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Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Maroto-Navarro, G., Castaño-López, E., & Mar García-Calvente, M. d. (2007). Indifference, Demandingness and Resignation Regarding Support for Childrearing. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(1), 51-67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506807072317>

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# Indifference, Demandingness and Resignation Regarding Support for Childrearing

## A Qualitative Study with Mothers from Granada, Spain

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ESCUELA ANDALUZA DE SALUD PÚBLICA, GRANADA

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores the maternal experiences of a heterogeneous group of 26 mothers from Granada (Andalusia, Spain). The aim is to analyse the needs and demands that these women express with regard to childrearing, using a qualitative methodology. The authors conducted in-depth interviews and analysed the discourses of the mothers following the hermeneutical method. The variables used for sample selection and the themes that emerged during the interviews revealed that the discourses of the mothers revolve around three dimensions: indifference, demands and resignation regarding support for childrearing. The lack of paternal involvement in childrearing appears as a transversal dimension. This article shows that the material conditions of existence marked the differences in the responses of the women regarding support for childrearing, while the sexual division of labour and gender inequalities unified their discourses.

**KEY WORDS** gender ♦ health ♦ motherhood ♦ qualitative ♦ social support ♦ Spain

### INTRODUCTION

Criticism of the scientific, hegemonic and patriarchal discourse that, without regard to the great differences among women, naturalizes us, homogenizes our experiences and reduces us to a single facet – reproduction – represents a central axis of contemporary feminist theory (Haraway, 1995; Schiebinger,

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*European Journal of Women's Studies* Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications  
(London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), 1350-5068 Vol. 14(1): 51-67;  
<http://ejw.sagepub.com> DOI: 10.1177/1350506807072317

1999). Thanks to the work of other authors, we know that motherhood is a subjective experience, one that is relational, social and cultural, and that, because of these characteristics, there is great diversity in the way that women conceive of and understand their mothering experiences (Badinter, 1981; DiQuinzio, 1999; Scheper-Hughes, 1997; Stack, 1974). In this article, we examine the maternal experience of women from Granada, Spain. The qualitative study of mothers' needs and demands regarding support for childrearing has enabled us to analyse the existing diversity in great detail.

The transition to motherhood (Bailey, 2000) and women's childrearing expectations (Lundgren, 2005) are studied in many countries. In Spain, however, there is a scarcity of this kind of research, which is striking for two reasons; first, the specificity of the Mediterranean region in terms of caring for children and second, the social, economic and political changes that have occurred in Spain in recent decades. Solidarity within families has been and continues to be one of the pillars of our welfare state (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). This solidarity has a female face and is manifested in the informal care (García-Calvente and Mateo-Rodríguez, 2004) that women provide within their kinship networks. Nonetheless, it would be inappropriate to define this childcare solidarity as a characteristic exclusive to Spanish women, since the social profit at the expense of the *invisible* work performed by women (Durán, 1999) is a feature of the international economic system (Waring, 1988).

In Andalusia, the traditional nuclear family (father-provider and mother-caregiver) is the most common family model (Requena, 1999), although its decline has begun and it is now giving way to new forms of family organization, such as two-income couples. In recent decades, women have entered the educational system at all levels and are now accessing the most qualified sectors of the labour market.<sup>1</sup> However, the conquest by women of the *public domain* has not been accompanied by policies in support of childrearing or by men's participation in the domestic sphere. This lack of interest in children and domestic life contributes to women remaining in the *private domain*, brings about second shifts (Hochschild, 1989) and makes balancing family and job difficult.

On the other hand, the fact that working mothers are not exclusively devoted to childrearing has meant that for the first time in Spain the care of children is considered a social problem worthy of political consideration and also that a law on the equality of women and men is currently being developed. But in general the measures put into place up to the present are not reversing the situation, in that childrearing responsibilities remain in the hands of women and the obligatory nature of this responsibility is not questioned (Esteban, 2003). The public authorities give women the tasks of such care in the form of a moral duty backed by the exaltation of the *natural* female ability for childrearing (Comas, 2000).

