

Enveloping and Tethering: The Cloth-Mother Metaphoric

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## Abstract

Mothering ideologies convey the idea that mothers should be the sole caregivers of their children. In these mental frameworks, infants are chaotic and vulnerable and mothers are morally bound to contain and protect them. The metaphor of the mother as provider of a warm, sheltering space is common to Christian religious traditions and to twentieth century attachment theory. The author proposes that this perception of 'mother-as-envelope' is an instantiation of an underlying metaphor in which the qualities of cloth, such as warmth, flexibility, softness, and facelessness, are considered the qualities of ideal mothering. The author reviews psychoanalytic, feminist, and fictional literatures that perpetuate and critique this metaphorical equation. Through a psychoanalytically-informed framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, three Renaissance paintings of the Madonna-Child dyad are analyzed. Cloth is found to be a metaphor for containment, devotion, and breast milk in these images. Ettinger's (2004, 2006) concept of woven *matrixial* space and Barthes' (2010) *punctum* are considered in tandem, as the author identifies areas of *punctum* in the Renaissance images and discusses their relationship to her own experiences as a mother and to modern-day mothering ideologies.

*Keywords: discourse analysis, psychoanalysis, mothering ideologies, cloth, attachment theory*

Dedication

To my husband Zu Edward,  
whose co-parenting supported this radical feminist treatise.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction



*Figure 1. The author swaddled as an infant, carried by her father in a homemade cradleboard.*

Photographer unknown. Vancouver, B.C. c.1985.

I was walking through the early winter dusk with a new friend, our babies strapped to our chests, when she told me that she didn't believe in swaddling. I did not know it at the time, but this moment was the beginning of my interest in the connection between cloth and mothering. “What,” I asked her, “is there to believe in?” She said that the idea of using a piece of cloth to



restrict a child disturbed her, that she wanted her daughter to feel free and loved, to know that if she needed calming, her mother would hold her in her arms. To her, swaddling was cruel. I followed her logic, and found that it made sense. But my own perspective was completely different.

My father created a cradle-board around the time I was born. With leather straps to hold me and backpack straps to hold it onto his own back, this baby-carrying contraption was an object of beauty, utility, and comfort (Figure 1). In it, he carried me through long walks in the city and on the beach. Completely immobile, warmed by a blanket, I was happy in my swaddling. I often slept and would remain strapped in, leaning against a log or park bench, until I awoke. I remember these as some of the truly safe moments of my childhood. To me, *not swaddling* was cruel.

I inquired into other parents' opinions and found the flames of an intense debate. Proponents describe swaddling as an act that mimics the uterine environment (Karp, 2003). They say that swaddled infants are contented infants, as they feel safe in a familiarly constricted state. Critics say that the swaddled infant is oppressed, with no method of emotional expression (Sunbury, 2012).

Both camps agree that swaddled infants are more convenient. They are calmer and cry less, they sleep more, and they cannot crawl or roll over. But convenience is an ambivalent concept in modern Western parenting—dominant mothering ideologies posit that it should never come at the expense of an infant's needs. If adults do not wish to be put into a straightjacket (and few do), why are mothers doing this to their children? *Why can't they just pick their babies up?*

The question reflects our era. As a society, we have accepted a set of beliefs (an ideology)

about infants, children, and mothers' roles in caring for them. Deeply internalized rhetoric tells us that infants have urgent needs and that mothers are required to satisfy them. That infants need near-constant physical touch and that a mother's warm embrace is irreplaceable.

Perhaps because I enter swaddling discourses as an outlier, having experienced it as a form of paternal nurturing, I am intrigued by the rhetorical elements of the debate. Decisive arguments put forth by both sides are less interesting to me than the precepts they hold in common. Both accept certain tenets as sacred: the well-being of the infant above all else, the assumption that all mothers want what's best for their children. Both sides characterize infants as disorganized and in need of intense maternal care. Both sides characterize good mothering as a practice of taking full responsibility for the child's emotional and physical health.

And both sides of the debate use cloth as a metaphor for the mother's body. Whether cloth is perceived as a cold substitute for the mother's arms (cruel) or an offer of relief as it stands in for the mother's womb (loving), the metaphorical equation of mother = cloth seems inescapable.

Cloth has figured largely as a practical tool in my parenting practices. While I swaddled my son for only the first few weeks of life, I carried him in a homemade sling most waking hours for a year after that. It injured my hip but, in calming him, it kept me sane. In his early years my hands seemed always to be touching cloth. Daily loads of laundry, sorting and discarding the too soon too small baby clothes, changing diapers, changing my shirt, changing nursing pads, changing milk-stained sheets, changing my shirt again, carrying a blanket to protect against the afternoon San Francisco winds, hanging light-blocking curtains in a futile effort to win another hour of sleep, wrestling with the sewing machine from my mother-in-law. Even in a comparatively affluent industrialized context, where I did not have to wash clothing by hand or

weave it myself, I felt the intimacy of cloth more deeply than I had since I was an infant.

And in all of my parenting practices, including those in which I used (and, even as my children grow past infancy, continue to use) cloth, there are elements of an invisible storm of ideas about mothering that I have held and dropped, rejected then believed and, in believing, proselytized and grieved my former ignorance. My experience of mothering ideologies was (and remains) that *nothing is inert*. Everything is high-stakes for today's mothers, every choice reflecting an adherence to or resistance against changing, unachievable ideals. Ideals that demand expression in every maternal behavior and every material object.

The interminable baby-wearing I undertook was part of an Attachment Parenting regimen, intensive parenting based on the belief that near-to-instantaneous responses to infants' cries will foster better mother-child bonding (Sears & Sears, 2001). I believed not only that my son needed this but that all babies needed this. I did laundry to stave off the stained look and rancid smell of motherhood—because the cleanliness of my baby was a measure through which strangers could judge my fitness as a parent and through the cleanliness of my clothes my fitness as a woman. I would be a bad mother to expose my son to toxins for the sake of my own convenience, so I made my own detergent.

I needed the light-blocking curtains because I did not believe in sleep training. I nursed our son back to sleep until I night-weaned him at fifteen months old. When I did so, I feared that our neighbor—the same friend who had told me that she did not believe in swaddling—would sit me down for a talk about the ways that I was abusing my child by *only* rubbing his back while he wailed beside me in bed. She had called the tenants before us to tell them something similar.

I cloth diapered. I felt guilty for this because my favorite parenting book advocated being

'diaper-free': attuned mothers simply intuit their children's bodily functions, even at night (Bauer, 2006). The rhetoric of this book and the movement it inspired is similar to anti-swaddling arguments, and it carries intensive mothering ideologies to the extreme. Adults do not wish to sit in their own waste (and few do), so why are mothers using diapers to do this to their children? *Why can't they just pick their babies up... and hold them over the toilet at four o'clock every morning?*

As I navigate my capitulations and adherences to Western ideologies of mothering, I have come to know cloth in new ways. It has begun to mean more to me. I noticed the softness of the cotton baby sling after dozens of washes. I could place its untucked end on my son's head when he slept, protecting him from sun, wind, and the appreciative fingers of older women seeking the texture of chubby baby cheeks. I hung the white cloth diapers on the clothesline to bleach them in the sun and felt, suddenly, that I had a deep, unspoken bond with those older women. They too had once stooped to the laundry basket and reached up to pull a clothespin off the line. I preserved too many of the too soon too small baby clothes.

Already immersed in discussions about motherhood, I began to think about cloth as a complex substance worthy of study. What is the rhetorical link between cloth and motherhood? Metaphors are successful when the two objects are largely similar. But in what ways can cloth and motherhood be even remotely analogous?

The question opened up a Pandora's box: suddenly, I saw examples of mothers being symbolically or literally replaced by cloth everywhere. Harlow's monkeys, who preferred a terry-cloth doll ("cloth mother") to the machine that fed them milk (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959), appeared next to Winnicott's transitional objects (1953, 1992); cloth-covered sugar teats were

used by enslaved African American women in the American South to comfort their babies, often separated from their mothers (Morrison, 1998; Washington, 2005). Ettinger's *matrixial* space is described as creativity through weaving and linking (2006) and Anaïs Nin's protagonist in *Ladders to Fire* stitches her affection for her son onto her lover (2014). Medieval depictions of the Madonna show her holding up her cloak to protect all of humanity (Rudy, 2007) and sumptuous white cloth echoes breast milk in Solario's painting from circa 1507 (Figure 4).

The breadth of this paper grew out of the persistence of these connections. As they accumulate I find that, while it is unusual for the metaphor of cloth-for-mother ('the cloth-mother metaphor') to appear as explicitly as it does in discussions of swaddling, the *qualities* of cloth are often constituted as the qualities of the 'ideal' mother. No one yearns for mothers to be replaced with cloth—and as a society we could not allow mothers to take the easy route by removing their bodies in such a way—but we do usually want mothers to have at least a few cloth-like qualities. Softness, flexibility and warmth.

Similarities between the qualities of idealized mothering and commonly understood qualities of cloth appear in a multitude of ways. Cloth is passive and yielding; the ideal mother is passive and yielding (Thurer, 1994; Badinter, 1981). It cannot shatter because it is strong in its flexibility. The good mother accommodates the needs of those around her, using her womanly dependence to advantage (Deutsch, 1945). Cloth takes the shape and sacredness of the items it contains, becoming sacred by proxy when used to wrap ritual herbs (Gordon, 2014) and hanging on the edges of windows and precious paintings (Baert & Rudy, 2007). The ideal mother molds her life around her children (Hays, 1996; Horney, 1993), basking in the reflected glow of their priceless innocence.

Cloth wraps, ties, contains, holds, encloses, protects, filters, and buffers. While tight swaddling has become controversial, the 'good mother' does not leave her newborn naked and shivering. She wraps it gently in cloth (Gordon, 2014). When her children are vulnerable, she literally and metaphorically ties herself to them (Hays, 1996; Rich, 1995; Sears & Sears, 2001). In their early years of chaos, she contains their emotions and needs (Kristeva, 1984; Lacan, 1938); she protects them from harm—even, perhaps, from herself (Rich, 1995). She filters their environment just as her womb did in gestation, forming a barrier between her children and the brutalities of the world (Silver, 2007).

Cloth provides warmth, softness, touch, and intimacy. Modern-day mothering ideologies present a woman who is warm, soft, touchable, and ever intimate (Dill, 2014). Cloth can be tread upon, burned, marked, torn, and mended. She may be a “doormat” for her children (Thurer, 1995), and her body carries the marks of pregnancy and childbirth. Cloth is associated with the body and absorbs sweat, blood, and tears. She, as a woman, is associated with bodily fluids (Shildrick, 1997) and absorbs the emotional pain of her children, her family, and perhaps the world (O'Brien 2007; Thurer, 1995).

Fundamentally, cloth is silent, faceless, without needs or a self. It can be manipulated, used, and discarded at will. Except to sing lullabies, the ideal mother does not have a voice. Her natural place is in the home (Hays, 1996; Wolf, 2002). And in these ideologies she is faceless, a blank screen for all who project their experiences. She, apparently happily, provides the material out of which our fantasies take shape.

Naomi Wolf believes that dominant mothering ideologies serve to “keep women from thinking clearly and negotiating forcefully” about their psychological and economic needs (2002,

p. 5). Believing that a critique of the ideologies that shape my experiences of mothering (and my experiences of being nurtured) can help me—and perhaps others—to more incisively critique patriarchal belief systems, this thesis seeks out and examines moments in religious, visual, literary and psychoanalytic discourses when the qualities of motherhood are expressed through the metaphor of cloth. For the integrative aspect of this thesis I turn to three Renaissance paintings as the artifacts around which to weave these threads: Andrea Solario's *Madonna of the Green Cushion* (1505) (Figure 4), Raphael Sanzio's *The Sistine Madonna* (1512) (Figure 5); and Albrecht Dürer's *Madonna with the Siskin* (1506) (Figure 6).

Images are important ways of disseminating ideology and present realities in which that ideology is 'naturalized' (made normal) (Freedon, 2003). Through most of human history, most people have been textually illiterate. Rudy and Baert (2007) tell us that their experiences of images were likely more vivid than those of people in the modern world. In pre-Industrial Europe, for example, the Church revealed some images only on certain holy days. These images were felt to be not simply representations of religious figures but actual spiritual entities themselves (Rudy & Baert, 2007). Although we prize text as a mode of communication, the affective nature of the visual is still with us today.

Critical Discourse Analysis is a mode of study that allows us to question the structure, context, and reception of texts (Van Dijk, 2001). Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis widens the lens to include non-textual elements of discourse (Scollon & Levine, 2002). It includes an examination of the formal elements of an image, including composition, line, balance and simplicity; symbolism, including dynamics between entities within the image; and the effect of the image on its viewers.

Because I believe that deep psychological elements are at least as important as societal contexts in the generation of mothering ideologies, my discursive analytic approach is informed by psychoanalytic perspectives. In this thesis I propose that our ideas about cloth and mothering share deep subconscious roots related to the concept of the *imago*, a psychological construct formed by archetypal forces in specific contexts (Isaacs, 1948; Jung, 2003). An *imago* is often rooted in unconscious memories of early childhood experiences, including emotional and physical sensations. Early infant experiences of nurturing performed through cloth (and in the context of cloth) may contribute to the alacrity with which the cloth-mother metaphor has been adopted as a rhetorical and ideological tool.

In Chapter 2 I review the literature on Western mothering ideologies and the metaphors they use to further their naturalization. Although there is a wide variety of cross-cultural ideas and practices associated with the cloth-mother metaphor, I narrow my focus to predominantly European American discourses. In 'Two hidden metaphors in mothering discourses' I explore two of the ways that I see the cloth-mother metaphoric instantiating itself in Western discourses: the 'maternal envelope' (the depiction of the ideal mother as an enveloping, protective material) and the 'tethered mother' (an effort by some feminist authors to transform the cloth-mother metaphor into a statement about their entrapment in social roles). In the following sections I map the geographies of modern-day Western mothering ideologies, reviewing the literature of their origins, breadth, and impact.

Having grounded my discussion in the more straightforward literatures about metaphor, ideology, and ideologies of mothering, 'Metaphors and Symbolisms of Cloth' enters the less studied field of the psychology of cloth. Because I believe that cloth functions as both a



metaphorical concept in mothering ideologies (its qualities used to describe the qualities of good mothering) and an embodied experience that welcomes those ideologies (in our unconscious memories of its use in early infancy), I seek out researchers who incorporate psychological thought with embodied experience of textiles. I discuss the limited empirical research on cloth in psychology (studies that have looked at the healing effects of textile creation) and the somewhat more expansive research on cloth in psychoanalysis.

In 'Source Material: Renaissance Images' I outline representations of the Virgin Mary in pre-Industrial times, including her associations with creating cloth. I then discuss the three Renaissance images that comprise the primary source material for the integrative aspect of this paper. These images depict the Madonna-Child relationship in which Mary supports, holds or cradles the infant Jesus. Because in my integrative section I will discuss these images as archetypal and symbolic, in this section I contextualize them within the mercantilism of the Renaissance and their educational value as ideological tools within the Catholic Church.

As I conduct the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework for Chapter 3, the integration section of this thesis, I draw from the work of visual grammarians Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and Dondis (1973); and Roland Barthes' (2010) concept of the *punctum*, the element of a photograph that 'pierces' the viewer. In the paper's conclusion, I consider the limitations of this research in terms of its cultural homogeneity and need for greater engagement with issues of economic discrimination. I consider the ways that the cloth-mother metaphor could be transformed to become more inclusive.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### General Introduction

There is a popular idea that mothering is 'natural' and 'instinctive'. But the very ideas of nature and maternal instinct are outcroppings of ideology, defined by Steger and James (2010) as “patterned clusters of normatively-imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations, carrying claims to social truth” (p. xii). Ideology can be conceived more practically as a set of ideas that govern behavior (Wilson, 1992). Social psychologists have studied the intractable nature of certain ideologies, finding that personality traits (anxiety) and situational factors (social upheaval) affect the likelihood of their adoption (Jost, Kay, & Thorisdottir, 2009; Weber & Frederico, 2007).

Ideologies find fuel in culturally accepted symbols and metaphors, particularly those that are part of larger lexical themes (Gorman, 1990; Goatly, 2007). Unlike analogies, which help us to think through foreign concepts and thereby integrate them into our known conceptual categories, metaphors have hidden agendas. Through their action of 'mapping' one concept onto another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), metaphors are useful in subtly reinforcing latent ideologies (Goatly, 2007). They allow one concept to cloak itself in the clothes of another (Aristotle, 1997).

Metaphors reinforce existing beliefs (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Lynne & Graham, 1999). Through naturalization (Freedon, 2003) they position their ideology as the only reality (Goatly, 2007; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). In the realm of motherhood, they make the qualities of cloth the essence of appropriate mothering. Through them and the ideologies they embody, the deep emotional work of mothering becomes stereotyped and trivial (Bell, 2004; Liss, 2009).

## **Motherhood and Metaphor**

Perhaps because mothering is perceived as a practice involving intangible, unseen aspects (Rich, 1995), including love, intuition, an innate sense of one's toddler's whereabouts (Bauer, 2006), metaphors for mothers and mothering are plentiful. 'Mother Earth' is a metaphor for our planet and a vaguely defined ecological provider (Baker, 2013; McCredden, 1997) and mothering is described as a practice of 'balance' (Garey, 1999; Vair, 2013) or a 'double-edged sword' (Shelton & Johnson, 2006). McKie, Gregory and Bowlby (2002) position a mother's work as part of a “carescape” in which her orientation is toward the health and well-being of others. The cloth-mother metaphor joins these metaphors in promoting mothering ideologies.

Mothering ideologies can be conceived of as constellations of values and prescriptions for behavior regarding women who perform the work of nurturing children (Hays, 1996). They use metaphor to further their own set of ideals, which are sometimes crystalized into a symbolic woman, characterized as the 'Good Mother' (Rich, 1995; Ruddick, 1995), the 'good enough mother' (Winnicott, 1992) and the 'appropriately attached mother' (Sears & Sears, 2001). Feminist theorists also take ideological positions and have provided their own definitions of 'mother,' such as Sara Ruddick's practicalist focus on mothering as the work of preserving, nurturing, and training a child (1995) and Glenn's (1994) more expansive working definition of a socio-culturally embedded relationship, “in which one individual nurtures and cares for another” (p. 3).

When researchers discuss mothering ideology they nearly universally cite Sharon Hays' 1996 book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (Arendell, 2000; Bell, 2004; Bengtsson & Psouni, 2008; Büskens, 2001; Johnston & Swanson, 2003, 2006; O'Brien, 2007; Macdonald, 1998, 2009; Romagnoli & Wall, 2007; Thurer, 1995) Hays' book consists of a historical

exploration of ideas and practices of motherhood, a brief discursive analysis of childrearing advice texts, and analyses of a series of interviews with 38 working- and middle-class mothers. Hays invites women to discuss the expectations placed upon them, their own ideas of motherhood duties, and their day-to-day lives. She terms her findings the “ideology of intensive mothering”, a set of ideas with clearly delineated practices, deriving from several core beliefs: that child care is the domain of the mother, that methods of child-rearing should be child-centered and dictated by experts, that these methods should be emotionally and financially costly and labor intensive; and that children and childcare are beyond (and incompatible with) market value (Hays, 1996).

Hays' book contrasts the ideology of intensive mothering with mothers' actual experiences and the skills they require in a capitalist world. Mothers describe feeling guilty and un-motherly for their work outside the home, and Hays believes that because women must perform roles as workers as well as mothers, they experience deep rifts within their self-concepts. She readily admits that her sample size is small and not representative of a cross-section of American mothers; she does not explain her method of data analysis except to cite the Grounded Theory idea of pattern recognition (Glaser & Strauss, 1980). Her findings, however, surprised no one, and the idea of “intensive mothering” as the dominant ideology of motherhood in the West remains unchallenged (Maines Walters, 2008).

Nearly twenty years after Hays published her seminal work Randi Maines Walters examines the role of mothering ideologies in mothers' experiences in her doctoral thesis (2008). Through a study of the qualitative findings of 50 participants, Maines Walters (2008) finds that 'intensive mothering' has become 'entrenched mothering', with the beliefs proposed by Hays

(1996) nearly universally internalized across the sample. The participants state that not only is child-rearing their sole responsibility, it should also be their sole concern. They struggle to establish identities that encompass both full responsibility for their children and a sense of powerlessness to create a world that is safe for them. The mothers in her study report receiving little social support in their parenting and have completely incorporate intensive mothering ideologies—which I propose include the cloth-mother metaphor—into their belief systems.

### **Metaphors in clinical work.**

Metaphors have been used productively in psychoanalysis, which, in its exploration of dreams, symbols and other unconscious manifestations, has itself has been described as a metaphorical enterprise (Arlow, 1979; Leary, 1994). Interest in the explicit use of metaphors in therapeutic conversations has grown since the 1980s (Leary, 1994); a body of literature now shows that metaphors can be used to build rapport between therapist and client (Bubbenzer, West, DeTrude, Mahrle, & Sand-Pringle, 1991), facilitate the discussion of difficult information (Trad, 1993), and help clients to see their problems from new perspectives (McMullen & Conway, 1996; Strong, 1989). Metaphors are thought to operate on both conscious and unconscious levels, making them highly valuable in motivating client change (Matthews & Dardeck, 1985; Strong, 1989).

Proponents of Strategic Family Therapy (Haley, 1978; Madanes 1981, 2000), while working with metaphor in the ways mentioned above, also conceive of familial relationships as metaphorical. Their work is an example of family systems therapy (Kopp, 2013) and they make use of metaphor in their work with families in a number of ways (Kopp, 2013; Madanes, 1981). For example, the relationship between a mother and her child may be a metaphor for the way that

the mother relates to her partner, or the way that the family relates to the world (Madanes, 1981). Minuchin and Fishman (2009) operate within this modality and describe searching for a single visual metaphor to encapsulate a family's experience of itself. For example, 'The family is a trap' could be a representative metaphor for a family whose members describe ingrained and isolating dysfunctional dynamics (Minuchin & Fishman, 2009). This use of the idea of metaphor allows therapists to see similarities between intra-familial dynamics that might otherwise remain hidden.

### **My intentions for the use of metaphor.**

I use the term 'metaphor' to describe a constellation of ideas characterized by a conflation of the qualities of cloth with the qualities of good mothering. It should be noted that the phenomenon I am describing is not fully captured by the term 'metaphor'. While most objects that become metaphors somehow mirror each other (similarity being the cause of a metaphor's success), the relationship between mothers and cloth is far more psychologically complex.

