Negotiating the Complexities of Mothering: An Autoethnography

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A B S T R A C T

This research delved into the nuanced experiences of a first-time mother. Using the lens of autoethnography, she provided an elaborate narrative of how she navigated the complex social role of motherhood. The study highlighted how she negotiated the inherent contradictions within the motherhood experience as both liberating and restrictive. The exploration focused on uncovering the intricate web of social and cultural influences that shaped and influenced her mothering practices, particularly within the context of the good mother ideology and the prevailing culture of intensive mothering which imposes idealized standards of motherhood. A significant emphasis of the study was made on her dual role as a mother and a teacher, examining her roles as a mediator of nature and culture. The autoethnography further unveiled the intricacies of conflicts, contradictions, and complexities that emerged from her interactions with significant others and society in general. The implication of this research is multifaceted and extends beyond the individual narrative of the first-time mother, offering a nuanced analysis of the intricate connection between personal agency and external pressures in the realm of motherhood. The examination of these intricacies calls for a reevaluation of the expectations and standards surrounding motherhood. By highlighting the impacts of social and cultural factors on mothering practices, this study emphasizes the need to critically assess and redefine prevailing standards to be able to account for the diversity in maternal experiences. Overall, the study advocates for a more inclusive approach to understanding the varied experiences of motherhood.

INTRODUCTION

The term "mother" has been culturally associated with the roles of childbearing and child-rearing. However, the concept of motherhood may be ambiguous, as a biological mother may not necessarily be the one who raises her child. The distinction between motherhood as an institution and mothering as the everyday experience of child-rearing is crucial. O'Reilly (2004) referred to motherhood as a patriarchal institution that is deeply oppressive to women and mothering as referring to women's realities and experiences that are empowering to women.

Despite acknowledging that fathers can also engage in child-rearing, mothering is predominantly associated with women because, universally, women do nearly all the mothering work. As Tarlow points out, "Caring is part of the world of women" (1996). Childbearing and child-rearing are considered natural to women. However, the definition of what is deemed "natural" in motherhood is intricately tied to societal norms, compelling mothers to conform to culturally accepted and prescribed methods of caregiving – encompassing the various activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for their child. Mothers who are unable to live up to these expectations are considered not only "bad mothers" but "failed women" (Holmes, 1997).

This paper explores my personal experiences as a mother, examining the changes and challenges that accompanied this new role. It delves into the intricacies of identity and self-concept within the context of motherhood. Additionally, the interplay between my personal values and my significant others' values and beliefs are explored, shedding light on the broader social and cultural forces shaping my journey. The purpose of this study is to

delve into my lived experiences as a mother. Situated within a specific time frame and context, the research aims to explore the pressures, societal expectations, and role negotiations faced by mothers. By willingly subjecting my thoughts, feelings, and narratives to scrutiny, this inquiry seeks to unravel the process of identity seeking and potential challenges such as role strain and resocialization experienced during the transition from academic life to motherhood. The study also reflects on critical moments that shaped my understanding and practices of motherhood and its multifaceted meanings and identities.

This research endeavors to provide insights into the complex journey of motherhood, highlighting the intersections between personal experiences, societal expectations, and individual identities. By examining the changes, challenges, and self-reflections associated with being a mother, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on motherhood and offer a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of this transformative role.

The Motherhood Ideology. "What's really unique about maternal anxiety today is our belief that if something goes wrong with or for our children, it's a reflection on us as mothers because we believe we should be able to control life so perfectly that we can keep bad things from happening." Judith Warner

