons to become men; finding that mothers acknowledged that masculine and feminine experiences were interrelated. These mothers expected their sons to develop their sex-role identities with both masculine and feminine selves shifting their male children to more gender neutral selves (Bush, 2004). By communicating expectations of the advantages of developing both masculine and feminine identities these mothers are adding to the individual construction of femininity and to society's construction as well.

Memorable Messages

As short units of discourse, memorable messages express the behavioral instructions received by individuals by using repetitive beliefs, proverbs, and colloquialisms (Barge & Schlueter, 2004). Memorable messages are characterized by

two specific factors. First, the message that the individual remembers is retained for a long period of time, and second, the individual recognizes that the message has had a major influence on the course of one's life (Stohl, 1986). Individuals use these examples from those close to them as socialization tools as well as guiding their self-perception and identity (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981). Guidelines for the direction of behavioral actions are collected through memorable messages gained through a variety of sources and contexts (Johnson, Orbe & Cooke-Jackson, 2014). These messages are utilized as directives for decisions on how to behave in future situations. Because of their effect on behavioral principles, memorable messages represent "rich sources of information about ourselves, our society, and our ways of communicating" (Knapp, Stohl & Reardon, 1981, p. 40).

Researchers have studied memorable messages as early as the 1960s when they were used to study consumers and the "stream of messages" they receive from competitive advertisers (Krueger & Morrissey, 1965). In this study the content of the message was found to be the most important aspect of the communication. Messages received nearest to the time a decision is being made were found to have the most influence on the behavior of consumers (Wells & Chinsky, 1965). Memorable messages were found to be consistently effective and useful in a wide variety of contexts as well (MacLachlan, 1983). The location or situation in which the individual encounters the message adds to the recollection of its meaning when it is brought to mind. Stohl (1986) states that the "socializing and memorable nature of the messages were enhanced by several recurrent features in their form and structure, the receptivity of the respondent, the content and the context" of the message (p. 232).

Memorable messages are the lessons individuals glean from the purposeful formation of discourses communicated to them over specific times in their lives (Dallimore, 2003). Messages providing information regarding norms, values and expectations which help to guide social identity and behavior. Messages providing the importance of social interaction and how it affects one's own development (Stohl, 1986). As these messages are communicated, they provide individuals with a shared sense of reality. Using this method of understanding an experience, an individual scans their memory to utilize prior situational experiences comparable to the one they are presented with at the moment as they formulate judgments and decisions for actions (Schank & Abelson, 1977). In a study researching the moral messages parents communicate to their children the setting and the age of the recipient as well as the content of the message were found to be especially important in recalling past communications with relationally important persons. Parental messages were found to have a "scaffolding effect" not only during adolescence when it was received, but also as young adults construct and refine their own moral positions (Waldron et al., 2014). Negotiations of one's own identity are built upon the cultural, religious, and societal messages individuals receive from influential people in their lives. By studying the particular memories that are recalled at significant moments in one's life, researchers are given a window into the understanding and construction of an individual's self-identity.

Memorable messages have been studied in a variety of socialization processes. Organizational communication scholars have researched the use of memorable messages and the individual role of newcomers in organizational socialization as well as their influence in the process of organizational socialization as a whole (Barge & Schlueter,

2004; Stohl, 1986). The messages new members of organizations receive upon entering

are instrumental in their attitudes and adjustment into the association with fellow

members. Family communication studies have examined memorable messages in the

influence of mothers' messages on daughters' romantic schema, attitudes toward

sexuality and dating, and the construction of identity and face negotiation in relationships

(Heisler & Ellis 2008; Johnson, Orbe & Jackson, 2014; Kellas, 2010).

Memorable messages present researchers with a rich supply of data regarding

self-perception; self-assessing behavior, and the way people communicate and socialize

(Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981; Smith & Butler-Ellis, 2001). Recalling messages

received from influential people in one's life can point to the development of attitudes

and mindsets on a variety of life proclivities including the relationship between styles of

communication and memory over time (Reece, Haden & Fivush, 1993). Gender roles and

the socialization of attitudes toward them, gender as a social structure, sexuality and

memorable messages that guide behavior and attitudes toward it, and the long-lasting

impact of these communicated messages are all subjects of studies of the lives and

decisions that emerging adult populations are facing (Heisler, 2014; Heisler & Morrison,

2000; Monti, Rudolph & Abaied, 2014). Ways in which mothers communicate

instructions through memorable messages teach their children attitudes regarding gender

and the way it is performed.

