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Drawing on six years of field research with homeschooling mothers, I show four ways they were accused of maternal deviance for keeping their children out of conventional schools, and I uncover the four justifications they used in response. On the surface, critics objected to the behavior of homeschooling; however, their specific accusations—and the accounts they engendered—revealed that it was mothers' (alleged) emotions that were at issue. I conclude by discussing how attention to emotions enhances our theoretical understanding of accounts, as well as how these data begin to map out the emotional complexities in the social construction of good mothering.

INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling rates in the United States rose sharply in the late twentieth century. In the mid-1980s, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that less than 300,000 American children were homeschooled (Stevens 2001); by the early twenty-first century, that number—a conservative estimate—exceeded 1.1 million (National Household Education Surveys Program 2003). Although homeschoolers have gained visibility with their growing numbers, they have yet to secure mainstream acceptance. Homeschooling parents are frequently asked about their motives to keep their children out of conventional schools and often find themselves explaining their decision to disapproving audiences. This article is about how homeschooling mothers deal with criticism from non-homeschooling strangers, friends, and family members, whom I call "outsiders." Through fieldwork and in-depth interviews with homeschooling mothers in the Pacific Northwest, I show how outsiders cast them as irresponsible, and how homeschoolers defended their "good mother" identities by justifying their reasons for teaching their children at home.

Researchers have examined parents' reasons for homeschooling, both quantitatively (e.g., Bielick et al. 2001; Collom 2005; Mayberry 1988) and qualitatively (e.g., Bates 1991; Knowles 1988, 1991; Pitman 1987; Stevens 2001; Van Galen 1988). Several of these studies have found that homeschooling is roundly criticized (e.g., Bates 1991; Mayberry et al. 1995; Pitman 1987; Stevens 2001), and that parents are often reproached and labeled (and vaguely so) as having "real emotional problems" for keeping their children out of school (Mayberry et al. 1995:94). Yet despite the prevalence of stigma surrounding homeschooling, few studies have examined how homeschoolers experience and deal with it. Those that have, however, have approached the problem tangentially and on a cultural level, analyzing how the pro-homeschooling discourse destigmatizes the activity. Stevens' (2001) work provides the most notable example. His comprehensive analysis shows how the movement's early leaders advanced the cause by laying the rhetorical support structure for homeschooling parents, who wanted to educate their children at home, but did not yet have the

cultural vocabulary to justify their actions (see also Bates 1991). Yet it is interesting to consider this phenomenon on an interactional level as well: How do individual parents interpret the precise nature of the stigma, and how do they draw on this ''vocabulary of motives'' (Mills 1940) to deflect it? My research shows how homeschoolers are accused of ''maternal deviance'' (Murphy 1999) and identifies the ''accounts'' (Scott and Lyman 1968) they use to salvage their maternal identities.

''Accounts,'' according to Scott and Lyman, are statements that ''bridg[e] the gap between action and expectation'' (1968:46). When people engage in behaviors that conflict with situational norms, their identity is called into question; others may think less of them, and violators often feel the need to repair their damaged identities by explaining their ''untoward behavior'' (1968:46) in two ways. ''Excuses'' accept the wrongfulness of the act but deny responsibility for it; ''justifications'' accept responsibility for the act but ''den[y] the pejorative quality'' of it (1968:47). Both types of accounts help deviants ''save face'' (see Goffman [1955] 1982), align their conduct with cultural expectations (see Stokes and Hewitt 1976), and reconstruct respectable identities. Yet because of their conceptual distinction, excuses and justifications neutralize stigma differently. Excusers present their behavior as regrettable and distance themselves from it; they agree with the rules but deny the identity their behavior suggests. Inversely, justifiers endorse their behavior under the circumstances and oppose the rules, which they claim falsely mark them as deviant. The mothers I studied justified homeschooling, and in doing so, rejected the charge of irresponsible mothering.

Sociologists have explored the cultural mandates of good mothering. Hays (1996) uncovered the ''ideology of intensive mothering'' in the United States: mothers must be the primary caregivers, regard their children as ''priceless,'' and use childrearing methods that are ''child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive'' (1996:8). Hays found these norms to be so stringent that deviating is inevitable; mothers ''can never fully do it right'' (1996:133; see also Blum 1999; Bobel 2002). Other researchers have indirectly revealed good mothering norms by using Scott and Lyman's work to

analyze the ways mothers account for violating them. Murphy showed how new mothers may feel deviant for varying at all from the medical recommendation for infant feeding. The mothers she studied felt the need to account when they quit breastfeeding earlier than recommended (2000), when they chose not to breastfeed at all (1999), and even when they anticipated while still pregnant that they might ''fail'' at breastfeeding (2004). Other researchers have relied on Sykes and Matza's (1957) ''techniques of neutralization'' to illuminate ways mothers neutralize stigma. For example, Heltsley and Calhoun (2003) uncovered the rhetoric that helped mothers of beauty pageant contestants deflect charges of bad mothering, and Copelton (2007) examined how mothers-to-be accounted for violating ''nutritional norms'' during pregnancy. These studies illustrate the potent stigma of maternal deviance, as well as how individual women account for their deviance, negotiating good mother identities in a culture that sets unattainable standards.

Interestingly, however, little research has investigated how mothers account for *emotional* deviance, despite the prevalence of emotion norms implicit in the social construction of good mothering. For example, Hays' content analysis of childrearing manuals revealed that good mothers ''instinctively'' lavish unconditional love on their children and prioritize the intense, ''natural'' emotional bond they share with their children (1996:57), hence the norm that childrearing be ''emotionally absorbing'' (see also Blum 1999). Yet the specific emotion norms of good mothering, and mothers' accounts for violating them, have yet to be explicitly examined.

Sociologists have studied emotions as social constructions rather than as biological phenomena. People experience emotions ''on the template of prior expectations'' (Hochschild 1983:231); they understand their feelings based on culturally specific beliefs about what emotions are valuable and how they should be interpreted, acted on, and expressed. Together these beliefs constitute an ''emotional culture'' (Gordon 1989), which influences how people see themselves, interact with others, and interpret competing emotional ideologies (Lois 2001). Different social groups construct different emotional cultures; the particular

constellation of emotional beliefs varies, by definition, from one emotional culture to the next. Yet all contain beliefs about ''emotional deviance,'' which Thoits defines as ''experiences or displays of affect that differ in quality or degree from what is expected'' (1990:181); emotional deviance refers to the ''wrong'' feelings as well as to ''too much'' or ''not enough'' of the ''right'' feelings, within a particular emotional culture. That very little research has examined the emotional culture of ''good'' mothering is curious, given that particular emotion norms (and thus, deviance) are fundamental to contemporary definitions of femininity in various arenas such as work (e.g., Hochschild 1983; Pierce 1995), self-help groups (e.g., Irvine 1999), voluntary associations (e.g., Lois 2003), and families (e.g., DeVault 1991; Erickson 1993; Hochschild 1989; Lois 2006).