In various situations and at various points in history the relationship between cloth and motherhood has not been more literal than metaphorical. Mothers were in fact the most likely producers of cloth in pre-industrial times (Gordon, 2014). And for Harlow and Zimmerman's deprived macaque monkeys (1959) and Winnicott's blanket-loving babies (1953), cloth cannot be conceived of as a metaphor for nurturing because it does actually perform that function.

In addition, metaphors are usually explicit references made between two clearly external objects, for example between the nation and a hypothetical body, as in "mother land" (Musolf, 2012). It is not often that both 'objects' under study are related to such strong affective and physical sensations as the need for nurturing and the feel of textile. The fact that the metaphorical relationship between motherhood and cloth depends solely on those qualities is part of their

complexity.

The cloth-mother metaphor does, however, involve the transfer of one set of ideas onto another (Aristotle, 1997; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003) and follows a metaphorical tradition in which “bodily experiences are...correlated with certain abstract or subjective experiences” (Koveces, 2001, para. 21). Though it is incomplete, I continue to use the term.

I believe that the cloth-mother association lies beneath or beside the perceptions and language that characterize idealized mothering. It can be deduced from its multitudinous irruptions into a variety of discourses, including religious, scientific, psychoanalytic, visual, poetic, political, and philosophical. It shows itself as well in its entailments (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). These include the concepts that nurturing is warm, that caregivers envelope and surround their infants, and that women are “tied down” by their children. I propose that our tactile experiences with cloth and nurturing reside *deeper* in our psyches. It is possible that the metaphor of mother = cloth continues to be used because it fulfills a deep psychological need: to remember or re-live our early experiences of maternal nurturing. Its force is best described through depth psychology.

Archetypes are figurative and universal (Jung, 1981); the metaphor of the cloth mother is more loosely defined and arises in a context of psychosocial events. Jung's early term 'imago' (coined before he developed the concept of archetype and used extensively by Lacan in his earlier years) describes such forces. The British developmental psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs delineates the concept:

The distinctions between an 'imago' and 'image' might be summarized as: (a) 'imago' refers to an unconscious image; (b) 'image' usually refers to a person or

part of a person, the earliest objects, whilst 'image' may be of any object...and (c) 'imago' includes all the somatic and emotional elements in the subject's relation to the imaged person...whereas in the 'image' the somatic and much of the emotional elements are largely repressed." (1948, p. 93)

The concept of 'imago' is valuable for my study because it acknowledges the strong corporeal-experiential components of the cloth-mother metaphor, the impact of early infant needs, and the origin of the metaphor in the unconscious. Kristeva's (1984) concept of the *semiotic* state and its preverbal, needs-based orientation toward the maternal body shares these elements.

### **Two hidden metaphors in mothering discourses.**

The two cloth-related metaphors I come across most frequently are the metaphor of 'mother-as-envelope' and the metaphor of the 'tethered-mother'. The mother-as-envelope metaphor portrays the mother as a container for her children, providing shelter and a buffer from the outside world. It appears in Western religious, psychological, and popular discourses. The tethered-mother metaphor presents the mother as eternally tied to her children, her movements circumscribed by their location and needs. It is most commonly used in feminist critical discourse in an attempt to portray mothers' negative experiences of intensive mothering ideologies.

### ***The maternal envelope.***

The Christian Madonna is most often depicted draped in cloth (Twomey, 2013). The richness and length of this cloth varies according to the needs of the era and the artist. While some images show the Madonna as a humble being wrapping her baby in her own veil (Twomey, 2013), Byzantine images showed her in great splendor. By the Medieval period, the concept of



Mary's Cloak or mantle as a powerful protective shield for the common person had become commonly accepted (Rudy, 2007). A genre of prayers called the 'Mantle of Our Lady' supplicated her for protection under this cloth (Gordon, 2014; Rudy, 2007). A prayer from the seventeenth century proclaims,

Mary, spread out your mantle,

make of it a shield and screen,

Let us all stand safely under it...

Whoever diligently places himself under

will not be brought low in any danger ...

Your mantle is so very broad and wise...

It covers the whole wide world, it is our refuge and cover. (Gordon, 2014, p. 206)

In these prayers, the Madonna is considered powerful through her association with the Christ child, whose glory she reflects. Her clothes, an extension of her benevolence and her body, are mystical objects of veneration (Twomey, 2013). In stating, “Your mantle is already spread out” the prayer references the Madonna's eternal suffering on humanity's behalf: she opens her cloak, making herself vulnerable in order to protect us. Her arms never tire.

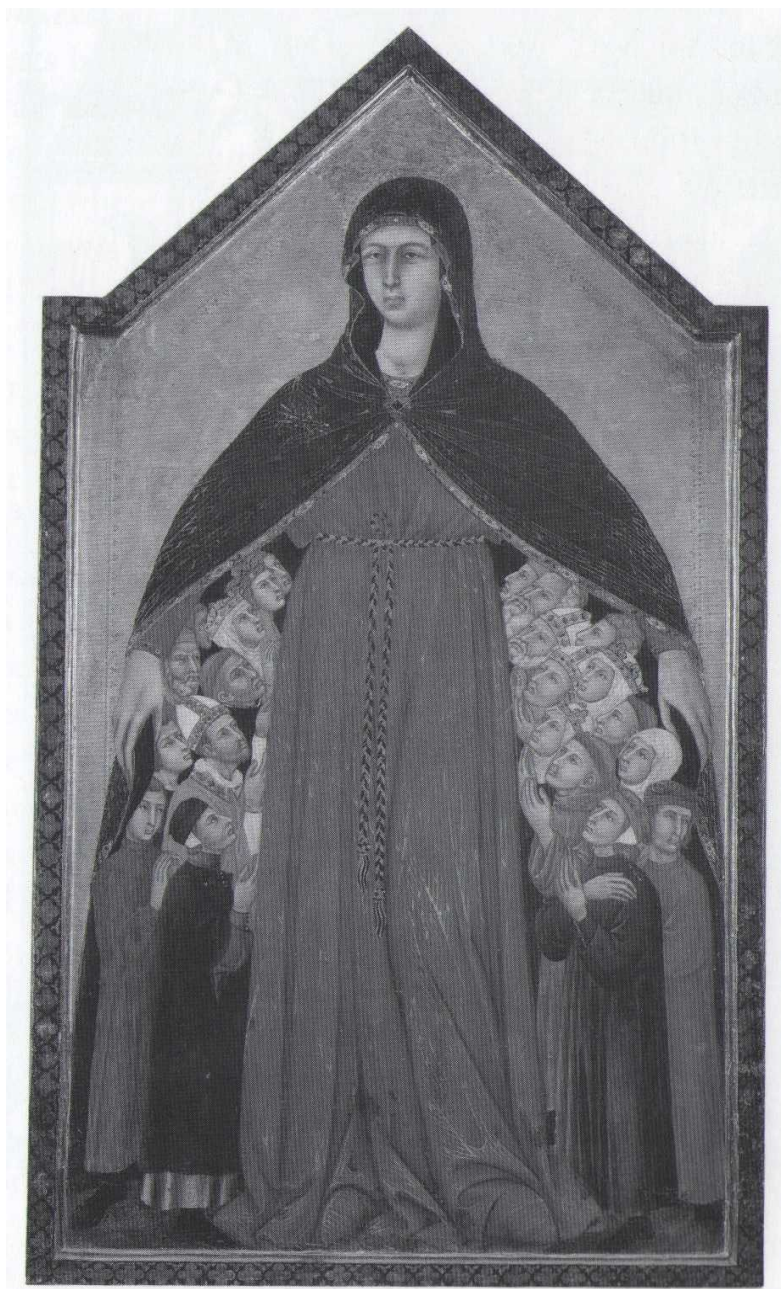
The *Madonna della Misericordia* (Figure 2) is an image from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century in which the Madonna performs her protective function through the use of her cloak. An immense Madonna figure holds out her cloak while legions of followers huddle beneath. Just as the mantle prayer exhorts “us all” to stand under her cloak, the *Madonna della Misericordia* does not discriminate. She shelters all of humanity, and her own child is absent. Modern-day followers of Rudolf Steiner (Pearce, 2012; Salter, 1987) have adapted the idea of Mary's sheltering mantle,

but use it exclusively to describe the mother-child relationship. They attribute the idea of the 'Madonna's Cloak' to Steiner (Pearce, 2012; Salter, 1987), and use it as a metaphor for engaged, protective mothering in the modern day:

the outstreaming of the mother's soul can be pictured as forming a protective cloak around the baby, radiating love and protection. For the young child [the] Madonna's cloak is a spiritual reality. It enfolds him in warmth and deeply affects him. (Salter, 1987, p. 230)

Steiner was a late-19<sup>th</sup> century spiritual leader who termed his ideas 'anthroposophy' (Steiner, 2013). The idea of an energetic force emanating from the mother's soul can be attributed to his spiritual orientation.

The idea that this energetic force from the mother's soul envelopes her child, who is 'deeply affected' by it, aligns with the older Christian tradition of the Madonna's Mantle. It provides a sense of maternal responsibility akin to the Madonna's devotion and suffering. These rhetorical adaptations, drawing on an influential and highly codified religious tradition, carry great force when they enter popular discourse today. Just as the Madonna creates a safety zone for her child (Liss, 2009), it has become a moral imperative for the mother to emotionally and physically protect her child (Joseph & Fass, 2013).



*Figure 2. Madonna della Misericordia (Virgin of Mercy), Simone Martini. Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale. Siena, c. 1308 (as reproduced in Rudy & Baert, 2007).*

The research paradigm and vernacular rhetoric of twentieth century attachment theory draw heavily on the metaphor of the maternal envelope. Mother and child are presented in isolation of societal and economic contexts (Buchanan, 2013; Contratto 2002), with the mother uniquely essential to the children's healthy development (Ainsworth, 1967). Spatially-based metaphors of envelopment, containment, support, and encircling abound in these discussions. Her provision of a 'secure base' of emotional availability (Bowlby, 1988) or a 'containing space' (Winnicott, 1953) is like a cloak of protection under which the child may develop. She is a supreme container who orients her child in “in space and time, provides his environment, permits the satisfaction of some impulses, restricts others” (Bowlby, 1951, p. 53). After her baby is born, the mother naturally desires “to turn inwards...longing to be concerned with the inside of the circle which she can make with her arms, in the centre of which is the baby.” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 25)

Many materials could fill this function—an egg shell, a wooden hut. However, the maternal envelope of attachment theory is like a textile in its permeability and its need for structure. The mother allows some elements of the outside world to intrude, increasing the frequency of these events as the child matures (Bowlby, 1988; Winnicott, 1964). And she needs a structure in order to stand; Winnicott (1964) describes the father's postpartum role as providing the larger environment for the mother to envelope the child, supporting her in doing so.

Metaphors carry subtle consequences. Although one rarely intends a direct correlation between all aspects of the concepts out of which we make our analogies (their “entailments” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003)), such a correlation is always implied. The entailments of the mother-as-envelope metaphor are manifold: if the nature of woman is to surround a child with nurturing

protection, the hard work of parenting cannot be called 'work'—it is simply instinctual. And if a mother is destined to offer such protection, it stands to reason that the child needs it for survival: children who do not receive it will suffer immensely. The metaphor also implies that mothers and children operate in an intimacy excluded from the outside world and that separation from the mother is difficult and final. One either stands beneath the Madonna's cloak or one stands outside it.

The ancient womb-as-vessel symbolic axis (Neumann, 1955) underlies the idea that the mother is naturally endowed with (or is morally responsible for providing) a protective spiritual textile around her child. In wide-ranging cultural artifacts and rituals, the womb is symbolically presented as a container into which one might put things or a place one could enter (Neumann, 1955). The metaphor can be read through psychoanalytic theory that posits that adults (particularly men) wish to return to the 'comfort' of the womb, and thus prefer to see mothers not as people but as warm, sheltering, nurturing, protective spaces (Freud, 2001; Lacan, 1938).

Such is the case for Jay, the love interest in Anaïs Nin's 1959 three-part novel *Ladders to Fire* (2014). In the relationship between him and Lillian, the protagonist, cloth is used as a metaphor for the pathological expression of thwarted maternal instincts. Lillian is a mother who loved her child but not her husband, and left them both. She selflessly loves her new partner, a man who lacks any sense of personal responsibility and compassion. He is “gnome and sprite and faun, and playboy of the mother-bound world” (p. 23, emphasis added). Nin devotes several pages to the asymmetry of their relationship.

Jay buried himself in her fur [coat]. He made himself small. He had a way of becoming so passive and soft that he seemed to lose his height and weight. He did

this now, his face in her fur, and she felt as if she were the darkness, the smallness of the taxi, and were hiding him, protecting him from the elements...She was the fur, the pocket, the warmth that sheltered him. She felt immense, and strong, and illimitable, the boundless mother opening her arms and her wings; she his shelter and refuge, his secret hiding place, his tent, his sky, his blanket. (pp. 22–23)

This list is all that we expect of mothers: that they warmly envelope and shelter—and that they like it (Hays, 1996). Much in the way that Freud (1996) describes a child's image of his mother as omnipresent but indistinct from other mother figures in his life, Lillian is depicted as a being of colossal strength, valuable only for her protective function. A being without a face or name.

By extending the cloth-mother metaphor to include a romantic relationship, Nin demonstrates its participation in the intensive mothering rhetoric (Hays, 1996) requiring female sacrifice. Because it is written into a context where the child is not present, we can more objectively see the strain that undying maternal devotion can cause. The rhetoric of maternal devotion seems normal when it is spoken in the service of a vulnerable child. It seems oppressive when applied to a man who neither needs nor deserves it.

Nin also draws attention to the illicit connection between the mother-as-envelope, the womb, and sexuality. As Lillian becomes the containing space, a caressing protector that buffers Jay from the outside world, she also, at times, welcomes him into her body sexually. Any expression of maternal sexuality is taboo in mainstream American society (Shipps & Caron, 2013) and telling a version of the Oedipal story from the perspective of the mother creates narrative tension.

Lillian's maternal feelings give rise to intense anxiety. She must compromise, accommodate, and enable Jay's irresponsibilities. He refuses to work and is flagrantly unfaithful. She is not an entirely willing participant in her self-effacement, and pursues empowerment through stereotypically maternal tasks. Lillian turns to mending in a scene that exaggerates and thus disrupts the domestic tranquility that has been essential to idealized visions of motherhood since the Victorian era (Badinter, 1981; Thurer, 1995).

She was weaving and sewing and mending because he carried in himself no thread of connection, no knowledge of mending, no thread of continuity or repair... She was sewing together the little proofs of his devotion out of which to make a garment for her tattered love and faith... She sewed his pockets that he might keep some of their days together, hold together the key to the house, to their room, to their bed.... She sewed the lining so that the warmth would not seep out of their days together, the soft inner skin of their relationship. (2014, p. 24)

Lillian's mending, while undertaken with care, demonstrates female anxiety for which most metaphors of motherhood have no space. Her position is miserable, and she sews not out of adoration but out of a felt necessity. Throughout history, mothers have performed the same task, at times with just as much desperation and dread.

Lillian is creating Jay. This is both a repetition of the gestation-birth-nourishment drama, and an interesting reversal of the cloth-mother's association with passivity and formlessness. She ties his memories together, reminds him of his love for her, sews his sleeve so that he can meet her need for comfort, and, in a feat of Freudian brilliance, she both embraces and inverts the mother-as-envelope metaphor by creating a pocket within Jay's clothing in which she can insert a

key to their room.

Lillian engages in both major aspects of the cloth-mother metaphoric: envelopment (as she does in the scene in the taxi) and entrapment. The description of her metaphorical stitching of Jay's psyche references both his need for containment and her need to provide it. Although she feels maternal obligations to her lover instead of her child, she is caught within their web all the same. The metaphor of the mother tied down by her mothering duties references the use of cloth to restrict and bind; she is the 'tethered mother'.

### *The tethered mother.*

In order to discuss the metaphor of the mother 'tethered' to her children and home, I must expand my discussion of D.W. Winnicott's (1953) concept of the transitional object. Before it became his most well-known term, the 'transitional object' was known as the 'fetish object' in psychoanalysis (Winnicott, 1953). It is the Linus blanket, the teddy-bear, the cloth doll. Children may have a succession of these objects which tend, according to Winnicott, to acquire more realistic or anthropomorphic qualities as the child's intellect emerges (1964). Some textile qualities, such as fuzziness, may allow the child to feel that the object is animate (Winnicott, 1953). Other aspects of cloth, such as its ability to hold smell, also encourage the child's growing attachment (Winnicott, 1964).

Following Kleinian ideas (Karen, 1994; Klein, 2002), Winnicott believed that the transitional object symbolized "the breast" (Winnicott, 1953). Like the mother, it is an object both self and not-self. Through interacting with that somewhat challenging yet eminently reassuring object, the child learns to differentiate its ego from the outside world (Winnicott, 1953). In a more practical sense, its mother-like aspects endow the child who holds the object



with a sense of her presence even in her absence. The child can thus explore his/her world while still feeling tied to the mother.

The transitional object appears in the first passage quoted from Nin (2014). She ends her paragraph describing the protagonist as her lover's "secret hiding place, his tent, his sky, his blanket." (p.33). Nin ends this list by naming the most tactile, common, and mistakenly ordinary object; placing it at the end, she indicates that the blanket is the most powerful. Lillian has the power and responsibility of being not just an archetype and a maternal envelope, but also the transitional object (Winnicott, 1953). Because Jay remains with her inside the taxi, the presence of a transitional object is superfluous. It intensifies the scene as one of extravagant mothering energy, indulgent, a surplus of nurturance. She, as a woman, provides everything. He, as a full-grown man, truly requires none of it, but feels that he needs it all.

The idea of the child tied to the mother appears throughout psychoanalytic and popular discourses. For example, Lacan believed that the complex of the maternal womb imago needed to be resolved in order for a child to be able to build new relationships; he writes, "its sublimation is particularly difficult, as we can see in the attachment of the child to *his mother's apron strings*" (1938, p. 21, emphasis added). Lacan presents the problem as the boy's concern but the mother's responsibility. If she does not navigate it correctly, her son will never let go—a tragedy for him. But if children can be forever tied to their mothers' apron strings, the truth is, also, that *mothers* can forever be tied to their children through their apron strings. A tragedy, perhaps, for her.

Rich (1995) describes her experiences with motherhood in these terms. She writes of "longing to be free of responsibility, tied by every fibre of [my] being" (p. 22). She feels that the

average American mother is “connected with [the child] by the most mundane and the most *invisible* strands” (p. 36, emphasis added), mothers are “tied to their children by compassionate bonds” (p. 53). In a dark moment she describes herself as “a tangle of irritations” (p. 29).

Rre-framing the Winnicottian description of the mother's happily enveloping “circle... with her arms” (1964, p. 25), Rich describes herself tethered, caught inside a circle with her children.

It was as if an *invisible* thread would pull taut between us and break...if I moved... into a realm beyond our tightly circumscribed life together. ... Like so many women I waited with impatience for the moment when their father would return from work, when for an hour or two...the circle drawn around mother and children would grow looser, the intensity between us slacken...I did not understand that this circle, this magnetic field, was not a natural phenomenon.” (1995, p. 23, emphasis added)

Rich twice emphasizes the invisibility of the mother-child tether, even directly after describing visually obvious physical manifestations of that connection, such as the milk let-down reflex she experiences in response to the baby's cries. Perhaps the thread must be described as invisible to convey the power, terror, and magic of the connection she feels with her children. Perhaps she hopes to express that it is a tie that cannot simply be abandoned or changed, as more material ties might be; that for her, the institution of motherhood feels unbreakable.

Rich is not alone in her subversion of the nurturing, enveloping cloth-mother rhetoric; the metaphor of the tethered mother appears frequently in feminist discourses (Fineman, 1995). Thurer (1995) also uses the rhetoric of constriction to describe cloth-mother ideals. She writes

that in the early modern era, the boundaries of acceptable female behavior became “rigid and restrictive”, and that “while women were no longer burned at the stake, many smoldered in quiet desperation, chafed by a set of social restraints” (p. 188). She characterizes attachment theory as a belief that, “baby and mother are...connected by a kind of invisible umbilical cord” (1995, p. 259). Other theorists have contributed to this rhetoric, proposing the cloth-mother metaphor as a tethered mother in attachment theory (Franzblau's (1999) article, 'Historicizing Attachment Theory: Binding the Ties that Bind') and patriarchal gender norms (Clarissa Pinkola Estés' most recent book, *Untie the Strong Woman* (2011), about archetypal maternal figures).

The entailments of the metaphor of the tied-down mother are easily apparent. Women tied by invisible emotional bonds cannot be freed—and so a mother's possibility of emancipation is surrendered. The hopelessness described by Rich (1995) and the women she quotes is accurately portrayed, and perhaps perpetuated, by this metaphor. The tethered-mother metaphor does not, however, disallow the possibility of other linkages: that children could be tied to their fathers or other caregivers, or that lesbian mothers would both be tethered to their children. In fact, the metaphor of the 'circle' in which Rich found herself “loosens” when their father returns home from work. A circle can be any size, and tethers can be any length.

### **Historical Context of Mothering Ideologies**

As Thurer (1995) describes in detail, mothers throughout history have been conceived of as powerful, terrifying, promiscuous, virginal, sweetly passive, obsessive and emotional, and cooperative. The 'good mother' that we know in the West today derives primarily from Victorian ideals of motherhood (Badinter, 1981; Büskens, 2001; McKnight, 1997; Thurer, 1995). The ideal Victorian mother was a doting, religious, adored, asexual, angelic woman interested only in the

well-being of her children.

Because this thesis is restricted to relatively recent Western ideologies of motherhood, I begin this brief history in the Europe of the Middle Ages. The Western maternal image in the Middle Ages was most frequently presented as Mary, the mother of Christ in Christian theology (Rudy & Baert, 2007; Thurer, 1995; Williams, 2005). Mary was held up as a maternal ideal but, as we can see in the lengthy history of Church-decried wet-nursing and infant abandonment, most women could not or would not live up to her example (Badinter, 1981; deMause, 1995; Thurer, 1995).

By the time of the Renaissance, Mary was depicted as sumptuous, elegant, and deeply adorned (Rudy, 2007)—a far cry from the poverty in which most of her adorers lived. Women at that time were characterized as dangerous, lacking in morality and common sense (Woods-Marsden, 1998). They were, however, economic contributors to the household, valued for their ability to bring money to the family through field work or products created at home (Gordon, 2014; Thurer, 1995). Badinter (1981), Hays (1996), and Thurer (1995) share in the belief that the idealized visions of motherhood we know today were necessary to the capitalist project of the Industrial Revolution. They state that it was not until the separation of work and home in the eighteenth century that 'mother' became synonymous with 'hearth.'