Biological differences are maintained through the socially constructed system

communicated by influential others. There are studies examining the similarities and

differences in the conversations mothers have with their daughters and with their sons

(Beaumont, Vasconcelos & Ruggeri, 2001; Heller, Robinson, Henry & Plunkett, 2006;

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Jackson, 1998). These studies report that parents, especially mothers, interact differently with their sons and daughters in storytelling and in communicating coping skills for conflict resolution (Monti, Rudolph & Abaied, 2014; Muchnik & Stavans, 2009). In the context of peer victimization (bullying) in elementary schools it was found that mothers suggest avoidance techniques to their daughters while sons are taught confronting skills. Differences in the emotional support received from mothers by young adult children do not go unnoticed and have an influence on relationships within families (Trees, 2002). Trees' study on gender-related identities highlighted the importance in researching the influence and interaction of mothers and their sons and daughters as they relate to maternal support in identities, expectations, and behaviors. The perception of differences in communication and support were found to shape behavior processes and evaluations. Sons and daughters report the perception of being treated differently in the communication of competence, connectedness, and emotional autonomy in the relationships with their parents (Frank, Avery & Laman, 1988). Assessment of these insights identified that males and females perceive the construct of relationship dimensions between them and their mother to be sex-specific in areas such as autonomy and relatedness. As mothers communicate attitudes toward historically traditional feminine and masculine roles, lasting impressions are being left on their children as self-identity is being individually defined and constructed. Memorable messages are the abbreviations of a young life remembered.

The millennial generation has been raised with a different mindset than their mothers (Bem, 1983; Bernstein, 2004; Colaner & Rittenour 2015; Damean, 2010; Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Moen,, Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Reger, 2001; Weitzman,

Birns & Friend, 1985). The daughters of the feminist generation who are now mothers themselves are beginning to realize that there is more than an economic imbalance in the compensation of males and females in society. There is also a value imbalance in the mindsets of our society regarding masculinity and femininity. The definition of femininity is blurring and continues to transform as emerging adults construct their own identities and attitudes regarding femininity. Is the content of the messages mothers communicate to their children about femininity different to sons and daughters? What do sons and daughters perceive as the purpose or reason these messages are communicated to them? Messages that are powerful enough to be recalled time after time provide significant insight into the developmental processes of an individual's social identity. Therefore, the current study proposes the following Research Questions:

RQ 1: What is the content of maternal memorable messages to their children about femininity?

RQ 2: In what contexts are these memorable messages communicated?

RQ 3: Will the messages sent to sons be qualitatively different than the messages sent to daughters?

RQ4: What was the perceived purpose of these memorable messages?

CHAPTER TWO

Methods

Participants

A convenience sample of introductory and upper-level young adult under

graduate communication students at a mid-sized private university in the south central

United States was used for this study. A total of 281 participants, 146 females and 135

males were surveyed. An informational announcement was made at the beginning of

the class by the researcher and information packets describing the process and

requirements of the study were handed to each student. Participants were offered extra

course credit decided upon by the instructor of the course. Non-participating students

were offered an option for extra course credit. This insured that participation in the study

was voluntary. The option consisted of reading a short article on mothering styles and

writing a one page reaction paper. Students had the choice to participate in the study or

participate in the alternate option to receive the same extra course credit.

Procedures

After obtaining approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB),

this study was conducted in the classroom and offered to two classes of undergraduate

students. Participants read an introduction explaining that they were participating in a

study about relationships between mothers and children. Participants were given a

consent form and the researcher read the consent form with them as they read it

individually. After the form was read, participants were offered the chance to ask

questions about participating in this study. The voluntary nature of this study was repeated by the researcher and the participants were reminded that they may withdraw at any time. The consent form also presented the voluntary nature of participation. At the completion of the survey, the researcher told the participants again that their involvement was voluntary and anonymous. By informing the participants of the confidentiality of their answers, the hope is that the messages and the responses would be as truthful as possible. All information provided by participants will be destroyed immediately following the completion of the research thesis.

