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## Reconceptualizing Dreamwork (With Apologies To Lewis Carroll's *Alice*) As A Facet Of Motherwork

### **Abstract**

While acknowledging some of the myriad ways in which the term "dreamwork" has been used by scholars over the past century, this article directs especial attention to dreamwork as both a facet of motherwork and form of anticipatory socialization. This particular conception views dreamwork as an interpersonal accomplishment and emphasizes its collaborative character. In arguing for its utility, we note how this conception of dreamwork complements insights found in other works and suggest how these ideas might be related, and future research on parental involvement in the lives of children strengthened, by gathering them together under the concept of dreamwork.

### **Keywords**

Dreamwork; Parenting; Motherwork, Mothering, Socialization

### **Reconceptualizing dreamwork (with apologies to Lewis Carroll's *Alice*) as a facet of motherwork**

In Lewis Carroll's classic children's tale, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871/2001: 113), Humpty Dumpty, that most imperious anthropomorphized egg, haughtily harrumphs to Alice that "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." When Alice protests, observing that "The question is whether you *can* make words mean so many different things," Humpty retorts dismissively: "The question is which is to be master - that's all." This fantastical conversation seems to anticipate the challenge that awaits any earnest writer who would attempt to define "dreamwork," given that scholars in a wide array of disciplines have used this word in very different ways.

While Blass (2002: 103) has categorically insisted that "dream work is, and can be nothing but, the various rules that Freud devised and used as he applied his technique of dream interpretation," it appears likely that Freud, himself, might have been startled by what his tropology of dreamwork has inspired and by how it has been adopted, adapted and deployed by scholars in a wide variety of fields including

aesthetics, cultural studies, hermeneutics, linguistics, and poetics and rhetoric (Civitaresse 2006; Ferro 2006; Gane 2006; Hoeveler 2006; Mahon 2007). Moreover, while many in the caring professions do continue to pay explicit homage to Freud in their writings on dreamwork, at least some would seem more obviously inspired by the theories of Carl Jung or Alfred Adler or Fritz Perls or Aaron Beck (Amendt-Lyons 2004; Bird 2005; Davis and Hill 2005; Jones 2007; Litowitz 2007). In other disciplines, even greater eclecticism may be evinced in charting a genealogy of dreamwork, with new lines of descent proposed that would, for example, give greater prominence to the historical Weber rather than the ahistorical Freud (Gerona 2004) or direct pointed attention to Plato's *Republic* and his characterization therein of science's work as dreamwork (Franchi 2005: 99). However, given the voluminous literature that exists on night dreams, "social dreams" and "daydreams," as well as the widespread use of the dream-as-metaphor, it is, perhaps, predictable enough that definitions of dreamwork will only occasionally mesh.

Dreamwork has been described as a research method and assessment tool in work with specific clinical populations (Levin and Nielsen 2007), studied as a grassroots social movement (Edgar 1995) and identified as a facet of "ethnicity work" (Adams 2005). It has been exalted as a spiritual practice that allows the dreamer to harken to "the voice of the soul" (Savary 1990: 12), heralded as a secular consciousness-raising method which contains the potential to challenge structural oppressions (Burch and Moss 2003) and touted as a management technique that can be deployed prosaically to cultivate "corporate creativity" (Maxwell 2002). It has been narrowly used to describe an inchoate image that guided the refashioning of a doctoral program (Fetterly 1999: 710) and broadly presented as if synonymous with the entire process of artistic creation (Sonenberg 2003). Dreamwork is said to demand skills that are only possessed by a specialized elite after a long and arduous training (Pesant and Zadra 2004) and proclaimed by others, who champion its democratization, to involve techniques that are easily mastered by laypersons; the subtitle of one popular book promises that dreamwork can be mastered in "One Minute or Less!" (Chetwynd 1980) while another identifies its target audience as "complete idiots" (Pliskin, Romaine and Just 2004).