The public support made available for motherhood and fatherhood is very limited. It consists of 16 weeks' paid maternity leave from work, an

average leave of two days for fathers when their child is born and €100 per child per month only for mothers who also have a paid job. These measures are of some assistance to 'working' mothers, still a minority sector in Spain, but they do not benefit fathers or mothers who are unemployed, single, undocumented immigrants or who work in the underground economy. Worth highlighting is the non-existence of paternity leave, the absence of support during the post-partum period (Maroto et al., 2004), the shortage of government-run nurseries, etc. Thus, no policies cover the needs of a large sector of the population that is, in general, quite vulnerable.

Some authors speak of the eclipse of the father figure as the head of the family (Flaquer, 1999) and of the existence of new paternal models that are more involved in domestic tasks and childrearing (Henwood and Procter, 2003), although it becomes apparent that the change in roles is established more in theory than in day-to-day practice (Edley and Wertherell, 1998). Despite certain changes in their discourses and the social desirability of such changes, Spanish men have not become part of the labour force in the domestic sphere: 50 percent do nothing at home except eat and rest, while only 3 percent participate in domestic chores on an equal basis with their partners (Bonino, 2000).

## THE STUDY

Our aim was to analyse, through in-depth interviews, the demands for childrearing support that 26 mothers from Granada (Andalusia, Spain) expressed in their discourses.

Sample selection was not random, due to the need to use a relatively heterogeneous group of women. Seeking out women with differences in education (no education, secondary education and university education), employment situation (unemployed, in precarious employment, manual labourers and professionals), age upon becoming a mother (adolescent-early, intermediate, late), number of children (one or more than one) and age of offspring (from 0 to four years of age) contributed to achieving the heterogeneity sought.

Various mediators (paediatricians, nurses and directors of women's associations) acted as key informants and facilitated access to the participants. The first contact with the mothers was by telephone, although some initial contacts were in person. We explained the aim of the study, the type of collaboration we hoped for and the conditions in which the interviews would have to take place.

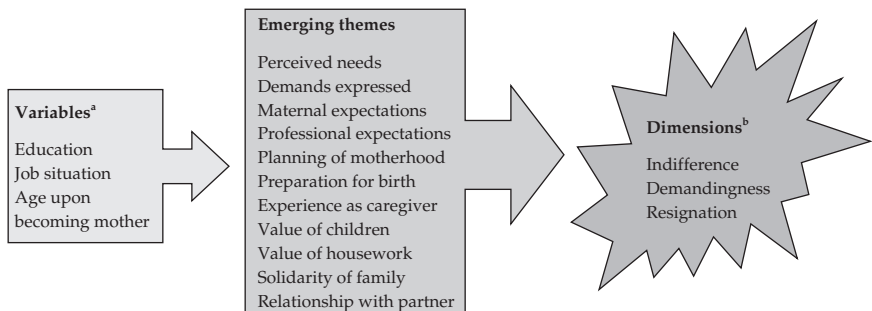
In July 2003, we performed the interviews at the time, date and place that the participants preferred. We took special care to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a space that allowed the women to be relaxed. After obtaining the informed consent of all of them, the interview was tape-recorded. The confidentiality of the data was guaranteed.

During the interviews we explored the mothering experiences of the participants, their feelings and expectations as well as their needs and demands. The opening statement was: 'We would like to learn about your experiences as a mother and how you are experiencing childrearing.' The particularity of each woman's discourse conditioned the direction taken by each interview. The transcription was made by a person expert in the subject matter. The personal data that identified the participants had been previously replaced with pseudonyms.

With the support of the computer program N-Vivo, we followed the hermeneutical method proposed by Diekmann et al. (1989). After the general reading of the texts, we gathered the interpretative information for each interview and we identified interconnected themes. In accordance with the current inaugurated by Heidegger, we attempted to capture the sense of the contextually mediated discourses, seeking out the meanings that things have for the people involved. We found that the emerging themes bore a close relationship to some of the variables used for the sample selection (education, employment situation, age upon becoming a mother). Therefore, these variables as well as the emerging themes contributed to the classification of the discourses along three dimensions: indifference, demandingness and resignation regarding support for childrearing. Figure 1 shows the selection variables, the emerging themes and the three dimensions that resulted.