Life had once been lived primarily outdoors, while residences were used for shelter and sleep (Thurer, 1995). With urbanization, two primary living spaces began to solidify: factories with terrible working conditions and small homes with, one hopes, marginally less terrible working conditions. Badinton (1981), Hays (1996), and Thurer (1995) propose that as home became a refuge from a mechanized world, those who performed the (unpaid) work of domestic

tasks became the symbol of nurturing care, further crystalizing gender roles.

Where once childcare was likely performed collectively in the presence of other, more pressing work (such as weaving or the creation of goods to sell at market (Gordon, 2014)), it was now the domain of individual mothers and their older children. Pamela Druckerman (2013) states that Parisian mothers without childcare options would leave their children tied to furniture to keep them out of trouble during long working hours. Life was difficult but the idea of a home with a mother in it as a place of refuge had taken root.

A middle class arose and with it, concepts of privacy and intimacy, adornments for the home, and a focus on mothers as those responsible for bestowing these elements to a household (Glenn, 1994; Thurer, 1995). Protestantism exalted marriage as a sacred union, in opposition to the Catholic preeminence of cloisters and monasteries. Becoming a (married) mother became a Godly act, and the wholesome, fertile woman with flour on her apron became the ideal (Thurer, 1995).

Perceptions of motherhood in Victorian times oscillated between a belief that maternal behavior was ingrained and God-given, and that women needed to be taught how to care for their children (Arnup, 1994; Horney, 1993; Huie Harrison, 2015). The high mortality rate was blamed on poor parenting performed by working class women (Arnup, 1994); the image of a Victorian lady, her virtue reflected in the health of her children, became an aspirational ideal. Thurer (1995) describes a psychoanalytic mechanism through which this idealization may have been perpetuated even within the Victorian family.

She writes that with sexual repression and class aspirations, ideas of physicality and work were forced out of motherhood. A good Victorian lady cared for her children in the confines of a

nursery, with paid help but out of the public eye. As the role of a middle- or upper-class woman became more closely defined by the domestic sphere, she spent less time with her husband, who presumably worked outside the home, than ever before. In her isolation she became an easy target for idealized projection. In the minutes during which she was exposed to her family members and society at large, she could conceivably maintain the facade (Thurer, 1995).

'Hidden mother' photographs from this era encapsulate the psychology of Victorian motherhood ideals (Figure 3). Nagler (2013) has amassed a hundreds-strong collection of these images: photographs of small children whose mothers hold them from behind a piece of cloth. The women loom completely covered in the background. It is thought that their presence was required to hold their children still during long photographic takes (Batchen, 2013). We do not know these women's names or faces. But their covered forms show us their devotion to their children, their performance of the work of child-rearing, and the ease with which their personalities were erased for posterity, replaced with a piece of cloth.



*Figure 3. Little girl with her doll and hidden mother; J.C. Elrod, photographer. Louisville, KY, date unknown (as reproduced in Simpleinsomnia, 2015).*

The idea of (white, upper-class) women's rights became a political topic in the twentieth century. Child-rearing theories based on the idea of intense infantile needs did, too. Büskens (2001) and Franzblau (1999) believe that the philosophical orientation of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1988) arose in response to concerns about women's increasing civic power in the second World War. These theories required women to stay home with their children at the same time that women's participation in industry needed to be diminished (Büskens, 2001; Franzblau, 1999). Now colored with a tinge of research-based respectability, the Victorian-era mother, the first mother in Western history to have been confined to the domestic sphere, was proposed as both natural and necessary.

### **Recent changes in mothering ideologies.**

Throughout history, mothers were not expected to ensure their children's health and survival, but to hope for it (Badinter, 1981; Joseph & Fass, 2013). Things have changed: children survive more often and mothers are expected to do more for them. Motherhood in America is now at both its most idealistic and at its most prescriptive (Büskens, 2001; Franzblau, 1999; Hays, 1996).

Meg Luxton (1980) published a fascinating study of the oral narratives of 100 women comprising three generations of a Canadian mining town. The changing social mores of mothering practices form a thread through these narratives. One woman of the first generation describes these changes:

When mine were wee we figured all they needed was feeding and a bit of loving now and again. I left mine to sleep most of the time for the first year. But my daughter, her babies were born in the 1940s and she was all modern...She



spent more time with them than I did but it seemed odd to me. And now my granddaughter has a wee one and she thinks it needs all sorts of attention. She says babies need talking to and music and she has her sit on the table with her and that baby's never alone except at night. And the baby seems to thrive on it but her mother's never alone and gets no peace. (1980, p.104)

This mother sees the transitions in mothering beliefs and practices as having a positive impact on the child but a negative impact on the mother. The fact that the mother is “never alone and gets no peace”, a sentiment that seems par for the course in modern parenting manuals (Büskens, 2001), sounds surprising to her.

Researchers agree that expectations of mothers have increased over the last 100 years (Hays, 1996; Thurer, 2005) with a sharp uptick in the last 25 (Fox, 2009; Maines Walters, 2008; McDonald, 2009). But the question of *why* this intensification has occurred receives less attention. McDonald (2009) cites Swidler (1986) in proposing that ideologies rigidify in times of social upheaval. She points to the increase in both women's participation in the workforce and the number of parenting books published (which, she states, increased five-fold between 1975 and 1997); and the more audible “mommy wars” (debates about the value of non-familial childcare) as evidence of this upheaval.

Historian Paula Foss (Joseph & Foss, 2013) describes a confluence of factors causing changes in parenting philosophies, from the decreasing social role of the family over the past century (including fewer grandparents living in-home, and children schooled outside of the home) to the rise in reports of child abduction and neglect in the media. Most prominently, however, she cites class fear. The gap between rich and poor is rising (Board of Governors of the

Federal Reserve System, 2013) and “We don't want to be the parents of kids who didn't maintain our affluence and status. . . . We're worried they won't have that drive to succeed” (Joseph & Foss, 2013, para. 24).

Foss acknowledges the increasing power of the state, which paradoxically requires mothers to heavily invest their own personal resources. This is a topic picked up by political theorists who posit that with the rise of a nation state (Santoro, 2011), 'good mothering' has become a moral obligation with far-reaching consequences (Luccisano & Wall, 2009; Smythe, 2006). Individual women are now held responsible for the creation of a populace of educated, law-abiding, happy citizens; if a mother fails in her efforts, the cost of correcting or caring for her child requires resources of the state, thus encouraging political rhetoric of personal responsibility (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Huie Harrison, 2015). Sociologist Bonnie Fox states that the discourse of 'risk' hides this moral evaluation, replacing fear of “unwed” mothers with “at risk” mothers (2009). Such 'bad mothering' (Langer, 2000) thus faces political and social condemnation.

### **The ideology of the helpless infant.**

Ideologies of motherhood are also, necessarily, ideologies of infancy (Chodorow & Contratto, 1982). Dominant mothering ideologies have intensified over the last 25 years in part because of a growing understanding of infant needs (Büskens, 2001). This understanding has come about through an array of scientific studies and theoretical work (Karen, 1994). Primarily derived from increased concern for children's health and well-being, this work rarely considers the role that other caregivers might play in an infant's development (Bell, 2004; Büskens, 2001). It perpetuates intensive ideals of mothering.

Infants are now perceived in psychological and social health discourses as the center of the family: fragile and in need of near-constant physical and emotional support (Büskens, 2001; Luccisano & Wall, 2009; Sears & Sears, 2001). Ideas of the infant as a site of emotional and physical chaos appear historically in psychoanalytic thought, gaining steam around the middle of the last century. The belief that the infant is an emotionally volatile entity in need of 'regulation' has become an accepted truth in attachment theory discourse (Bowlby, 1951; Leach, 1986; Sears & Sears, 2001). Because depictions of infants' needs are tied to understandings of mothers' responsibilities, I here provide a short discussion of these needs as they appear in psychoanalytic theory.

Freud's early infants were relatively organized (if hallucinatory) beings, controlled by primal drives. He describes their upset in the language of machinery, "the motor discharge of screaming" (1958, p. 220). Melanie Klein, who also believes that the infant was driven by a need to satisfy drives related to its survival, states that the newborn infant's paranoid and schizoid ego lacks "cohesiveness and... a tendency towards integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits" (1946, p. 100). Similarly, Lacan describes early infancy as a time of chaos and anxiety:

the chaos of the interoceptive sensations...[as well as] anxiety, the prototype of which appears in the asphyxia of birth; cold, which is linked to the nakedness of the skin; and the labyrinthic discomfort to which the satisfaction of being rocked corresponds. (1938, p. 18)

Lacan's infant is emotionally complex; its helplessness in the face of its own emotions requires careful attention. Julia Kristeva's concept of the infant's pre-verbal state (the 'semiotic

chora') follows suit. To Kristeva, the infant first experiences an undifferentiated space of meaninglessness “where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him” (1984, p. 95). The safety and intimacy of the mother's body provides the space in which this child comes together and falls apart.

For Winnicott, the early infant is so much in need of containment that it cannot exist on its own. To him, “It is not enough that it is acknowledged that the environment is important” he writes, (1960, p. 587) “an infant cannot become an infant *unless linked to maternal care*” (1960, p. 589, italics in the original). Without maternal care, Winnicott's infant is formless, having no internal structure or organization.

The mother-as-envelope metaphors respond well to these characterizations, presenting a solution to the 'problem' of the vulnerable, chaotic infant. The mother will protect and the mother will contain. In all of these theories, a close bond with an attentive, attuned mother is necessary for the child's healthy development. She helps the child to stabilize for Klein (1946), envelopes the child with cloth and affection for Lacan (1938), mediates between the child's inner state and the symbolic world for Kristeva (1984), and provides a 'holding space' for Winnicott (1960) who wrote that,

Holding protects from physiological insult. [It] takes account of the infant's skin sensitivity—touch, temperature, auditory sensitivity, visual sensitivity, sensitivity to falling... and of the infant's lack of knowledge of the existence of anything other than the self. It includes the whole routine of care throughout the day and night, and it is not the same with any two infants because... no two infants are

alike....Holding includes especially the physical holding of the infant, which is a form of loving. It is perhaps the only way in which a mother can show the infant her love. (1960, p. 590)

Similarly, John Bowlby (1951) describes the infant's mother as its “psychic organizer” who “orients him in space and time, provides his environment, permits the satisfaction of some impulses, restricts others” (p. 53). As ideologies of infancy as a time of chaos and discomfort spread into popular culture, the descriptions of adequate maternal behavior begin to take the shape of an enveloping force.

The broad tenets of attachment theory have filtered into popular consciousness and have been adapted into child-rearing manuals (Hays, 1996; Karp, 2003; Leach, 1986; Sears & Sears, 2001; Thurer, 1995). Penelope Leach tells mothers that “Because he has you; because... he knows that you care, his sadness need never be solitary; his despair need never be desolation. Whatever the world must do to him, he has a safe haven with you” (1986, p. 444). Her rhetoric is of an infant or child in need of emotional shelter and companionship. What could be worse, she asks, than your son suffering without you?

Dr. Sears is a well-known proponent of 'Attachment Parenting' (Sears & Sears, 2001). Loosely based on ideas from attachment theory and borrowing from traditional infant-care practices from non-industrialized societies (Büskens, 2001), Attachment Parenting is a set of childcare practices designed to prioritize the facilitation of the mother-infant bond (Sears & Sears, 2001). It is the 'style' of parenting I practiced with my son, as described in Chapter 1. Most notably, Attachment Parenting practices include baby-wearing (carrying the infant close to the chest in a baby-carrier), full-term breastfeeding (into the toddler years) and co-sleeping (in or

near the parents' bed). On the Babywearing Advice section of Dr. Sears' website he describes the needs of an infant:

gestation [lasts] eighteen months – nine months inside the womb and at least nine more months outside. The womb environment automatically regulates baby's systems. Birth temporarily disrupts this organization. The more quickly...baby gets outside help with organizing these systems, the more easily he adapts... By extending the womb experience, the babywearing mother (and father) provides an external regulating system that balances the irregular and disorganized tendencies of the baby. (Dr. Sears Institute, n.d., para. 6)

In Sears' text the infant is proposed as a fetus-like neonate in need of a replacement cloth womb. He goes on to say, however, that the most important aspect of babywearing is that it keeps the mother close. The mother should literally tie herself to her baby.

The emphasis on pseudo-wombs in contemporary parenting literature derive from ideas that infants are altricial, born incompletely developed (Small, 1999). Jessica Benjamin calls the belief that we all wish to return to the womb, “the trope of the entire theory of infancy” (1996, p. 133). The desire to return to a womb-like state is occasionally used in psychoanalytic interpretations of adult fears (Lacan, 1938); perhaps the ideologies of infant chaos reflect our own feelings of confusion and self-doubt.

In an interesting reversal, Jung (2012) does not present the infant as chaotic, but as a “sharply defined individual entity which appears indeterminate to us only because we cannot see it directly” (p. 11). Because it lacks a chaotic, exceedingly fragile infant, Jung's conceptualization of the mother-child relationship does not require a maternal container. In fact, he describes

women in the language other theorists reserve for infants. To women with a positive mother-complex, their mother's womb is a place of “chaos” (p. 32) and the mother is “all that is obscure, instinctive, ambiguous, and unconscious” (p. 33). While mothers might rightfully object to such a representation, the Jungian approach to infant needs is less than prescriptive and, in its expectations placed upon mothers, less punitive than most psychoanalytic perspectives.

### **The ideology of the sick infant**

In contrast with the fragility-in-need-of-protection narrative seen in psychoanalytic discourses of infant development and attachment theories, medical and popular discourses about African American infants are phrased in terms of infants' health (a weakness-in-need-of-strength narrative). Instead of enveloping and containing their infants, low-income African American mothers are exhorted to work outside their home and send their infants to 'enriching' government institutions (Macdonald, 2009). The stereotype of the unfit African American mother and her sick baby has been perpetuated by media images of the small, twitching 'crack baby'.

The myth of the 'crack baby' epidemic was widely publicized in the 1980s. Many media reports conflated pathology due to maternal 'crack' cocaine use with known developmental issues common to premature birth (Greider, 1995), rates of which are higher for African American women (Behrman & Butler, 2007). It is now understood that the effects of 'crack' cocaine on infant development were vastly overstated (Lester, Barry et al., 2014; Messinger et al., 2004). But in the era of Reagan's trope of the 'welfare queen' (Geiger, 1995), an intensive rhetorical campaign painted African American infants as sickly and unsalvageable (Greider, 1995; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Zerai & Banks, 2002).

Images of preterm babies were used to criminalize African American mothers. The 'crack

baby' depiction paved the way for increasingly intrusive medical, police, and social welfare interventions for 'at risk' African American families (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995; Zerai & Banks, 2002). The claim that 'crack babies' "cost \$1 million apiece to bring to adulthood" (Califano as cited in Greider, 1995) exemplifies the belief that African American infants, in their 'weakness', would suckle resources not from their mothers but from the state.

In contexts of economic discrimination and negative cultural stereotypes, it can be important for mothers to perceive infants not as fragile, chaotic beings but as survivors (Scheper-Hughes, 1985). African American mothers tend to place their children in this more positive light. Young African American mothers in Lashley's (2007) qualitative study admirably describe their four month-old infants in terms of survivorhood. For example, one participant states that "This is a tough little baby here. She can handle a lot of things." (Lashley, 2007, p. 104). African American mothers also indicate their greater emphasis on the value of infant strength in reporting higher stress levels than European American mothers when their infants are born prematurely (Miles, Burchinal, Holditch-Davis, Brunssen, & Wilson, 2002), and more negative perceptions of premature infants' health (Holditch-Davis et al., 2009).

Few studies have examined the range and bases of African American-centric perceptions of infant characteristics (Lashley, 2007). It is possible that the idea of infant strength is related to African American mothers' resistance to European-centric intensive mothering ideals. Collins (1994, 2000) finds that African American mothers subscribe to less-intensive mothering philosophies, tending to encourage independence, model self-reliance, and engage in other-mothering. This ideology opposes ideas of infants as fragile and disorganized and demonstrates a commitment to raising children who survive oppression.



### **Psychological impact of mothering ideologies.**

Research into the psychological impact of mothering ideologies on mothers has focused on two areas: disappointment and cognitive stress. Studies on disappointment have used the concept of 'expectations' to contrast mothers' future projections of maternal experiences with their lived realities (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005; Oakley, 1979, 1980; Reid, 1983; Shelton & Johnson, 2006). Ann Oakley, a British sociologist, published an ethnography entitled *Becoming A Mother* (1979), and released a deeper analysis of her participants' experiences a year later (Oakley, 1980). Oakley and her assistant interviewed 55 first-time mothers twice before giving birth and twice after. It was a nearly culturally homogenous sample of women who gave birth in a London hospital during the 1970s. Oakley's discussions of the impacts of ideology demonstrate a schism between expectation and reality: 82% of participants reported their experiences of pregnancy as different from their expectations; 93% found their experiences of birth to contradict their expectations, as did 91% regarding the social aspects of motherhood. In all cases, their expectations were better—that the experience would be more pleasurable, less difficult—than their experience.

Reid (1983) critiqued Oakley's research sample for being 93% middle-class. Her research found different outcomes for women of lower socioeconomic status, who expressed fewer feelings of disappointment and shock at the demands of life as the mother of a newborn (Reid, 1983). She believes that mothers in her sample were familiar with the demands of child-rearing through the presence of children in their extended kin networks. She proposes that they were less reluctant to leave the workforce because their previous work had been neither rewarding nor regular. As described in reference to African American infant ideologies, there is some evidence to indicate that class differences mediate the psychological impact of mothering ideologies.

McCormack (2005) and Romagnoli and Wall (2012) found that low-income mothers felt they needed to match their actions to prevailing intensive mothering ideologies in public, but resisted them in private. This indicates that the ideological precepts had not been fully internalized.

Studies of mothering expectations usually take a longitudinal form, speaking with mothers before and after major life events, such as birth (Oakley, 1980; Reid, 1983). Studies of the cognitive stress impact of mothering ideologies can take place over the course of one session (O'Brien, 2007; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006; Romagnoli & Wall, 2012). Women are invited to talk about their ongoing experiences in an area of their lives in which mothering ideologies are thought to conflict with other ideologies or physical or emotional needs.

Examples include the workplace, where individualist capitalist norms clash with expectations of women's nurturance (Hays, 1996; Ramsay & Letherby, 2006); children's schools, where expectations of mothers' advocacy interface with the boundary of the state (Arendell, 2000; O'Brien, 2007); and the experience of having children later in life, where more modern valuations of mothers' readiness come up against older ideas of selfishness (Shelton & Johnson, 2006). In all of these arenas, women struggle to assert their own voices. Whether or not their own values align with those of intensive mothering, they must navigate such societal ideals. They may feel themselves to be primarily tethered mothers, but, even in the case of women who have decided not to have children, come up against ever-present assumptions that they are enveloping (Ramsay & Lethersby, 2006).

In addition to values and practices, intensive mothering ideologies prescribe emotions. Women are directed not only to prioritize their children but are expected to want to do so (Hays, 1996; Oakley, 1980). Shaila Misri, an obstetric psychiatrist, writes that clients who have

internalized ideals of motherhood find it difficult to voice psychiatric concerns that do not align with the emotions they believe they should be feeling (Misri, 2005). Her evidence is anecdotal but aligns with the research. At least one in ten pregnant women experiences depression but only 18% of those women seek institutional help (Strass & Billay, 2008).

Internalized mothering ideologies are thought to invite self-blame as mothers inevitably fall short of societal expectations. Middle-class mothers are found to experience guilt, self-blame, and judgment from their peers (Caputo, 2007; Fox, 2009; Hays, 1996; Wall, 2010). When mothers engage in activities that fall outside the ideological definitions of motherhood (such as sports or leisure time) they struggle to reconcile their actions with their beliefs (Arendell, 2000; Miller & Brown, 2005). Those who have internalized intensive mothering ideologies experience more discomfort with their identities, struggling to adjust to the changes that having children has brought (Maines Walters, 2008).

### **Social impact of mothering ideologies.**

The most obvious impact of intensive mothering ideology is that women put more work into raising children. On average, American women today spend more time working outside the home and taking care of their children than they did 50 years ago (Macdonald, 2009). Mothers are “rewarded” by their children's intense attachment (Sears & Sears, 2001; Wolf, 2002), performing unpaid and unvalued domestic work and receiving lower pay for work outside the home (Hays, 1996; O'Brien, 2007; Wolf, 2001). As with all moral valuations, the intensive mothering ideologies place some people within the bounds of acceptability, and others outside them. In order for one kind of mother to become the ideal, another must become the deviant.

Discourses of deviance control and punish women who do not conform to gendered

norms of motherhood (Fineman, 1995; Rothman, 1994). They solidify the ideology of good mothering, making it increasingly difficult to access a socially-sanctioned space of nurturing care if one does not fit the image of the kind of person who can provide that care. Low-income fathers, for example, face the explicit prejudices of being lazy, abusive, neglectful, and intellectually inferior (Gorski, 2013). This stereotype is exceptionally detrimental, as the identity of fatherhood is more vulnerable to external influences than that of motherhood (Erickson & Aird, 2005).

Intensive mothering ideologies also exert their influence on the lives and experiences of women who are employed to care for their non-biological children. Society-wide thinking about women, children, and child care is reflected in the low regard shown toward childcare workers (Weisberg, 2013; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). Almost half of domestic workers (people who perform housekeeping and childcare work) in the United States are foreign born and 95% are female (Burnham & Theodore, 2012). Unregulated childcare workers are likely to experience minimum wage violations and are more likely than any other unregulated employment sector to be unfairly compensated for overtime hours (Bernhardt, 2009).

Childcare workers often suffer the consequences of systemic exploitation. Childcare work is itself emotionally demanding; immigrant women providing care for American children often experience the additional strain of missing their own children, from whom they are separated. Such mothers are compelled to leave their own children in their home country, despite their wishes. Global capitalist markets profit off of the painful separation of mother and child in the Global South. Arlie Hochschild (2001) questions whether the United States is “importing maternal love, just as [it has] imported copper, zinc, gold, and other ores from third world

countries in the past?” (Hochschild, 2001, para. 11)

One of the emotional coping strategies employed by immigrant mother childcare workers is the development of an emotional bond with the child for whom they care (Parreñas, 2013). In a qualitative research study examining the emotional impact of globalized childcare, one mother states that, “In my absence from my children, the most I could do with my situation is give all my love to that child” (Hochschild, 2001, para. 3). But the essential emotional care work provided by childcare workers occupies a liminal space in American discourses of child development and within broader segments of American society. While it is seen as essential, it is also feared (Parrenas, 2013).