Scholars Phoenix, Woollett, and Lloyd (1991) pointed out that: "Incorporated within the term 'mothering' are the intensity and emotional closeness of the idealized mother-child relationship as well as notions of mothers being responsible for the fostering of good child development." The psychological development and general well-being of the child are dependent upon the accessibility of the mother. Therefore, mothers should be ever present and available to their children (Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, 2001, Baker, 2018). This is reflective of intensive mothering, which is the dominant cultural ideology of mothering — exclusive, wholly child-centered, emotionally involving, and time-consuming (Hays, 1996) and the mother portrayed is "not a subject with her own needs and interests" (Bassin et al., 1994). The prevailing ideals of motherhood are perpetuated in various mediums such as popular culture, the media, and the increasingly influential realm of

social media and women often find it difficult to disregard (Abetz and Moore, 2018). Because of this, mothers would unfortunately often find themselves competing with one another (Chae, 2015). In the words of Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004): "Intensive mothering is the ultimate female Olympics: We are all in powerful competition with each other, in constant danger of being trumped by the mom down the street, or in the magazine we're reading. The competition isn't just over who's a good mother—it's over who's the best. We compete with each other; we compete with ourselves. The best mothers always put their kids' needs before their own, period. The best mothers are the main caregivers. For the best mothers, their kids are the center of the universe".

According to Williamson et al. (2023), the concept of the "good mother ideology" pertains to the notion that women are deemed as "good" mothers only when they conform to the principles of the prevailing parenting discourse. This ideology establishes a dichotomous standard for categorizing mothers into good and bad, against which they and other mothers measure themselves (Lanctot and Turcott, 2017). The ideology can be found in motherhood and parenting discourses across history and cultures (Arendell, 2000, Chodorow, 1998). The ideology of intensive mothering places children's needs and the act of raising them above all other priorities. This idealized image of motherhood which encompasses notions of selflessness, unconditional love, and constant nurturing was instilled in women starting at a very young age. The cultural narrative surrounding motherhood not only underscores its significance as the pinnacle of feminine achievement but also perpetuates traditional gender roles by assigning caregiving roles in the hands of women. The pressure to conform can lead to feelings of inadequacy and guilt among mothers (De Sousa Macado et al., 2020). When mothers meet these criteria, they are frequently praised and receive positive feedback from others, thereby reinforcing the notion of the good mother ideology and emphasizing the significance of motherhood within a woman's identity (Turner & Norwood, 2013). However, if mothers fail to conform to these standards, they often face judgment, negative evaluations, exclusion, and the act of shaming

commonly referred to as "mum-shaming" (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2017).

The Mother as a Teacher. During the early years, children predominantly spend most of their time with their family and their experience at home has a profound impact on their early learning and the parents play a crucial role in shaping their development (Bornstein, 2015). The role of a mother extends beyond being a caregiver or nurturer; she also assumes the vital role of a teacher in her child's life. As a mother, she is expected to take on the essential and unmitigated task of educating and socializing her child. In this capacity, the mother serves as a mediator between nature and culture, functioning not just as an ordinary teacher but as her child's most influential educator. The concept of the "mother-as-teacher" acknowledges the mother's role in the cognitive development and achievement of their children (Scott-Jones, 1987). Numerous parenting resources and websites emphasize that parents, especially mothers, are the child's first and best teachers. Even before formal schooling begins, children are viewed as little learners in their homes, where mothers in traditional patriarchal households begin to "teach" and impart knowledge. Consequently, mothers find themselves navigating motherhood and engaging with discourses on child-rearing while struggling to reconcile the conflicts and contradictions that may arise.

METHODS

In this paper, I utilize autoethnographic research and gather artifacts from the years 2008-2011, including social media posts, personal notes, and diaries, to share my personal experiences as a first-time mother and my journey in mothering. The use of autoethnographic methodology or narratives of the self provides and captures local stories and the associated meanings, understandings, and social criticism (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographies aim to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 5) and gather data from their personal encounters, aiming to uncover and explore concealed elements and the significance of cultural narratives (Chang, 2013).

Autoethnography is considered an appropriate method for investigating complex emotional experiences (Akehurst & Scott, 2021) and involves analyzing personal experiences and recollections of the past through the lens of the present (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). It also connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political (Given, 2008).

Dahlberg (2006) suggests that phenomenological essence lies in the everyday moments of the living experience. In autoethnography, the methodology serves four purposes: (1) to illustrate aspects of personal experience that shed light on cultural phenomena, practices, and narratives; (2) to weave together current and past research with lived experiences, contributing to the scholarship of existing and future research; (3) to embrace personal vulnerability to expose stigmatized experiences that often evade quantitative and qualitative frameworks; and (4) to merge creative and scientific writing, fostering a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the reader (Jones et al., 2016).