Rather than decry this lack of unison as an "obvious" failing or presume to rank the disparate ways in which "dreamwork" has been defined, the aim of this article will be far more modest. It simply attempts, with anticipatory apologies to Alices everywhere, to argue for the utility of one particular construction of dreamwork - specifically, that which defines it as an interpersonal accomplishment, developed, negotiated, sustained, or discarded in interactions among parents, their children and interested others; (2) note how this conception of dreamwork complements insights found in other works that do not use the concept explicitly; and (3) suggest how these ideas might be related and further research strengthened, by gathering them together under the concept of dreamwork.

## **Dreamwork as interpersonal accomplishment**

In an earlier article that focused on mothers whose children, twelve years and under, studied ballet, we extended Levinson et al.'s (1978) construct of the "dream" as a career anchor to suggest how, through "dreamwork," dreams may be constructed by mothers on behalf of their children. In chronicling the socialization of "stage mothers," the term *dreamwork* was employed in an attempt to distinguish between the idle daydreams of one's child in a future occupational role and dreams

which inspire and embody parental agency and action. Parental dreams, it was argued, can have a narrative quality in spite of their fuzziness and sometimes fantastical nature. Dreamwork, as used therein, referred to forms of purposive behaviour that allow dreams to be worked out in an exploratory way as a series of short- or long-term projects. The concept frames a variety of forms of parental behavior undertaken on behalf of children and suggests how parents come to invest potentially great amounts of time, money, energy, and themselves in the activities of their children. Moreover, while both mothers and fathers may engage in dreamwork on behalf of their children, it was suggested that mothers may be particularly encouraged to do so by the dramaturgy of motherwork.

In stark contrast to media depictions of "stage mothers" (Giroux 1998; Tennant 2005), "hockey fathers" (Bergin and Habusta 2004; Firmbach 2000; Haney 2002) or other putative examples of "extreme parenting," the term "dreamwork" is employed to emphasize the social, collaborative character of activities that are undertaken on behalf of children. Rather than view child-centred dreamwork as the unique creation of a single author, it is envisaged as a multi-authored work that is built up crescively and elaborated upon by interested parties. Thus, while a journalist writing on the "casting crib" has described herself as "one of the bottom feeders of Hollywood lore: a stage mother" whose twin boys "had work permits before they were 3 months old" and numbered among the roughly "4,500 infants and toddlers in the Los Angeles area between the ages of 15 days and 6 years [who] had entertainment work permits, according to state labor statistics" (Levander 2004), it would seem premature to suppose that this situation is best reduced to a series of expostulations that denounce "[t]he narcissistic, overly demanding, and destructive antics of stage mothers" and the "negative consequences of [a] loss of perspective in adults" (Weinstein 1995:21). Even though the term "stage mother" may imply a linear form of self-aggrandizement, the etiology of the role may follow a more serpentine path.

To the extent that women, but not men, are encouraged to conflate issues of identity and intimacy, the role of the "stage mother" implies that some women fashion a "career" out of the mothering role and construct dreams in relation to a child as part of the "extended self" (Belk 1988; James 1890). However, a dream need not operate solely or primarily at the intrapsychic level as an internally directed conversation within the self; rather, it may exist as an intersubjective state that is constructed and assessed in the company of others. This vantage point, it may be noted, complements Fine and Leighton's (1993) suggestion that even nocturnal dreams can be profitably studied as: "1) external to the individual (that is, socially produced and mediated by the self); 2) reflective of cultural/societal content; 3) shared socially with others; and, 4) connected to social organization" (Vann and Alperstein 2000: 112). Moreover, while parental dreams, like nocturnal dreams, may remain private and solitary, unrealized or quickly forgotten, it is also possible that they may be imbued or freighted with meaning and accorded profound significance.

Admittedly, it is difficult to disentangle the origins of dreams that are shared by very young children and their mothers. For example, our earlier research with mothers whose children studied ballet noted that only a minority of women expressed, from the very onset of their child's dance training, a well-articulated dream of their child as a future professional dancer and that those who did almost invariably attributed the genesis of this dream to the child rather than to themselves. For example, a mother could maintain that her child "has always wanted to be a ballerina. She's been begging me for lessons ever since she learned how to talk" or report that, "Since the age of three, my daughter has had one dream and that dream is to be on Broadway." A cynic might well suspect that such assertions contain at

least some level of apocrypha; that is, while many three-year-olds might know of Sesame Street, Broadway would seem a more uncommon destination in the childhood atlas. It is also possible that some mothers perceived that certain accounts are conventionally approved of more than others and retrospectively appropriated the past and changed it. Nevertheless, while the genesis of a dream may initially reside with a parent and/or in the parent's response to cues from a child, its articulation invites the participation of others. Over time, dreams may become interpersonal projects that are developed, negotiated, sustained or discarded in interaction with a variety of "brokering agents" including, but not limited to, status coaches such as instructors who have a vested interest in their own version of the dream.