<div align="center">*Measures*</div>

The participants were administered a paper survey with open-ended questions to complete during their communication class. The participants were asked to answer all the questions with communication from their mother being a primary focus. This study provided the participants with the definition of a memorable message (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Medved et al, 2006; Nazione et al, 2011). The definition used was adapted from Stohl's (1986) description of the memorable message, i.e., "a statement of guidance or advice which has influenced you in the creation of your feminine identity." The participants were asked to recall and write down on the survey a message they remember from their mother on the subject of femininity; the specific instructions were, "Write down a memorable message you received from your mother that you believe has had an influence on your understanding of femininity". Next, the survey asked participants to indicate the context or situation in which the message was received. After participants had written out the content of their memorable message and the context in

which the message was conveyed, they were asked to explain the reason they feel the message was communicated to them, i.e., why did your mother tell you this?

Data Analysis

The messages were coded to reveal emergent themes and messages within maternal communication. These messages were sorted and categorized to determine the type of messages sons and daughters remember most from their mothers. The first stage of coding and analyses established the units of analysis and identified major themes in participants' responses. The Barge & Schlueter (2004) inductive approach coding method used in their article on memorable messages in newcomer socialization was employed to examine content and function of the message. Two independent coders analyzed the content and context of the answers given by participants to uncover the common themes in the data.

To construct an initial coding scheme, we conducted open coding on one third of the surveys. The open responses of the participants were categorized individually by each researcher according to thematic similarity. As response categories were developed, new themes were only added when the existing categories were not sufficient in incorporating the message being suggested in the response. This process provided discernible categories of survey responses, yet both researchers felt that the majority of the participants did not answer the question about femininity as it was written. Messages from the first round of independent coding focused on issues of mothering and mothering advice, feminism and feminist notions about the role and behavior of women, while other messages did focus on the question about femininity itself. Another category of messages emerged dealing with messages about women/femininity that mothers directed

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at their sons verses their daughters; the messages directed at sons were substantively different in content and thus were separated from messages delivered to daughters.

Therefore, a second round of coding was performed independently by the researchers where only messages perceived to be addressing the actual notion of femininity were selected from the full set of existing data. Once the two coders agreed on the set of "feminine only" messages, they met to discuss the categories and themes of femininity that emerged. More structural coding was utilized to identify broader themes regarding participants' attitudes toward femininity. This round of coding revealed distinctly constructed coding schemes. The researchers compared the emergent themes and combined their categories into five themes. This was achieved through axial coding. The result of this process revealed a scheme of five categories representing memorable messages communicated by mothers to their children directly addressing the question of femininity.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

The primary research question asked, "what is the content of maternal memorable messages to their children about femininity?" A total of 281 different items were generated by the participants in the study (M=135, F=146). Most of the respondents only reported one memorable message; a few reported more than one. Some reported messages that did not relate to the subject of femininity (n=11) such as "you can't have dessert until you finish your vegetables" and "losing loved ones is painful." These messages were removed from consideration because we believed they did not address the topic of femininity. Others did not identify any specific messages at all, claiming the question wasn't applicable to their mother/child relationship (n=6) for example, "can't recall" and "she hasn't said anything." These items were removed from consideration leaving 264 messages available for analysis. The subsequent coding process for the remaining messages produced five major categories of memorable messages concerning femininity.

Challenges to Traditional Femininity (n=95)

The first major category of memorable messages received from mothers to emerge presented a direct challenge to beliefs about traditional femininity. Messages of independence, self-confidence, and gender equality all challenged the more traditional feminine roles held by society. Responses describing independence were prominent in messages mothers particularly relayed to daughters. Comments such as, "Don't sell

yourself short," "femininity is not a limiting factor," "independence and education before husband," and "you have choices and can be any kind of woman you want to be" are examples of soft challenges to traditional femininity conveyed by mothers. Much stronger, more direct challenges to traditional beliefs regarding femininity were found in messages like, "You are powerful, independent, and don't need a man to accomplish anything," "Work hard – don't be dependent on a man," and "Don't depend on a man and never let him disrespect you." The memorable message communicated to one female participant conveyed this attitude toward challenging traditional norms:

> "'Make sure you make your own money so you never have to rely on a man to support you.' She said this in reference to going to college, having a career, and being financially independent. Women in my family are stuck in unhappy relationships because they are financially dependent on the male they live with. My mother doesn't want me to fall into a similar situation."