Modern-day intensive mothering ideologies are focused on the development of an emotional bond with a small child (Hays, 1996; Macdonald, 1998). The metaphor of *bonding* is related to the 'tethered mother' version of the cloth-mother metaphor, as it proposes that mother and child could be bound together by an unbreakable tie. As discussed earlier, feminist writers have used the tethered mother metaphor as a visual expression of the restrictions that mothering ideologies place upon them. Most attachment theoretical discourses, however, use the idea of emotional 'bonding' in a positive sense.

According to Macdonald (1998), the idea of bonding has an impact on beliefs about childcare, as the social benefits of motherhood “[accrue] to the person with whom the child has bonded” (p. 33). A woman whose bond with her own child is forcibly broken may welcome the creation of a new tie with a surrogate child. The woman who hires her to look after her own child, however, may find the idea that another woman and her child could form a deep emotional bond to be deeply troubling.

McBride et al., (2005) state that mothers may engage in 'maternal gatekeeping', preventing others from engaging in childcare tasks in order to reinforce their own identities of mother. But mothers who work outside the home depend on alternate care arrangements for their children. Women of high socio-economic status feel pressured to ensure their child's healthy, status-successful development. Intensive mothering ideologies promulgate the idea that mothers are responsible for such success (Joseph & Fass, 2013).

Macdonald's socio-historical (2009) and qualitative (1998) research into the perspectives of childcare providers and mothers finds that employer mothers address their fear of other women bonding with their children by positioning those women as maternal extensions of themselves. This objectification allows privileged women to feel that, instead of being replaced in their child's affections, they are in fact in two places at once. Childcare employees are expected to love their employer's children as if they were her own, but to efface themselves and their roles in the children's lives as soon as their mothers return home from work, a prospect that is troubling and hurtful to many of the women of whom it is expected (Macdonald, 1998).

The belief that another woman can extend one's own mothering capacities—to break the bond with her own child in order to extend a wealthier mother's tether—forms part of the lineage of colonial beliefs. Enslaved African American women in the antebellum American South were frequently forced to breast feed plantation owners' babies while their own were malnourished (Collins, 2000). This oppressive attitude carries through into the present day, continuing to legitimize the objectification of childcare workers, sometimes through the 'Mammy' trope of a supposedly subservient African American surrogate mother (Wallace-Sanders, 2008). The inter-generational trauma of the memory of forced breast feeding may contribute to African American

mothers' low breastfeeding rates today (Talita Oseguiera, personal communication, August 28 2015). Mothering ideologies ensure that some mothers are given advantages over others. The social impacts of such exploitation can affect not only women themselves, but their children and their children to come.

### **Psychological Derivation of Mothering Ideologies**

In an essay first published in 1938, Jung (2012) writes that he believes unexpressed components of the mother archetype (held universally but expressed idiosyncratically) guide Western thought to project a “massive weight of meaning that ties us to the mother and chains her to her child, to the physical and mental detriment of both” (2012, p. 26). He rails against the white-washing of motherhood in the West, where mothers are idealized as selfless, devoted beings.

Jung supports his arguments with vast clinical experience and looks for evidence in the prominent symbols of our time. The Virgin Mary, in particular, has “entirely lost the shadow that still distantly followed her in the allegories of the Middle Ages” (p. 37). He positions the uni-dimensional nature of the modern Virgin Mary (who has figured prominently in mothering ideologies throughout the ages) as a reflection of a collective repression of the archetypal mother, who embodies not only birth but also death.

Rich (1995) describes her experience of mothering ideology in a way amenable to Jungian analysis. She describes the images in her mind as both semi-conscious psychological complexes and as discourses situated in power relations with the outside world:

the booklet in my obstetrician's waiting room, the novels I had read, my mother-in-law's approval, my memories of my own mother, the Sistine Madonna or she of

the Michelangelo Pietà, the floating notion that a woman pregnant is a woman calm in her fulfillment. (Rich, 1995, p. 39)

Rich finds her own ideas about motherhood to be confused and disjointed. She describes textual discourse (booklets and novels) interwoven with highly symbolic mental images of Madonna and child, Rich's own early memories of her mother, and other 'floating notions'.

In *Motherhood and Sexuality*, Marie Langer (2000, p. 54) describes a floating entity similar to Rich's, though more obviously malevolent. It is the 'modern myth' (urban legend) of a couple who return home from the movie theatre to find that their servant has killed and roasted their baby. The servant presents this 'meal' with great aplomb, causing the parents to lose their minds. Langer feels that this story responds to the repressed thoughts of the people who recount it; in an early edition of her work she cited it as evidence of growing unrest with the Peron regime (2000, p. 55).

Langer (2000) proposes that the unconscious maternal needs of oppressed people circulate through socially-embedded narrative (social discourse). Jung's theory of repressed archetypal forces offers a deeper explanation for such symbolism, while Langer's theorizing about this story is focused on situation-specific catalysts. Both posit an underlying psychological reason for widely held implicit ideas about mothering.

Other psychoanalytic theorists agree that mothering ideologies have roots in unconscious processes, but believe that they originate in early childhood experiences of nurturing (Benjamin, 1996; Chodorow, 1989; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991). They feel that ideological, cultural-level confines placed on mothers result from individuals' early experiences of powerlessness and fear (Chodorow and Contratto, 1982; Homans, 1986), or a developmental need for differentiation



(Kristeva, 1984).

Chodorow and Contratto (1982) critique feminist approaches to motherhood that react against or support dominant mothering ideologies. They propose that four major themes of feminist writing derive from “unprocessed, infantile fantasies about mother” (p. 88). These themes are the blaming and idealizing of an omnipotent mother figure; denial or romanticization of maternal sexuality; a narrow and isolationist view of mother-child relationships; and a link between motherhood and aggression and death. The first three themes are present in dominant mothering ideologies, making the critique levied by Chodorow and Contratto (1982) applicable to a larger societal context. The mechanism through which these themes function is one of projection. It is the fear of maternal omnipotence: hatred of the mother who once held such immense physical power and may yet continue to be a psychological presence.

Kristeva (1984) focuses less on a fear of the maternal body and more on the child's natural need to differentiate. She proposes that in order for the child to differentiate from the mother the child needs to make the mother's body abject (to conceive of it as disgusting and untouchable), a transition roughly analogous to Lacan's mirror stage (Covino, 2004). In 'Stabat Mater', Kristeva states that this abjection, repressed, becomes the root of misogyny and upholds ideals of virginity associated with the Madonna (1985).

Margaret Homans (1986) is also concerned with the repression of the materiality of the mother's body. In her work on Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Francis & Shelley, 2010), she proposes that the demon created by Frankenstein evokes revulsion in his handlers by being simultaneously maternal (affectionate) and embodied. Homans sees Shelley's work as part of a larger critical endeavor, applicable to women's roles in society. She states that men seek an ideological

substitute (image) to replace their mother as a means to control her. As the demon comes to life and ruptures the image with emotional needs and desires, it becomes untenable. And as women embody motherhood, their physical selves must be negated.

For a mother to be abjected (Kristeva, 1985) and negated (Homans, 1986), she must be simultaneously conflated with materiality and rejected for that very quality. This focus on maternal embodiment is one of the main connecting points in the cloth-mother metaphor. Both cloth (Gordon, 2014) and maternal bodies (Rich, 1995) are strongly associated with matter and earthly, fleshly concerns. And it is difficult for us to think and write about the importance of the touch of cloth on our bodies without falling into cliché or engaging in a disembodied intellectual exercise similar to the abjection and negation of the mother. Like our perceptions of motherhood, our experiences with cloth are deeply intimate and life-sustaining and just as strongly societally coded as insubstantial, obligatory, and dull.

### **Metaphors and Symbolisms of Cloth**

I have thus far discussed the mother side of the cloth-mother metaphor. I will now move into a discussion of the aspects of cloth that lend themselves well to that metaphoric relationship. These aspects include its use as a metaphor for the body, self, life story, and relationships; its appearance in psychoanalytic discourses, and the role of cloth creation in psychological healing. I also discuss its uses as a practical tool for maternal nurturing in swaddling and baby wearing, as well as a rhetorical tool in discussions of those practices. And finally, I address the significant role it plays in coping with the loss of a loved one or the grief of separation.

Cloth has great metaphorical power. It is used as an archetypal symbol and a rhetorical substitute not only for mother figures but also for a multitude of objects and concepts. Gordon

(2014) attributes the wide range of cloth-related metaphors to our unconscious experience of cloth as an anthropomorphized object. She states that it feels 'alive' to us in the ways that it moves seemingly of its own accord: responding to the forces of wind or gravity, absorbing liquid, and folding inward when touched. Because it seems alive, its physical qualities inspire emotional reactions within us, and it is ubiquitous in all life-stage rituals (Gordon, 2014). There is no 'symbolism' or 'metaphor' of cloth; its symbolisms and metaphors reflect the needs and rituals of those who use it.

Certain ideas, however, do recur. Cloth is usually perceived to be passive and yielding but strong in its flexibility (Gordon, 2014; Attfield, 2000); it is known to adopt only the shape of the forms it covers (Gordon, 2014; Harris, 2008); it wraps, ties, contains, holds, encloses, protects, filters, and buffers (Gordon, 2014; Johnson, 1999; Kalaba, 2011) and thereby warms and embraces (Barnett, 1999; Gordon, 2014; Stallybrass, 1993). It is created through the overlapping and interlacing of threads. It is associated with the body (Barnett, 1999; Femenías, 2010; Gordon, 2014; Hamlyn, 2003; Jones & Stallybrass, 2000; Stallybrass, 1993) and bodily fluids (Gordon, 2014; Stallybrass, 1993). It can smother and shroud (Gordon, 2014), but for the most part it is associated with comfortable domesticity (Addo, 2013; Barber, 1994).

Gordon (2014) describes five main metaphors of cloth; in addition to containing and tying (as explored earlier in the context of the mother-as-envelope metaphor and the tethered-mother metaphor), she sees cloth metaphors in the idea of thread as a pathway; the creation of cloth as representative of growth and birth; and in its decay, cloth as a symbol of death (2014). Cloth has also been metaphorized as a symbol of the body, the self, and life story.

### **Cloth as a metaphor for body and self.**

Cloth is understood to be deeply connected to the human body (Barnett, 1999; Femenías, 2010; Gordon, 2014; Hamlyn, 2003; Jones & Stallybrass, 2000; Stallybrass, 1993). Its associations with fertility and nurturing can be representative of our own physical memories of the bodies of our mothers or other caretakers (Kalaba 2011). As will be discussed further in this review, the association between cloth and death is related to our experience of it as a material body that will decay over time, much like our own (Gordon, 2014; Stallybrass, 1993). Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1996) believes that the most salient archetypal symbol for the body is the magic carpet, as it has a secret ability to transport the rider into alternate worlds, much like the body can be manipulated to allow us to access alternate states of consciousness. Ancient Egyptian mummification wrappings were thought to allow the body of the deceased to enter the after-life in a similar way; they formed a skin around the body, protecting and preserving it.

Collier (2012) draws from Valoma (2010) to add 'skin' to Gordon's list of metaphors. She notes that the term *skinn*, from Old Norse, meant 'outer covering'. While Collier does not fully explicate this analogy, her supposition could be supported by the way that embroidered tapestries show a smooth exterior on one side and a messy interior of inner workings (knotted thread) on the other. Skin also appears smooth and cohesive from the outside, containing a network of nerve fibers internally. Collier adds that clothing, like skin, is often seen as a metaphorical expression of inner being. This idea is related to the Jungian idea of 'persona', the false self which we present to the outside world (Jung, 1966).

Our bodies (and their positions in discourse) contribute to our individual senses of self. Similarly, textiles can be used to create identities and personas. Belk (1988) states that the possession or production of certain items contribute to identity, particularly if they can

demonstrate creativity, mastery, and the movement of time. Johnson and Wilson (2005) studied the motivations of 39 amateur female textile artists and their findings support this claim. Their participant narratives indicate that the textiles the women create are symbolic of their status, identity, and relationships.

Jung (1966) conceives of identity through the idea of a persona, a psychological mask that simultaneously broadcasts an identity to the outside world while hiding characteristics that are true to the person themselves. He describes the mask as a “conventional husk” and as a “false veil” (2014). In Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1996) Jungian fairytale analyses, the items of clothing worn by characters are archetypal representations of their persona. In the story of Vasalisa and the Baba Yaga, for example, the young woman must wash the crone's clothes in the river. Through her initiatory task, Vasalisa learns how to care for a persona that will protect her in the world. Estés sees the possibility of female empowerment in this act and in other conscious uses of persona.

### **Cloth as a metaphor for life story and relationships.**

Cloth can be related metaphorically to narrative. The formalized methods of many textile-creating crafts (discreet stitches comprising a knitted object, for example) analogize neatly to linear narrative patterns, where words follow one another. Each stitch holds together that which came before and that which comes after it, as each word is connected to those that precede and follow (Krueger, 2002). English idioms reflect this metaphor, as we 'spin tales' and 'weave stories' (Gordon, 2014).

Ancient European goddesses of spinning or weaving were often goddesses that determined life courses, such as the Greek Morai, four female figures who mercilessly spun

mortals' fates (Neumann, 1955). This symbolic relationship continues today in the discussion of life stories. Collier (2012) quotes from Klass (2008), who phrases a life story in terms of knitting, "We cast on—we follow the pattern or we improvise—we choose the best materials we can... and hope that time and stretch will be forgiving" (para. 1). A participant in Johnson & Wilson's (2005) study states that she needs to keep the textile pieces she has created because, "It is not just needle-work, it is other parts of my life that I have poured into it. It has made life what it is" (p. 112). The stories of women's lives do not only engender their creation of textiles, but are also guided by cloth-creating experiences.

The metaphorical relationship between text and textile forms the backbone of Kathryn Kruger's *Weaving the Word: The metaphors of weaving and female textual production* (2002). Kruger writes that, historically and in some communities today, narrative events were depicted through woven symbols and stitched images. While a patriarchal interpretation perceives written text as superior, having replacing the former textile-based mode of communication, she sees it differently. Kruger proposes that written text did not replace this tradition but was born from it, a theoretical approach she supports through analogies to Kristevan psychoanalytic theory (Kristeva, 1984).

Sociologist Anita Garey (1999) positions cloth as a metaphor for the relational value of women's (particularly mothers') lives. She uses the metaphor of weaving to describe the work that mothers perform. She uses this metaphor for two reasons. First, in a deliberate attempt to counteract other metaphors of motherhood, such as 'balance', which she sees as incapable of reconciling nurturing work with paid labor. The weaving/relationship metaphor can encompass women's lived experiences of interconnectedness of work and family, combining the elements

just as a woven fabric is created of threads brought together. And second, she believes that mothering is a creative and conscious activity, like the sequencing of patterns and threads in making cloth.

Garey's (1999) short explanation of the metaphors underlying her work is reminiscent of Bracha Ettinger's (2004, 2006) psychoanalytic and philosophical work on intersubjectivity. Ettinger uses both the womb and weaving as metaphors for creativity and human connection in her conception of 'matrixial space'. People of all genders can participate in this space, and it is composed of "a webbing or a matrixial weaving...between several individuals" (2004, p. 87). Ettinger opens up the mother-as-envelope metaphor to present a space through which we might more broadly conceive of human experience, from the perspective of both mother and child. For her, the matrixial space is one of connection between people that is both corporeal and not biologically defined; it is absence and presence, fusion and differentiation.

In a personal essay, Silver (2007) details the intersubjective experience she had in writing a paper about Ettinger's theory. She shares a familiar story of bodily disenchantment, being hurt and frustrated about her inability to conceive a child. Her aging mother, in what she first perceived as a misguided attempt at comfort, told her, "I am your baby." Through thinking about Ettinger's theory in her academic life, Silver (2007) was able to change her perspective on this statement.

She realized that her mother was not speaking of taking the place of an infant, but extending an invitation to open up an emotional realm of co-existence and care that is only most commonly—but not exclusively—accessed in mother-infant relationships. As a woman who had suffered two miscarriages after undergoing one abortion, and whose mother is ailing, Silver

(2007) is as much a mother as I am. Ettinger's theory allows her to fully experience motherhood, without requiring the 'child' to be her biological offspring.

Inclusive, creative, non-essentialized, and intimate, Ettinger's (2004, 2006) theory is useful in resisting ideologies of motherhood. Liss (2009) applies Ettinger's womb-textile metaphor directly to the (literal) mother-child relationship. She states that, as Ettinger's theory permits boundaries to be fluid and changing, it is a more true-to-life description of the mother-infant relationship than psychoanalytic theories proposing containment as the ideal maternal function.

Liss' statement perfectly encapsulates the too-easy metaphoricity of cloth: it is the metaphorical basis of Ettinger's (2004, 2006) theory of intersubjectivity and relationships, a theory that allows mothers to move away from prescriptive ideas of infant containment (Liss, 2009; Silver, 2007). And, as described in the earlier 'Mother as Envelope' section of this thesis, cloth is used as a prescriptive metaphor of mothering ideologies—the very discourses that demand that mothers perform containment. Cloth is always in transition.

### **Cloth and Psychology**

No systematic empirical research has been conducted on the psychological elements of experiences of cloth (tactile or emotional). Limited bodies of research focus on the emotional benefits of textile creation; and the psychological effects of infant swaddling. The heated debate about the ramifications of swaddling contains much talk and little study, with psychoanalytically-oriented theorists positing severe negative consequences and a limited number of randomized medical trials providing evidence of slight emotional benefit. Research into the emotional benefits of textile creation has been qualitative, the samples homogenous (predominantly



European American), and conducted using convenience sampling methods (Collier, 2012).

**Emotional effects of textile creation.**

Johnson and Wilson (2005) interviewed and gave questionnaires to a sample of 39 women, finding that they engaged in textile production for purposes of creating identity, making meaning out of the events of their lives, and because they enjoyed the products of their labors. Nelson, LaBat, and Williams (2005) interviewed 25 female textile artists in Ireland, documenting their struggles to educate the public about the importance of their work, and describing its intense (though undefined) personal value. Reynolds (1999) presents a case study of the use of collaborative textile work in helping a client through complex grief.

Collier (2011) conducted the first and only large-scale study of women who produce cloth, asking them about their reasons for doing so. She surveyed 891 women and found that they were most likely to knit (as opposed to sew, spin or weave). Forty-seven percent said they used textile making to cope with bad moods and that they felt that it was effective for this purpose. Collier (2011, 2012) attributes such salutogenic effects of knitting to the feelings of pleasure that can come from creating something beautiful.

While limited in number and scope, these studies have uncovered some of the ideological orientations undergirding American women's leisure textile production. Collier (2011) found that the women in her sample focused on personal fulfillment and the enhancement of social relationships instead of commercial value. They preferred to give items away rather than to sell them. This rejection of capitalist ideals is reminiscent of the relational value ascribed to children and childcare in intensive mothering ideologies (Hays, 1996). Similarly, a participant in Johnson and Wilson's (2005) study stated that she had to keep her finished products, as they are "like

babies” (p. 121). Like infants, created cloth items contain elements of our bodies, our minds, our emotions, and our experiences.

Might women who struggle with transitioning into motherhood identities be helped by creating knitted or woven products that are “like babies”? Much more empirical research could be conducted on the ideologies of motherhood and femininity with regard to textile production and their possible application to clinical contexts. The effects of cloth—cloths we know, cloths we buy, cloths in which we bundle ourselves, cloths we use to bundle our babies, the clothes of deceased loved ones—could also be studied in this way. Although we have no systematic study of these issues, some psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners have worked with them. And when it comes to the psychological effects of cloth used in infant care, almost everyone has an opinion.

### **Emotional effects of infant swaddling.**

Cloth has extensive practical uses in infant nurturing and, as this thesis outlines, deep metaphorical associations with motherhood. To swaddle a baby is to wrap it tightly in cloth or swaddling bands so that some portion of its body is immobile (at least its arms, though historically this zone has also included the legs and head) (Karp, 2003). Phenomenological explorations of memories of being swaddled or swaddling one's baby, and the associations one has with the cloth used to do so, have not been conducted. Although psychological investigations of swaddling began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Watson & Morgan, 1987), no controlled psychological studies of its long-term effects on the infant, caregiver, or their relationship have been conducted.

Early research, such as Geoffrey Gorer's 'swaddling hypothesis' (Gorer & Rickman,

1949), depicts behavioral patterns in populations that practice traditional swaddling. He describes the parenting (mothering) style of Russian peasants as “one of succoring protection, rather than of great emotional attachment” (p. 96) and believes that swaddling has the effect of producing impulsive, mutely rage-filled adults—the effects of a too-tight maternal envelope.

More recent psychological and psycho-historical literature has specified some of the mechanisms through which swaddling is thought to damage infants. These include: allowing for the mother's 'projective' (non-empathic) care (Frenken, 2012); the reduction of skin-to-skin touch and maternal interaction (Frenken, 2012; Fauntleroy, 2011; deMause, 2010; Badinter, 1981) which then causes stress for the infant (Kennell & McGrath, 2003; Whiting, 1971), parental misattunement (Fauntleroy, 2011) or interference with breastfeeding, which is supposed by some researchers to enhance mother-child bonding (Mohrbacher, 2011; Bystrova, Matthiesen, Voronstov et al., 2007); and its use as a pacifying tactic, stunting the expression of infant attachment needs (Vikander, 2012) in service of parental convenience (Frenken, 2012; O'Mara, 2011). To some, parental love and swaddling are mutually exclusive (deMause, 2010; Badinter, 1981). Swaddling is positioned ambivalently within both the maternal envelope and tethered mother metaphors: as both an expression of “succoring” envelopment and as a tool mothers use to escape from the tethers of infant care.

In the introduction to this thesis, I described 'convenience' as a double-edged sword for mothers today. It is connected to the idea of maternal 'selfishness', a rhetorical critique of swaddling for centuries. In 1764, Rousseau portrayed wet nurses who swaddled as mercenary and lazy, willingly neglecting the children in their care (1979). Family historian Lloyd deMause writes that swaddled babies in pre-Enlightenment Europe were often left in their own feces, their

neurological development stunted to the point of having created a “black hole” by lack of stimulation (deMause, 2010). More modern anti-swaddling discourse parrots intensive mothering ideologies, admonishing parents to remember, “You're not managing an inconvenience, you're raising a human being” (Fauntleroy, 2011, p.1).