While initial forays into dreamwork may be incorporeal and without significant consequence, the tessellation of events can create a social organization which then folds back and coaxes further investments to be made. For example, our research noted that enrolling a child of nursery and kindergarten school age in dance lessons generally occurred as part of a tentative parental search for extracurricular activities that might amuse, occupy, or stimulate a child. However, in pointing to the ways in which the interior decor of dance studios might promote parental awareness of dance lessons as a possible pathway to a professional and "glamorous" career, or how the routine staging of end-of-the-year dance recitals could serve as a powerful visualization of the "career ladder" that children could climb with continued training, it was suggested that involvement with dance studios, at even the most general level, could have an impact upon the perceived meaning, implications and functions of dance lessons.

For example, in outlining how studio personnel acted as brokering agents for dreamwork and offered up a variety of inducements for continued or heightened involvement, it was argued that "altercasting" (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963) children as "students" rather than as "customers" invited children and their mothers to assume certain obligations towards staff members and respond to them as "experts," and affirmed their authoritative role to prescribe the content of dreamwork. This lexicon encourages mothers to disattend to the fact that a "school of ballet" is, simultaneously, a business enterprise, and to view the pronouncements and recommendations of studio staff as disinterested assessments of a child's potential as a future dancer rather than as self-interested "sales pitches" that seek to bolster the studio's profitability. While elite dance schools which enjoy the luxury of having far more applicants to their programs than available spaces can afford to be exacting in their evaluations of a child's suitability for dance training, the same is rarely true of non-elite studios. To the extent that non-elite studios must compete with other non-elite studios in the vicinity for students, nurturing the dream may occur as a routine form of sales behaviour.

In addition, teachers and other status coaches may furnish mothers with a variety of exculpatory statements that minimize the significance of events that potentially challenge the viability of the dream. For example, when children fail examinations that are judged by examiners external to the studio, teachers may encourage parents to view the external examiner, and not the dream or the student, as problematic, with claims made that the examiner is "well known" to be "the hardest examiner of all the examiners" or examiners depicted as troll-like individuals who jealously guard their professional turf, begrudging passage to even "the most talented" of children. Mothers of overweight children studying ballet may also be told that professional companies are "moving away from anorexic girls with stick legs" and towards "healthy looking girls," with praise directed upon a child's "beautiful feet" and extreme musicality. However, akin to the workings of a cybernetic system with

faulty feedback loops, a parent may be urged into further dreamwork on the assumption that the information they receive is professionally prognostic.

In emphasizing that the setting in which dreams are made serviceable can provide dreamwork with a vitality and momentum which might otherwise be lost, our research explored how the meaning of dance lessons could be reshaped from an activity of fleeting importance to a project that was thought to warrant attention and significance. Moreover, recognizing that dreamwork follows different trajectories that cannot always be predicted, it was proposed that analyzes of parental dreamwork be organized around four constituent social processes: exploring dreams, articulating dreams, living dreams and - anticipating that, as children age, guardianship of dreams will increasingly shift from parents to children themselves - letting go.

In addition, while the term "stage mother" is commonly used as a pejorative, which identifies a "type" of mother as "deviant" or atypical, it was argued that this role may be more accurately viewed as a caricature of what society has, by convention, deemed admirable behavior for mothers. As Collett (2005: 329) observed in her study of the role of children's appearances in the maintenance of identities and management of impressions for their mothers, "the identity of mother is distinctive. Being someone's mother is not enough. A mother's success is measured by her child's life and achievement. As the tangible results of her endeavors, a woman's children *are on stage*. . . ." (emphasis added). Insofar as the ultimate goal of "motherwork" demands the production of a "marketable product . . . an adjusted and achieving child" (Epstein 1988: 197), the most fulsome execution of its dramaturgy may *require* that mothers engage in dreamwork on behalf of their children. As such, dreamwork may be profitably conceptualized as another strand in women's traditionally invisible and unpaid work within the family.