Two studies provide partial exceptions to this oversight, illustrating some aspects of what could be considered an ''emotional culture'' of parenting. First, Godwin (2004) showed how parents of ''troubled'' teens learned narrative rhetoric in a support group to manage their feelings of ineffective parenting. In encouraging parents to embrace some emotions yet disregard others, the group's culture allowed them to assuage their guilt and construct good parent identities. Although Godwin's research showed how emotions operated as part of a parenting ideology, gender was not a main feature of the analysis, thus it did not illuminate the emotional culture of mothering. Taylor's (1995) research on postpartum depression is a second exception, showing how the new mothers she studied drew on larger cultural beliefs about the physiology of ''deviant'' emotions to define themselves as good mothers, despite their anxiety about mothering and resentment toward their babies. Although Godwin's and Taylor's studies identify how parents draw on beliefs about emotions to account for their emotional deviance, neither integrates theories of accounts. Because the homeschoolers I studied used justifications, but not excuses, to account for the maternal emotional deviance others attributed to them, an accounts framework may be theoretically helpful in understanding their experiences. Moreover, analyzing emotional deviance more broadly may further specify theories of accounts and other forms of aligning actions. By focusing solely on how people manage

their deviant "behavior," "actions," and "conduct," these theories have neglected deviant emotions entirely.[1]

Not only has the accounts literature overlooked emotions, but the emotions literature has also overlooked accounts. The theory of emotion management (Hochschild 1983) is premised on the idea that when people experience "emotive dissonance"—have feelings that contradict what they are expected to display—they work to decrease it by redefining the feeling or altering the display. To superimpose Scott and Lyman's (1968:46) terminology, emotive dissonance constitutes a "gap between [emotion] and expectation." Accounts, then, are a way of "bridging the gap"—of managing emotions. Although many studies show how people explain their deviant emotions to preserve a positive sense of self (see Hochschild 1989; Irvine 1999; Lois 2001), none have integrated emotions and accounts, despite their theoretical complementarity. Connecting these parallel tracks may be theoretically fruitful to both literatures.

In this article, I uncover how a group of homeschooling mothers accounted for their maternal emotional deviance. Outsiders often objected to homeschoolers' choice to educate their children at home, and as a result, accused them of being irresponsible mothers in four distinct ways. Mothers responded by invoking a set of four justifications—each one designed to target one of the specific allegations leveled against them. Although on the surface, outsiders objected to the behavior of homeschooling, their specific accusations—and the accounts they engendered—revealed that it was mothers' (assumed) emotions that were at issue.[2]

[1]I refer here to both the classic theoretical formulations in this genre (e.g., Mills' [1940] "vocabularies of motive," Sykes and Matza's [1957] "techniques of neutralization," Scott and Lyman's [1968] "accounts," and Stokes and Hewitt's [1976] "aligning actions") as well as recent empirical and theoretical investigations employing the accounting concepts (e.g., Buzzell 2006; deYoung 1989; Kalab 1987; Nichols 1990; Pogrebin et al. 2006; Presser 2004; Scully and Marolla 1984; Shover et al. 2004).

[2]If I were to rely solely on my interview data to show how mothers accounted for their alleged emotional deviance, I would only be able to make claims about how mothers interpreted outsiders' accusations, not about the empirical content of the accusations. However, the observational data I collected from attending homeschooling functions, talking with outsiders about homeschooling, visiting homeschooling websites, and hearing media stories confirm mothers' perceptions: outsiders questioned their feelings and cast them as emotional deviants. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helping me clarify this issue.

In the next section, I discuss the setting I studied and the methods I used to gather data. I then lay out the four ways mothers were accused of emotional deviance, along with the ways they justified their feelings. I conclude by discussing how attention to the realm of emotions enhances our theoretical understanding of accounts as well as how these data begin to map out the emotional complexities in the social construction of good mothering.

SETTING AND METHOD

In 2000 I moved to ''Springfield'' (pseudonyms used throughout), a county in the Pacific Northwest with over 120,000 residents, half of whom lived one small city, the other half in smaller towns and outlying rural areas. I immediately noticed that homeschooling was common, although the public school districts were adequately ranked in the state and very accessible to most residents. I wondered why parents would keep their children out of conventional schools and how this affected their lives. Because I was not a homeschooler, but wanted to gain the ''intimate familiarity'' (Blumer 1969) I would need to answer these questions, I decided to conduct field research on and take an ''active membership role'' (Adler and Adler 1987) in the homeschooling subculture. I began by attending a support group, open to the public, called PATH, or the ''Parents Association for Teaching at Home,'' through which parents shared curricular ideas, connected with other homeschoolers, vented stresses, solved common problems, and gained academic, legal, and social information about homeschooling. Over 600 families were members of PATH, setting Springfield's homeschooling rate at more than twice the national average.[3]

Although homeschoolers were overrepresented in Springfield, PATH members' demographic characteristics were

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[3]According to U.S. Census data, the 600 PATH member-families constituted between 3−4% of the households with children under 18 years old in Springfield County. The U.S. Department of Education (see Lines [1998] and the National Household Education Surveys Program [2003]) has estimated that between 1−2% of school-age children are homeschooled nationally, thus, it appeared that homeschooling in our county was indeed quite prevalent—at least twice the national rate, and probably much higher because most families homeschooled more than one child.

quite similar to what the most representative studies have shown (see Mayberry et al. 1995; Ray 2000; Wagenaar 1997). Almost every PATH family was white, intact, and heterosexual. Most were middle class, although their income-levels ranged from poor to very affluent. The PATH meetings, held one night a month in a middle-school gym, were populated mostly by women because mothers were overwhelmingly in charge of the homeschooling. Meeting activities varied but included question-and-answer panels, small-group discussions, famous guest speakers, and informal curriculum displays. Participant numbers waxed and waned—some meetings drew hundreds whereas others drew only a few dozen. Although PATH was open to all homeschoolers, regardless of religious beliefs, evangelical Christianity was often made salient in the meetings, mostly through attendees' comments and questions.

Our state's homeschooling laws were relatively liberal. They required that only one of the following conditions be met: one parent had at least one year of college, one parent had taken a 15-hour homeschooling course (offered at a community college), or a state-certified teacher met with the child weekly. Most parents I talked to had at least one year of college, although many enrolled in the 15-hour course anyway. No one I met opted for the weekly teacher visit.