We also found a transversal dimension: the lack of paternal involvement in childrearing. The results presented in the following sections are structured around these four dimensions.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Selection Variables and Emerging Themes that Classify the**  
**Motherhood Discourses along Three Dimensions**



<sup>a</sup>The variables regarding number of children and age of children, also used as sample selection criteria, did not determine the maternal discourses.

<sup>b</sup>Each one of these dimensions corresponds to a level of education, an employment situation and a different age upon becoming a mother, as well as different responses to the emerging themes. Throughout the presentation of results, we discuss the relationship between variables, themes and dimensions.

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## INDIFFERENCE REGARDING SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE

After performing the analyses, we were able to confirm that for respondents belonging to low income groups, certain *normative needs* (Ballester, 1999)<sup>2</sup> for childcare are not covered. However, from their discourses it was impossible to detect any demand not related to economic assistance. According to Baudrillard (1979) needs are subjective and in order for needs to be transformed into demands, they must first be self-perceived. These participants do not perceive themselves as *in need* in the realm of childcare and in consequence they do not make demands. Thus the discourse of the mothers who subsist without complaining and who let themselves be controlled by the adversities of destiny is classified as *indifferent*. The story of Laura illustrates this question. At the age of 25, she has three children, aged two, four and seven. She is currently unemployed and is a single mother because her partner threw her out of the house while she was pregnant with her last child. Her mother has passed away, her father is an alcoholic and she lives on government assistance and the help that her sisters sometimes provide. Although she is aware of her defenceless situation, she does not have tools with which to remedy it:

- Interviewer:* How does a mother alone with three children get by?  
How does she manage?  
*Laura:* I've got used to it . . .  
*Interviewer:* But how do you . . . ,  
*Laura:* Well, by getting used to it, because, otherwise, what can I do?

These words represent a group of women who have not had the opportunity to reflect on their needs and who, in consequence, do not generate specific demands when faced with situations that for other mothers would be a constant source of discontent. They adapt to the circumstances without creating conflicts. Vanesa is an unemployed cleaner and a single parent. She lives with her family and, for the time being, she has the peace of mind of having her mother close by. When she speaks about needs for motherhood, she does so in the third person:

- Vanesa:* There are a lot of mothers who have no resources and there should be more help for them, in the form of money or something . . . There are lots of things they might be in need of. Thank heavens right now I don't need anything because I have . . . my boyfriend works and we've got everything we need.

Although Rocío has a job and an intact family, her life story is hard. She was a single mother of a child who died. Her current husband is

unemployed and her daughters ask for things that are 'for the higher classes'. However, she appears impassive, even when she admits that she counts on the help provided by her four-year-old daughter:

*Rocío:* You know what? When that's all you've got and you've never known anything else, you adapt. On the other hand, my boss has two helpers that take care of her children because she can't manage, she gets completely hysterical. But that's what she's known since she was little because her parents had a nanny, but since I'm not used to that and I can't afford it, well . . . I need the help that I have: that of my older daughter who, although she's only four, is very willing to help.

We find that to the extent that women are unaware of their social rights, of how public policies work and of the type of services that they could receive, they do not generate demands with regard to support for childrearing. Their only manifestations are related to money, generally in the form of social benefits. The case of Juana is representative. When she got pregnant, unintentionally, she moved in with her boyfriend, who lives with his mother. He works as a lorry driver and spends a lot of time away from home. She has no contact with her parents because when she was a child they abandoned her, leaving her to be raised by her grandparents. She believes she is undeserving of assistance and her discourse is defeatist:

*Juana:* Well, economic [assistance] I guess because that's what's needed for the children, money, to give them a good start . . . mostly economic because cleaning the house . . . if you can't do it in the morning you do it in the afternoon or at night . . . basically it's the money because what else are they going to help you with?

These statements lead us to question the effectiveness of government assistance policies that are exclusively economic, since we think that in the long term they will not solve the problems faced by mothers. In accordance with the Beijing Declaration, we believe that the final objective must be to empower women at all levels so that they can finally take control of their lives.