To begin documenting my journey, I revisit my experiences starting from the year I left my academic career and became expectant with a child. I draw upon my "notes" that document informal conversations with my husband, mother, grandmother, and other immediate family members who directly interact with my son and influence my child-rearing practices. While I predominantly use the first-person perspective as the author throughout this paper, I recognize that my husband, son, mother, and significant others play significant roles in the narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Meaning and Identities

I was once a 27-year old spirited young university instructor. In 2007, I completed my master's degree in Demography while teaching at the Sociology Department at the same university where I was teaching. At that time, I was filled with a mix of accomplishment and possibilities. I never considered teaching when I was still an undergraduate student. I thought that I did not possess the same academic qualities that my professors have. But I found my place inside the classroom and every morning as I strolled through the university corridors, I eagerly anticipated the opportunity to shape young minds and inspire the next generation. This experience brought me a

profound sense of fulfillment that I had never encountered before. But deep inside me, I couldn't help but ask: "Is this the life that I want? Do I really belong here?"

The Ticking Mommy Clock

The birth of our son marked a profound milestone in our lives, arriving more than a year after our marriage. That was the time I decided to leave my five fruitful years at the university and embark on a different journey. Our decision, my husband's and mine, to start a family prompted us to relocate to my home province. Making this decision was challenging; its difficulty lay in the emotional weight of letting go of an integral part of my identity. I bid farewell to the world of academia and embraced the responsibilities of starting a family. Venturing into motherhood is treading into unfamiliar territory. I am fully aware that my university education did not prepare me for this, but in our society, when a woman reaches a certain age, the mounting pressure for marriage and motherhood intensifies, as if motherhood is considered the ultimate accomplishment for women.

Do not get me wrong. Being a mother is part of my long-term plans. However, the prospect of succumbing to the pressure that society places on my uterus elicits a sense of discomfort within me. It began with getting married followed by a persistent stream of inquiries, echoing the incessant questioning on when the first child will arrive: *"kailan naman ang anak?"*. In the subsequent nine months, I became wholly consumed by the role of a "full-time expectant mom." Rather than dedicating time to prepare for my classes, I immersed myself in reading pregnancy books. Instead of focusing on academic papers, my efforts were directed toward researching birth plans and prenatal development. It was during this period that I immersed myself in the literature on pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing. Conversations with my mother, grandmother, and other mothers about their childbirth and mothering experiences paved the way for my understanding of their mothering experiences. This marked a significant departure from the academic world I had come to know, yet it led me toward a newfound path to self-discovery. But when you are a *'probinsyana'* - raised and socialized in the province, and you are a woman, the time will come when you will be caught in the "pressure" of the "ticking mommy clock" (biological clock). Relatives, particularly the older ones, will keep on asking for grandchildren to continue the family lineage. Without children, one will be subjected to jests and unwarranted comments, unfairly branding as *'mahina'* insinuating that their virility was contingent solely on their ability to produce a child. At the ages of 31 and 27, my husband and I embarked on the transformative journey called parenthood, influenced significantly by the external pressures exerted by our significant others. However, upon introspection, I realized that our choice to yield and give in to the pressure was also an assertion of our agency in navigating complex familial dynamics and societal expectations. Deep inside, there was an inherent excitement within me, eager to embrace the world of motherhood.

The Motherhood Experience

"I never thought motherhood would be so fulfilling until I had Io." I remember posting this on my Friendster profile, a social networking site, two months after the birth of my son. At that time, motherhood was catching up with me. A year of meticulous preparation, devouring childbirth literature, and absorbing invaluable tips about dos and don'ts on nurturing a newborn served as my guiding light. My husband and I decided to embark on this journey alone. We did not hire a nanny *or 'yaya',* nor did we follow the tradition of living with my mother during the early stages of childbirth. My mother and my grandmother, who raised me as a child, resided in another town. They visited us intermittently- once every two weeks or sometimes just once a month. It was all "book-guided" or "follow your instincts" child-rearing for us from the start. The rigorous demands of the academic world have equipped us to navigate this new chapter of our lives. I coped with the new situation easily. I was breastfeeding, bathing my newborn, taking him on morning strolls at the park, and lulling him to bed. I was not the sleep-deprived and disheveled first-time mother who did not have the time to comb her hair – a *'losyang'* or unkempt, and I was even recuperating from a cesarean section operation. However, there were still some periods of unease and anxiety or, in our local term*s, 'praning'*, or anxiety-fueled overthinking. At times, the fear of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) would compel my husband and me to vigilantly observe our son while he sleeps, ensuring that his breathing