Most babies exhibit lowered emotional and physiological arousal when swaddled (van Sleuwen et al., 2007). Decreased arousal is beneficial for infants whose arousal levels are otherwise elevated, such as those who are stressed or in pain. This 'swaddling passivity' has also been found to benefit mothers' mental states in some contexts (Ohgi, Akiyama, Arisawa, & Shigemori, 2004). Combined with the greater ease of caring for a swaddled infant, it may mean increased mobility for the mother (Vikander, 2012). A mother who does not sacrifice her mobility for her child, however, does not adhere to the intensive mothering ideologies. Like the mother who received a concerned phone call from my neighbor after allowing her child to cry alone, she will pay the price of non-conformance.

Our perceptions of swaddling as a metaphor for helpful or intrusive maternal enveloping, or as an inappropriate attempt to break free of mothering duties, will vary according to our beliefs about mothers and their responsibilities. It is likely that one's early experiences with cloth and swaddling contribute to these ideological positions. Montréal-based artist and therapist Esther Kalaba (2011) writes that “For the newborn infant, cloth literally becomes a secondary holding environment, and the first experience of feeling mother; of comfort, safety, and warmth... or lack thereof” (12). Susana Rotbard's (2010) work explores these very early childhood sensory experiences.

### **Cloth in Psychoanalytic Practice**

In *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust describes the memory of the sensation of eating a cookie dipped in tea, given to him by his doting mother: “The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of our intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect” (1982, p. 1). Susana Rotbard, an Argentinian-born psychoanalyst, feels that experiences such as Proust describes are ripe for therapeutic exploration and uses 'some material object' as the central tool with which to access her clients' early childhood memories (Rotbard, 2010).

Rotbard invites her clients to work with materials that have traditionally been allocated to artists, including textiles. But it is not just the materials that are 'artistic'. Rotbard believes that her clients can interact with materials in ways that have been ascribed to artists. She rejects the idea that artists have a monopoly on early maternal memories leading them, and them alone, to “delight in the exact texture of materials and the metaphoric quality of objects.” (Pollock, in Liss, 2009, p.20).

Rotbard's analysis explores the ways that the materials she supplies allow unconscious bodily memories to take form. Her work forms a new branch of art therapy in its focus on the symbolic value of the materials the client chooses, and not the interpretation of the resulting product. Clients follow Rotbard's specific techniques and use cotton balls, ribbon, straw, and more traditional art therapy materials such as paint and clay.

She finds that a psychological process defined by carefully curated materials encourages the “irruption of affective memories into consciousness” (Rotbard, 2010, p. 84, my own translations), through the non-directed meeting of the sensorial qualities of the object and the emotional intelligence of the body. The product created can then become part of the therapeutic

relationship, allowing the therapist an insight into the corresponding rhythms and textures that make up the client's internal life (2010).

Rotbard's work does not engage in the traditional psychoanalytic quest of bringing unconscious materials into symbolic reality. She works with unconscious elements, often forgotten dreams or sense memories of preverbal infantile experiences, within a context closer to their original state. To try to put these sensory-affective memories into conversation would require their removal from their position in the emotional/physical body. Working with materials primed to induce unconscious projection, Rotbard can allow clients to share experiences with her that they might not otherwise be able to articulate, and which the intellect might undercut.

This method, she believes, also helps the therapist-client dyad to recreate the primary relationship. She finds that the empathy and attunement with which the therapist relates to the client are amplified by the therapist's sensitivity to the rhythm and texture of the client's creations. She writes about working with a woman whose narcissistic qualities had stopped her from fully developing her maternal identity and whose daughter was suffering as a result.

In their work together, the mother used two white cotton balls. Although Rotbard does venture that these items “signify the purity of children, her pregnancy, menstruation, as well as death and the abortions of her grandmother” (p. 223), she does not presume that her interpretation is essential or even accurate. Instead, the cotton balls are seen as instances of sensation: “signs which refer to formal and rhythmic qualities (forms, colors, spatial location, textures, malleability, sound when touched, etc.), which appeal to intersensorial fields of perception and to affective memory” (p. 225). The client's choice and positioning of the cotton balls gives Rotbard a felt sense of the client's internal landscape. I will return to this idea in

analyzing Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion* in the integrative component of this thesis.

### **Cloth in Psychoanalytic Theory**

Cloth can be used as the litmus test for a psychoanalytic theory's ability to acknowledge lived experience. Its multivalent, multi-metaphoric nature allows psychoanalytic thinkers to incorporate it into their theories in the realm of the theoretical or the practical, the disembodied or the corporeal. Theoretical orientations that follow the latter route, such as those put forth by Luce Irigaray (1985), Bracha Ettinger (2004, 2006) and Susana Rotbard (2010) tend to be better able to describe and accommodate maternal experiences. Those that perceive cloth in the abstract, such as in Freud (Freud, 1996; Freud, 2010) and Lacan (1998, 1999), tend to neglect maternal subjectivity.

In his 1933 lecture *On Femininity*, Freud tells his audience that weaving is women's only socially useful contribution to civilization (Freud, 1996). He proposes that it arose not out of women's ingenuity but as an imitation of nature, inspired by the presence of pubic hair in the development of sexual maturity. Because pubic hair 'conceals' the mother's unbearable phallic lack, he believes that weaving is a psychic extension of that hair. When women weave, they do so to create a stronger, better veil for feminine inadequacy.

As Thurer (1995) notes, Freud's work is nearly devoid of maternal analysis; where mothers do appear they are incidental to child-rearing, performing necessary physical duties but influencing little. They are vague, amorphous, and conflated with their bodies. Where Freud does discuss mother-related psychological issues, he works from a daughter-centric perspective (Chodorow, 1989).

His description of the young girl's version of the Oedipus complex reflects his inability to

define mothers as people: “For a girl too her first object must be her mother and the figures of wet-nurses and foster mothers that merge into her” (Freud, 1996, p. 4). Just as he attempts to theorize mothers into mother figures, Freud considers cloth in the abstract: a metaphysical characterization of unconscious drives. Perhaps he sees no value in exploring its physical qualities; perhaps he cannot imagine such an exploration at all (Irigaray, 1993).

Lacan's approach to cloth is similar, although in his later years he developed one interest in real-life textiles, an interest in the topology of knots. Nobus (2003) describes Lacan weaving ends of rope together and drawing knots for himself and his audience members. He is particularly interested in the so-called Borromean knot, in which three rings are intertwined in such a way that if one were to be cut, the other two would no longer be joined (Lacan, 1999).

In its simplest form, the Borromean knot requires each ring to cross over the others four times in an over-under-over-under pattern—a process that the participants in Collier's (2011) study of textile creators would recognize as weaving. Lacan proposed that his designations of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary could be adequately represented in this way. Psychosis, he believed, is the dissolution of the structure through the severing of one of its rings, which may lead to the creation of a fourth ring tying the otherwise loose rings together (the 'sinthome') (Nobus, 2003; Wertheim, 2006).

Lacan addresses textiles more directly than Freud does but he bases his work in the language of topology—a branch of mathematics he knows little about (Nobus, 2003). And although he plays with it as an object to be touched, his metaphor of the Borromean knot is primarily a visual one. The 'knot' (technically a chain), while replicable in string, is known historically as a geometric shape painted onto the Borromeo family's crest (Roudinesco, 1990;



Ulmer, 1994). It may be replicable in real life, but the Borromean knot is not a worldly object. It has no other known function, but to act as a visual symbol for something else.

Freud and Lacan encounter cloth again in the *fort-da* game analyzed by Freud in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2010). He describes his grandson Ernst's game, which consists of throwing toys in and out of his crib and delighting in their disappearance. Freud writes that Ernst particularly enjoys playing with a spool, which he propels into his curtained bed by holding onto the string attached to it while yelling "fort!" ('gone!'), then retrieving it by pulling the string and yelling "da!" ('here!').

This game is used as a starting point for thoughts about the mother-child relationship for multiple theorists (Bosanquet, 2010; Derrida, 1987; Freud, 2010; Irigaray, 1993; Lacan, 1998; Winnicott, 1941 in Caldwell & Joyce, 2011). Lacan (1998) places his emphasis on the phonetic aspects of the game. He believes that the boy's repetition of his newly formed vowels (*o* and *a*) signifies his entry into language (the Symbolic), which creates himself as a subject. Freud believes that the child is re-enacting the appearance and disappearance of his mother (Freud's daughter, Sophie).

Freud believes that in controlling the outcome of the game, Ernst is able to reduce the hostility he feels toward his mother in moments when she leaves him. For Freud, the spool and thread are a substitute for the mother (Bosanquet, 2010). The mother who is present, or absent, or absent and then present again, is necessarily the focus of the child's mind. The spool he holds and the thread to which it is attached only serve to facilitate the child's unconscious need for control.

Derrida disagrees, feeling that the significant symbolic element is not to be found in the spool but in the bed in which the game takes place. To Derrida, the bed is Sophie—Freud's

daughter and the child's mother —and Freud's writing about his grandson's game is in fact a description of his inability to connect with her in an emotionally vulnerable way. He describes the veil surrounding the boy's cot as a 'hymen' but, as if his own thinking were too crass, refuses to explore the meanings of this (Derrida, 1987; Bosanquet, 2010). He writes,

I myself will not open this curtain—I leave this to you —onto all the others, the words and things (curtains, canvases, veils, hymens, umbrellas, etc.) with which I have concerned myself for so long. One could attempt to relate all these fabrics to one another, according to the same law. I have neither the time nor the taste for this task." (Derrida, 1987, pp. 308-309)

Luce Irigaray (1993) gladly takes up this gauntlet. She does not find it distasteful to talk about the mother's hymen in the context of cloth. But she abandons the idea of the cloth of the bed or the thread on the spool as the exclusive domain of metaphor, and turns instead to an exploration of the exact physical qualities of the textiles involved. She is interested primarily in the veil surrounding the cot, which she imagines as white and gauzy. She sees it as a membrane between the mother and the boy's world and chides Freud for ignoring its physical qualities:

"Freud does not seem to care about the nature or texture or indeed the color of this veil. Apart from the thread and the reel he has nothing to say about any of the things that ensure the return... He has nothing to say about what properties in the veil make the going-return possible." (1993, 31)

She exhorts us to remember the visceral qualities of the experience that make it possible for the little boy to enter the world of language.

Irigaray's critique is vastly different from the interpretations put forth by the other, male

psychoanalysts. It acknowledges the importance of felt experience and echoes Irigaray's writing about women, where she focuses on the female body as the root of feminine difference (Irigaray, 1985); Irigaray similarly focuses on the substance of the textiles as the root of their importance to Ernst. Irigaray's experience as a mother informs her analysis and she explains that, "...in my reading, it is not amazing that the bed should be *fort*. The game occurs by day and children hate to stay in bed" (1993, p. 31).

In an early paper, Winnicott (1941 in Caldwell & Joyce, 2011) takes yet another approach, eliminating textiles from the interaction altogether. He uses a Kleinian focus to map out stages of infant play and exploration in relationship to objects that they enjoy dropping in the presence of caregivers. Winnicott chooses not to address either the symbolic or embodied experience of the thread, bed, or veil of the *fort-da* game. His work on transitional objects does, however, acknowledge their metaphorical and tactile importance (1953).

### **Cloth and Loss**

While cloth and loss are not usually connected explicitly on ideological or rhetorical levels, cloth figures largely in lived human experiences of loss and can become a metaphor of personal healing. This section outlines the ways that cloth created within a context of loss has helped women to cope with those losses: loved ones' clothing can carry associations of their lives after they are deceased, the repetitive aspects of its creation can facilitate the eruption of repressed trauma; and through its associations with nurturing, it represents the pain of deprivation when nurturing has been denied.

### **Creating textiles to grieve and heal.**

Grief is the only emotional context that equals nurturing in its consistency and frequency of association with cloth. To grieve is to care. When it comes in the context of death, grief often reflects the emotional and physical care work given to the dying person. If we consider mothering as a set of actions or thoughts (Ruddick, 1995); or as the performance of physical and emotional work of caring for another person (Glenn, 1994), we can see grieving as an intrinsically 'motherly' act.

Creating cloth can be a way to address and cope with grief. In its association with mothering ideologies (particularly the aspect of nurturing), it may provide a confirmation of the woman's identity as a mother or caretaker as she goes through a difficult time. Stories of women creating cloth in order to navigate through complex grief abound (Collier, 2012; Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Napesni in Gordon, 2014).

Ollie Napesni, whose son was murdered, engaged in the longstanding tradition of making quilts in honor of a lost loved one. She stitched quilts to give to her community at her son's memorial ritual: "every morning I get up at 4:00 and I just cry and sew...so a lot of the quilts...have teardrops on them I'm sure" (as cited in Gordon, 2014, p. 251). Napesni describes using textile production for a therapeutic aim that is tripartite: social, in that she will bestow these quilts to her community and thus participate in a communal healing ritual; behavioral, in that the activity provides structure and focus for her day, and perhaps the therapeutic component of the pleasure of creating a beautiful thing; and finally, deeply metaphorical or mystical in her concept of the quilts holding her tears. It is as if she is using the cloth to create her own holding environment, a safe space to express her grief. She does not state this, but I imagine that the use of cloth brings back memories of nurturing her own child, or being nurtured by her mother.

Collier (2012b) expresses a metaphorical version of the process described by Napesni. She describes her experience of creating cloth that does not absorb her tears but does absorb her pain. She writes about having crocheted a sweater

“while my friend was dying; all of my pain and her pain were absorbed into the sweater during the time I was with her. The sweater became more than an object of distraction or of beauty. It became an object that held memories of my feelings and it captured precious yet difficult moments shared in time.” (para. 5)

Collier here makes the cloth's function as a containing space explicit (“an object that held memories of my feelings”); as it is in its use in nurturing, the use of cloth in grief is a meeting of metaphorical, psychological, and tactile events.

Textiles have begun to take their place in therapeutic contexts, through the work of Rotbard (2010) and Collier (2011, 2012a, 2012b). Ann Futterman Collier is a clinical therapist who works with textiles in her therapeutic practice, and the author of the book *Using Textiles and Handcrafts in Therapy with Women: Weaving lives back together* (2012a). Like Rotbard, she works with textiles but without Rotbard's specific theoretical orientation and practice. In her work, Collier encourages clients to pursue the production of textiles, noting that this process may give rise to traumatic memories, lead to the creation of a healing object, and/or give the creator a sense of pleasure or well-being.

Collier (2012a) states that one of the purposes of her book is to help guide non-professional textile-makers who encounter traumatic memories in themselves or others while producing cloth. The unbidden eruption of repressed memories is an interesting phenomenon in this context. It is perhaps related to trance states, which may be caused by repetitive cognitive

loops that disable other cognitive functions (Wier 2006). The repetitive nature of textile-creation work fits well into this conceptualization. Marion Zimmer-Bradley describes a fictional account of this phenomenon, describing a character falling into a trance while spinning and remembering the son from whom she is separated (2001). Like the lived-in uncanniness of clothing after a person has died, the hypnotic aspects of textile creation are intensely emotionally salient but have been neglected by mainstream psychological study.

Cloth creation can also be used in a symbolic sense, for example in Collier's (2012a) project of teaching women to create shawls to help women to heal from trauma (2012a). She notes the specifically protective metaphorical nature of a shawl, which is thus understood to act as a symbolic protective force, protecting the women so that they can heal (a conscious use of the idea of the maternal envelope). Estés (1996) also describes creating 'scape coats' with her clients, textile cloaks covered in epithets women have heard used to describe themselves, in an effort to remove them from their self image.

Narrative aspects of cloth creation can be similarly therapeutic. Frances Reynolds (1999) published a case study of a woman dealing with complicated grief, with whom she co-created a stitched tapestry; Rachel Cohen (2013) describes working with women in conflicted-affected areas of Ecuador to create visual narrative pieces that convey their experiences of war trauma. The practice was inspired by Chilean women's practice of creating *arpilleras* during the Pinochet regime—visual depictions of torture and suffering, created collectively and in secret. The use of textiles to process grief and to express resistance can be seen around the world. Some Afghan women create 'War Rugs', in which traditional methods of carpet-weaving are subversively combined with representations of modern-day war machinery (National Public Radio, 2015).

### **Loved ones' clothing.**

James Stallybrass (1993) writes touchingly of the death of a good friend and colleague, Allon White. He states that owning and wearing Allon's clothes helped him to enter into his grief. It was only in wearing a jacket he had casually inherited from Allon's widow that, in the middle of academic proceedings, Stallybrass was “quite literally overcome. I could not read, and an embarrassing silence ensued. I cried...I realized that for the first time since his death, Allon White had returned to me” (p. 35).

White had returned to Stallybrass not as a ghost or a mental image but in the physical reminders of his body: creases in the jacket arms, “because I cannot recall [him] as an idea” (Stallybrass, 1993, 50). For Stallybrass, cloth is memory through the ways that our bodies adopt it; the lived experience of cloth on Stallybrass' skin was the lived experience of the death of his friend's body.

Rarely explored in psychology and other academic disciplines, a melancholic of textile uncanny is known to those who have lost a loved one whose body they knew well, whose clothes survive in their just-lived-in states (Brick, 2011; Kalaba, 2011; Michas, 2013; Shad & Jonderko, 2015). Psychotherapeutic approaches to grief would do well to incorporate textile mementos.

### **Cloth as loss in Morrison's *Beloved*.**

First published in 1987, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1998) is a work of resistance. It is a fictional documentation of the very real ways that enslaved African-Americans coped with trauma in the antebellum south. It is an exercise in grief, exceedingly difficult to read while simultaneously difficult to put down. Her use of cloth within the story is manifold.

*Beloved* shows the ways that relationships can be fragmented by poverty and slavery. The use of cloth parallels this fragmentation and demonstrates deep emotional and physical need,

often in the face of insufficient resources. It represents hope in its offering of the possibility of power, nurturance, and emotional containment; and loss when those desires are thwarted.

When she decides to marry, Sethe sews herself a wedding dress out of clothes she was supposed to mend for the slave 'owner', who has refused to hold a celebration. After consummating her marriage, she must unstitch the seams of her wedding dress and put the items back into their original form. She is 14 years old. The dress of many cloths shows Sethe's desire to inhabit a world of femininity and power, the world of a married mother. Instead, she is forced to rip that dream apart by the seams.

Before fleeing the her oppressors, Sethe sends her eight month-old daughter ahead, hidden in a wagon with her brothers, "three children...chewing sugar teat under a blanket on their way to Ohio" (p. 71). While I will discuss the cloth teat in Dürer's painting of *The Madonna and the Siskin* as symbolic of a divide between mother and child, the teat in *Beloved* performs the opposite function. It binds the child to her mother: "so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it" (p. 16).

This child later dies at Sethe's hands in a tragic, but effective effort to keep her daughter from being abused in slavery. When Sethe's 'daughter' later returns as the stranger Beloved, her infantile rage includes indulgences such as ribbons and new dresses, and sugar. "She gnawed a cane stick to flax and kept the strings in her mouth long after the syrup had been sucked away" (p. 55). Beloved seeks sugar but through the sugarcane strings, she finds the cloth in which it was wrapped. Sethe's effort to comfort and maintain connection with her child through the cloth teat has come back to haunt her.

At times, it is cloth that nurtures Sethe. Like Baby Suggs, the family matriarch portrayed



in memory, cloth is a calming, orderly presence, a necessity of life that holds things together. When Sethe experiences a flashback to her mother's lynching and the story of her mother's infanticides, she gets up to fold the sheets drying by the fire. They are still damp but she needs to fold them so that her hands have something to do; the dampish cloth soothes her, as do the familiar and repetitive motions of folding, as the system of lines and folds that comprise a folded sheet give order to chaos.

In the examples of the wedding dress, the sugar teat, and the damp sheets, cloth is an aspiration to nurturance. Sethe wants to be a married woman and a mother, and she uses cloth to create that image, even if only for a moment. When she gives her baby a sugar teat, she is denying that child the milk that other caretakers might give her, but giving the child a promise that her mother will find her. From the child's perspective, this promise is eventually broken when the slaveowners return and Sethe protects her child by killing her, becomes a fixation that is only temporarily fulfilled by the strings of sugarcane. And the memory of her mother's lynching is so painful that Sethe needs the comfort of folding so badly that she folds the sheets by the fire before they are dry.

If cloth provided an adequate bandage to the wounds of loss experienced by Morrison's characters, it would be a nurturing element within this story. But in its inability to contain that grief, it underscores the depth of those traumas. Like a dead loved one's worn sweater, cloth in *Beloved* is a presence that reminds us of all that is absent.

## **Source Material and Methodology**

### **Renaissance images of Madonna and Child**

It has been said that all mother-child images in the West reference the Madonna-Child

dyad of Christianity (Batchen, 2013). The image is archetypal, canonical, and can be adapted to promulgate various ideologies about women, children, and their relationships. As the source material for this integrative thesis, I examine three Madonna-Child paintings, all completed in Renaissance Europe in the same decade: Andrea Solario's *Madonna of the Green Cushion* (1505), Raphael Sanzio's *The Sistine Madonna* (1512); and Albrecht Dürer's *Madonna with the Siskin* (1506). I analyze these images through the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and in light of the role that cloth plays in these images of maternal-child relationships.

The Virgin Mary is often associated with cloth in religious texts (Gordon, 2014; Rudy, 2007; Twomey, 2013) as the creator of textiles, the wearer and bestower of textiles, and as a spiritual force associated with textile relics. Christian iconography adopted the pre-existing pagan traditions that associated female goddesses with both childbearing and cloth creation (Gordon, 2014; Neumann, 1955). In medieval northern Europe the Virgin thus became “premier weaver, miraculous clothier, blessed knitter, and seamstress” (Rudy, 2007, p. 6). She was depicted spinning and sewing at the moment of annunciation when the angel Gabriel came to her, often with the thread lying conspicuously over her abdomen to signify the creation of new life (Neumann, 1955). She spun purple (royal) cloth as a child at the temple (Rudy, 2007) and into the present day she is spoken of having created a seamless, ever-growing garment for Jesus as he developed past infancy (Helmick, 2011; Williams, 2005) and having created him in her womb like a textile (Benedict XVI, 2005).

An excess of cloth implied wealth, and when the Madonna is not depicted as a humble peasant (Williamson, 2010), she is heavily draped as befits a religious icon. This splendor is sometimes used to demonstrate her generosity, such as when her cloak is used as a symbol of

enveloping shelter (Figure 2) or when she bestows a box of silk to an adoring Thomas (Rudy, 2007). Her robes may demonstrate her maternal nature through the symbolism of her red gown, representing the supposed connection between menstrual blood and breast milk; or when she uses her veil to swaddle the newborn baby Jesus (Twomey, 2013).