Without the means to design their futures, they have often been overcome by the events that occur, such as their pregnancies. They are enlisted into motherhood 'accidentally' (Vanessa): unplanned pregnancies at a very young age. No defined maternal ideal appears in their discourses and they did not undergo a preparatory period for the change that was going to take place in their lives. Trapped in their surroundings, far from experiencing the situation in a conflictive way, they simply assume it:

*Interviewer:* Do you like being a mother?

*Laura:* Huh! Well, now that I've got them, yes. But . . . it's nice maybe when you've got a partner, when you've got help, but now, like this . . .

In addition, in some cases, the value attached to children is contradictory. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1997) speaks of an economy of emotions with which mothers control and limit their affective relationships with their offspring in order to survive emotionally in disadvantaged environments. Rocío, after the death of her first son, tried to avoid becoming too attached to her daughters and for Manuela children are interchangeable. She has six children, a conflictive relationship with her husband (who has spent time in prison) and a sexist education that leads her to value boys and girls in a different way:

*Manuela:* I had wanted to get pregnant again because my girls had already left and got married . . . I said to myself 'if it's a girl, at least when I'm a little old lady she'll take care of me' . . . but when they told me it was a boy I wasn't so happy anymore, . . . it's not the same as having a daughter, well, a boy isn't going to clean your bum . . . When I gave birth, the lady next to me had a little girl and I said: 'I'll trade my little boy for your little girl' but she didn't want to.

Lastly, before becoming mothers many of them had been in charge of taking care of other children in their wider family. That is why, despite their lack of skill in formulating demands, there is something in which they are empowered: they are expert caregivers, in contradiction with the studies associating a low level of education with an increased need for childrearing information (Moran et al., 1997). Also, some are 'rich' in terms of family solidarity, in that they can count on their mothers.

#### DEMANDINGNESS REGARDING SUPPORT FOR CHILDBEARING

Other women, with greater economic and educational resources, have manifested a multitude of demands regarding support for mothering. *Demandingness* is the word that best defines their discourses, but why are they demanding? For one thing, they are familiar with the 'market' of public services and are very selective clients who want to choose, from among multiple options, the alternative that is best for them at any given time. Second, dissatisfaction increases as people satisfy their physical needs, because it is then that wishes of a psychological origin – which can never be satisfied – tend to appear (Galbraith, 1992).



These mothers find there is insufficient social awareness regarding children. Therefore, they demand that public life (Murillo, 1996) also be designed with children and their caregivers in mind:

*Elena:* Children are also clients and they have rights . . . rarely are there play parks, changing tables . . . It's a real feat to change a baby's nappy in a public toilet! These things make the difference between life being easy or it being a real nuisance.

Most of them have paid help for childrearing. Nonetheless, they are not satisfied because they do not want to hire just anyone, in an 'under the table' arrangement, to take care of their children. They demand specialized, high quality personnel and for this reason they propose that child-minding services be professionalized. Andrea is 34 and has a long-awaited baby. She has convinced herself that she is capable of reconciling childrearing with her job as a librarian. She does not want to have to rely on her family because she believes that it is the parents who should be in charge of childrearing. She is worried about where to leave her little girl:

*Andrea:* It would be nice if they would tell you how to find people who can help, professionals or people who are trustworthy . . . so that if you bring someone in to raise your children, at least you know who it is, you have references.

At the same time, these are women who do not want to be mothers at any expense. They have postponed motherhood until they consider it to be the right time. This wait heightens their expectations and the transition to motherhood begins even before they become pregnant. Being a mother thus becomes a mental state and they reflect, in advance, on what type of mother they want to be, what they want their relationship to be like with their partner, their professional life and their social life. According to Beck-Gernsheim and Beck (1995), they seek perfection and well-being at all levels; therefore, for the sake of the baby (and for their own sake) they are capable of foregoing the experience:

*Eva:* I love children but . . . I didn't know if I was going to have any or not. I thought that if my family, economic and personal situation, you know, everything, was favourable, then I would have a child and if not, well, then I wouldn't have one.