remains gentle and steady. Furthermore, a virus spreading at that time added another layer of caution about visiting crowded places like supermarkets because of the fear of catching the virus and bringing it home to our son. Alongside these concerns, there were also incidents of mood swings, probably attributed to fluctuating hormones or postpartum depression. However, despite this moment of uncertainty, I found both excitement and enjoyment in the whole experience of being a mother. Each day brought me joy and wonder and a newfound discovery of resilience within me.

How do I feel about being a mother? Sometimes at night, as I gaze upon my son asleep, I ponder and contemplate the responsibility in my hands as a mother. Raised under the guidance of my "*lola*" or traditional grandmother, I imbibed the belief that a woman's purpose in society revolves around the sacred act of birthing, nurturing, and passing on the teachings necessary for the rearing of future generations. For my grandmother, this is the circle of life. That was precisely how she raised me – instilling in me the "womanly" virtues and equipping me with the "basic skills" that a woman should possess. However, the liberal atmosphere of university life ushered in me a wave of transformations that challenged and contradicted the beliefs ingrained within me. As my father once said, my transformation was from a 'Maria Clara to Madonna' – from traditional and conservative to bold and independent, after just one year in the university. In my quest for self-discovery, I joined a feminist youth organization on campus. My sociology courses exposed me to discourses on patriarchy and misogyny, feminism, and the empowerment of women. Through these, I realized that a woman's role in society transcends the confines of motherhood and domestic life. It became clear to me that every woman should possess the freedom to choose her own path free from societal expectations. At one point, I even convinced myself that marriage has no place in my future. Dreaming of having a child of my own, I entertained embracing motherhood through alternative means such as undergoing in vitro fertilization as an unmarried woman – a choice that would be deemed unacceptable in the traditional context of my upbringing. Now, as a married woman with a child, others may perceive my situation as the quintessential embodiment of the conventional Filipina narrative – a wife and a mother. Yet, for me, I am more than just a traditional mother and wife. I am my son's teacher and husband's partner as well. I refuse to blindly adhere to the obligations and conventions of motherhood. I am mothering my child based on my personal values and my own unique experiences. I am not simply replicating the methods of my own upbringing for the sake of "cultural continuity". Instead, I am forging a path that weaves together culture, traditions, personal values, and knowledge and fits it in the evolving landscape of a changing world where my child will grow up.

So, when my son was born, I knew that rearing him would be different from the way my grandparents raised me as a child. I carry with me a profound understanding of the role I would play as the primary agent in my child's socialization. I am not a mere passive agent who would transmit the societal conventions and traditions to my child but rather, I will be a facilitator who will foster an atmosphere of growth, discovery, and autonomy.

Mothering Complexities

What characterized my experiences as a mother? My journey of motherhood can be characterized by a kaleidoscope of colorful experiences, adjustments, and discoveries. Surprisingly, the transition to motherhood came naturally to me even without the customary set-up of having a mother or elderly female family member to guide me and "show me the ropes". Instead, my husband did his fair share of "mothering", and he was also keen on doing his job of "fathering" our son. In my son's 6th month, my husband suggested that I get a part-time teaching job after sensing my longing for a taste of my former academic life. Concurring with the idea, I accepted a part-time, one-day-per-week teaching job at a nearby college in our area. My classes would begin at 9 am and end at 4 pm. For one entire day every week, I immersed myself in my old academic life, and it was just my husband and my child at home. My husband thought that it would do me good as I get a "day off" from being a mother. It was during these hours that I reclaimed a glimpse of my former identity while my husband and our son embarked on their own bonding experiences to forge the father-son connection. This arrangement brought balance to our lives and proved that the

pursuit of personal goals need not be sacrificed for the sake of parenthood.