### **"My son the doctor" and the extended self**

Several decades ago, Slater (1969) memorably entitled her examination of upward social mobility among American Jews as "My son the doctor." Although Dundes (1971: 194) would later direct attention to this phrase as a putative exemplar of an "ethnic slur" that is constructed on multiple-trait folk stereotypes, including that of the overly involved "Jewish mother," others would construe its significance quite differently. Thus, for Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (1992: 34), the common appearance of this phrase within Jewish humor is inoffensive and believed to attest to "the hopes and fears that haunt Jewish parents," including, most especially, the "desire for *nakhas* from children. *Nakhas*, meaning pleasure or contentment, is both a Hebrew and Yiddish word. . . .[that] [o]ver time . . . has come to connote the particular pride parents derived from their children's accomplishments."

The phrase "my son the doctor," and Telushkin's commentary upon it, would seem relevant to a discussion of dreamwork for at least two reasons. First, although the word "nakhas" is distinctively Hebrew/Yiddish, there is no reason to suppose that the admixture of parental attachment, identification and ambitiousness it synthesizes and encapsulates - as well as the activities, undertaken on behalf of children, that such potentially intense feelings may inspire - are exclusive to parents who speak either of those languages. One might consider, for example, the broader implications of Smith's (1974: 195) observation that the Japanese language distinguishes between "many kinds of mothers" including, among others, "*kyooiku* MAMA" or "education mothers" who "pay attention to their children's education" and "*suteeji* MAMA" or "stage mothers." Similarly, it would seem presumptuous to suppose that

the phrase "my son the doctor" only enjoys currency among "overly involved" Jewish mothers. Indeed, Silverman's observation that "we are all Jewish mothers now" (cited in Slate, 2007) would certainly seem apt in the United States where (1) in 1997, choral conductor Don Campbell's *The Mozart Effect*, which proposed that exposing infants to classical music could enhance children's thinking and performance, became an "instant best seller" and fueled a "stampede of Mozart-related children's products" (Jensen 2002); (2) by 2002, *Baby Einstein* (slogan: "Great Minds Start Little") had become a "\$1-billion-a-year toy category" (della Cava 2002) and "32 percent of our nation's infants owned at least one Baby Einstein video"; (3) between 2003 and 2004, overall sales of educational toys increased by 19 percent; and, (4) in 2004 alone, developmental videos and DVDs reaped profits of \$100 million (Quart 2006: 24). As della Cava remarks, "Trek to the toy store these days and, with a blizzard of names such as Baby Genius, IQ Baby and other cerebrum-inspired monikers, you'll think you've stumbled into a mini-Mensa convention."

Quart's (2006) examination of what she dubbed "the Baby Genius Edutainment Complex" identified a vast range of "child enrichment" products and services in the United States including those that provide for the tutoring of prenatals (e.g., BabyPlus Womb Song) and package giftedness as either digestible through baby formulas (e.g., Similac Advance, Nestle Good Start, Bright Beginnings) or transmittable through instructional DVDs (e.g., the *Brainy Baby Left and Right Brain; Athletic Baby Golf; Athletic Baby All-Star*). Affluent American parents may also elect to enrol their prodigy-in-training in programs such as the Baby-Genius Art & Languages School in west Los Angeles (aka "UCLA for babies") (Quart 2006: 40) (cost in 2003: up to \$12,000 annually [Darmiento 2003]) or, on the opposite coast, the Diller-Quaile program in New York where, for \$1980 for a 30-week term, 4 to 8 month-old "Music Babies" and an accompanying adult may partake of 45 minutes weekly in "enriched musical experiences in a school setting" (Diller-Quaile 2009) and, in doing so, simultaneously demonstrate both "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen 1899) and "conspicuous leisure" (Grenfell and Rinehart 2003: 91). To like effect, the website for Broadway Babies & Applause Theatrical Workshops, also in New York, outlines how a child, beginning as young as four months of age, may progress sequentially from a 45-minute "mommy & me" "Broadway Babies" class (cost for the 14-week winter 2009 term: U.S. \$695) through a "separation class" designed for "Broadway Little Stars" (ages 3-4) (\$695) into a "drop-off" classes for "Broadway Stars" (ages 4-5) (\$715) and, upon "graduation" from one-hour classes for "Broadway Superstars" (\$1095) when s/he is in kindergarten, be ready to tackle postgraduate work in a 2-hour class for "Broadway All Stars" (\$1360) (Applause 2009). However, all of these marketed products and services, regardless of their cost and specific focus, would seem: predicated on an assumption that a desire for "nakhas" is widespread; invite parents to envisage even a very young child in a future occupational role; and may serve to encourage and sustain parental dreamwork.