For four years I took detailed field notes of the monthly PATH meetings as well as of three statewide homeschooling conventions that I attended. I also conducted 24 in-depth interviews (via convenience, snowball, and theoretical sampling) with homeschooling parents about their experiences, focusing the questions around the topics of education, homeschooling, parenting, and family.[4] I collected data from other sources as well: PATH's monthly newsletter and listserv, several audio-taped sessions from conventions I did not attend, two prominent homeschooling magazines, and an occasional newspaper article or National Public Radio report.[5]

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[4]I directed two undergraduate students, who had been homeschooled themselves, in conducting several of these interviews.

[5]I rely most heavily on my interview data because they confirm what I found in my observations and other data sources, yet allow the subjects to speak for themselves.

My sample of interviewees was also fairly consistent with larger research samples of homeschoolers (see Mayberry et al. 1995; Ray 2000; Wagenaar 1997). Twenty identified with a Christian-based religion, and among those, 14 held highly conservative and evangelical Christian beliefs (which were often part of their motivation to homeschool, as I will discuss). Four interviewees told me they were not at all religious. Twenty-one of the families were white, two were Hispanic American, and one was African American. Parents' ages ranged from late twenties to early fifties, with most in their mid thirties to early forties. All interviewees were women, although four husbands participated in their wives' interviews. They homeschooled (presently or previously) between 1 and 12 children (average 3.2), and their years of experience ranged from 1 to 17 (average 6.3). Most families were middle class, although a few were working- and upper-middle class. One subject was single, one was widowed and homeschooled her grandson, whose father was single; all others were married. Most held four-year college degrees; two worked outside the home (the single mother worked part-time; the other worked nights and weekends).

As I collected data, patterns emerged around salient topics, or ''sensitizing concepts'' (Blumer 1969), such as the ways homeschoolers were criticized and the accounts they used to defend themselves. I kept these concepts in mind as I collected more data, further probing homeschoolers to flesh out the richness and intricacy of the experience. I formulated tentative theories to explain the patterns that emerged; some new data supported my developing analysis and others refuted it, progressively helping me revise my conceptual framework. I continued until I reached ''theoretical saturation''; no new patterns emerged from the data, and my findings were validated, a process similar to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) model of grounded theory.

JUSTIFYING DEVIANT EMOTIONS

Many outsiders disapproved of homeschooling because they believed it would harm children in multiple ways. Strangers, friends, and family members often accused homeschoolers of irresponsible mothering and challenged them to account

for their decision.[6] Mothers became accustomed to responding with a set of four justifications to neutralize the charges of maternal deviance. Although on the surface, outsiders wanted mothers to explain the deviant *behavior* of homeschooling, mothers' accounts revealed that each charge targeted a specific deviant *emotion*, which outsiders assumed underlay mothers' motivation to homeschool. Therefore, mothers' accounts each neutralized one of four specific charges of emotional deviance.

Academically Arrogant

Homeschoolers were commonly accused of feeling arrogant about the academic demands of homeschooling. They were cast as smug, irresponsible mothers who thought they could do a better job teaching their children than credentialed teachers in conventional schools. Outsiders often expressed this view to me when they discovered I was researching homeschoolers, but they also confronted homeschoolers directly. Valerie, a white, middle-class mother of seven children, decided to homeschool in the mid-1980s, when the movement was new. She explained how her friends reacted to her decision, implicitly accusing her of feeling superior and overconfident about her ability to teach her children: ''They all said, 'Who do you think you are, that you think you would be able to teach your children school at home?'...I was just very taken aback.''

   Most mothers interpreted others' criticism as an indictment of their parenting ability. The message was that homeschooled children would suffer because parents arrogantly dismissed teachers' expertise. Many mothers understood this accusation because they had held the same perspective when they had first heard of homeschooling. Before Pam, a

[6]The source of the criticism did not influence whether mothers accounted (they almost always did), but it did affect them differently. Although strangers were the most likely to express their disapproval—fleetingly in the supermarket check-out line, for example—their criticism was most easily dismissed. Comparatively, homeschoolers' received fewer negative comments from their own parents or siblings, yet these family members expressed their disapproval repeatedly and demanded more explanation, which intensified the charge of maternal deviance and the need for solid accounts. Homeschoolers found friends' disapproval harder to disregard than strangers' but easier to deal with than family members because it was usually not chronic.

white, middle-class mother, had considered homeschooling eight years earlier, she thought, ''This homeschooling thing is not the right way to go. All these people [are] out there thinking that they know what they're doing, and they don't have a clue; they're probably ruining their children.''

To combat the perception that they were arrogant, home-schoolers invoked a justification: they admitted feeling a great deal of confidence that they could provide the best education for their children, but they denied that this confidence was excessive or problematic. Valerie said, ''I felt confident in my conviction that this was for our family; on how to do it, I wasn't that confident. I knew I *could* do it, I just wasn't sure *how*.''[7] Mothers anchored their confidence in their intimate knowledge of their children's interests and motivational currencies; they argued that it truly did place them in the best position to advance their children's education. Parents discussed this idea at one of the PATH meetings I attended, which I recorded in my fieldnotes:

> We talked about individuality in kids—how each is different, but schools don't honor that. ''Standardized curriculum is for standardized kids!'' one mom declared, and another asked how teachers could possibly know how each kid is different. ''But a mother knows!'' she said. ''A mother knows how her kids are different and what they need to learn in their own ways.''

Thus, homeschooling nurtured each child's individuality. This rationale was effective in countering the charges of maternal deviance because it drew on cultural ideas of good motherhood: ''good'' mothers know their children better than anyone else (including fathers), and because of this,

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[7]In another article (Lois 2006), I show that many mothers openly admitted that they were anxious and unsure about how to teach their children, especially early in their homeschooling careers. As time progressed, they experienced ebbs and flows with what they considered ''successful'' homeschooling, frequently encountering challenges that made them question their decision. Yet these bouts with uncertainty did not shake the confidence they presented to outsiders who questioned their teaching abilities. In fact, they used their uncertainty to show that they were good mothers because (1) they were highly involved, constantly assessing their children's academic progress, and (2) they cared enough to be worried—their anxiety was evidence that they did not disregard their children's best interests. Thus, they felt confident in their ability to find the best fit for their children and alter their educational plans as needed.

they can—and should—respond to all of their children's individual needs as they arise (Blum 1999; Brown et al.; Hays 1996; Lupton and Fenwick 2001).

Some homeschoolers, although not the majority, neutralized the stigma of arrogance by explaining that a conventional classroom was ill-suited for their children because, relative to their age peers, they were advanced and would not be challenged, or were delayed and would fall behind.[8] Mothers justified their confidence in homeschooling by detailing the great lengths they went to in finding the right fit for their children. Gretchen, a white mother of three sons, explained how her oldest, Harry, learned to read at age three, and as he approached kindergarten age, she and her husband, Tyler, explored the options. They first visited a Catholic school:

> Although I'd heard all good things about their kindergarten, what I saw when I walked into the room was 25 or 26 kids with one adult. And they were coloring in dittoes. They were *coloring.* And at that time, we weren't quite sure how we were going to cover the $200 a month in tuition, and so when I saw those dittoes I thought ''Man, I could make a lot of dittoes for $200 a month!'' [*Laughs.*] And I had what I can only describe as kind of a physical reaction. It was like a spiritual experience. I thought, ''I can't do this! I *can't*!''