When it came to social support and relationships with my mother, grandmother, and relatives, I have experienced various conflicts and contradictions. My mother, grandmother and even my uncles frequently view us as overly protective of our son. They accuse us of mistrusting conventional child-rearing practices. My grandmother would express her disapproval, saying, "You don't trust our tried-and-true methods of raising children. That's how I raised all your uncles".

One point of contention is that they felt that we were being too "exclusive". They have commented on our reluctance to bring our son to the barrio, the close-knit community where I grew up, where everyone knows each other. We were so cautious about taking our son to other places because of the potential virus threat at that time. We limited our outdoor activities to the park in front of our house. It was not until his seventh month when we took him to our barrio and other places like the mall. As my grandmother commented, "Do not be overprotective of your son so that he will not be a weakling. He will build immunity if you expose him outside. Let him play with dirt".

Of course, we did not reject the idea. However, every time we ventured outside and visited other places, especially in our barrio, we always brought with us isopropyl alcohol or sanitizer My mother humorously dubbed our barrio a "baby factory" due to the prevalence of dirty children playing in the streets.

1. Modern Medicine vs. Folk healing

When Io was a year and four months old, he suffered from his first serious illness. He had a fever for a couple of nights, got bloodshot eyes, and was suffering from a cough and cold. My husband and I immediately took him to his pediatrician. After two days and his condition had not improved, we took him to my mother's house. We received a great deal of scolding as she already told us the first day Io got sick that he might have a *'pilay'* or dislocated bone or *'nabati'* or *'nausog'*. *Bati* or *Usog* is a popular superstition in the Philippines. In many places, especially the countryside, *'bati'* is believed to occur when a child suffers from an unexplained illness or discomfort due to an interaction with a person with "strong energy". No modern medicine can cure this discomfort, and all that is needed is a *'hilot'* or a

traditional healer. By 7 p.m. despite the late hour, we found ourselves compelled to comply with my mother's order, driven by a sense of hopelessness and desperation. My husband, my mother and I took our son to Ka Ilyang, a well-known *'hilot'* in our town.

As we entered Ka Ilyang's house, we were led to the porch by a young girl while another young boy called the old woman. While waiting for Ka Ilyang, my mother said, "I told you to go to Ka Ilyang. Why do you always insist on seeing a doctor? It is just a simple case of dislocated bone because your child is too physically active. If you had brought him here, you could have saved a considerable amount of money".

When Ka Ilyang arrived, I saw an incredibly old woman – in her 70s, gray-haired, wearing an old worn-out duster dress. An image of me being brought to her as a child with a broken bone flashed before me. She had with her some leaves and candle wax. With a lighted candle, she heated the candle wax in the spoon and poured it over a basin with water. Then she said, *"Nabati!."* She started waving the leaves unto my face and my child's face as if driving away evil spirits. I struggled to contain my laughter and kept quiet. After that, she started massaging my son's back and stomach with oil that smelled like kerosene. I looked at my mother and whispered to her, "What is that?" but Ka Ilyang seemed to be distracted by this, looked at me angrily, and said, "So disrespectful and hard-headed!" The ritual ended with a pinch on my wailing son's nose. She gave me garlic and said, "Grind it, mix it with water and let the child drink it, and his stomachache will be relieved". We left with the diagnosis that my son was *'nabati'*, has *'pilay'* or bone dislocation, and *'kabag'* or gas pains. On our way home, I asked my mom:

Me: "Mom, Do I really need to make Io drink this"?

Mom: "Just have faith. Do not contradict Ka Ilyang or else it will not work".

To my surprise, my son started feeling better the following day. Despite this, I maintained the medication prescribed by the doctor. I honestly couldn't discern whether it was Ka Ilyang's magic or the effects of the doctor's medication that contributed to his recovery.