*Madonna of the Green Cushion* was painted by Andrea Solario in 1505 (Figure 4). Solario was an admirer of Leonardo (“Andrea Solario: Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist,” n.d.) and his influence can be seen in this painting. The image, part of the canon of the *Madonna Lactans* (Twomey, 2013), also called the *Madonna del Latte* (Carroll, 1996), is a reference to the Madonna of Humility, a trope that became common in the Medieval ages and continued for several hundred years (Williamson, 2010). In these images the Madonna is depicted as a simple woman with simple needs. Sometimes she is fancifully adorned, but most often she is seated alone, portrait-style in a natural setting. It is thought that the Madonnas of Humility were created in an attempt to humanize Mary and her Son (Carroll, 1996; Williamson, 2010). When he appears in the Humility images, he is depicted naked and, as in the case of the Solario painting, holding his foot while he nurses.

In this image, the Madonna gazes down at her son with intimate concern, a slight smile on her face. She holds her breast out for the toddler-aged child, adjusting the nipple so that he can suckle it more easily. He in turn gazes up at her, cradling his right foot in his hand. She feeds from her right breast and a bucolic scene rolls in the background. The child rests on the eponymous green cushion, which seems to be placed atop a raised platform. While the child is naked, the two are surrounded by rich cloth. The Madonna's head scarf is white and draped in a way that resembles the flow of breast milk. She envelops the child with her arms, her gaze, her

nourishment, and her abundant robes.



Figure 4. Andrea Solario, *Madonna with the Green Cushion* (Louvre, 2015)

Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* was completed in 1512 (Figure 5). The painting is framed by long green curtains, an effective *trompe l'oeil*. Madonna and child are only two of six religious figures depicted in the image, along with Saint Sixtus, Saint Barbara and two cherubs. The Madonna stands barefoot atop a gathering of clouds, gazing with concern to the slight right of the viewer. The child in her arms is nude, large and healthy. He looks toward the viewer with piercing eyes and, as in Solario's painting, loosely grabs his right calf. The Madonna carries the child on her right side. Saint Sixtus beseeches her while Saint Barbara gazes fondly down to earth. The cloths in this image are sumptuous and some, such as Saint Sixtus' robe, are intricately woven. All of the major characters in this image touch cloth—a gesture that reflects the wariness, tenderness and foreboding on their faces.



Figure 5. Raphael Sanzio, *Sistine Madonna* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, 2015)

Dürer's *Madonna with the Siskin* (1506) (Figure 6) follows a different, older visual syntax: paintings in which Madonna and Child sit together atop a throne but do not relate humanistically to each other or the other figures in the painting (Thurer, 1995). The Madonna sits with a desk in front of her, a scrap of paper placed atop it; a long red cloth drapes vertically behind her. Two cherubs float above her head, carrying a crown of flowers. The child sits in her lap, facing the viewer but gazing without focus into the bottom-right corner of the frame. John the Baptist, portrayed as a child, places a lily into the Madonna's hand.

The Madonna accepts this lily with eyes averted (to the left of the viewer) and her disproportionately large right hand sits atop a copy of the Old Testament. Her long, uncovered hair suggests a pursuit of a womanly beauty that opposes modern-day maternal ideals. Unlike Solario and Raphael's depictions of the child as completely nude, Dürer's infant Jesus is wearing an unbuttoned and open christening gown. The child's open gown reflects the Madonna's apparent indifference toward him; he holds a cloth teat in his right hand, and leans his head toward the siskin, a small yellow bird perched atop his left shoulder.





Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer, *Madonna with the Siskin* (Krén & Marx, 2015)

In these three paintings, the Madonna is depicted holding a naked child and in a natural or heavenly setting. All figures are white-skinned and able-bodied. In Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* and Dürer's *Madonna with the Siskin* the foreknowledge of crucifixion hangs heavy in the air. Raphael's painting may have once hung in a triptych, with a picture of the crucifixion to the Madonna's left, or in front of a crucifixion—an explanation for her mournful gaze (“The Sistine Madonna,” n.d.). Dürer's painting contains several codified religious symbols. The siskin, for example, stands in for the more common goldfinch, was known as a symbol of the predicted crucifixion (Friedman, 1946).

Solario's image does not show such symbols of foreknowledge; in fact, explicit symbolism is scant in his depiction. Solario aims instead to naturalize the Madonna and child by showing a cozy, cloth-surrounded breast feeding relationship. The tradition of such Madonna *Lactans* images may have been related to church fathers' condemnation of the common practice of wet-nursing, in which middle- and upper-class mothers hired poorer women to nurse and raise their babies for up to five years (Badinter, 1981; deMause, 1995; Thurer, 1995). This same practice was used coercively and traumatically during slavery in the antebellum American South.

According to late Medieval and early Renaissance thought, the Madonna's sacrifices were twofold. First, that she gestated and birthed the Christ child; and second, that she breastfed him. While breastfeeding is portrayed in Madonna *Lactans* images as a mother's duty, other religious visual rhetoric portrays it as a sacrifice. In Intercession images, the Madonna stands next to Christ and below God, exposing her breasts to indicate that she gave of herself in order to raise her son (Ryan, 2002). Her sacrifice is rhetorically equated with the crucifixion, as Christ exposes his bloody wounds in these same images, and the two figures request God's benevolent

intervention. On their behalf, God intervenes to prevent the suffering of the people below.

The idea of suffering and sacrifice is absent from Solario's image. He makes breastfeeding look easy. There is great intimacy in this portrait, visually amplified by the unified field provided by the whiteness of the child's skin and the whiteness of the madonna's casual head scarf. The scarf itself perpetuates the idea of milk in its color and in its flowing form. A rolled end seems to snake out an unusual angle above the child's head, as if reaching from the mother toward him. While it is in fact part of the larger piece of the Madonna's head cloth, which we assume hangs behind her, the white fabric folds like a river bend, emulating the stream of white liquid within the child's mouth. The child is surrounded by rich textiles. They emphasize the emotional bond between mother and child.

In contrast, the Sistine Madonna shows apprehension and physical awkwardness. The Madonna is depicted standing, her long blue robe flowing out beneath her. Her headscarf drapes over her shoulder and she holds it around the bottom of the very heavy-looking child in her arms. The only cloth that touches the Christ child is his mother's cloak, which more than her hand, cradles him. This element is part of a tradition of depicting the infant Jesus atop his Mother's cloak in nativity scenes (Twomey, 2013) and suggests the mother-as-envelope metaphor of the tradition of viewing the Madonna's Cloak as a buffering, protective sphere.

There is no breastfeeding in the Sistine Madonna picture. The Madonna does, however, have a left breast. In other Renaissance paintings, such as Solario's which depict the Madonna breastfeeding, this is surprisingly uncommon. In the Solario painting, we can see that the Madonna's right breast is exposed but her left is covered by her reaching left arm. This is not a mistake or happenstance; Dorger (2012) found that in most Madonna *Lactans* images, the non-

nursing breast simply disappears. Not only is it not displayed, it is not allowed to exist at all. She describes the breast that is exposed for nursing as "a virtually unattached appendage" (p. 212).

The Sistine Madonna's left breast indicates her corporeal perfection and womanly beauty, which is, none the less, covered by the various cloths around her. Because she is depicted standing, the Sistine Madonna's robe, as sumptuous as those in Dürer's painting, is more noticeable. In fact, it is her left leg draped in luminous blue that forms the very centre of the composition. The fluffy white clouds below are reminiscent of the cloud-like forms of tufts of cotton or breast milk in water.

The Dürer painting *Madonna With The Siskin* (1506) shows no attempts at mother-child intimacy. It is a Madonna/Child dyad in which the child has no need or interest in nursing. He does not face the Madonna nor look up to meet her eyes. He sits astride a large cushion on her lap, facing the world, much like his regal mother behind him. She is not holding him— in fact, no parts of their bodies touch.

At the time of this painting, the Netherlands were beginning a strong Protestant history ("Netherlands Reformed Church: Dutch Protestant denomination," n.d.), but nevertheless remained within Catholic influence. Dürer chose not to paint one of the newer-styled Madonna *Lactans* for his subject; instead he followed a more traditional visual syntax in which the religious figures are not human but icons, surrounded by a range of highly specific symbolic objects. The object most directly relevant to my study is the sugar teat and its positioning.

While sugar teats have likely been used for millennia, this painting is the first known visual depiction of a sugar teat (Castilo & Roca, 2009). In preparatory drawings for this painting, Dürer depicted the child raising a cross in his hand, but in the painting he replaced it with the

teat; Krén and Marx (2015) suppose that perhaps the soother contained poppy seeds and thus would signify sleep or death and thus reference Christ's death in a similar way. The fact that teats were usually made of linen, symbolic of religious purity at the time (Twomey, 2013), supports their argument. Beyond the symbolic, it is evident that Dürer made one conscious effort to humanize the child even beyond his nakedness. Dürer's depiction of a cloth teat demonstrates the child's infantile desires.

Breastfeeding is not a requirement for the establishment of a close mother-child relationship. In Dürer's painting, however, the cloth teat acts not simply as a replacement for the breastfeeding relationship but also as a symbolic break in that relationship. Without the provision of milk, the child shows little need to cuddle up close the mother's chest in this moment. She is still there—he is, after all, still a child and this is, after all, still a Renaissance painting—but unlike the Solario and Raphael paintings, the connection between mother and child is not the subject of this piece. They do not seem to be connected at all.

The emotional state depicted in the Dürer painting is primarily one of preoccupation. As commonly found in early Madonna-Child paintings (Thurer, 1995), none of its six religious figures seem to care or realize what the others are doing. The Madonna stares off into space as St. John tries to give her a flower; St. John looks beseechingly up at her while a cherub beside him tries to get his attention. The baby Jesus gazes off into the distance, perhaps listening to the chirps of the siskin.

All three of these Renaissance Madonna-Child dyadic images were created within a decade of each other but they demonstrate diverse ideologies. Taken together, they may show an early burgeoning of the cloth-mother metaphor, as it began to be promulgated as an aspect

essential to femininity. Cloth alienates the mother in Dürer's painting, through the teat but also in its position hanging behind her, separating her from the natural setting. But it protects the child in an ephemeral halo or cloak of containment in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*. In Solario's *Madonna Lactans* image, the Madonna's milk-like head cloth serves to inculcate its audience into patriarchal norms of motherly devotion. This is the cloth-mother that we know best: using her own body and cloak to nurture and envelope. The covert symbolism in these images is prescient of the subtle and deeply ingrained mothering ideology to come.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

I conduct a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of reproductions of three early-Renaissance paintings of the Madonna and Child dyad for the integration of this thesis. I choose these images because all three are remarkably similar and remarkably different. Their similarities provide a basis of comparison, their differences an opportunity for analysis. Textiles figure largely in each painting, reflecting various ways that mothers and their nurturing capacities can be associated with and metaphorically represented by cloth.

Most ideas are disseminated through visual and linguistic devices. Van Dijk positions Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the study of these devices' messages, their truth claims, and their claims to legitimacy (2001). Through careful reading of one or more texts, its methods of production and dispersion, and its historical and socio-cultural contexts, critical discourse analysts attempt to expose the ways that power and inequality are enacted and perpetuated (Fairclough, 1995). Lakoff & Johnson (2003) introduce the study of metaphor to these analyses. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) enlarges the CDA research paradigm to include non-linguistic sources that betray underlying ideologies, including images and sound

(Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Scollon & Levine, 2004).

Discursive analyses of mothering ideologies have studied the transfer of mothering ideals through multimodal methods including images, texts, conversation, and websites. The role of intensive mothering ideologies in breast feeding rhetoric has been thoroughly analyzed with regard to its education (Blum, 1999; Locke, 2009), activism (Newman, 2010; Rothman, 2008), and health promotion (Kimball, 2008). Images of mothers in American magazines (Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Shipps & Caron, 2013) and mothers' self-representations in family photos (Rose, 2004) and performance art (Bell, 2004) have also been explored. Online discursive analyses have examined depictions of frail children in need of intensive mothering care on international adoption websites (Carter, 2011) and problematized surrogacy rhetoric (Rothman, 2014).

Long before the internet, the image of the Christian dyad of Madonna and Child informed mothering ideologies for thousands of years (Batchen, 2013; Liss, 2009). To this day, depictions of the relationship between Madonna and Child often reflect idealized visions of mothering behaviors (Soriano, Lim, & Rivera-Sanchez, 2015; Stevens, 1973) and qualities (Williamson, 2015). The material objects with which the Madonna is associated, including textiles (her gown, and cloak) and textile-related objects (spindle and veil) similarly convey instructive and symbolic messages (Rudy & Baert, 2007; Carroll, 1996).

### **Methodological approach.**

In the analysis of the three Renaissance images, I draw from the visual analytical work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Dondis (1973) and Barthes (2010). These theorists provide frameworks for discussing the formal elements of an image and examining the way those elements contribute to the viewer's subjective experience. I look at these factors in light of the

prescriptions of modern-day mothering ideologies, noting the ways that the images use cloth as a metaphor for nurturing, enveloping, and tying.

I adapt Barthes' (2010) term *punctum* from studies of photography to painting for this analysis. The *punctum* is an element of an image that breaks through the viewer's intellectual understanding of the image (the 'studium') to enter into the viewer's psyche (Barthes, 2010). Barthes describes the *punctum* as an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me...that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (2010, p. 26). In my analysis, I discuss and analyze the elements of each painting that draw my interest in this way.

Researchers in visual discourse analysis have attempted to identify the role and effect of an image's formal elements (Dondis, 1973; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). For example, rectangles and squares (shapes rarely found in nature) tend to represent machination, logic, and human intervention in Western visual discourses (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Circles, on the other hand, are organic shapes conveying “endlessness, warmth, [and] protection” (Dondis, 1973, p. 44). The size, position and relationship of shapes within the image's composition are also relevant, with dominance attributed to higher and larger forms. I use these 'visual grammars' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) as a starting point for my analysis of the Madonna-Child images.



### Chapter 3: Integration

This integrative section is organized first by image, using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis methods to examine the relationships between figures within the images. I begin these discussions with a description of my own reactions to the images. After exploring the ways that the figures relate to each other (expressed visually through the mother and child's postures) and the role that cloth plays in these images, I then explore the connection between Barthes' (1978) concept of the *punctum* and Ettinger's (2004, 2006) concept of *matrixial* space. I re-examine each image through that lens and then discuss the ways that the tethered-mother metaphor may be applied to images and texts depicting breast feeding and pregnancy.

#### Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*

My first response when I look at this image is one of appreciation for the image's aesthetic value. The colors are beautiful to me, and similar to those in the photo I included at the beginning of Chapter 1, which depicts me as an infant, swaddled and carried, by my father (Figure 1). After that rush of appreciation has passed, I feel unease. I feel myself in the role of the Madonna and I feel too much responsibility. I imagine the child weighing heavily on me, the struggle to carry him without any support. His weight is not properly distributed—he is not fully balanced. I notice the sweetness of the child, the passivity or wisdom on his face in contrast with the cherubim, who look, as some parents would say, 'like trouble'.

#### Forms, postures, and relationships.

Compositionally, Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* is perfectly balanced. The Madonna and her child appear at the top of an almost equilateral compositional triangle, with Saint Sixtus on the left and Saint Barbara on the right; they balance the image by gender and by their visual weight.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) state that triangles denote directionality and emphasis. This triangle is stable on its base, with its arrow pointing up. The green curtains surrounding the image emphasize the triangle's vertical direction. The Madonna's head, covered in her headscarf, forms its top. She (and her head cloth) have primacy in the image. Her child, the baby Jesus, is secondary to her power, as are the cherubs beneath her and the saints on her right and left sides.

The power relationship between the Madonna and the other figures in the painting is also evident in the directionality of her own and the others' gazes. The Madonna gazes softly to her left, away from Saint Sixtus, who gazes up at her beseechingly, gesturing perhaps to a crucifixion and placing his left hand over his heart. Saint Barbara gazes down, perhaps toward the cherubim, a soft smile on her face. The cherubim, seemingly unaware of the other figures in the painting, lift their eyes up with gazes unfocused and undirected. The baby Jesus follows his mother's gaze, slightly more directly addressing the viewer. The direction of gazes in this image is disorganized. There is no eye contact between any of the figures. The effect is disorienting but dynamic.

In contrast with the other paintings in this analysis, the painting of the *Sistine Madonna* depicts few circular and organic shapes. There is, however, a plenitude of semi-circular, sickle shapes. The Madonna's headscarf is the most obvious example, as it billows out to the Madonna's left arm. The generous folds of the green curtains on either side of the image echo this shape, as do the cloud puffs, Saint Sixtus' golden robe and the half-dome shape of his bald head.

Visual grammarians present no pre-formed interpretation of semi-circles, but do tell us that half-formed shapes bring tension to the image as our eye attempts to fill out a shape it knows well (Dondis, 1973). A full circle indicates organic wholeness, eternity. What is half of organic, half of wholeness, half of eternity? It is the promise of everlasting life with a caveat. None of the

figures are being harmed in the image of the *Sistine Madonna*. But we know that soon they will be. Christ will be crucified while his mother watches.

My personal reaction that the christ child is not “fully balanced” corresponds to the plenitude of half-circles of this image. The Madonna's billowing headscarf creates a vertical half-circle, a cloth shape that would topple over if it were a solid. Her stature as well implies a sense of teetering: her left leg is lifted up, pulling on the folds of her robe. She seems to be standing, or about to stand, on one foot. Moreover, she is not standing with two feet on the ground, but with two feet in the clouds. The feeling of impending doom is exacerbated by this sense of misbalance and the instability of the hold she has on her child.

The metaphor of 'balance' is one that Garey (1999) proposes in contrast with 'weaving' in her study of women's work and home lives. To her, the idea of 'balance' implies a dualism of work and home that simply does not exist within women themselves. Instead, Garey's mothers are portrayed as weavers of their familial relationships. Garey does not explain what metaphors she might use for women who withhold from 'weaving' such relationships. Are they (mis)balanced? The Sistine Madonna, in asserting her power to ignore Saint Sixtus below her, in standing on one foot, in carrying her child in an unfeasible way, in her association with an unstable geometric form, is far from balanced.

The Sistine Madonna is also like modern-day American women in the depth of her fear for her child. Research by Maines Walters (2008) finds that American mothers of all socioeconomic strata but particularly in low-income situations, struggle with feeling both entirely responsible for their children and powerless to create a world that is safe for them. The Sistine Madonna expresses the same sentiment, as she carries her child awkwardly and alone,

and thinks of the impending crucifixion with fear. The image does not show what the long-term effects of such fear could be, but it does show itself in the solemnity of her face.

The awkwardness of the way the Madonna carries her child relates to the concept of 'convenience' and my own experience of baby-wearing. The distance from which the Madonna carries the sizable child from her hip suggest strain on her wrists and arms. And the lack of support under the child's tailbone does not allow him to distribute his weight to assist her in any way. The mother's ability to exert herself on behalf of her child, while showing no evidence of strain in her face, is a characteristic demand of modern-day mothering ideologies (Büskens, 2001; Hays, 1996; Rich, 1995). Because we understand children's needs as immense, urgent, and best met by the mother (Hays, 1996), the very fact of maternal comfort is suspect. The Madonna's grace in hiding any discomfort that carrying the child might give her is similar—albeit superlative—to my own experience of baby-wearing.

I made a statement at the beginning of this paper that, “I carried [my son] in a homemade sling most waking hours for a year...It injured my hip but, in calming him, it kept me sane.” (p. 3) This statement relates to the ideology of infants as chaotic spaces in need of organization and protection, needing to be carried and 'calm[ed]'. My ideological belief that I needed to provide calm for my son was combined with the convincing metaphor of the cloth sling as a space of calm envelopment. The belief that infants are chaotic, that mothers need to calm them, and that cloth attached to the maternal body is a way to do so, all contributed to a physical practice that, in the end, proved injurious to the mother. As I type these words, I notice the ideological forces operating in my own head, as I think, *But wasn't it better for him? It helped him, so it was worth it.*

The idea that the detriment of my body is 'worth' a benefit to my son is a part of the Christian ideas of the Madonna and sacrifice. It is as if my son, in being a 'chaotic' baby, suffers more greatly than I do, as Christ suffers more greatly than the Madonna when he is on the cross. His need for comfort is greater than my need for hip alignment. Unfortunately, the belief that carrying the baby in a sling is calming and will have long-term positive effects, is not supported by research. Although the theory outlining the benefits of baby-wearing is well-developed (Büskens, 2001; Sears & Sears, 2001; Sears, 2015), only one study has provided evidence for the emotional benefits of baby-wearing (Anisfeld, Casper, Nozyce, & Cunningham, 1990)).

The child's posture in the *Sistine Madonna* painting is equally interesting. The child, without apparent purpose, touches his hand to his right leg. The child in Solario's painting does the same. As a parent, I recognize these movements as those I have seen in my own children: the desire to play with the toes, the flexibility to bring the leg high into the air while holding onto it at the same time. Even newborn infants grasp reflexively onto fingers and objects placed in their hands. In the Solario image, where the crucifixion is not referenced, I feel that this posture is one of comfort: the enjoyment of nursing and of being unclothed giving rise to a sense of freedom and playfulness within the child, as expressed by a casual interaction with his own body.

In the Raphael image, however, I read the gesture differently. It reads as a movement of self-comfort: the child holding on to his body with one hand, while the other touches the cloth of his mother's headscarf. In fear, the child grasps not only his own body but also his mother's veil, the cloth that protects him. The fact that the child touches his own body with one hand and the cloth with the other tells us, perhaps, that he finds comfort in them equally.

In this desire for self-comfort and cloth-comfort, we can see the value of the insight that

Winnicott (1953, 1992) brings to our understanding of infant development with the 'transitional object'. While Winnicott believes that the most appealing qualities of the object are those which are 'life-like' (similar to Gordon's belief that we metaphorize cloth because we can easily anthropomorphize it (2014)), I question this assertion. I wonder if the most appealing qualities of a transitional object are not those which appear 'alive', but those which appear to be most mother-like. Perhaps the child intuitively reaches for soft, cloth-like materials to perpetuate the development of what Rotbard (2010) terms his 'affective memory'. If this were the case, the child would seek mother-like cloth objects more frequently as he grew up, and began to differentiate himself from his mother. Winnicott does state that these are the qualities that first draw infants' interests, and that the desire for an anthropomorphized object increases as children develop (1953).