Gretchen felt that because the school's standards were so low, it would be easy for her to exceed them. By talking about her ''physical reaction'' and ''spiritual experience,'' she justified the degree of confidence she felt; she knew that classroom was not the right place for her son.

Later, her husband met with one of the teachers at the Catholic school and asked what the school could offer their child in particular, given that Harry was already reading:

> I'm saying, ''Our child reads by sight, yet you are having him color in a ball. How's that advancing his education?'' And it was almost like [the teacher said], ''Well, I'm the early child-hood development expert, you're not.'' You know, kind of

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[8]Providing for a child who has special needs—whether advanced or delayed—is not an uncommon reason for homeschooling (see Knowles 1988; Mayberry 1988).

like that. And I [thought], ''That may be so, but I'm the Harry expert, and *you're* not.''

Gretchen and Tyler justified their confidence in teaching their child by focusing on their intimate knowledge of him—they were the experts. In this way they neutralized the charges of arrogance and irresponsible parenting; choosing the right academic fit was highly *responsible* parenting.

Some mothers knew they could better provide for their children's education because conventional schools are gender- and race-biased. Because children must mold to the institutional demands, school inhibits their ''natural'' development. Cassandra was a middle-class mother of four young boys, ranging in age from nine to two. She had home-schooled for three years when she told me how conventional schools did not mesh with young boys' biorhythms:

> Six- and seven-year-old boys [are] just not wired to sit at a desk for five hours a day. I've found with my boys, that they need time—a lot of time—just to climb and run and dig holes and break branches and tear leaves off of trees. . . . Once they get . . . those wiggles out, . . . then I can sit at the table [to do schoolwork] with them for a good hour. . . . Why fight nature?

Cassandra drew on what ''everybody knows'' (Scott and Lyman 1968): young boys cannot sit still. Their education suffers because the system does not honor their biology, thus Cassandra confidently asserted that homeschooling would better maximize their academic potential.

Jackie, an African-American mother of two young girls, also opposed the way conventional school was structured, explaining how her children would be ''stifled'':

> My kids ask a lot of questions in a day. *A lot* of questions [*laughs*]! In a school setting, a child does not have the opportunity to ask all the questions they want to ask, and my belief is that that somehow stifles a child; they think they *can't* ask. . . . I think that [my kids have] learned that it's okay to talk. That's a big part of what I want them to learn.

Jackie's concern—that her daughters learn it was ''okay to talk''—came from a well-informed place: she and her husband were both highly educated and explained that they had read about studies showing that racial and gendered

stereotypes in conventional school discourage African American girls from being assertive, vocal, and academically oriented. (Such findings have been widely disseminated in popular culture. See, for example, Orenstein [1994].) Jackie framed her account convincingly and cast herself as a responsible mother, who knew she could do better.

Mothers talked about the conventional school system as a threat to their children's education and identities and said they homeschooled because they, not professional teachers, were the experts on nurturing their children, working with their learning styles, and ensuring that they would blossom into the unique people they were meant to be. All of the mothers I talked to invoked this powerful justification and in doing so, neutralized others' accusations of them as arrogant about providing for the academic needs of their children.

Socially Overprotective

A second way outsiders charged homeschoolers with emotional deviance was by labeling them as overprotective, a feeling that prevented children from developing the skills to function in society. Indeed, the second-most common question (after ''Why homeschool?'') was ''What about socialization?'' In six years, I heard this phrase hundreds of times. Homeschoolers themselves heard it even more, and their annoyance at constantly having to defend themselves unified them. Rolling their eyes and distorting their voices, they mimicked outsiders: ''How will they learn to work with others? Aren't you worried they'll be social misfits? What about the prom?'' One mother told me that her own parents were concerned that her children were ''kept in a bubble,'' and would not ''learn to cope'' or ''know how to get a job.'' They feared she was ''robbing'' them of their chance to learn how to navigate social life. These accusations cast homeschoolers as irresponsible mothers who, because of their uncontrollable overprotectiveness, were failing their children by sheltering them from reality.

Homeschoolers justified their ''overprotectiveness'' by admitting they felt greatly protective, but denying that the degree was extreme. They argued that homeschooling appropriately protected their children from the real dangers

present in conventional schools. Rampant bullying was one example. Most mothers feared the ridicule and ostracism their children could experience in school (although a few with boys who were small for their age were concerned about physical bullying), and although a few mothers discussed their own victimization, most expressed how heartbroken they felt when remembering their own class scapegoats. One mother said, ''Kids can be so cruel; why would I put my son in that situation?'' and another compared a conventional classroom to ''*Lord of the Flies* . . . [where] all the kids just kind of take over,'' and teachers were helpless to monitor peer interactions. Mothers drew on the maternal norm of feeling fiercely protective: ''good'' mothers are willing to ''kill and die'' for their children (Hays 1996:7; see also Blum 1999). By framing school as an environment where cruelty would inevitably damage their children, mothers justified the need to protect them by homeschooling.

Another danger homeschoolers identified was that ''labels'' might be applied to their children, damaging their self-esteem. Ability tracking, or grouping students by aptitude scores, was often a concern for mothers whose children were academically behind their age-peers. In school, ''everyone knows who the dummies are,'' as one mother told me. ''But with homeschooling,'' as another explained, ''she doesn't have to know that [she is behind]. And I feel she's better off—more confident.'' Others feared their children (especially active boys) would be stigmatized as ''problem children.'' Maria, a Hispanic-American mother in her mid twenties, pulled her son out of public school after his kindergarten year. She told me that homeschooling ''built up his self-esteem. In kindergarten he got sent to the office a lot. . . . So at home he's . . . not labeled the 'problem kid' . . . who disrupts the class; . . . he's my son who's smart. I didn't want that [negative label] to have to follow him through his whole life.'' In framing their concerns in this way, homeschoolers relied on well recognized threats to children's self-esteem such as being bullied or labeled ''stupid.'' Responsible mothers *should* protect their children from them.

Mothers also identified the dangers of educational bureaucracy, seizing on a state-level debate about instituting mandatory academic benchmarks, which required standardized testing starting in the fourth grade. One mother told

me that, upon hearing that he must pass the test, her son ''came home sobbing, and scared of it, and the night before the test he couldn't sleep.'' She believed, as many home-schoolers did, ''that kind of pressure'' was detrimental to children; it was ''more than the character of the child can handle.'' Her (over)protectiveness seemed justified against the backdrop of contemporary definitions of motherhood, which assert that children are ''entitled to a prolonged, care-free, innocent time'' (Blum 1999:36) and that it is ''a mother's job to ensure that they encounter [the] world in just the right increments'' (Hays 1996:78).