2. Too Early to Learn: Ma-Tortang Utak

By the age of eight months, Io was already standing on two feet, and by the time he was barely ten months, he had taken his first steps. At 18 months, a mere year and a half old, Io already knew the English alphabet by heart. By the age of two, he could effortlessly count from 1-20, later progressing to 1 to 100. In addition to this, he could recite 20 nation flags, demonstrate proficiency in phonics, and double phonics, and engage in conversations in both English and Filipino. From the outset, my husband and I already noticed that Io exhibited advanced motor skills and cognitive abilities. For us, everything that Io learned was part of playing and learning. He learned everything that he knew because, as parents, we were very selective of the toys he played with, the music he listened to, and the programs he watched on television. We read to him every night and provided him with the right toys appropriate for his age. Rather than opting for traditional toy guns and robots typically associated with boys, we supplied him with educational toys such as blocks, puzzles, pop-up, and educational books. Instead of exposing him to shows like Ben 10, which I find potentially violent for a very young child, Io watches Playhouse Disney programs, which I think are appropriate for his age. Everything seemed normal and ordinary to me until my grandmother paid a visit to our house and saw Io engrossed in an ABC book. While she was quite happy with Io's milestones given his age, her remarks hinted at concern. She commented, "Don't you think that is too much for his age? Children should be playing. Look at his cousin; he enjoys playing with Power Rangers and he even asked for a toy sword last night. Perhaps you should take Io to Sta. Rosa and let him play with other children his age there".

At age two and a half, we enrolled him in a toddler school. He was the youngest, and there were only four other students in the class. My intention was not solely for formal schooling but to provide him with the exposure and the opportunity to interact with other children his age. As a teacher myself, I believe that Io can start learning right at home, without having to wait for actual schooling in a formal school. So even if he is attending school, I continue to "teach" him at home through songs, dances, games, and consistently provide him with "quality time" and guide his curious explorations.

3. The Language Issue: Raising a Bilingual

In contrast to his gross motor skills, language development came slowly at first for Io. When compared to a cousin of the same age, he lagged behind in terms of vocabulary and clarity of pronunciation, and articulation. My husband and I agreed to raise him as a simultaneous bilingual and we introduced two languages to him, English and Filipino, since birth. However, since another caregiver (his aunt) speaks to him in Filipino, we believe that learning the Filipino language will be easier for him. We focused more on communicating with him in English and tried to use the "One parent/person one language" method. The OPOL approach is a popular method in raising bilinguals wherein one person usually the parent uses his or her own language with their child with the goal of exposing the child to two languages from an early age for them to acquire a good native-like mastery of the language (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004).

That decision was not to put privilege on the English language but to help him acquire the English language as a native speaker. Again, this is based on research that shows that learning multiple languages is easy for young children, and bilingualism has positive effects on children's cognitive development (Marian and Shook, 2012, Bialystok, 2020). However, one of my uncles has a negative and opposing view on this matter He remarked, "Why do you keep on speaking to your son in English? Look at his cousin, he can speak well using Filipino and they are the same age. You are putting unnecessary pressure on the child".

Io was able to overcome that stage, and I later observed a period of "word or vocabulary spurt." Although some of his utterances remained gibberish, he gained communicative competence. We continued using the One-Person One Language (OPOL) method, but when I felt that people around me might comment negatively, I shifted to using *Tagalog*, a local Filipino dialect. Io would sometimes use *Tagalog* or sometimes English and say, *"Ay naku, mama"...* or sometimes "Oh, no! Oh, coconuts!"

4. Teaching About Gender

"Mama is a girl... "Io is a boy" ... Mama, pretty... Io handsome... Io strong and stretchy (imitating the character from a TV program). I remember hearing this from my son when he was three, and I guess that was also around that time

when he started making some distinctions between girls' and boys' characteristics.

One summer, we had a birthday celebration at home, and all my relatives were present. At that time, Io was not yet toilet trained, so I would often let him wear a diaper. Following my grandmother's advice to get rid of the diaper, I just let him wear shorts that day. When he started saying "weewee," he took off his shorts and squatted like a girl. All my five uncles saw what happened, and my husband and I got disapproving looks from them followed by these remarks to my husband, "Why does he pee like a girl, is he gay? *Y*ou should teach your child because you are the father". And then my husband responded, "He is just imitating his mom".