I believe that the consistency with which we, as adults, associate cloth with nurturant mothering, indicates otherwise; that affective textile-based memories are too great for us to simply grow out of. In the painting of the *Sistine Madonna*, the Christ child is at least one year old. He grasps his mother's veil as if it could protect him. As a piece of cloth, it cannot. But as a piece of cloth, it does give him comfort. He has his flesh and his mother's cloth; the child in Solario's painting has his flesh and his mother's milk.

### **Metaphors of cloth.**

In the way that cloth creates the half-circle shape that conveys a lack of balance and fractured wholeness, it echoes the way that Toni Morrison (1998) uses cloth in *Beloved* to signify yearning and loss. The desire for nurturing—both to give and to receive—are exemplified by the presence of cloth and the way that the characters turn to it for comfort. Like a child sucking a

sugar teat because her mother is captive, the figures in the Sistine Madonna reach for cloth to feel that safety is near.

Every figure in the image, save for the cherubim, touches cloth without any purpose other than for self-comfort. Saint Sixtus touches his robe where he places his hand toward his heart. The Madonna touches cloth in using it to cradle her child, mediating her touch of his skin with her head scarf. Saint Barbara holds a piece of cloth she has wrapped around her shoulders, touching it in front of her with her left hand. And the baby Jesus, in addition to being cradled within it, touches the cloth of his mother's headscarf with his right hand.

Experiences of early childhood take precedence in psychoanalytic theories. Our bodily, emotional memories from that period of time are thought to be difficult to access but sometimes carried in our bodies (Rotbard, 2010). The concept of experiencing cloth in an early infant context of nurturance, creating within us an imago (Isaacs, 1948; Jung, 1981), is evident in some aspects of this image. The small ghostly faces floating in the background, on the sky behind the Madonna and child, are as undefined and compelling as early infant memories. The fantastical heavenly setting indicates a time before separation from our nurturing figures. And in a Lacanian reading, Saint Sixtus' delivery of the news of the crucifixion—hard words to hear, of a separation between mother and child, and delivered through speech—could be analogous to the introduction of 'logos', masculine rules and language (Kristeva, 1984; Lacan, 1938). In these small ways, psychoanalytic ideas of early infant experiences are visible within the painting.

In terms of the figure herself, the Sistine Madonna is cloth-like in association, simply by being so completely surrounded by it. She cradles her child in cloth, thus extending her physical and emotional protection. She is draped in cloth, and the softness of the clouds on which she

stands, combined with the green drapery around the painting, all accent the roundness of her face. She seems soft, and is cloth-like in this way. Other aspects of her figure conform to cloth-like qualities of softness: her oblique stance, where she seems to be standing almost on one foot, her body slightly turned to the right, indicating flexibility; although she is aware of her son's impending torture and doom, her posture shows no aggression or rigidity. Despite the setting, she seems more human than ethereal, and in this way her qualities are also cloth-like, as cloth is deeply associated with the body (Collier, 2012; Gordon, 2014; Stallybrass, 1993).

In the act of enveloping the child, however, the Madonna falls short of complete physical and emotional protection. The child remains unclothed and uncovered. And, unlike the permeable 'maternal envelope' described earlier in this thesis, the Madonna does not filter out the painful news delivered by Saint Sixtus. The child gazes mournfully out of the painting, in full awareness of the pain that the future will bring. This depiction goes against the grain of both attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Winnicott, 1964) and modern-day mothering ideologies in which mothers are expected to filter negative experiences out of the environment, correctly assessing the child's developmental stage and ability to process such information before delivering it.

Other ways in which the Sistine Madonna does not follow the cloth-mother metaphor include the detail and emotional expression in her face, and the existence of her left breast. All expressions of women's subjectivity resist the cloth-mother metaphor. Despite Gordon's (2014) protestations that cloth is life-like, as an object it is fundamentally faceless, inert and inanimate. When women display human behavior and share human experiences, they are less cloth-like. The Sistine Madonna's worried, tender expression renders her irredeemably human. In a similar way,



her left breast is an indication of womanly beauty. Beauty is not essential to child-rearing and indicates that the Madonna has value beyond her position as a mother. When the Madonna's breasts are not being used to nourish a child, they are often absent from Renaissance paintings (Dorger, 2012). Their inclusion in this image helps to identify the Madonna as an aspirational figure; in this way she is not explicitly cloth-like.

### **Dürer's *Madonna with the Siskin***

My first response on looking at this image is to register simply how much I dislike it. Every painting has a language, and this painting was not created in my idiom. I find the child's nudity disturbing—not the nudity per se, but the child's gown flayed open like a skin, unbuttoned at the neck—and I don't want his genitalia to be so central to the image. I dislike the maniacal way the Madonna gazes off into the distance, her pupils too round. The thing that draws my eye the most is the cloth teat, hovering like a small round doll's head. On further reflection, however, I have found that this small shape is not the *punctum* for me. It is not a place of resistance or piercing, but rather a place to rest my eyes in an otherwise discontented image.

### **Forms, postures, and relationships.**

Compositionally, the Madonna with the Siskin is imperfect. It is nearly symmetrical in the red cloth rising directly behind the Madonna, the two cherubim floating on either side of her head. But the young saints beseech her on the bottom right corner of the frame, not large enough in size to provide dynamic tension but figuring largely enough into the painting's narrative to draw the eye. Knowing that the teat was originally going to be a crucifix, as explained in the literature review, makes this imbalance more understandable: the strong graphic of the cross, combined with its symbolic importance, would balance the small saints, their concern, and the

flower they proffer. It would also be a more obvious match for the visual syntax of the painting, as most other objects in the painting's foreground are pre-established symbols.

The cloth teat does fit in with the other elements of the painting, however, as there are a number of other small circles in this image. In addition to the circle of the teat, there are the circles of the Madonna's too-round eyes, her thin necklace, the roundness of the left cherubim's head. These circles feel more complete than the semi-circular shapes in Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* but small, too tight.

There is canonical symbolism in this image through the siskin, the book, the saints, the lilly: symbols codified in religious discourses at the time provide some containment for the painting's many elements. The Madonna is flanked by archetypal images of male and female sexuality in the background. On her left, the masculine symbol of phallic verticality, a tree rising with a plume of leaves at its top and a smaller stump at its base. On her right side, a stone archway opens up into a world beyond. It has a small (clitoral) tree at the top of the archway, which is draped in wispy greenery. The 'masculine' side is closer to the foreground, indicating a preference for masculine characteristics, or perhaps echoing the emphasis placed on the male child's genitalia.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) suggest considering the ways that objects in a painting are positioned in terms of left and right. Often, objects mirror each other across the vertical central fold, as this creates a balanced, if simplified, composition. They state that objects on the left are usually considered 'given'—information already known—and objects on the right are considered 'new' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

In this approach, the cloth teat in the baby Jesus' right hand (the left side of the painting)

is conceptually and visually mirrored by the siskin perched on the baby's left arm. Corresponding to the idea that the information being provided by the siskin on the right side of the painting is 'new', the baby tilts his head toward the bird, as if listening to a message (most likely a warning about the crucifixion which the bird symbolizes). As the child has both arms raised, they form a short horizontal line of peach-colored skin across the middle of the painting. The cloth teat, positioned on the left, is a 'given' and the words of the Siskin are new. Perhaps this is an indication that the child 'knows' the teat in infancy, and is now progressing into a developmentally more mature stage, learning about the harsh reality of life as the messiah. If so, this would echo the interpretation I give the news from Saint Sixtus in the analysis of the *Sistine Madonna*.

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) talk about 'vectors', by which they mean imaginary lines that connect actors with the objects on which they act. These lines are often represented by linear visual elements in the painting, such as an arm or gun. In baby Jesus' lifted arms, he creates a vector of attention toward the siskin, emphasizing his connection with the bird and its message. His horizontal arms may also be designed to invoke a sense of foreboding of the crucifixion, as they are spread out at the shoulders at an unusual angle. What's more, the rest of the child's nude body sits somewhat vertically below them: an approximation of the cross.

The Child's left arm lifted to his side almost presents a circle, as he seems close to touching his own face or upper arm with his finger in a way similar to the self-touching of the baby Jesus in the *Sistine Madonna* and *Madonna with the Green Cushion*. His movement does not, however, complete the circle and he does not quite touch his own body. Like Raphael's child, he knows of the future crucifixion, symbolized by the siskin. Unlike Raphael's child, he

shows no need for self-comfort, grasping neither at his mother's robes nor at his own body. The disconnect between the tragic narrative of the image and its low level of emotional expressiveness is both interesting and disconcerting. The lack of emotionality in the mother's gaze is reflected in the low emotionality in the child's gaze. An attachment theoretical interpretation might find that the mother had not provided a secure base for the infant to develop his emotions (Ainsworth, 1967; Karen, 1991).

### **Metaphors of cloth.**

Cloth acts as a barrier between mother and child in this image. It comes between the mother and child through a cushion, robes, and through the teat, through which he does not express a need for breast feeding. The cloths are, however, the richest element of this image. The Madonna's robe drapes and folds, the christ child's gown hangs long behind him, as if it is a ceremonial outfit, perhaps a long christening dress.

The idea of the cloth-mother in the sense of the mother-as-envelope metaphor is completely absent from this image. In fact, the Madonna seems to have little interest in protecting or sheltering the child. His body is completely exposed to the elements, as his gown has been unbuttoned and lies exposed around him. In my reaction to this painting I describe it as "flayed like a skin." It is an appropriate choice of words, considering Collier's (2012) description of skin as one of the major cloth metaphors.

For a skin to be flayed open, the body is slit down the middle front. The job of the skin is, like the cloth mother in modern intensive mothering ideologies, to hold, protect and contain. It is as if the metaphor of cloth-skin lives in my mind beside the metaphor of the cloth-mother; and when I see an image in which the cloth-mother is not enveloping, the cloth-skin metaphor is felt

to be similarly broken. Perhaps this is an archetypal symbol related to the ideology of the helpless infant: the fear that the child will literally 'fall apart' if the mother is not there to hold him together with her cloth.

The Madonna with the siskin is a supremely powerful being. She does not care about the interactions other people (the young saint, the cherub beside him, the cherubs above her, the child on her lap) are trying to have with her. She holds a book—indicative at the time of specialized knowledge and unusual female literacy—and wears a rich robe. Her hair is long, perhaps to denote physical beauty, and she is being crowned with a coronet of flowers. She has adorned herself with a necklace. While this image's visual syntax follows a pre-renaissance tradition, it is iconoclastic in light of today's mothering ideologies, based on Victorian era ideals of purity and humility (Thurer, 1995). By today's standards, Dürer's Madonna would be considered a 'selfish' mother for indulging in her appearance with adornment while her child is undressed. Moreover, she is engaging with the double-edged sword of 'convenience', in not looking at him and he, not being monopolized by her gaze, is engaged with another being (the siskin). The very fact of a child talking to a bird, and not being watched or entertained by his mother, goes against most modern 'good mother' depictions.

The cloth teat in this painting is similar to the one described in Morrison's *Beloved* (1998). It is possible that the teat Dürer's infant is holding is formed of linen and contains fat or opium; both were known as symbols of death, and represent it in a way similar to the crucifix (Krén & Marx, 2015). But it may, as the sugar teat Sethe gives her baby, be composed of cotton and contain sugar ("The evolution of pacifiers," n.d.). The offhand way that the child holds the teat, with his right pinky finger held aloft and his right index finger loosely grasping the teat's

base, may demonstrate a relaxed playfulness that Sethe's children do not have the privilege to engage in. Sethe's infant sucks the sugar teat in order to feel connected to her mother in the long and hazardous journey to freedom. Dürer's infant Jesus holds his teat aloft as if it were a rattle, instead of a transitional object (Winnicott, 1953), the possession of which can feel like a life-line for a child in danger.

The long red cloth hanging behind the Madonna and child separates the dyad from the natural scene in which they have been painted. It is a deep crimson red, referencing blood and breast milk (Twomey, 2013). It emphasizes the Madonna's red lips, which, combined with the angle of her head and the protrusion of her chin, seem fabricated and mask-like. Masking is a known quality of cloth, which can rarely change the shape of an item, but has the ability to hide, covering that which lies beneath. The metaphor of 'mask' is related to the Jungian idea of persona (1966), also described in textile-like terms as a husk or veil (Jung, 2014).

While the Madonnas in Raphael and Solario's paintings seem more human, and thus less cloth-like, Dürer's Madonna's mask-like face, while engaging in the masking quality of cloth, does not seem to be an expression of docility. As I discussed earlier, personas can be used as tools for female empowerment. According to Estés (1996), women need to carry personas for their own protection.

Intensive mothering ideologies convey idealized mothers as genuinely empathetic and connected intimately with their children (Wolf, 2002). Seen in this context, women are portrayed as perhaps using their personas to function in the outside world, but always removing them to perform nurturing actions at home (Hays, 1996). This thesis, on the other hand, follows the contrary belief that motherhood, in concept and in action, is performative (Friedman, 2013). The

choice to use images as source material parallels this belief. Images themselves are mask-like, and a critical discursive analysis of images of mothers engaging in prescribed maternal acts is not an act of unmasking, but an act of examination. A dissection of visual depictions of mothering can allow us to choose which mothering masks we wear.

**Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion*.**

I feel curious when I see this painting. The child, enrapt with the mother's gaze, does not turn to look at the viewer at all, and I feel an urge to tilt the picture on its right to get a better glimpse of his face. Am I hoping that he will turn his attention to me? I am struck by how comfortable the child looks, how the action of grabbing his foot seems indicative of that comfort, the mother's knowledgeable adjustment of her nipple an example of the same.

**Forms, postures, and relationships.**

A visual grammatical analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996) of this image tells us about the relationships it portrays. The shapes that make up the image represent figures that are portrayed as sentient beings with needs and feelings, and an analysis of those shapes helps us to understand those needs. When we look at the position of some shapes, we see the relationships between the painting's actors more clearly.

In this painting, the mother's headscarf and the baby's body are both white, placed on a background of dark trees. The contrast ensures they both stand out, their forms creating a unified field of color. This field is approximately diamond-shaped, with the Madonna's head forming the top point, the baby's bottom on the green cushion the bottom point. The baby's head of red hair forms the left point of this central shape while the Madonna's red-clothed left arm forms the right. The diamond shape created by these forms is slightly off-kilter, with its shortest line being

the distance between the heads of the mother and child. This closeness draws our eye toward this point (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). It denotes intimacy.

The shape of the cushion underneath the infant Jesus is an important shape in this image. It curves around the baby's body like a cradle, except for the place where the mother's hand reaches around the back of the infant's neck and shoulders to support him and bring him toward her breast. It provides another opportunity for Solario to demonstrate the Madonna's devotion, as she pulls the child close to her. The shape of the green cushion resembles an embryo. It has an enlarged 'head' at its uppermost point, and directly analogous folds within its interior curve. A corded seam lines its posterior side, similar to an embryonic spinal cord.

It is exceedingly unlikely that Solario knew what an embryo looked like, or that this is a 'secret message' embedded within the image. My reading of the shape as embryo comes from my position in space and time: a Western woman aware of scientific imaging and intense debate over abortion in which images of fetal development play a large role. But in an analysis of the way the image works—on me—it is important to acknowledge that my reading of the painting is affected by the similarities of these shapes. While not all embryos develop into a functional human, I know that every fully-formed human being progressed through a stage in this shape. This understanding contributes to my experience of the painting as an archetypical image—a feeling that it, like Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, expresses a universal human desire for nurturance in early childhood.

Like the paintings by Dürer and Raphael, I read this image as one of developmental transition. The child is not enmeshed into the embryo-shaped pillow, but is being pulled out of it and toward the breast by its mother. This is not as serious a break as receiving the news that one



will die on the cross. It is rather, a simple gesture of movement away from an embryonic state.

The soft green cushion is also reminiscent of the description of the mother who, in the process of Rotbard's therapeutic work, uses two cotton balls on her expressive piece (Rotbard, 2010). To Rotbard, the symbolic significance of the cotton balls, while worthy of postulation, is less relevant than their sensorial qualities, which she writes “appeal to intersensorial fields of perception and affective memory” (2010, p. 225). Solario's green cushion performs a similar function.

It is as if I can feel the cushion underneath my own body when I look at it, a sensation of it being soft and firm at the same time. This experience of the cushion is incited in part due to the Christ child's nudity. Exposed skin is sensitive to touch, and observers with active cutaneous (skin) receptors are reminded of this fact when observing the nudity of the child in the painting. To Rotbard (2010), the clinician's ability to feel the elements of a client's expressive work in their own bodies is helpful for the therapeutic alliance. Solario's inclusion of an obviously intense physical sensory experience may create a deeper alliance between the viewer and the figures portrayed in the image.

Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion* has a number of conceptual circles within it. The mother encircles her son with her right arm, holding her left toward her breast, directly above the other hand, giving us an impression of a link between the hands. There is a circle of interaction between her breast, its milk feeding into the child's mouth, his adoring gaze looking up toward her face, just above her breast. There is a circle of connection where the child touches his foot with his own arm, creating a link between the sensation of his hand with the sensation of his foot (they each feel the other's touch) not unlike Irigaray's (1985, 1993) supposition that

women's psychology is defined by the touching of 'two lips'.

Solario's Madonna seems intent on placing her nipple into the child's mouth, seemingly oblivious to the outside viewer. With her head bent and her eyes focused on the child in this way, she is vulnerable in a way that the Madonnas in the other two images are not. The Sistine Madonna stands shakily on one foot, but she is not crouched over her child; her face greets the world and her eyes survey the surroundings. Dürer's Madonna tilts her head slightly, conveying attention, concern, or coquetry. Although she is not standing, her back is straight and the placement of her hand on the Old Testament conveys sureness.

Solario, on the other hand, conveys a woman's ability to be intimate with her child in connection with vulnerability. When I look at the image, I feel a desire to look after the mother. The idea that women caring for small children are in need of protection or support is absent from the mothering ideological discourses we see today. Ever-intensifying in their demands for the care of children, these discourses rarely address the mother's emotional or physical needs (Arendell, 1999). They focus instead on the emotional and physical needs of the child, for which she is understood to be totally responsible.

Although breast feeding and maternal devotion are requirements of modern intensive mothering ideologies, we rarely see images similar to Solario's in public discourses. The reasons for this are diverse. First, the image of a woman breast feeding is taboo, as it involves the exposure of her breast, which is seen exclusively as a sexual object. Second, the image portrays maternal devotion accompanied by physical sacrifice. The Madonna is not suffering in this image, but the physical exertion she makes in order to breast feed (as exemplified by her exaggerated leaning posture, the use of her left hand to position her nipple, the use of her right

hand to lift up the child, and her concerted gaze directed at his face) is obvious. Like the perceived inappropriateness of expressions of pain (as described in reference to the Sistine Madonna), the apparent discomfort expressed in Solario's Madonna figure contradicts modern mothering ideologies, where intense effort is required but little strife is accepted (Maines Walters, 2008).

The sense of the mother's sacrifices in breast feeding her child, as portrayed in early Christian intercessional images where the Madonna's breast milk was equated with Christ's wounds, has disappeared from modern mothering discourses. Breast feeding is part of the intensifying motherhood ideologies which define mothers who pursue convenience or their own emotional gratification as selfish. It is not considered an effort that some women might choose to do, but a 'natural' requirement of good parenting.

Precious few resources are devoted to supporting women who care for young children in America, and as the participants of Maines Walter's qualitative study of the wide-ranging influence of mothering ideologies (2008) tell us, they do not receive social support in their endeavors either. Garey's (1999) use of 'weaving' as a metaphor for mothers' work is also indicative of this lack of support, as weaving is a challenging task but mothers are expected to (metaphorically) perform it on their own. Hays (1996) describes this effort as well, in her observation that women who work outside the home are expected to fulfill the social requirements of commerce in their workplace, but to be paragons of patience and nurturance at home.

### **Metaphors of cloth.**

In my description of my initial reaction to this painting, I mention a desire to turn the

picture on its right side. When I do so, I notice that the child's face, even in its obscurity, is more lifelike than the mother's. With its heavy brow and small smile, it has some dynamism—I read it as an expression of joy or satisfaction. The Madonna's expression, on the other hand, is partly solicitous and mostly blank. Her posture seems attentive but the structure of her face is flat, unrealistic. In addition, her head is smaller than the child's, completely dwarfed by the rest of her body and her voluptuous robes.

The space of the image that her elbow, with its sleeve and robe, take up is equivalent to the Madonna's entire face, head, and headscarf. Face-fulness, the opposite of the silent, faceless, self-less inanimate characteristics of cloth, does not exist in this painting. The blankness of the Madonna's face strikes me as analogous to the Hidden Mother photographs collected by Nagler (2013), artifacts of the Victorian era in which mothers were, for unknown reasons, covered by cloth in the photographer's studio while they held their children still (Figure 3). Solario's Madonna is not completely covered by cloth, but her clothes occupy more space than she does. Her face is expressionless and small; the opportunity for her to voice her subjectivity is thus reduced. We all miss out when mothers are unable to express themselves. In addition, unlike in almost all of the Hidden Mother photographs in Nagler's book (2013), she does not assert herself by facing the viewer.

The Madonna's downward gaze also emphasizes the exclusive nature of her relationship with her child. While the Madonnas in the Raphael and Dürer paintings could conceivably interact with the rest of the world, sheltering them as the *Madonna della Misericordia* (Figure 2) does, Solario's Madonna makes it clear through her posture, her breast feeding, her effaced devotion, that she has space for only one child. Her devotion to the child is so large that there is

no room to look up or out at the world. We are not invited in. This more closely aligns with modern-day mothering ideologies, where mothering is conceived not as a communal act, but one of intimate exclusion and seclusion (Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1995).

The idea that one mother should care for one child is a relatively recent one (Thurer, 1995) and is not universally accepted. This is demonstrated by Collins' (2000) concept of African American mothers' engagement with 'other mothering' (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 1994), in which maternal care is extended beyond immediate biological descendent lines. Images such as Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion*, which romanticize a one-on-one bond between mother and child, parallel the Euro-centrism of attachment theories that propose an exclusive bond between mother and child as an essential ingredient for healthy development (Büskens, 2001).

The benefit of other mothering in Morrison's *Beloved* is parallel to its necessity. Sethe, whose memories of her own mother are few and violent, was cared for instead by a woman with a disfigured arm who could not work in the fields. She learns to identify her birth mother through her distinctive hat, using cloth to mark her mother as an individual, a woman whose existence matters. When Sethe sends her children to Ohio, she entrusts their care to others, with the understanding that they will bring her children to Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law and family matriarch. Baby Suggs, whose freedom was 'earned' by her son's commitment to years of extra work, would raise her grandchildren as if they were her own; when her daughter-in-law arrives, she mothers Sethe by housing, feeding, nursing, and clothing her. It is Baby Suggs who stitches Sethe not only a new dress but an extra bandage into its back, more soft cloth to protect and help heal the wounds of the lashes Sethe endured.