Homeschoolers also gave examples of unlikely events such as natural disasters, murderous rampages, or terrorist attacks that could threaten their children while in school. Studies have shown that protecting children's physical safety and health is a highly salient feature of good motherhood (Brown et al. 1997; Lupton and Fenwick 2001; Murphy 2000; Tardy 2000), thus homeschoolers neutralized the stigma of maternal deviance by referring to horrific yet rare events, such as the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Columbine High School murders, to legitimize the ''real'' dangers conventional schools posed. In fact, the day after the 2007 mass murders on the Virginia Tech University cam-pus, one mother posted an inquiry to the listserv with the subject line ''distance learning for college?'' Her message indicated that she was sincerely thinking of ways she could homeschool for college, something I had not heard any homeschooler suggest before.

Morally Self-Righteous and Extreme

The third type of emotional stigma homeschoolers bore was that they were self-righteous and morally extreme— feelings that led them to teach their children values that would forever position them at the margins of society. At one extreme of the moral continuum were the liberal par-ents, or as one mother called them, ''granola people,'' whose homeschooling was seen as ''some weird hippie thing'' and whose feelings toward the environment, politics, and social justice were cast as self-righteously leftist. At the other extreme were the evangelical Christians who, as another mother explained, ''sign their emails with 'devoted servant to [their husband, god, and their children]' and wake up at

5 a.m. to do their daily devotions, . . . their morning chor-
es, . . . and make breakfast before their children sit down to
eat.'' They were also assumed to be self-righteous and mor-
ally extreme: ''That's like totally June Cleaver! It's crazy!''

Although many homeschoolers I met held some philoso-
phies that were out of the mainstream, most did not consider
themselves radical, as they perceived others did. Thus, they
reacted to the stigma of moral extremism in two ways. First,
they offered ''traverses'' (Goffman 1971) wherein they denied
some of the extremism attributed to them, and they invoked,
at least at times, rationales that held mainstream American
appeal and meshed well with politically moderate rhetoric.
For example, they argued that values such as self-discipline
and deferred gratification were not nurtured in conventional
schools, which stripped individual children of the tools to
achieve and created a generation with many social problems.
Mothers felt it was their ultimate responsibility—not ''the
state's''—to ensure that their children embraced ''appropri-
ate'' morals and developed the corresponding character
traits. Maria, the 25-year-old Hispanic-American mother of
two young children, explained: ''I just want my children to
have successful lives. To be good community members, pay
their taxes, have good jobs, function in the community, and
just be good individuals. . . . I'm taking responsibility, and
in the end, if it turns out they didn't [adopt those values], it
was on me; I didn't leave it to someone else.''

Thus, homeschoolers neutralized charges of extremism by
emphasizing the mainstream view that responsible mothers
cultivate their children's moral development (Hays 1996;
Murphy 2000; Wall 2001) and raise upstanding, productive
citizens. Homeschooling provided them with more time to
do this, as Leanna expressed: ''We can have 'round-the-
clock input into their character development. 'Cause I think
the parents that have their kids at public school, and only
see their kids for a couple hours a day, have a lot harder
job trying to do the character-development kind of issues
than we do.''

The second way homeschoolers responded to the charges
of moral extremism and self-righteousness was by acknowl-
edging their intense emotions, but denying they were prob-
lematic. Unlike the traverses, these justifications drew from
politically partisan rhetoric. Conservatives, or those who

espoused dissatisfaction with (what they perceived to be) the lack of moral agenda in public schools, dominated PATH membership; the vast majority (though not all) of this conservative group held evangelical Christian ideologies, which other studies have found to be a common reason to homeschool (see Collom 2005; Knowles 1988, 1991; Mayberry 1988, 1993; Mayberry and Knowles 1989; Mayberry et al. 1995; Pitman 1987; Stevens 2001; Van Galen 1988). These mothers believed that ''the hub of society is the family,'' and accused the state of overstepping its bounds by ''teaching morality'' (or a misguided form of it), because it prevented parents from doing so. Thus, they disagreed with anti-prayer laws and opposed curricula that taught children about drugs and sex, the theory of evolution, and homosexuality. One mother said, ''We have a gay uncle, and it's talked about, and we love him, but acting out on that is just not what we value. So for the public school system to say we have to accept it all—I have a hard time with that.'' Some mothers reasoned further that their children were only ''on loan from God'' and that ''He was entrusting them into [their] care.'' By stressing not only the family's, but also God's authority over children's moral development, homeschoolers justified their extreme opposition to public education by appealing to ''higher loyalties'' (Sykes and Matza 1957).

Regardless of political leaning, most homeschooling families believed strongly in helping their children develop a solid sense of right and wrong before exposing them to ''negative'' social influences, a prominent feature of good mothering other studies have uncovered as well (see Bigner and Yang 1996; Brown et al. 1997; Hays 1996). Conservative homeschoolers, however, like evangelicals in the United States (see Apple 2001), believed in their own moral superiority because they were following ''God's path,'' which they characterized in absolute terms. Valerie, whose 17 year old joined a public-school basketball team, explained:

> He wants to be a light to the world, and sometimes he gets sucked in by the worldly stuff before him. I can tell. . . . I'll talk with him, and then it all comes out that he's not doing what's right, and so he's not happy with himself. He says, ''Mom, it's real difficult to keep your priorities when you have so much

coming at you. You know, the guys [on the team] are really into *girls*, and the way they talk in the locker room—I'm hearing that. And they swear. Even the *coaches* swear!'' And it's difficult; it's a battle. So he comes home worn out from that battle.... [If I had sent him to public school] I would've been sacrificing [him].

Using militant evangelical rhetoric (see Apple 2001), Valerie cast her son's experience as a ''battle'' in which his peers tried to lure him away from the universal path of righteousness. By stressing the danger of losing him to the forces of evil, she justified her self-righteous extremism.

At the other end of the spectrum, and far fewer in number, were the liberal homeschoolers, who were often labeled self-righteous extremists because they, like their conservative counterparts, believed their children's character and values would be negatively affected by the curricula and people in public school. Unlike the conservatives, however, most liberal parents were not religious, and those who were distanced themselves from evangelical politics by characterizing their beliefs as ''progressive Catholicism'' and ''liberal Christianity.'' Thus, they did not justify their self-righteousness with appeals to moral absolutism, but rather with appeals to moral relativism, pointing out the lack of it in public schools. They wanted their children to think critically, question the social order, and embrace diversity, but thought public schools only gave lip service to these values. Other research has revealed similar motivations for some groups of homeschoolers (see Knowles 1991; Mayberry et al. 1995; Van Galen 1988).