I did not see anything wrong with the way I handled Io's toilet training. I did not even adhere to gender-specific toys. However, for my relatives, something was wrong, and I was to blame.

5. Teaching About Religion

One thing for which I received extreme disapproval is having Io baptized a week before his first birthday. For my grandmother, mother, and relatives, it was a little too late. Traditionally, babies are baptized within a few weeks or months after their birth with the belief that this would shield them from bad spirits. My husband and I are "categorically" Roman Catholics, and we were even married in a Catholic church. The "delay" was a big issue for my grandmother, who was a *'manang',* a person who is a devotee in church, in our parish, and a regularly active official of several religious organizations like the Catholic Women's League and *Apostolado ng Panalangin*. I taught him how to pray before meals and before bed, but since we do not have images of saints or *'rebulto'* at home, Io's concept of God and the son of God, Jesus, is not based on physical images like those found inside churches. We believe that our son will have the time to know "his" God deeply when the right time comes. But again, due to pressure from the people around us, my husband brought our son to church one day. There was no celebration of mass yet when they arrived but there were already *'manangs'* preparing for the mass. As Io is naturally curious about things, he keeps on wandering inside the church. One of the devotees approached my husband and said, "When the liturgical service starts, please have your child remain seated. He cannot wander inside the church. The priest is very

strict and will get mad". Even before the liturgical service started, my husband and Io left the church. Io was only three at that time and a liturgical service can last for an hour. How can you make a toddler sit still for an hour? As far as I can remember, we brought Io to attend mass a couple of times only, and all those times we did not get to finish the entire service inside the church.

CONCLUSION

In cultures like ours, where family and children are highly esteemed, the social pressure to have a child, particularly within the initial year of marriage, can be so overpowering that couples would just succumb to the pressure exerted by the people around them. There is a social stigma attached to childlessness. Having no child, whether voluntary or involuntary, is considered deviant and is frowned upon. Men without children are conceived as weaklings and "*putol na ang lahi*". For Filipino families, the significance of having a child, particularly a male child to carry on the family name is deemed important. This is frequently associated with the concept of "manliness". Women without children are often unjustly perceived by society as "incomplete" as expectations regarding a woman's fulfillment are often narrowly defined by her role as a mother (Suppes, 2020). In my case, the decision to have a child was not based solely on social pressure but also on the demographic fact that I might surpass my peak childbearing years. However, I cannot deny that the demands and pressure to have a child were crucial factors that pushed us to decide to have one. Careers must be put on hold, especially for women. The biological clock is in control of a woman's timeline, and society judges whether she fulfills the task expected of her.

Transitioning Self-Identities. Transitioning into a new role involves acquiring the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to fulfill the responsibilities associated with the new role. Socialization plays a crucial role in helping individuals transition and adapt to their new social roles. A mother coming in to prepare for her new role must undergo these aspects of the socialization process - learn maternal roles and expectations, shift identities and self-concept, develop the necessary "parenting skills," emotional adjustment, and form social support networks.

The I and the Me. George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed that the self is composed of two distinct but interconnected parts – the "I" and the "Me". The self as a product of socio-symbolic interaction is not merely a passive reflection of societal expectations. The individual actively responds to the social world, making decisions based on other's attitudes, giving rise to two dimensions of the self - the "I" or the individual's response to the social self which reflects the attitudes of the generalized other, and "me" or the social self which responds to the attitudes of the generalized other. Conflict can arise between the "I" and the "me" when tensions emerge between a person's individual desires and expectations imposed by society.

In the case of mothering, the "I" refers to the spontaneous aspect of the mother's self, including her unique individuality, attitudes, desires, and aspirations. On the other hand, the "me" represents the socialized aspect of a mother's self. It reflects the internalization of societal expectations, cultural norms, and social roles associated with motherhood. It involves conforming to society's idealized standards of what a "good mother" should be and fulfilling the expectations of family, peers, and community.