The mother-child exclusivity pronounced in Solario's image has no real place in *Beloved*. Sethe is mother to two older boys, close in age, and gives birth to Denver when her baby is only just crawling. She cares for and breast feeds both infants at the same time, welcoming Baby Suggs' contributions to their care. To most of the female characters in Morrison's book, mothering is not a limited resource to be bestowed exclusively upon one child; it is a collage of relationships to be called upon when the need arises. The one character who pursues an exclusive mother-child relationship is *Beloved* herself, whose lucidity is severely fractured. She thinks often of the mother whom she remembers committing suicide by jumping off a slave ship; and she becomes obsessed with Sethe as they mutually build a pathological mother-child bond to which only they have access.

The Eurocentric perspective of exclusive mothering privileges European ideologies, economic security, and European beliefs about the needs of children. This perspective also privileges the child's view of the mother-child relationship. Like *Beloved*'s obsession with her birth mother and with Sethe, other children are seen as competitors for their mother's attention, as are activities that draw her attention away from the child, such as work and romantic interests. The adoption of this childish perspective into dominant mothering ideologies may have co-evolved with Freudian beliefs about the overarching importance of the mother-child relationship and the widespread acceptance of the idea of the possessive, romanticized Oedipal complex (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1996).

Nin's *Ladders to Fire* (2014) demonstrates the conflation of romantic and maternal feelings that can become the byproduct of such exclusivity. Lillian sublimates her feelings for her estranged child into expressions of romantic love and sexual desire for her partner. The idea

that a mother should devote herself entirely to one child, in addition to being impractical, is psychologically unsustainable. Mothers usually identify as women; women usually experience themselves as sexual beings, perhaps with an interest in romantic partnership.

The newest wave of intensive mothering ideologies closely restrict mothers' abilities to pursue and engage in sexual practices, as they prescribe bed-sharing, around-the-clock breast feeding, and near-constant physical contact with the child (Büskens, 2001; Sears & Sears, 2001). While few mothers will sexually abuse their children, and even fewer (if any) at the behest of a mothering ideology, their exclusion from the adult world of romance or marriage may encourage emotional codependency with their child. While Nin's character expresses her love for her son through her love for her partner, mothers who follow intensive mothering ideologies are encouraged to express their need for human intimacy through their relationships with their children.

### **The Matrixial Punctum**

While Madonna-Child images may follow traditions of representation, most are unique, transmitting information of the person who produced it and, on careful reflection, the person who views it. Ettinger's (2004, 2006) concept of intersubjectivity presents an opportunity for a psychological reading of these images that acknowledges the viewer's subjectivity. As Silver's (2007) story of her mother's invitation to enter such a space of intimacy exemplifies, Ettinger's *matrixial* space is about both the dissolution of the 'unitary subject' (2004, p. 75) and about relationship. It is a psychological state of creativity, a metaphorically woven womb in which nurturance, artistic expression, self and other are inter-punctuated.

To read an artistic image, we can float on the surface, describing the image as we see it.

We can go a little deeper in analyzing the ideological positions within the image. Or we can enter into a brief relationship with the creator(s) of the image, allowing the painter's expression to enter into us, meeting it in a place of our own creativity.

The above statement is theoretical. To apply it practicably to this thesis, I draw on Barthes' concept of the *punctum* (2010). I see the *punctum* as a *matrixial* access point, an invitation to enter into a space of unspoken dialogue with the creator of the image. In combining these two approaches, I propose a psychoanalytic interpretation of an idea proposed by a visual theorist; or, seen another way, a visual theoretical contribution to a psychoanalytic theory. I feel this is an appropriate introduction, as the concept of *punctum* overlaps well with psychoanalytic theories. Its focus is not on the visual elements of a photograph but rather how they are felt by the viewer (Barthes, 2010). Instead of positioning the importance of an image as an external absolute, the *punctum* posits the viewer's experience as essential and the meeting of the viewer's experience with the image as an appropriate place to begin visual analysis.

In applying a concept usually used in discussions of photography to an analysis of paintings, I lose the force of indexicality (the degree to which an image points to an outside reality) that made the *punctum* so important to Barthes (Nguyen, 2013). To Barthes, the value of the *punctum* is in its accidental nature (2010). It is like a secret that the subject of the photograph did not mean to tell, or an incident of parapraxis (Freudian slip). A funny face or the hem of a slip; elements that might not be noticeable until contemplating the photograph at length, or with the distance of time.

Representational paintings cannot accidentally include an otherwise unnoticed object or expression in the same way that a quickly snapped photograph can. Representation is purposeful.



In applying the *punctum* to a representational painting, we gain the opportunity to connect the *punctum* with unconscious desires on the part of the painter. I treat the paintings much like found photographs, windows into the ideologies and psyches of the people and time in which they were made.

When I apply the *punctum* to Ettinger's concept of *matrixial* space, the *punctum* can expand to become not only a place where the viewer experiences an emotional reaction to an image, but also a place where the viewer creates, in concert with the image, an experience. Through this act of creativity we enter into the *matrixial* space, where we feel a connection to the painting, its subject matter, and the painter.

The *punctum* for me in the *Sistine Madonna* is the place at which the Madonna's right hand touches the child's chest. I cannot see her arm, though it appears that it is reaching behind the child's body to grasp the side of his chest and therefore support him. But to me, the hand appears disembodied, its proximity to the Child's hand creating an uncanny near mirror image. With Raphael, I co-create the *punctum* in which the mother's hand is an object of fascination and concern.

The form the *punctum* takes contributes to, or derives from, my unease with the postures of this image. The Madonna's fingers are pointing upward, toward the child's face. Only four are visible. Just as we assume that her arm is behind him, we assume that her thumb is behind his back. The thumb would provide the child with extra support; the positioning of the fingers tells us that the child is at a stage of his development where he still needs his mother to hold him upright.

Looking closely, I see that the position of the hand contradicts other elements of the

image. The cloth underneath the child's body, for example, seems to be floating unsupported in mid-air. The Madonna's left hand holds her veil, which wraps around the back of her body and appears to envelope the child, close to his skin. The painting provides no 'logical' explanation of where the cloth might otherwise be held on the Madonna's right side. It cradles the child's right side but her right hand is not supporting it, grabbing the child's skin instead. The right hand seems to be part of the cloth itself, an extension of the veil's envelopment as it reaches up toward the child. The *punctum* of the Madonna's right hand on her child's skin speaks to me of the importance of the maternal body and its connection to cloth.

The *punctum* for me in the Dürer image of *Madonna with the Siskin* is the draping of her hair over her right shoulder. Her long red hair is otherwise held back, but falls in uneven, rope-like locks onto her robe, directly behind the child's cloth teat. It seems to be at once a mundane aspect of the painting—an object not cloaked in religious symbolism—and also a statement. The 'prick' of the *punctum* is the question of the unusual way this Madonna's hair falls and splits.

Freud (1990) describes the knowledge of weaving as women's contribution to civilization, and one that originated out of their observation of (pubic) hair. Similarly, the Madonna's full head of hair seems connected to the textile robes she wears. It appears like textile itself, a set of ropes hanging down and interweaving with the ribbons of her dress. Like the robes, her hair drapes down; unlike her robes, it explicitly separates at certain locations.

This splitting of hairs is metaphorically connected to the splitting open of the christ child's gown, which I described earlier in the metaphor of flayed skin. Out of the three Madonna figures under study in this section of the thesis, Dürer's Madonna is the only one not wearing a textile head covering. Where the others have their hair covered, their feminine sexuality literally

under wraps, this Madonna is a woman unto herself. The other Madonnas offer their children and the viewer unified fields of cloth—even the Sistine Madonna's billowing headscarf forms a half-circle but in its totality encircles the child. Dürer's Madonna uses nothing to cover her sexuality or the child's naked body. There is nothing unified, nothing covered. She is allowing exposure, to both her own sexuality and to her child's.

In Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion*, the *punctum* for me is the small curl of white fabric bunched up at the right side of the Madonna's face. It originally appeared to me as a coil of fabric snaking out toward the child's face, mimicking the movement of milk out of the Madonna's breast. I see now that this was a mis-reading, that it is the edge of a larger sheet of fabric, the majority of which is falling behind her robe. But still it draws me in. I am struck by its small grace, its folded S-shape hovering above and emphasizing the eye-gazing between the Madonna and the child.

In addition to highlighting the intensity of the gaze between mother and child, and referencing the flow of her white breast milk toward him, the curve of cloth also references the Madonna's devotion. It does this by exaggerating the degree to which she has bent far over her child to breastfeed him. The Madonna does lean over her child, cradling both him to her breast and drawing her breast to him. But the fold in her headscarf indicates a greater lean in her posture than is otherwise evidenced in the painting. There is no need for it to be folded as much or as tightly it is; the tightness of the fold indicates the idea that the mother should fold *herself* over her child. Like the other draping and folding fabrics with which the Madonna surrounds herself, the white S-fold indicates splendor and abundance. In this case, however, it is the splendor and abundance of maternal devotion that is emphasized.

### **The Tethered Mother in The Three Renaissance Images:**

The preceding analyses focus on the ways that the cloth-mother metaphor is expressed in terms of envelopment in the Renaissance images under study. While Raphael and Solario depict their Madonnas holding the Christ child close, cradling him in cloth and arms, Dürer keeps his distance from the metaphor of the maternal envelope, indicating instead a break in that relationship. The tethered-mother metaphoric is also present in these images, but in other, more implicit ways.

#### **Cloth and loss in connection with mother-infant relationships.**

The tethered-mother metaphor is connected to the relationship between cloth and loss in depictions of the Madonna and child. While most modern uses of the tethered-mother metaphor depict the mother unwillingly tied to her children or her mothering duties, the Madonna is tied to her grief. As discussed earlier, cloth can be used as a metaphor for the life story (Klass, 2008; Wilson, 2005). The Madonna's life story is like the *arpilleras* woven by women to memorialize torture (Cohen, 2013). It is the tapestry on which she is woven, a narrative that she cannot escape but in which she plays an essential moral role.

When I described the connection between cloth and loss, I proposed that in its presence, cloth reminds us of absence. As a metaphor for the human body, it reminds us of our mortality. It is the essence of materiality. We know that we are all cut from the same cloth, and can only hope that we have the chance to wear thin before we decay. The paradoxical nature and dialectical tension between presence and absence symbolized by cloth is evidenced in the three Renaissance paintings; and it is a metaphor for the mother-child relationship.

The tensions between life and death, symbiosis and separation, are prevalent in these images. The figures in Raphael's and Dürer's paintings know that Christ, the toddler in his

mother's lap, will die on the cross; we, even as minimally informed viewers, know this as well. Barthes (2010) describes a similar experience of gazing at a simple portrait of a young man sentenced to hang for an assassination attempt. To Barthes, the knowledge of the man's impending doom provides the *punctum* of the image, guiding his experience of it.

Like the Québécois expression of the *lampe de poche sur l'araignée* “flashlight on the spider”, once we know about the impending death of a child depicted in an image, we cannot unknow it. When we look at Victorian-era Hidden Mother photographs (Figure 3), our experience is guided by the same understanding. All children in Victorian-era photographs are assuredly deceased by now (Batchen, 2013). Gazing at them, we are pricked by the spider, cognizant of her spinning, her web of life and death.

From this knowledge arises a tension between what we see (that the figures are there) and what we know (that they are dead). The tension conveys a sense of anxiety and a sense of loss. Most likely, this sense of loss is a result of the foreknowledge of death. But it can also be found in our understanding of human development. Healthy mother-child relationships carry the same tension. They are relationships with an expiry date; the child will someday grow up and leave its mother's lap. Babies contain the end of infancy within them. Perhaps this is why their beauty can seem so precious and simultaneously so painful.

Separation is an aspect of healthy development, but it is also necessarily a loss. It can be conceived of as a kind of death. The dyadic Madonna-Child image can thus be perceived as not only the basis of all mother-child depictions (Batchen, 2013) but also as a metaphor for mother-child relationships (Wendy Phillips, personal communication, August 21 2015). The visual grammatical analysis I pursued above returned to this notion of a 'developmental transition' for

each of the paintings: the child is growing and changing in each of them.

Language plays a crucial role in the first major separation of mother and child in Lacanian theories, as in his reading (1998) of the *fort-da* game. Looking at the Madonna-Child paintings in this light, the words of the siskin and Saint Sixtus could be the bearers not of news of separation by death but of separation by language. The infant in Dürer's painting is perhaps already separated from his mother, given how little she envelops him, nurses him, and clothes him. Could this be why the siskin speaks to the child, although the title of the painting implies that its message is for her?

The nursing Madonna in Solario's image seems blissfully preoccupied with breast feeding, unconcerned with the infant's future separation. While I project my own understanding of an embryonic shape onto the pillow beneath the infant, the Madonna herself does not see it that way. She cradles her child, adjusts her nipple, and gazes into his eyes, completing the “inside of the circle which she can make with her arms” (Winnicott, 1992 p. 25).

The infant in the *Sistine Madonna* painting seems wary of impending differentiation from his mother. Unlike Dürer's Christ child who leans his head toward the siskin, Raphael's Christ child avoids the knowledge of his crucifixion (or developmental change) by avoiding the gaze of Saint Sixtus. And he grasps his own body and the cloth of his mother's headscarf, the connection he has to her. Separation from the mother is also separation from her sheltering cloths.

When I look at the photograph of my father carrying me swaddled on his back, I can almost feel the loss of an infantile preverbal state of safety that is conflated with the experience of cloth. As a mother, however, I have an opportunity to engage with cloth in this way once more. Like Solario's Madonna, I enwrap my children in swathes of cloth and emotional

connection; like Raphael's Sistine Madonna, I am aware of their future independence from these cloths. Everything is temporary.

All maternal nurturing is precarious, and all mother-infant ties (Lacan's 'apron strings' (1938, p. 21)) will eventually be cut. The three Renaissance images studied here indicate the role that cloth can play as a metaphor for this nurturing. It both indicates maternal containment and envelopment, and the inevitability of its disintegration.

### **Bodily tethers in the mother-infant relationship.**

When discussing the tethered-mother metaphor, I cited a description from Rich (1995) explaining the coordination of her milk let-down reflex with her baby's hunger. When a mother and infant develop a breast feeding schedule or rhythm, the infant's hungry cries may be preceded by the mother's milk let-down reflex, as the hormonal cycles in the infant's body may become aligned with the hormonal cycles in the mother's (Small, 1999). It is this 'invisible' connection that Rich describes, metaphorized as well as a 'magnetic field'. A mother's milk let-down reflex may also happen in response to the cry of her own or another child.

In order for a breast feeding relationship to develop and continue, the mother and child must be in close proximity to each other on a regular basis. Milk ties a mother to her child. And once the breast feeding relationship is established, breast feeding ties the infant to its mother. Solario's image of the Madonna and Child references this mutual connection.

The Madonna and child gaze at each other, her body and robes leaning toward him while her arms encircle him. His eyes gaze up at her, drinking in both the sight of her face and the stream of her milk. His nourishment may be supplemented by other foods but, in addition to the hormonal connection described above, a literal physical connection is formed between mother

and child in this moment that the milk is transmitted from her body to his. Their bodies are joined in a single act.

This connection may be perceived as physical, in a modern-day understanding of caloric content, or the once widely-held medical belief that breast milk was a form of menstrual blood (Twomey, 2013). Or it may be perceived as spiritual, as it is in the adoration of the Madonna's milk relics. In both senses, breast milk functions like cloth in Solario's image; it is as if, by filling the child with her milk, the Madonna clothes him with his own flesh. He is born of her and made plentiful by her milk.

Breast milk has been metaphorically connected to cloth at other points in this paper. In *Beloved*, Sethe's use of the cloth-sugar teat to feed and calm her infant is a prime example of the transitional object (Morrison, 1998; Winnicott, 1953): to help her child to feel safe, the mother gives the child a cloth item for comfort. But in *Beloved* the stakes are higher than in the situations Winnicott describes. Sethe decides that she does not want any other woman to breast feed her child. Thus, the cloth teat becomes a promise: Sethe will survive her flight from slavery because her daughter needs her milk.

When the adult woman Beloved 'returns', she seems to enjoy her process of gnawing on the flax of sugar cane. The sweet cane becomes a mouthful of tasteless plant-fiber threads as Beloved chews it to oblivion. This act re-enacts the cloth teat that she was given to suck while escaping from enslavement. It also represents Beloved's rapacious desire for nurturing and sensual experience, expressed also in her sexual relationship with Paul D. As it is understood in the work of Rotbard (2010), Beloved's early childhood neglect is expressed not only in emotional difficulties but in subtle desires, memories, and movements in her adult body.



In this way, mothers may be tethered to their own past experiences. Beloved herself becomes a mother in the story, pregnant with Paul D's child. We do not know whether she or her infant survives after running away into the forest. But we do know that the ability to gestate an infant, to be tied by an externally invisible, internal umbilicus, is not dependent on emotional freedom. Women may be enslaved and raped; they may be forced to unwillingly gestate a child. Others find themselves unable to disentangle from their pasts, forced to relive their early life memories when the prospect of new life emerges within them (Langer, 2000).

We can tie this understanding back to the ideas of cloth and loss in visual images that I discussed above. The visual representations of people whom we know to be dead, or whose deaths have been foretold (Barthes, 2010) can feel uncanny, full of *punctum*. My experience of pregnancy was an exactly mirror image: I felt it was uncanny to know that a life was to be born, but had not yet been. I felt that I had foreknowledge of the infant's birth just as, on looking at images of the Madonna and child, we have foreknowledge of the infant's death.

While the presence of the Madonna's robes reflect both nurturance and the materiality that reminds us of death in these images, it was only without cloth that I felt the enigmatic strangeness of the situation. In maternity clothing, I could cover up the pregnancy or perhaps codify it within the bounds of a society that fixates on material goods. It was only in moments of nudity and physical vulnerability (such as being unable to complete tasks that I could previously perform) that I came face to face with the *punctum* of an abnormal body. The body made twice as large by gestation; caught in a web of societal attempts at control; and tied, internally, to a being of its own creation.

### Chapter 4: Conclusion

Many mothers—myself included—enjoy using cloth in parenting practices, and adhere to mothering ideologies that equate the qualities of an ideal mother with the qualities of cloth. It is important for women to have the choice to do so, and to understand that adherence to mothering ideologies carries certain social consequences. There is nothing wrong with protecting and enveloping one's child; the prescriptive notion that a mother is expected to do so, and that only a mother is expected to do so, impact every aspect of society.

Glenn (1994) believes that to break free of classist and prescriptive mothering ideology, we must first 'decompose' mothering into its pieces; woman need not be equated with mother, and nurturing need not be equated with mother. This thesis has attempted to put some distance between the equated 'nurturing' and 'mother' by shining light on a particular (metaphoric) expression of the cultural standards of mothering. It is, I hope, a step towards severing the confluences of women with nurturing actions and responsibilities.

Glenn's second recommendation is that we displace the binary oppositions that enforce those confluences. This task remains. I have looked at the ways that the cloth-mother metaphor is conveyed as oppressive and unattainable in twentieth-century feminist tracts, comforting yet problematic in female-authored fiction and wholesome and necessary in Renaissance paintings. But it is not enough simply to say that it is untenable. What space does the metaphor need to move into? What could take its place?

If the equation of the cloth-mother metaphor is “cloth = mother” or “mother = cloth,” the simplest way to create it anew is to change one side of the equation. Thus, we could perceive of “cloth = father/non-gendered parent” or “mother = not-cloth.” Engaging in the former, we find

that the metaphor of cloth = father carries similar associations to the cloth = mother equation. Through it, fathers could be perceived as inherently warm, soft, and nurturing. Because biologically male bodies do not gestate babies, the 'father as envelope' portion of the metaphor would require some maneuvering in order to gain widespread cultural acceptance.

Knowledge of attachment theory has become so widespread that its metaphor of the 'secure base' is culturally available to men, too. The term carries connotations of domains that are traditionally conceived of as masculine, such as machine-work, military operations, and sports. Combined with the archetypal image of the protective father jealously guarding his child (usually daughter) inside a house or other container, this is perhaps a form that the cloth-father metaphor could take.

There are biological correlates between fatherhood and cloth, as well. Body hair is a male secondary sex characteristic, and this could play into unconscious associations of fathers with cloth. Young children often describe their fathers' beards as a site of physical softness and nuzzling intimacy. Moreover, fathers do engage in the tasks of 'mothering' as we know them. Fathers nurture, comfort, hold, nourish and protect their children. Because there are few cultural tropes that concretize these behaviors as performed by men, it is possible that a cloth = father conceptualization could be liberating for men whose emotional qualities include softness, flexibility, and warmth.

This thesis has been restricted to heteronormative Euro-centric discourses. There is much more to explore. It would be made stronger by research into the intersectionality of the cloth-mother metaphor, as it interweaves with effects of ethnic and cultural identity. Marginalization may exacerbate the impact of 'good mothering' ideologies (Arendell, 1999), or it may allow for

their resistance (Macdonald, 2009). And cultural differences demand that the same visual representations become incorporated into diverse discourses in diverse ways. For example, Gil and Vazquez (2014) explore the term 'Marianismo,' coined by Stevens (1973), which includes a set of restrictive maternal ideals expected of Latina women, including self-abnegation and the repression of sexual pleasure. A qualitative study of Latina women's experiences with cloth and mothering, perhaps related to Madonna depictions, would be an interesting avenue for further research.

I am also interested in the aspects of empowerment and power inequality that can derive from intensive mothering ideologies. In this thesis, I have discussed the victimizing nature of the cloth-mother metaphor and others that form the intensive mothering rhetoric. But there are powerful, even terrifying sides to it as well, extending back into ancient times, where the archetype of the 'terrible mother' (Neumann, 1955) existed alongside more positive depictions of motherhood more easily accepted today (Jung, 2012). A mother who can envelope is a mother who can crush or suffocate. Cloth is similarly multivalent. In addition to nurturing, it can be used to smother, suffocate, strangle, and shroud; future work could expand upon this thesis with an examination of the terrifying aspects of cloth.

The metaphorical use of textiles to represent maternal bodies, identities, and work is problematic, reinforcing existing societal gender norms. But to me, the topic is compelling because it has a certain poetry to it. A moment of grace can come from pondering how a beautiful, emotionally salient object can encapsulate the vast experiences of infancy and, perhaps, mothering experiences. Ideally, we would all—including mothers—feel protected by the archetypal force of soft cloth, and empowered by the capacity to care for others through it.