Patricia, a white mother of 14- and 5-year-old boys, had been homeschooling for 5 years when she told me about a ''big reason'' she began homeschooling her (then) 9 year old:

I started getting really concerned about how my son was being kind of culturalized to be a typical, insensitive male. When he was a little boy, he was really able to couch his feelings in words and *loved* music.... And what I found [at his private school] was that...[boys learned about] being ''cool''; just sort of being closed. Just not being very emotive. And it really hurt me that my son was becoming like that. So I just said, ''Forget it. You're not going to be around this. I really want you to do things like paint and move your body,

play a musical instrument, and sing.'' And I made him do
that. I *forced* him to do it. . . . When you're raising a child,
you're not just educating, you're trying to give them some
moral underpinnings, too. I really want him to be a good part-
ner when he hooks up with a life partner; I want him to be a
constructive, decent person who's not just expecting some-
body to mop up after him. And so I give him the running
commentary about men, women, and relationships.

Patricia held beliefs that some would consider radical, such
as challenging traditional masculinity (striving to get her son
to be more ''emotive'') and relationships (talking about his
future ''life partner''), yet she justified her moral extremism
by claiming that gender stereotypes are truly a problem,
and that schools not only overlook gender inequality, but
in fact promote it.

Other liberal parents justified extreme beliefs such as natu-
ralism (''High fructose corn syrup as the main ingredient in
food is not okay!'') and anti-consumerism. David and Abby,
white, upper-middle class parents of two children, justified
their extreme views on mass media:

> *David*: We don't watch TV . . . [so] we don't expose [the kids]
> to ads on television and a lot of things about this culture, like
> video games and that kind of stuff. We *question*, I guess is
> what I'm trying to say. I find that critical thinking—which is
> one of the most important things you can ever learn, and
> you need to have [in order] to live in a democracy—is not
> really taught in the schools, as far as I can tell.
>   *Abby*: Quite the opposite. Which is why we don't have a
> democracy here [in the United States]!

In these ways, parents of all ideological persuasions justified
their extreme moral beliefs and self-righteousness by
pointing out mainstream society's moral inadequacy and its
consequences.

Relationally Hyperengaged

The fourth type of emotional deviance homeschoolers
were accused of was that they were hyperengaged with
their children—that their abnormally strong desire to be
emotionally and physically close to their children caused
them to be excessively involved with every aspect of their

lives. Outsiders claimed that these intense feelings, allegedly the result of mothers' own psychological ''issues'' (usually cast as codependency or something similar), led to an unhealthy mother−child bond that prevented children from developing independence. For example, many mothers said that they could not bear the thought of sending their children to school because they would ''miss them too much.'' Such statements quickly spawned the stereotype of hyperengagement and called mothers' feelings into question; they were accused of forfeiting their children's well-being to fulfill their own emotional needs. Whitney, a white, working-class mother of an 11-year-old son, told me that her sister raised ''concerns'' about her homeschooling, saying suspiciously, ''I didn't realize you and Ritchie were so close.'' Whitney, feeling judged, responded, ''What did you think we were? We're mother and son!''

   Most mothers responded to the charge of hyperengagement the way Whitney did: they justified it by avowing the close bond with their children while denying it was ''unhealthy.'' They argued that homeschooling fostered these close family relationships, which were in their children's best interests, and this neutralized the stigma of irresponsible mothering. As one convention speaker said, homeschooling was about ''the four Rs: reading, writing, arithmetic, and *relationship.*'' Indeed, other studies show that fostering strong family bonds is one common reason parents give for homeschooling (see Collom 2005; Knowles 1988, 1991; Mayberry 1988, 1993; Mayberry et al. 1995; Van Galen 1988).

   One way mothers justified their engagement with their children was by questioning cultural norms. They thought that American culture coerced parents into believing that early mother−child separation was good for children's independence and maturity, yet they had seen first-hand the damage (they believed) separation could do to the mother−child bond. Cassandra reached this conclusion after sending her son to preschool, a decision she later regretted:

   [Preschool] is the norm in our society. So I just went along with it without thinking and put him in, and he hated it. He hated being away from me. He thought he was being punished. . . . The only thing he could think of was, ''Why doesn't

she want to spend that time of the day with me? Why is she
making me go to this? She knows I don't like it; I cry.'' All the
kids were crying when they left their mothers. But we're told
they need to do this for their social development, and they
have to detach from their mothers and all of that.

Cassandra justified her close bond with her son by showing
how her experience challenged cultural assumptions about
the mother–child relationship, rhetoric that also exists in
some alternative mothering movements, such as the inter-
national pro-breastfeeding group, La Leche League (see Blum
1999 and Bobel 2002). Such rhetoric often emphasizes that
mothers should rely on their intuition, even if it means dis-
regarding ''expert'' advice (see Bobel 2002; Hays 1996;
Murphy 1999). For example, one mother said that the idea
of homeschooling ''answered what my heart felt,'' which
was to keep her children with her rather than enroll them
in school.

Mothers explained that homeschooling would allow them
to spend more time with their children and stay emotionally
connected to them. They said that school disengaged chil-
dren from their families during ''their best hours of the
day,'' and interfered with the mother–child relationship in
which they had invested so much. Judith, a white mother
who homeschooled her two children through high school,
explained as she sat on a panel at a statewide convention:

When our son was born, I didn't anticipate the change that he
would bring into my life. . . . [I quit work because] I wanted to
do nothing but be with this little guy. So I did everything I
could to learn about becoming a good parent; I wanted to
be a good mom. And I'll skip up several years: homeschool-
ing became a part of that because I didn't want to give him
up—not just to the school system per se, but . . . I really was
enjoying the time that we were having together. . . . And that's
when I heard about homeschooling . . . and I said, ''There's
my excuse to be able to keep him home: I'm gonna home-
school him.''

Judith's rationale—that homeschooling is good mothering—
allowed her not only to neutralize the stigma of maternal
deviance, but also to construct an identity as an extremely
responsible mother, who did not want to send her children

to school to be, as many homeschoolers said, "raised by someone else."

Like Cassandra and Judith, many homeschoolers stressed their intense emotional bond with their children and their desire to be good mothers—highly noble feelings by contemporary U.S. standards and an integral part of the ideology of good mothering (Bobel 2002; Hays 1996; Wall 2001). Blum (1999) referred to this ideal as the "exclusively bonded mother-child dyad," which promotes the belief that children need their mother's physical presence, especially during the preschool years (otherwise they will unbond and detach from them), and that the mother is the *only* person suited for this job. This idea is rampant in popular discourse, which warns of disengaged mothers during children's "formative years" (see Blum 1999; Hays 1996). Homeschoolers borrowed this rationale and extended it, redefining the "formative years" as lasting well into adolescence, which helped them justify keeping their children out of school.