Second, the phrase "My son the doctor", as well as the concept of nakhas, would seem to invite consideration of the subtle differences that inhere between parental conceptions of children as "property" and as "possessions" that form part of the "extended self" (Belk 1988) and become the focus of dreamwork. Although various scholars have commented upon parenthood as an extension of ownership and property rights and/or examined how this ideology is displayed within the language and metaphors that are employed, by parents and others, when talking about parents and their children (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Smith 1983), far less attention has been focused on parental understandings of children as an extension of the self. Thus, while various academics have investigated the use of intimates as an

indirect form of "impression management" (Goffman 1959), their analyses have most typically directed attention to the strategic use of others as "status symbols" and to how, by association, one may attempt to claim self-flattering attributes (Cialdini, Finch and Nicholas, 1990; Gillespie 1980; Salamon 1984). Yet, a distinction can assuredly be drawn between parental deployment of children for the cynical purposes of impression management (e.g., adorning children in designer togs as a way of extending personal space and indirectly advertising social class and *savoir-faire*) and conceptualizing of one's child as a defining attribute of the self.

Cohen (1989: 126) observes that Belk's (1988) definition of the "extended self" encompasses not only those material possessions and kinds of behaviors that contribute to personal identity but, as well, "those in which we have invested 'psychic energy,' those useful in achieving personal goals and symbolic self-expression, those having affect attached to them, and those that occupy a central place in our thoughts or memories." Although the "extended self" has been criticized as a "transcendent concept . . . which given no apparent boundaries is at once metaphor and scientific construct" (Cohen 1989: 125), Belk's much-cited article continues to invigorate research on not simply the somewhat predictable topics of consumption norms and shopping behavior (Fennis and Pruyn 2007), but, as well, on the identification and attachment that individuals forge with sports teams (Bristow and Sebastian 2001), advertising memorabilia (Motley, Henderson and Menzel 2003); pets (El-Alayli et al. 2006) and even pet rocks (Kiesler and Kiesler 2004). His concept of the extended self may also have even broader utility inasmuch as it seems to capture some of the more elusive aspects of the parent-child relationship that are not easily addressed within the children-as-property literature.

Admittedly, some might seize upon the fact that Belk's concept of the "extended self" was originally coined in an attempt to explain consumer behavior, and proceed, in Eureka fashion, to argue that the terms "property" or "possessions" are interchangeable in their semantics. Nevertheless, there would seem to be a meaningful divide between viewing children as property versus as possessions that form part of the extended self. Moreover, when coupled with the concept of "dreamwork," Belk's concept may assist in conceptualizing parental, and especially maternal, involvement in the lives of children in ways that are left largely unexplored within the allied literature on both the "hurried child" (Elkind 1981, 1984, 1987; Lynott and Logue 1993) and "hot house children" (Quart 2006).