In my case, the tension in mothering arose when my desire to "mother" my child "my own way" came into conflict with how my significant others, especially my family view how raising a child should be done. It was a battle between my own unique approach to motherhood versus conforming to the expectations, norms, conventions, and traditions set by my family.

Negotiating the "I" and the "me" involved resolving conflicts and finding harmony between one's personal desires and societal expectations to find the balance between personal autonomy and the demands of society. Thus, a mother's self-identity is a product of the negotiation of the overly complex relationship between the I and the me.

Self-Discrepancy. Tory Higgins (1987) developed the self-discrepancy model that explores the relationship between self-concept and emotional well-being. According to this model, individuals have three types of self-representations: the actual self, or how the individual perceives themselves, the ideal self, or how they aspire to be or the person they wish to become, and the ought self, or how

they see themselves based on societal expectations. According to Higgins, one's emotional well-being is influenced by the gaps in these various representations of the self. One might experience a gap between the actual and the ideal self or between the actual and the ought self.

When one engages in mothering, the actual self in motherhood is the actual self of the other based on her assessment of her mothering qualities, abilities, and behaviors. The ideal self in motherhood represents her desired and ideal image of motherhood reflecting her hopes and dreams of how she perceives a good mother should be. The ought self in motherhood represents the image of a mother reflecting the expectations, norms, and beliefs of one's culture.

Discrepancies in these representations of the self in motherhood may arise from gaps in one's personal values and cultural norms. It is important for a mother to recognize that unresolved gaps may affect her well-being. To be able to do so, one must adjust to her actual, ideal, and ought self and come up with more realistic and attainable expectations as a mother.

Negotiating the Complexities. Motherhood, for me, was a mixture of contradictions and negations. Considering the structural context in which my husband and I decided to raise a family, we already knew that we would encounter conflicts from the beginning. We have our own beliefs and principles in child-rearing, and there are dominant ideologies of mothering and child-rearing based on "the old ways". There is a constant battle between the modern and the traditional, the new, and the old. Resistance to these ideologies resulted in disapproval and displeasure from my significant others as they equated resistance with disrespect. Negotiations arise as I give in to some of their demands and feel the need for social support. My relationship with my husband was contrary to these contradictions. Having a partner who shares the same principles as mine or is willing to compromise and do his share of "fathering" made the experience of mothering empowering for me.

However, even with a husband who immerses himself in mothering practices, the everyday realities of motherhood, and all the mothering activities are still primarily attached to me as I am the woman and the mother. It is I who is expected by society to raise a "good child" with all the right

values and character. The shortcomings and imperfections of a child are seen as the mother's failure to "mother" his child properly. It is in these kinds of situations that mothers suffer from 'mother guilt' and 'mother blame' (Constantinou, et al., 2021).

The mother's role as the child's first teacher is rooted in the family's role as a primary socializing agent. The unmitigated task of "educating" one's child is heavily dependent on the woman – assuring that the child is on track with the normal and right developmental path – physical, mental, and social as well as teaching him the right values that will make him a good person.

I also believe that the mother's role as a child's first teacher is extremely important as education should not merely focus on the achievement of basic skills like the 3Rs but on helping the child realize his fullest potential. My role as a mother is to serve as the mediator and facilitator of this kind of learning as the foundations of learning and thinking skills should be laid early in life (Fisher, 1990).

I acknowledge this "heroic" role of the mother, but I beg to differ with society and even science's restrictions and limitations. I continuously engage myself in child development discourses. I read guides on child-rearing as I review related literature for research, but I do not look for the perfect formula, or universal template mothers should use in raising their children. Society is there to offer its "time-tested" ways, and research can offer support based on scientific evidence, but I firmly believe that mothering is and should be a "personal experience", in which she teaches and learns at the same time. Every mothering experience is unique. Every experience is valid.

In conclusion, the arrival of my son emerged as a pivotal and transformative moment in my life. The interplay between my personal values, societal expectations, personal aspirations, and the innate and intrinsic desire to nurture a family form the intricate fabric of my journey, shaping my identity as a woman, a mother, and a lifelong learner.

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