These women's capacity to control their pregnancies reveals their autonomy and highlights the active role they play in deciding the path that their lives will take. They have made a great investment in their professional careers, reflecting carefully on each decision and, when they

decide to become mothers, they follow a similar procedure. However, their expectations are so high that their maternal ideal becomes unattainable. Adriana, a chemist aged 34, has a three-year-old child. She has the support of her mother and also has paid help. She is happy although she misses her freedom:

*Adriana:* The concept I had of motherhood was very bucolic . . . I saw my sister with her adorable children and I thought 'what a lovely thing'. It was all very romantic, very idealized . . . What happens is that when you've got your own you've got so many worries that they cause a lot of concern and you end up saying 'this is not so romantic after all'.

Furthermore, the stress experienced by these women increases because they feel they are unable to deal with the daily battles related to maternity. They feel the need to be instructed in the more practical aspects of childrearing. Eva, a 40-year-old engineer and a single mother of a baby, believes that the social welfare and health care services can respond to specific questions, but she would like to be able to cope well with childrearing on her own:

*Eva:* Things that people can understand, not things that a scientist would say . . . All of that is in the books, but information campaigns with basic stuff are needed. Sometimes people tell you 'it's intuitive'. Alright, but you might be doing it wrong for three months before the 'intuition' comes . . .

In this respect maternal education becomes a way to increase the mother's personal autonomy and not depend on professionals all the time. Knowing what to do at any given moment and making decisions without hesitation are these women's highest aspirations, as they want to control motherhood just like they control the rest of their lives. Mónica is 33 years old, a teacher and the mother of a baby. She has numerous questions, looks for all kinds of information and wants to receive useful advice:

*Mónica:* If my head hurts I know that I can take an aspirin, but when she cries I don't really know if something hurts, if she has wind, if she's hungry, if she hasn't eaten enough or if she's just crying for the sake of it.

They have decision-making capacity over their lives but they are not empowered in the area of childrearing, because, unlike the other respondents, they were not socialized in settings where the presence of children is high:

*Andrea:* It would be good if they taught you something because we are living in a society with fewer and fewer children. It's not like before, when there were children everywhere, there was the neighbour's little one and all your relatives . . .

They also have difficulties balancing family life, profession and their personal time. Luisa, an adoptive mother and a veterinarian, is 42 and has paid help. She has difficulty balancing her love for her child and her love for her job:

*Luisa:* If you work and you like your work, you don't want to set it aside.

They want to spend more time with their families and maintain their individuality, their previous life. In other words, they want to be mothers without renouncing being women. The case of Elena illustrates this need. She is a social worker, aged 35, who has two children, aged one and three. Her pregnancies were very much planned. Reading and asking experts she developed many, very high expectations. She imagined herself as the ideal mother but her expectations have not been fully met:

*Elena:* I imagined myself being 90 percent mother but I wasn't really in touch with reality. I think that I hadn't foreseen that my work would continue to make the same demands of me, and then there's the relationship with my partner and my desire to keep doing my things, my friends . . . The fact that I would have my own needs, I didn't imagine that.

Lastly, we propose that the discontent of these women is not only rooted in a subjective source of dissatisfaction but rather is caused by the blurring of roles. Thanks to their social status and the rapid democratization of Spain, these respondents were socialized in *unisex* settings until they reached motherhood. In this sense, they vindicate making reproductive work visible. These are the only women in our study with this type of demand because it is only they who seem to have become aware of the sexism existing in our society:

*Adriana:* Sometimes I feel that I need to make a statement, that when people talk to you about how marvellous it all is, about how great being a mother is, you know, you also need to say 'Yes, but listen, what about everything I have to put up with?' That part also has to be kept in mind, because it is very hard.

## RESIGNATION REGARDING SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE

We find that mothers who show *resignation* when talking about support for childrearing have an intermediate profile, between the *indifference* expressed by some and the *demands* of others. They are manual labourers with a secondary education who had their babies between the ages of 24 and 31, after marrying. They wanted to become pregnant and their pregnancies were not postponed. In other words, they planned motherhood but did not calculate each and every step:

*Rosa:* How did we decide to have a child? I'm not really sure . . . It's not like we said 'let's have a baby'. My husband was more into the idea than I . . . Well, for love, because when you really love someone you say 'Oh, a child with the person I love'.