For example, Grenfell and Rinehart's (2003) ethnography of American youth figure-skating subculture and aspiring national-class female skaters emphasized that "parental involvement and support is necessary for viable participation of children in figure skating," positioned parents as "co-actors in this figure skating subculture," directed attention to the interaction between the child skater and multiple adult figures (coaches, trainers, choreographers) and focused particular attention on the potential for children's rights abuses when "[t]he parent/child/coach coalition becomes so focused on the shared idea that the child *has the talent* and has *made the commitment* that this seems to justify any amount of work and sacrifice to attain a competitive-related goal" (emphasis in original). In contrast to the construct of dreamwork, however, they posit a continuum of parental involvement within youth figure skating that "bridges the gap between the stereotypical 'stage mom' (the entertainment/beauty content genre) and the competitive 'sport mom' (the competitive youth sport genre)" (Grenfell and Rinehart's 2003: 87) and suggest that "[t]his parental involvement may also range within a continuum, which, on the positive end, might be 'supportive parenting' and on the negative end, what we term 'conspicuous parenting'." According to these authors, "conspicuous parenting" occurs

when "the parent pushes the child as in the role of the stage mom but also pushes his/her own image as the idealized, self-sacrificing parent - i.e., the 'conspicuous display' of ideal parenting." However, they insist emphatically that "[c]onspicuous parenting is decidedly *not* altruistic - in fact, the intent of the parent, whether conscious or unconscious, is to display one's own prowess" (ibidem: 87, emphasis in original). Thus, they cast a suspicious eye on "Soccer Moms" "who pride themselves not only in the participation and achievements of their child but in the highly visible way in which they can display their role as involved, concerned parents. Bringing team snacks, hosting team pizza parties, setting out chairs for spectators, coaching the team, volunteering to referee" - and pose as rhetorical questions, "at what point do these activities go beyond the function of supporting the youth sport organization and become self-aggrandizing behaviors? At what point do the parents *become* the competition?" (ibidem: 91, emphasis in original).

Although Grenfell and Rinehart acknowledge the significant financial costs that the parents of these young athletes confront (i.e., "A base estimate of annual costs for one skater ranges between U.S. \$30,000 and 40,000" (ibidem: 88)), and the enormous investments of time that parents themselves may be required to spend, "attending five skating sessions Monday through Fridays in the summer, or taking children to ballet and strength-training lessons, or merely shopping for the proper sequins for a \$500-600 outfit" (ibidem: 87), they suggest that these behaviors are best understood as "utilitarian" (ibidem: 90). They propose that "in the post-modern age, . . . children have become to parents covert opportunities to demonstrate prowess, status, symbolic capital, and power," "subtly. . . returned to a type of commodity, where their use is indicative of status, standing, and mostly, power for adult coaches, teachers, and parent," and now simply provide their parents with the opportunity to demonstrate their power in a way that is qualitatively akin to "the display of the 'trophy wife' for aging men of power" (ibidem: 90).

It is Grenfell and Rinehart's contention that achieving children serve as "a means for displaying parenting skills" - specifically, as "markers of status for parents" - and they conclude that this signifies that children are viewed by their parents "as objects which may be utilized instrumentally" and "are only seen for their use-value" (ibidem: 87). An assuredly kinder interpretation, however, is the parable of the talents, and the fear that some parents may experience that they are not allowing their child to come into his/her own. Moreover, the parental activities that Grenfell and Rinehart (2003) would cast as solely self-aggrandizing may be more charitably envisaged as indicative of parental involvement in the construction of a social and sociable world for one's children - the creation of a ready-made friendship network, so that children will be liked, happy and popular.

Grenfell and Rinehart's continuum of parental involvement would seem to implicitly presume that (1) the motives that underwrite parental involvement are easily distinguished; (2) these motives remain constant over time; and (3) ideal parents will not only be utterly altruistic in their support of a child but, as well, will scrupulously refrain from any conduct that might suggest a "conspicuous display" of altruism. The concept of dreamwork, however, contains no such presumptions. Rather, it is suggested that, whether or not dreamwork stems from purely altruistic motives, its dramaturgy makes motivation at least somewhat irrelevant; as Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*: "For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath three branches - it is to act, to do, to perform" (act 5, scene 1). Moreover, rather than view claims of self-sacrificial behavior as *prima facie* evidence of "conspicuous parenting," these types of claims may be seen as the logical outgrowth



of social constructions that actively encourage women to assume the role of the "selfless mother" who exists only to nurture her child.