Another way homeschoolers contested the stigma that they were hyperengaged was to emphasize that childhood was finite and at its end, most parents, as one mother said, "look back and regret not having enough time with [their children]." Homeschoolers contended that they were not squandering their time. Dramatic life events could punctuate this rationale. For example, one mother decided to home-school after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 "to build our family bonds closer." And Barbara, a white, working-class mother of 10 and 8 year olds, said that she homeschooled because a tragedy validated her bond with her children:

> My girlfriend's kids were both killed in a very, very sudden accident, and when you go to a friend's funeral for their children, you really think [about] what's really important here in life: it's your children. I remember [my daughter] was about four when that happened, and that really had quite an impact. Just really, "What's important?"

Mothers also fought the stigma of hyperengagement by showing how homeschooling enhanced children's relationships with other family members as well. Fathers, for example, could spend more time with children because homeschooling provided scheduling flexibility, so vacations

were planned around the father's work schedule rather than determined by the school calendar. The quality of fathers' time with children was also enriched. For example, family nighttime routines were harmonious because homeschoolers finished their "homework" and participated in extracurricular activities during the day, which reserved the entire evening for "family time." Schools interfered with family, as one mother said: "All these statistics…about the American family [show] the way families splinter apart into all their own activities, and they hardly ever eat together anymore. When you are homeschooling, you are together."

Mothers also claimed that schools drove wedges between siblings, noting that the age-stratified structure of conventional school taught older children to reject their siblings because it was not "cool" to play with younger children. Cassandra pulled her oldest son out of kindergarten for this reason. Homeschooling had reversed the dynamic, and she hoped it would continue:

> I think about how great it is that I have four brothers growing up who know each other, and who spend so much time together, and really enjoy each other's company. They're probably going to be close the rest of their lives. …I've seen it with some of my homeschooling friends whose kids are older, and I think [to myself], "That's how I want my family to be."

Under mothers' watchful eyes, family relationships were maintained and nurtured, which is a key element in cultural definitions of good mothering (DeVault 1991; Hays 1996; Seery and Crowley 2000). Homeschoolers justified their hyperengagement by showing how family relationships can never be too close, which helped them construct identities as good mothers.

CONCLUSION

Homeschooling mothers were accused of maternal deviance for keeping their children out of conventional schools. Strangers, friends, and even family members often implied (or stated outright) that they were irresponsible mothers who were "ruining" their children by depriving them of the opportunity for "normal" development in four areas: academic, social,

moral, and relational. Within each of these four areas, outsiders charged mothers with a specific emotional problem, which they assumed misguided them into homeschooling. Children would suffer academically because their mothers were arrogant, and they would fail to develop social skills because mothers were overprotective. Mothers' self-righteousness would prevent their children from accepting mainstream morals, and their hyperengagement would hamper children's developing independence. Thus, home-schoolers' stigma as maternal deviants was anchored in what outsiders perceived to be their *emotional* deviance. To combat the charges of maternal deviance, then, mothers developed four justifications, each targeting one of the (alleged) problematic emotions, which helped them construct identities as good mothers.

One contribution of this research is that mothers used specific justifications based on the specific charges leveled against them. Because of the conceptual difference between excuses and justifications, the two types of accounts can neutralize stigma in different ways (Scott and Lyman 1968). In this vein, some researchers have shown that people do selectively invoke excuses or justifications, depending on the situation and the differential effects each will have on their identity. For example, Higginson's (1999) work on teen mothers dating older men showed how their relationships' status influenced which type of account the teens invoked. Initially the teens used a set of justifications to account for their relationships, but drew from a set of excuses once the relationships ended. Scully and Marolla (1984) illustrated how convicted rapists' definition of the women they raped influenced their accounts: they invoked several excuses for raping ''victims,'' but used several justifications for ''having sex'' with ''seductresses.'' However, the existing research does not subdivide accounts further—it does not explain what leads a person to invoke one justification over another justification (or one excuse over another excuse), despite the prevalence of *sets* of justifications and excuses within deviant subcultures.

One explanation may be found in the theoretical proposition that accusations of deviance are problematic because they blemish individual character (Becker 1963; Goffman 1963; Scott and Lyman 1968; Stokes and Hewitt 1976; Sykes

and Matza 1957). The accused behavior implies that the person is immoral, and this implied immorality leads to the need for an account. Thus, theories of accounts have traditionally been conceptualized with three (usually sequenced) components (Figure 1): First, a person is accused of a deviant act, which, second, implies that she or he is immoral, which third, leads to an account to repair the "spoiled identity" (Goffman 1963).

Despite these interrelated events, the vast majority of the accounts literature has focused on this last component (the account), has given some attention to the first (the accusation) (see Mills 1940; Nichols 1990; Presser 2004; Stokes and Hewitt 1976), but has taken this middle layer—the implications of immorality—for granted, leaving it largely unexplored. It could be that what happens in this "black box" of implied immorality is what leads people to invoke *particular* justifications (or excuses) over others—to choose only one from a set of justifications.

This middle layer is also important to analyze because there are many ways of being considered an immoral person. For example, the "immorality" of a rapist (see Scully and Marolla 1984) is quite different from the "immorality" of a mother who chooses not to breastfeed (see Murphy 1999). Yet not analyzing the implications of the accusations in these two forms of deviance—rape and formula-feeding—equates the "immorality" of these behaviors theoretically.

Layer 1:
Accusation: Deviant Act

Layer 2:
Implication: Immoral Person
                                       (threat to self)

Layer 3:
Account: Justification #1   Justification #2   Justification #3   Justification #4
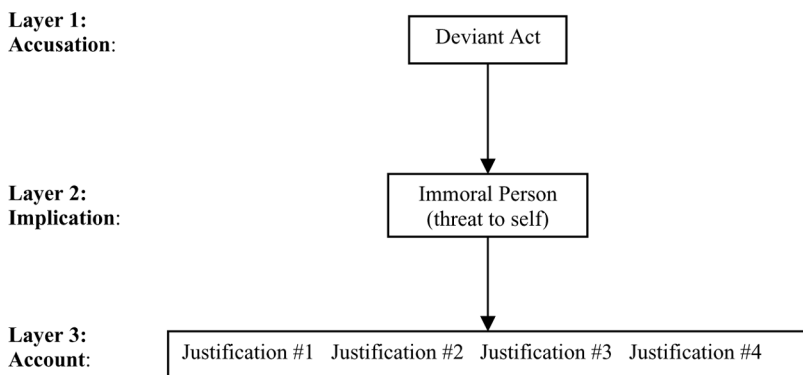
FIGURE 1 Traditional Theoretical Model of Accounts.

When the implications of the accusations are glossed, theories of accounts are less precise than they could be. Thus, it is helpful to examine this middle layer: how, exactly, do particular accusations threaten individuals, and how, exactly, does that affect the accounts they invoke?