After becoming mothers some continued working while others gave up their jobs in order to devote themselves exclusively to childrearing. Regardless of their current job situations, they are essentially *housewives*. They have internalized reproductive work as a female responsibility that they cannot delegate and at which they cannot fail. Thus, their status as women depends on motherhood, while their other personal facets are forgotten: Paula, a 38-year-old doorwoman, has a baby and a seven-year-old and continues to work because she receives help from her mother and sister:

*Paula:* You're working all the time and you finish cleaning one area and you already have to start in another . . . there's more laundry, more ironing, more . . . cleanliness. When they're little you want things to be cleaner . . . you want everything disinfected just in case the dummy falls or for when they're crawling . . .

For the mothers who work outside the home, their job is a source of income rather than an opportunity for personal and professional development. They would like to stop working in order to devote themselves exclusively to childrearing, but doing so would not be economically feasible. The second shift causes them a great deal of stress and thus they ask other women in their family for help with the children. Rosa is 31 and her son is four. She works as a waitress and her mother takes care of her little boy while she is at work, because she cannot afford paid help:

*Rosa:* Maybe I wouldn't mind working if I could do it while my boy was at the nursery, if I could take him there and fetch him and then go home and spend time with him and be able to take care of the house at my own pace.

On the other hand, the women who are able to manage the family economy with just their husbands' salaries prefer to stop working and devote themselves to their children:

*Susana:* Working when you have children . . . it's impossible. There are nurseries: you go, you pay, you drop off your little ones and you leave, but I think 'Am I going to earn a day's wages and then go leave it at the nursery?' No, I'd rather raise my child myself, I enjoy it and I'm at home, and we eat with what my husband brings in.

Leaving their jobs is not a difficult choice, since for them it is just a way to earn money. However, spending all day at home taking care of the children becomes a monotonous job. So they vindicate the possibility of disconnecting once in a while from their home, children and spouse, to gather strength and be able to face their daily obligations with renewed energy. Julia is a 34-year-old unemployed fieldworker with a seven-year-old daughter and four-year-old twins:

*Julia:* You have to prepare the meals, you have to take care of the house, you have to be with the children, it's mad, you're running around all the time . . . You can't stop moving all day long . . . And the worst part is that you're hard at work all day and it's as if you weren't doing anything . . . I'd like to have an hour or two for myself and then go back to the house.

Some situations create feelings of discontent and frustration for them but they do not envision themselves leaving it all behind and starting over. They do not have tools with which to make that kind of change and they feel trapped. For this reason we believe their discourses express resignation. Susana is 32 years old and has two children. She was a nursing assistant but left her job to take care of her children. She tries to be a model wife and mother, in addition to being concerned about tidiness and hygiene. When she feels overwhelmed, she is tempted to leave it all behind, but in the end she chooses the status quo:

*Susana:* There are times when you feel frustrated, powerless, angry . . . it makes you want to go to the door and say, 'You can all get stuffed.' Those are the times they overwhelm you, when it seems that they all depend on you and you can't manage everything. My strategy is to slam the door or throw the brush or whatever is at hand and walk out the door, because if I stay I may start shouting at all of them and say things I'd prefer not to say.

They are expert caregivers who, just like the 'indifferent' mothers, do not generate demands with regard to childcare. But is their knowledge enough to attain satisfaction? The well-being of these women has its locus in the private sphere (Murillo, 1996), in the optimal functioning of childrearing and home management. Remunerated work interferes with their attainment of this objective, however, those who are exclusively devoted to childrearing are also dissatisfied. Both employed and unemployed women would like to see changes in their lives but do not demand them because, in a display of their capacity for resignation, they do not want to generate conflict. To change everything that oppresses them, to experience a more satisfactory mothering situation and to have more self-confidence, we believe these women also need to be empowered.