Additional messages directly challenging traditional feminine characteristics were messages about self-confidence including phases such as, "You can achieve anything you put your mind to," "Don't be afraid to outshine a boy," and "Do great things. You have so much to offer. Have fun." Mothers' messages also challenged the traditional feminine role with comments about gender equality. Responses such as, "Anyone deserves to create their own path regardless of gender," "Being feminine doesn't limit a women to only doing things that are stereotypical," "Women have as much power as men," and "Superheroes wear dresses, too."

The Feminine Role of Mothering (n=61)

One of the more interesting categories that emerged in the data associated femininity with mothering where the performance of the mother role is viewed as feminine itself, i.e., relational, supportive, nurturing, caring, etc., with children as the

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focus. Maternal messages recalled by the participants in this study appeared to validate the feminine role expectations of mothering that is understood through her actions, for example, one participant wrote:

> "My mom always made dinner for my family and baked things. It seemed as if that was the best way for her to communicate that she loved us. This set her apart as feminine because it was something that she did as a mom. It set her apart as feminine because it was something she did as a mom. Whenever she was in the kitchen, I would come join and she would teach me how to bake and have me help her; however, my brothers were never taught. She indirectly showed me the importance of cooking/baking for the family so I would be able to show motherly love in that way when I became a mother myself."

Additional messages framing mothering as explicitly feminine were, "she shows her love through kisses and acting like a mother in general," and "femininity was being nurturing to your children." Comments encouraging these specific characteristics were, "women care for kids [equals] selfless [equals] loved ones first," "females tend to be giving," "females are empathetic," "women are better at recollecting things," and "mom is caring by how she treats her family."

A mother's unconditional love for her children was noted in many of the participant's responses. Mothers communicated this unquestionable emotion to their sons and daughters with comments like, "If you are ever in trouble, tell me and I won't be mad. I'll do whatever I can to fix the situation," "I will always be there for you," and "I will love you no matter what you do. I don't care if you decide to be a garbage man." Other maternal messages about a mother's love were unspoken, such as "a mother's love is special," "she would support me in everything I did," and "she had unconditional love."

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Another major category of memorable messages from mothers was directed

toward appropriate and proper feminine behavior, i.e., what mothers told their children

about the way feminine women should behave. The survey revealed many messages

about behaving in a strong and independent manner with mothers themselves often

serving as role models. Even more messages stressed the traditionally held feminine

behavioral characteristics as key factors in femininity. One male participant recalled a

memorable message communicated to him by his mother:

> "'Girls are different than boys. They don't want to get sweaty and dirty all the
> time, they have a certain way they are supposed to act. They can't be rowdy all
> the time; they must be nice and look pretty.' I was told this when I was young
> and didn't understand why the girls couldn't play outside with me. My mother
> was explaining the differences between boys and girls and the social conforms
> that go with."

Other participants replied that their mother communicated a variety of actions and

behaviors that were and were not associated with being "lady-like," for example "stand

up straight with good posture," "sit with your legs crossed," "always carry yourself with

grace," and "women are like fine china." Other instructions for feminine behavior

included "be poised and ladylike and have sound etiquette," "don't do things that are

trashy or unladylike," and "be a good hostess – gracious and attentive."

Mothers also communicated messages of emotional strength in the modeling of

behavior for their children as well. Participants responded with messages such as, "it's

OK to be strong *and* emotional," "it's OK to let everything out," "femininity doesn't

mean you are weak," and "women are strong, independent, and kind."

Finally, messages promoting the supportive and more nurturing aspect of

traditional feminine behavior were reflected in messages such as, "Men are leaders of the

families, women are subordinate to the husband," "women get married and have children," and "consider a profession that allows you to have families and stay home to raise children."