My data indicate that, at least in some cases, accounts are actually responses to a variety of deviant *emotions* that are *implied* by a deviant behavior. Homeschooling mothers did not simply justify homeschooling their children—they justified the deviant maternal emotions others thought caused them to homeschool. Thus, they used specific justifications because they neutralized specific allegations of deviant emotions. For example, arguing that schools are dangerous places for children accounts for the behavior of homeschooling just as effectively as arguing that schools drive wedges between family members. Yet arguing the former better neutralizes the emotional stigma of feeling overprotective. When outsiders attacked mothers' deviant behavior of homeschooling, mothers actually defended themselves against the implicit (or sometimes explicit) message: ''what unacceptable *feelings* allow you to homeschool?''

Although my data illustrate this dynamic among homeschooling mothers, they also suggest some ''theoretical generalizability'' (Glaser and Straus 1967). It is reasonable to speculate that emotional messages are embedded in many types of deviant accusations, which may help to explicate this middle layer in the accounting process (Figure 2). In this way, my research indicates that charges of emotional deviance may be the force operating in this ''black box'' of implied immorality to direct accused deviants in choosing specific justifications (or excuses) over others to neutralize their stigmatized behavior.

A second contribution of this research is that it expands our understanding of the ''emotional culture'' of motherhood in two ways. First, by analyzing the charges of irresponsible mothering, my research reveals some normative emotions involved in the social construction of ''responsible'' mothering—the ones homeschoolers, according to outsiders, rejected. Previous research has identified some of the emotions integral to the cultural ideal of mothering, although it has not analyzed them as emotions per se or as part of the emotional culture of motherhood. For example, love,
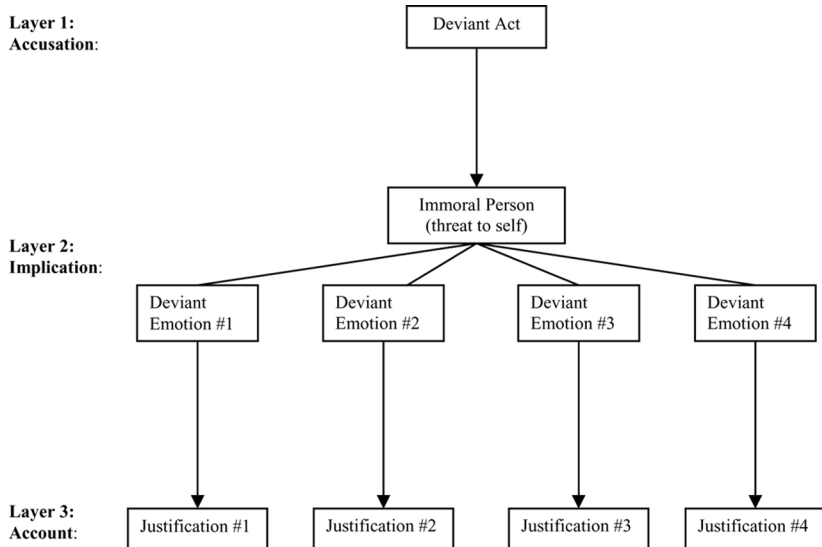
Layer 1: Accusation:				Deviant Act			

FIGURE 2 Elaborated Theoretical Model: Emotionally Layered Accounts.

concern, and desire to sacrifice are the most important emotions of ''good'' mothering, whereas greed, selfishness, and laziness are all characteristic of ''bad'' mothers (Blum 1996; Bobel 2002; Copelton 2007; Hays 1996; Murphy 2000). Generally, these emotions cluster around the theme of sacrifice (and its antithesis, selfishness)—the core feature in defining motherhood and an important piece in defining femininity (Hochschild 1989) in contemporary U.S. culture. By identifying the unacceptable feelings of arrogance, overprotectiveness, self-righteousness, and hyperengagement, my research reveals a wider variety of emotions that are proscribed in the social construction of motherhood than have previously been identified.

Second, by examining homeschooling mothers' accounts for their (alleged) emotional deviance, my data show how individual mothers may interpret the emotional mandates of good mothering, evaluate themselves against it, and work to decrease the ''emotive dissonance'' (Hochschild 1983) they may experience. In some ways, my homeschoolers were like other mothers, drawing on a subcultural

discourse to account for their emotional deviance, as did the mothers in Taylor's (1995) study, who labeled their deviant emotions, such as anxiety and resentment, as symptomatic of postpartum illness. Yet, unlike Taylor's subjects who excused their deviant emotions by attributing them to a biological process out of their control, homeschooling mothers justified their deviant emotions by endorsing them. This comparison illustrates that excusing and justifying maternal emotional deviance have very different implications for the social construction of mothering. Excuses allowed Taylor's subjects to reinforce the mainstream emotional culture of mothering; although they denied responsibility for their feelings, mothers agreed, for the most part, that they were inappropriate and undesirable. Homeschoolers' justifications, on the other hand, challenged the emotional culture of mothering by drawing attention to the problematic emotional standards that unjustly cast them as deviant.

One reason for this difference may be found in the type of deviant emotions each group of mothers allegedly felt. Taylor's subjects were accused of having the "wrong" emotions: resentment, guilt, depression, anger, shame, anxiety, fear, detachment, and disappointment. That these mothers went so far as to label themselves ill is testament to how incompatible these emotions are with the emotional culture of mothering. Homeschoolers, on the other hand, were accused of having "too much" of the "right" emotions—confidence, protectiveness, morality, and engagement—and their overabundance of these feelings was (allegedly) detrimental to their children. Thus, they were cast as deviant for their maternal emotional *intensity*.

Yet homeschooling mothers justified this emotional intensity. They were not arrogant; they were categorically confident that they knew their children's needs best. They were not overly protective; their children needed protection from the real threats inherent in conventional school. Their moral self-righteousness was not extreme; schools actually promoted mediocre (and some thought wrong) cultural values. They were not hyperengaged with their children; they recognized how schools artificially and prematurely severed the family bonds that were imperative for children's development. Thus, homeschoolers' vision advocated feeling more

of the emotions that ''good'' mothers feel—confidence, protectiveness, moral conviction, and engagement. Yet, in justifying these intense emotions, homeschoolers not only defended their identities as ''good'' mothers but also ratcheted up the standards for good mothering, ultimately promoting a version of motherhood that was even more difficult to live up to—at least emotionally—than the mainstream version of ''intensive mothering'' that Hays (1996) identified.

By illuminating the ways that maternal deviance may be cast as emotional deviance, these data broaden our knowledge about the variety of maternal emotions considered important as well as deepen our understanding about how they operate in defining responsible mothering. Moreover, these data demonstrate that some of the ways mothers account for emotional deviance may constrict the parameters of ''acceptable'' mothering practices, intensify gender stereotypes, and further trap women within the narrow confines of the emotional culture of motherhood.

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