#### LACK OF PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDBEARING

We decided to discuss the relationships that these women have with their partners in a separate section because, although their discourses and experiences reveal many differences, they all have something in common: they are the principal caregivers of their children. Their material conditions of existence, the paths their lives have taken and their lifestyles mean that these women have very different experiences and needs with regard to mothering, but the fact that they are women in a patriarchal society with gender relations rooted in the idea that the mother is the caregiver and the father the provider means that they are all automatically responsible for childrearing. Both the 'indifferent' mothers and the 'resigned' mothers have partners who are absent from everything related to childrearing. In the case of the 'resigned' women, this situation arises from a tacit agreement, from the traditional division of family responsibilities:

*Silvia:* My husband takes it very seriously, but that's because it's his duty . . . He has to go out and work and bring home the bacon.

On the other hand, the 'indifferent' women are in charge of childrearing but do not have partners who always take responsibility for providing:

*Manuela:* All men know is how to make babies.

In the case of the 'demanding' category, both mum and dad are providers and caregivers, although the father assumes a role of assistant in childrearing, never that of co-caregiver or main caregiver. Thus, in all three cases, the well-being of the children depends on the mothers:

*Elena:* The men are under less stress because they can relax knowing that if they start to feel snowed under, you will take care of everything. But I don't have that knowledge. I am more responsible than he is and I think this is a general tendency, from what I can see in other women.

## IN CONCLUSION

Throughout the text we have tried to present different ways of experiencing mothering. As the results suggest, and following Galbraith (1992), the demands made by mothers are related to their self-perception and the satisfaction of their normative and subjective needs. The 'indifferent' mothers are the least demanding because they do not have their basic needs met and because they focus all their efforts on getting by with the little they have. Summing up, we can state that indifference is closely linked to survival, that demandingness is linked to perfection and that resignation has to do with reducing conflicts.

For Bourdieu (1991), the root of these differences is class inequalities because the sophistication of the demands depends on the woman's level of knowledge regarding the market of goods and services that society offers. We have also confirmed the power that socialization in the traditional female roles has in explaining differences between mothers: proximity to children and the extent to which *unisex* settings are frequented have been determinant factors in the maternal discourses. The 'demanding' mothers, who are not empowered in the area of childrearing, feel overwhelmed by this task. For this reason, they demand that institutions fulfil a more educational function, which in other cases family members provided. The other mothers, educated by the women in their surroundings, feel at ease in the area of childrearing. In all cases, the sexual division of labour and gender inequalities makes the discourses similar. The lack of paternal involvement is the common denominator in all the maternal experiences analysed. All of this leads us to presume that while social class divides women, gender brings them together.

Family support, specifically female solidarity, is a frequent subject, although the diversity of experiences has been almost as broad as the sample. Given the complexity of the debate surrounding this subject and the fact that it is not the main purpose of our research, we will address this matter in greater depth in future work.

However, we do believe it is worthwhile to highlight the lack of government attention to the least privileged mothers and the fact that the target population of government assistance for childrearing is comprised of a privileged minority (the mothers that complain the most and make the most demands). This situation, besides being unfair, seems to us to be

a clear symptom that in Spain, childrearing, even today, remains a question reserved for the private sphere, and that the state legislates in such a way that most mothers (the 'resigned' and the 'indifferent') continue to be unavoidably devoted to this task.

The initial aim of our work was to examine mothers' needs and demands regarding childrearing support. As the study progressed, we became increasingly aware of the enormous differences in childrearing experiences, and our results thus contribute mainly to bearing witness to the diversity of mothering. These results will be very useful for future studies, especially in the design of tools capable of capturing the mothers' ultimate needs.

Lastly, we would reiterate that while the respondents were a heterogeneous set of women, it should be recognized that such a sample is not representative. The claims made about mothering within the article are specific to this particular group of mothers.

## NOTES

This research was supported by the Health Department of the Regional Government of Andalusia and by the Spanish Network for Research on Health and Gender (Carlos III Health Institute) (G03/042). It was carried out with the collaboration of two health centres (in the northern and southern areas of Granada), one women's association and a community social services centre (Andalusia, Spain). The authors are particularly grateful for the participation of all the mothers who made this study possible.

1. Despite recent changes, many Spanish women have always worked outside the home in agriculture, industry, domestic service, handicrafts, etc. (Babiano et al., 2004).
2. The concept of normative needs is an attempt to objectify the basic needs of human beings. They are needs agreed upon by theorists and are closely related to human rights (Ballester, 1999).

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