Traditional Feminine Appearance (n=20)

A smaller yet still prominent category of memorable message responses to emerge from the data was messages representing traditional views of proper feminine appearance. Comments encouraging the importance of appearance were prominent in this category. This theme reflected beliefs and values about the nature of femininity itself, for example, characteristics such as beauty, posture, and poise were often reported in the written responses of participants. Other traditional notions of femininity were wearing makeup to look presentable and putting effort into your looks is considered "lady-like." One female participant reported her mother's memorable message as:

> "'You need to put on some makeup if you want a husband.' The context or situation was when I was not wearing any makeup going to class. My mother told me this because society has told us that as women we always need to try to look our best to gain the attention of boys."

Mothers of other participants communicated similar ideas with comments such as, "society cares deeply about appearance, make an effort" and "always walk with posture."

Different Messages to Sons (n=49)

The final category of memorable messages to emerge were messages directly communicated from mother to son. These messages appeared to be different from the messages mothers were sending to their daughters and reflected advice and instruction on how to interact and behave with women. By far, the largest response from male participants was memorable messages about respecting women. Messages of

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gentlemanly and chivalrous behavior were seen as acts of respect toward women. These

messages included comments such as, "Always hold the door for girls," "Never ask a

woman her age, weight, or income," and "Females are more emotional than males and

should be treated better."   Male participants interpreted their mother's "respect women"

comments as a code of conduct.

> "'Always treat a woman like a queen. Hold the door open, pull out the chair,
> compliment her, etc.' This caused me to be polite, courteous and genuine to all
> women and that they should be treated as well as anyone else. She told me this
> when I was going on one of the first dates with my girlfriend to make sure I am a
> gentleman and am always polite to women."

Other messages mothers communicated to their sons were filled with warnings

and advice about the opposite sex. These cautions included, "Don't trust a girl right

away," "Think and act carefully to them and never trust," and "Women think differently

than men." Sons also reported messages mothers communicated to them about the

behavior women appreciate, such as "Be straightforward with women. There is never a

good time to lie," "Do not toy with emotions," "If you love someone, support what they

do," and "Pick up after yourself. Women like that."

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

Studies researching the mother/child relationship are numerous. Reviewing the literature on the subject of femininity revealed the influence mothers have over their children during their formative years. However, the primary goal of the current study was to better understand and appreciate the role a mother's messages play in her children's understanding of femininity. Through the use of inductive and qualitative methodology, the current investigative analysis generated five categories of maternal memorable messages recognized by sons and daughters as significant in their understanding of femininity.

Using the grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992), these categories were created to provide an interpretation of the influence that mothers' communication exerts on the understanding of femininity by sons and daughters. Through the analysis of the data collected the relationship between the meaning prescribed by the mother and the perception realized by her children was explored.

In general, five categories emerged from the data analysis supporting the importance of a mother's communicative relationship with her children in the understanding of and attitudes toward socially learned concepts such as attitudes toward femininity. As such, the current study offers four points for further consideration. First, the patterns that emerged from the responses reveal considerably more messages that challenge traditional attitudes toward femininity than those upholding conventional

views. This category of responses reflects a change in traditional values which seem to be in line with current social constructions of femininity. With maternal messages encouraging independence, self-confidence, and gender equality, this data suggests that messages communicated by mothers regarding conceptualizations of femininity clearly inform their children's understanding and attitudes on the subject.

Second, these responses appeared to detail specific performances and characteristics that participants felt were distinctive to the role of mothering itself and to the mother/child relationship. The participants in the current study appeared to validate the feminine role expectations of mothering that are conceptualized in and through her actions as mom. Apparently, simply by performing the role of mother, a woman who enacts these behaviors within the family is displaying femininity to her children. Role modeling relational attributes such as nurturing, support, unconditional love, etc. as the adult female representative within the family was made part of an overall understanding of what it means to be feminine, i.e., to be mom is to be feminine.