### **The "good mother" and dreamwork**

Various authors have noted how the promotion of motherhood since the 1800s has been accomplished both by exhortation and by prescription. Thus, in an analysis of advice offered to mothers from the time of Rousseau onwards, Badinter (1981) observed how practical advice (e.g., do not swaddle your baby, do breastfeed your baby) has been interspersed with an inculcation of the creed that motherhood should generate deep and powerful feelings in a woman. Similarly, Ehrenreich and English (1979: 4) remarked upon how the advent of "scientific motherhood" saw the proffering of advice by various "experts" who used their authority "to define women's domestic activities down to the smallest details of housework and child raising." In recent times, these types of directives have not abated; rather, they would seem to have increased. Thus, expectant and/or breastfeeding mothers may find themselves exhorted to "support your baby's brain and eye development" (Enfamil 2007) by consuming Expecta LIPIL DHA supplement; informed that they may "strengthen" a child's "earliest capabilities" and "ensure" that their infant is born "more alert and responsive, nurse better, sleep better and later in life, enjoy improved school readiness" by strapping onto their abdomen a "Baby Plus Educational System"; and cajoled to purchase a Bebe Sounds Prenatal Gift Set that "includes all you need to listen, talk and play music to your unborn baby" (Toys R Us 2007). However, as the "good mother" has evolved from supplier of a child's physical needs to creator of an (ill-defined and ever-changing) "optimal" physical, social and emotional environment for her child, the likelihood has increased that mothers will be found wanting in some way and held accountable in the production of a less than-perfect child. As Epstein (1988: 197) has remarked, "Idealization and blame of the mother are two sides of the same belief in an all-powerful figure" (see also Antler 1984, 2007; Douglas and Michaels 2004; Gorman and Fritzsche 2002).

Collett's (2005: 342-343) investigation of the role of children's appearances in the maintenance of identities and management of impressions for their mothers reported that, by tending to children's dress, grooming, and behaviors, her sample of women attempted to "show themselves and others that they are good, capable mothers who care about their children." Moreover, while acknowledging that "[i]n all likelihood, most of the people these mothers encounter throughout the day are not paying as close attention to the way these children look as the mothers assume they are," she maintained that "the woman who believes that she successfully manages her children's appearances gains confidence in her abilities and affirms her most salient identity." Collett's remarks point to the centrality that women may assign to their mothering role even though her assertion that *all* of the mothers within her sample viewed motherhood as their "most salient identity" would certainly seem overly bold, given that the contents of her list of interview questions (which appear as "Appendix A: Interview Questions" pp. 343-344 of her article) suggest that she did not ask her respondents to identify which, of the multiple statuses they presumably occupied, they defined as their "master status," nor directly address the issue of self-identity.

To the extent that a child can be viewed as an extension of self, dreamwork may represent a socially organized attempt on the part of mothers to create, enhance and preserve their identities as "good mothers." For example, in our research on

mothers whose children studied dance, attention was directed to the ways in which women attempted to present their behavior as laudable and it was noted that dreamwork was both brokered and justified with reference to the construct of the "good mother." Thus, the impression management of mothers seemed designed to present themselves as initiating action in the "best interests of the child" and as willingly making "sacrifices" towards that end. However, it was also emphasized that, unlike those social settings in which a child is cast as an appendage of a parent ("Dr. Brown's daughter"), this symbolic ordering of importance is reworked within the subculture of the dance studio; there, a woman encounters considerable encouragement to anchor her identity in the "Mother of" role, regardless of whatever unique accomplishments or other statuses she may possess; view her child as part of her extended self; and evaluate herself as a "good mother" through both the child's accomplishments as a dancer and her own efforts towards that end. It was additionally noted that if the invisible tasks of motherwork are most likely recognized in their breach (Graham 1984), those who engage in dreamwork may be particularly prone to exploitation by professional status coaches who, in forwarding particularized definitions of the "good mother", are pursuing self-interested ends. Moreover, even though status as a "good mother" within the dance studio subculture was most readily achieved by those who were full-time, at-home middle or upper-class mothers, providing unwaged labour on behalf of children and the dance studio itself (holding fund raisers, contributing items to be sold at raffles or bake sales), their doing so did not immunize these women against potential labeling as "stage mothers." Indeed, the fact that these women sought to neutralize possible labeling as a "stage mother" suggests how elusive the status of a good mother could be.