Additionally, this study provides a significant understanding of how maternal messages may be affecting the expectations of what it means to behave in a feminine manner. Responses categorized into this theme reflected the most traditionally held views of women and feminine behavior and reported specific feminine actions expected of girls and women. Data revealed that mothers communicate feminine behavior both verbally and non-verbally to their sons and daughters as they serve as role models of femininity. Perceptions of these messages were similar among males and females. Most of the data presented the physical representation of feminine behavior; however, ideologies of

emotional expectations were extracted by sons and daughters from their mother's messages as well.

Finally, an entire category of memorable messages were directly sent only to the men/sons of the current study. Over a century of psychoanalytically based research supports the vital role of a mother in her son's life including helping him to grow and mature into a well-adjusted man (Chodorow, 1978). The current study helps to support this ideology by reporting specific messages mothers communicate exclusively to their sons. This data contained advice and warnings about women that were given to sons who were participating in this study, but never to daughters. These maternal messages to sons reflected behaviors to expect from women and those to display toward women, for example, "always respect women." Yet, interestingly, none of the "respect women" messages were communicated to daughters. By differentiating the messages she communicates to her sons and daughters, a mother is upholding the traditional separation of male/female and masculine/feminine behaviors, norms, and expectations. Whether communicating verbally or non-verbally, a mother serves as role model for her children, moving them closer to or farther from gender equality. Respect is a universal attribute; yet no female respondents recalled their mother telling them to respect other females or even to respect males. Furthermore, no comments were reported from female participants in whom their mother communicated how they should be respected by men. Although mothers are not uniquely equipped to model the actions a man takes in respecting a woman, they are able to verbally instruct and non-verbally portray the consequence of such actions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This exploratory study provides a comprehensive qualitative assessment of memorable messages communicated by mothers regarding femininity. In this appraisal, the data makes significant contributions to the literature in the area of generative communication of attitudes on femininity. Four distinct types of messages communicated by mothers to their children emerged in this study and provide some intriguing questions for future consideration.   First, the study reveals that mothers communicated messages containing reinforcement of the traditional norms of femininity as well as messages challenging those patterns; however, which of these types of messages best serves the daughters and sons of this generation? Is there a place for both messages regarding femininity in their lives?

Second, mothers are clearly primary sources of messages about femininity for their sons and daughters and yet, what other sources influencing conceptualizations of femininity exist for boys and girls? Clearly, mothers are not the only sources of information or persuasion within the family, thus, what might a father, an older brother or sister, or even a grandmother or aunt report about femininity that support or challenge mom as the primary source?

Additionally, participants in the current study appear to have framed the role of mother as inherently feminine, i.e., to be a mother is to be feminine. Clearly, such conceptualizations conflate the issues of sex and gender resulting in one basic conceptual

frame when clearly, they are not. For example, fathers can be nurturing, caring, loving, supportive, sensitive, and emotional. Conversely, mothers can be playful, competitive, career oriented, and often take on the role of disciplinarian. Future studies should explore this apparent conflation of sex and gender in order to more deeply explore reasons for conceptualizing the role of mom as so overtly feminine.

Finally, the men in this study reported on messages they received from their mothers with comments regarding femininity as it related to women. However, there were no messages containing the fact that men possess feminine qualities, a feminine side, or have the ability to enact traditional feminine roles. Mothers communicated femininity by framing it as an exclusively sex oriented concept, i.e., performed by females. However, they did not communicate the possibility that femininity was gender oriented and includes gendered notions of femininity in men. Why did the men in this study not consider their own femininity? How could mothers communicate femininity in a way that their sons could understand what femininity looked like in men?

The messages mothers communicate during their children's formative years deserves increased attention, especially in the field of family communication. Formation of attitudes concerning gender identity and feminine characteristics are essential in an individual's maturity and are particularly relevant in the relationship between a mother and her children. The lifetime effect of the relationship between a mother and her children is evidence that her communication is an important part of any child's social identity. Given that mothers' messages wield a strong impact in the lives of their children, understanding the ways in which mothers communicate their attitudes on

femininity will not only expand mother/child research, it will deliver new awareness into

the context and intended purpose of maternal memorable messages.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent Form for Research

Department of Communication Studies, Baylor University   Principal Investigator: Cindee Millard
Maternal Memorable Messages in the Understanding of Femininity   Advisor: Mark T. Morman

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let us know. We would be happy to answer any questions.

      Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate we will ask you to sign this form before we do any study procedures. We will give you a copy of the signed form. The person in charge of this study is Cindee Millard, under the advisement of Dr. Mark T. Morman. We will refer to this person as the "researcher" throughout this form.
      The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of mothers' messages on the perceptions and understandings of an individual's femininity. About 200 participants will take part in this research study at Baylor University. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately one hour.
      After signing this consent form, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire asking personal demographic information.
      To the best of our knowledge, taking part in this study will not present any risk to you at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this research, but your participation will help communication scholars better understand the messages mothers communicate about femininity to their children. You will not be paid for taking part in this study. There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.
      We will keep the records of this study confidential. The personal information questionnaire will be destroyed following the completion of your research session. The demographic portion of the questionnaire will be completely anonymous and responses cannot be linked back to you in any way. There will be no personal or individual identifying codes used, so you are guaranteed complete anonymity. All surveys will be destroyed after the study is concluded.
      You may contact us with any concerns or questions about the research. Please direct all inquiries to Cindee Millard, Department of Communication, Baylor University, One Bear Place #97368, Waco, Texas, 76798. Mrs. Millard can also be reached at 254-366-2939 or by e-mail at Cindee_Millard@baylor.edu . Dr. Mark Morman can be reached by email at Mark_Morman@baylor.edu or by phone at 254.710.6914.
      If you want to speak with someone **not** directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254.710.1438. You may talk to them about your rights as a research subject, your concerns about the research, and/or file a complaint about the research.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the information in this consent form including risks and possible benefits. I have been given the chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:
I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

APPENDIX B

Memorable Messages from Mom

Memorable messages are characterized by two specific factors:

1. *The message that the individual remembers is retained for a long period of time.*
2. *The individual recognizes that the message has had "a major influence on the course of their life".*

With these factors in mind, recall a memorable message from your mother in a statement of guidance or advice which has influenced you in your understanding of femininity.

1. Please write down a memorable message you received from your mother that you believe has had an influence on the formation of your understanding of femininity.

2. In what situation or in what context was this memorable messages communicated to you by your mother?

3. What do you believe to be the intent or purpose of this message? (i.e., Why did your mother tell you this?)

4. Please respond to the following statement by circling the appropriate number on the scale below.

I feel confident in my recollection of the memorable message.

Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Agree

Demographic Questions

Directions: In the questions below, please select the answer that best describes you. There is no right or wrong answer. Circle only one item per question.

1. What is your sex?

   Male   Female

2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received?
   a. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (i.e., GED)
   b. Some college credit, no degree
   c. Trade/technical/vocational training
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor's degree
   f. Master's degree
   g. Doctorate degree

3. What religion do you identify with?
   a. Jewish
   b. Morman/Latter Day Saints
   c. Roman Catholic
   d. Protestant/Other non-Catholic Christian
   e. Muslim/Islam
   f. Other non-Christian
   g. No Religion/Atheist/Agnostic

4. What ethnicity do you most identify with?
   a. White
   b. Hispanic/Latino
   c. Black/African American
   d. Native American/American Indian
   e. Asian/Pacific Islander
   f. Other

5. What is your relationship status?
   a. Single
   b. Engaged
   c. Married
   d. Divorced
   e. Widowed

6. What is your sexual orientation?
   a. Heterosexual
   b. Homosexual
   c. Bisexual

7. What is your age? _____

8. Is your mother living?

   a. Yes

   b. No

9. What is your mother's age?

   a. 30-40

   b. 41-50

   c. 51-60

   d. 61-70

   e. 71-80

   f. 81 and above

10. What is the frequency of your communication with your mother?

   a. Frequently/Daily

   b. Regular/Weekly

   c. Some/Monthly

   d. Not Much

   e. None

11. How close do you feel to your mother?

   (*Circle the number which best represents the closeness in your relationship.*)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Contact	Distant	Somewhat Distant	Close	Somewhat Close	Very Close	Extremely Close

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