The construct of the "good mother" may function as an ever-available invitation to shame or guilt in child-rearing and the activities that accompany it, inviting a mother to endlessly ask herself, "Am I being a good mother? Am I squandering my child's precious talents? What might become of my children if I gave them their head? If my child does not turn out to be accomplished - a dancer, a musician, an artist - will I be responsible?"

## Conclusion

While our original research focused upon a single social setting and on how dreamwork may be particularly encouraged by the "good mother mandate," the concepts of the dream and dreamwork may have greater currency and a broader constituency that includes fathers. Indeed, fashioning dreams in which children are made central and energizing dreamwork on their behalf may be more routine parts of parenting than formerly acknowledged.

One might consider in this context that a recent poll of college students, for example, reported that 25 percent of these students felt their parents "were overly involved" in their postsecondary school lives "to the point that their involvement was either annoying or embarrassing" (HealthyPlace.com 2009). In complementary fashion, it would seem telling that the website for the University of Calgary currently provides graduating students with instructions for "Landing your helicopter parents." This site reports laconically, "There are a few different models. There is the basic Helicopter parent who hovers close to you and swoops down to solve any problem that may come up. There are also Lawnmower parents (who mow down any obstacle) or Curling parents (who sweep every problem away), and the most extreme cases are often called Black Hawk parents (named for an American military

helicopter)" (University of Calgary 2009). In like fashion, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has ostensibly seen the need to identify a list of the "do's" and "don'ts" that should guide the parental actions of university-level-age students. Among the *Do's*: "offering advice on how to approach an instructor or professor concerning a specific issue" and "helping to proofread"; among the *Don'ts*: "contacting instructors or professors directly to discuss an issue" or "Writing parts of or their entire essay") (Government of British Columbia 2009).

One might also contemplate Kivisto's (2003) comments on the naming practices of the parents of the renowned late sociologist Stanford Lyman:

[w]ith brothers named Harvard, Yale and Princeton, Stanford's parents were far from subtle in conveying the significance they attached to higher education for their children (or at least their male children, since his twin sister Sylvia didn't receive a Seven Sisters moniker).

Kivisto's remarks also invite consideration of how gender-role beliefs systems may impact the content of parental dreamwork and affect parental inferences about a child's nature and capabilities, their expectations about the child's future roles and occupations, and the types of opportunities they provide with the aim of developing children's skills in various domains.

In suggesting that the concepts of the dream and dreamwork may tie together disparate strands in parents' thinking, actions and interactions which would otherwise remain disconnected, it is acknowledged that parental efforts may represent, in part, a projection of the parent (i.e., "if only I had been able to have dance lessons myself, how different things might have been!"). However, unlike the term "extreme parenting," which conjures up readily-familiar images of "hockey fathers" who furiously attack referees and/or the fevered antics of mothers on *Toddler & Tiaras*, the concept of dreamwork may provide for understanding even the most intense forms of parental involvement in ways that do not presume, in a *priori* fashion, that such involvement is pathological or predatory. Moreover, if terms such as "stage mother" and "hockey father" direct attention to parental actions that are enacted in relation to distinctive public settings, the concepts of the "dream" and "dreamwork" are broad enough to encompass those which may be more private and mundane. For example, for a parent of a child with a profound language delay, the dream of one's entirely silent child being able to express the simplest of thoughts may serve to inspire dreamwork and energize future battles with naysayers. The concept of parental dreamwork may also encourage researchers to contemplate the alternative: what happens when there is a lack of parental visions of this sort and/or a readiness to act in tandem with others and dedicate energies towards the accomplishment of dreams. Finally, it can be noted that approaching potentially intense parental involvement in the lives of children in this way would seem consistent with what Plummer (2009: 174-175) recommended in arguing against the "hunt" of High Sociology "for the questing beast. A snark" and for the practice of an "understated" sociology which tends to the "knowledge of those on the scene/The telling and retelling of narratives/At once personal and communal,/Original and conventional."

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