1 Introduction

Like so many Americans, Myra Rossi is feeling insecure.[1] Unable to find a suitable job for a year, she has been living off her savings, which are now nearly gone. She worries a lot—about drive-by shootings, nuclear terrorism, and road rage. She thinks it is only a matter of time before the planet will become uninhabitable due to global warming. She doubts she and her boyfriend will make it as a couple. Myra has just had a baby.

With five-pound Giovanna now wriggling in her arms, where does all that insecurity go? Myra has heard again and again—from experts, from friends, and from her own stay-at-home mother—that a baby's security ultimately depends on its early relationship with its mother. She is now that mother, wondering how to fulfill her maternal job description given *this* is the world her child has been born into. If she struggles to "make it all better"[2] and turn the tide of turbulent social forces for this one particular child, a quiet question may go unheard under the gale: What if trying too hard, with such high expectations that the mother-child relationship can indeed make it all better, brings its own set of consequences? Or spoken louder: What if placing a whole society's worth of security needs onto the shoulders of individual mothers backfires and ultimately *undermines* security?

Meanwhile, this moment, she is this baby's mother and needs to figure out how to proceed. Rather than fight the world on multiple security fronts, Myra engages in a simple yet creative act. She pulls out a Lysol wipe to sanitize the counters. It makes her feel a little bit better. She carefully places a clean paper towel under Giovanna's pacifier. She is protecting her daughter. Though Giovanna has never had any health problems, Myra finds her thoughts drawn to all that could go wrong medically, fixating on one particular illness after another, which she calls the problem du jour. Myra's growing obsession with simply keeping Giovanna alive becomes so all-consuming that it appears to absorb her previous economic, social, and environmental insecurities. Perhaps she fixates on this one issue because it seems fairly manageable, given Giovanna's good health so far. In any case, as she engages in all-out warfare against her enemy, *the germ*, she finds herself worrying less about the other things that once seemed so threatening.

Unfortunately, some of those problems are made worse by being ignored. Myra stops worrying about paid work and all but ceases her job search, thus launching herself into a multiyear period of unemployment. She stops worrying about her boyfriend, and three years later, at the time of my final check-in with her, the relationship's long-term prospects remain dubious. She has solved the insecurity puzzle through a laser focus on her baby's health—providing a psychic solution to unmanageable demands—but it exacerbates the real insecurities in her life.

Heather Dover sobs the moment I show up at her door. She is underemployed and living with her two young children and life partner in a subsidized apartment complex that is about to be closed down. Yet that's not what Heather is crying about. She's crying because motherhood has worn her down. Her Herculean efforts to create a sense of safety for her children, to give herself to them day and night as a living security blanket, have left her drained. Heather held her children nearly continuously during their infancies, has slept with them every night since birth, breast-fed each of them for three years, and always tries to "follow their lead," as she puts it, playing whatever they are interested in even when it becomes mind-numbingly tedious.

Like Myra, Heather is using a *security strategy*—a set of mothering practices intended to create security, or at least a sense of security, for

one's children or oneself. While Myra focuses on physical security—germs, health, and safety—Heather focuses on emotional security and hopes that lavishing love and comfort on her children will give them a secure inner core no matter what ultimately befalls them. But Heather's security strategy, like Myra's, comes at a cost. For her, motherhood feels like a supreme sacrifice. As she denies her own needs, she finds herself battling feelings of resentment and even rage. "It's just *so hard* sometimes," she tells me, once her crying has calmed enough for her to speak. "I feel like I'm carrying this whole thing and I'm just *fried*." As this book will show, it is not Heather's mothering practices, per se, but her single-minded intensity regarding the security she believes those practices will bring about that can undo the good she is trying so hard to do.

Stepping back from these individual mothers and taking a long-distance view, we see women's use of security strategies in their mothering is an entirely reasonable response to the current social situation. Within the context of an unpredictable economy, uncertainty about marriage, and fraying government safety nets, the last refuge of security upon which society at large projects almost mythical powers to make it all better is the mother-child relationship. Not that the mothering relationship typically *is* a source of ultimate security, but due to a lack of alternatives, we hold out hopes that it will be. Because of this, many mothers today try to shoulder almost impossible burdens. They want so badly to do what is necessary to keep their families safe, but they do not know how to change the economy or to make marriage into a reliably soul-nurturing institution, so they do what they think they *can* do for their families. They can focus their protective energies on insecurity in the emotional realm, like Heather, or on germs, like Myra, and make those the battleground issues upon which the struggle for security is fought. If they can at least right those wrongs, they can feel they are fulfilling their maternal responsibilities and standing between their families and the surrounding perils.

The unfortunate finding of this research, however, and what *Motherload* will repeatedly show, is that heaping mothers with unrealistic security expectations causes them to engage in struggles that actually cause security *repercussions* within the family. The fierceness of a woman's efforts, the vastness of her skills, or her willingness to shoulder such burdens aside, a one-relationship solution to society-sized insecurities simply doesn't work. Furthermore, the contortions required for this type of

individualistic solution put great strains upon families that set in motion a cascade of ill-effects. This research documents those ill-effects, born of our hopes for redemptive security projected onto the mother-child relationship, and also documents the much greater ease in families that manage against the odds to take alternative approaches, such as more evenly distributing the responsibility for security among a greater number of players than just the mother.

WHY SECURITY?

Motherload is based on 168 interviews with fifty-one mothers in the United States, thirty-four of whom partook in a longitudinal study during the first three years of their children's lives, beginning in late pregnancy. To capture some of the diversity in American mothers, I interviewed women of various races and ethnicities, wealthy and poor, married and unmarried, lesbian and heterosexual, native-born and immigrant, and who ranged in age from teens to women in their forties. For a full listing of the study participants and a discussion of the research methodology, see appendices A and B.

When I began this research, I intended to examine the effects of various social forces on how women juggle independence and connection in their roles as mothers. I wasn't focusing on security, but the women I interviewed certainly were. In discussing why they chose to mother in the particular ways they did, security came up with such resounding frequency that I simply could not ignore it. For example, mothers such as Heather Dover—who keep their children close, hold them frequently, and attend to their every whimper—typically do so for the sake of security. Likewise, mothers who seem to have just the opposite in mind—who purposefully let their children cry it out in separate rooms, do not gate the stairs, or handle children roughly to toughen them up—also explain these choices as necessary measures for survival in today's challenging world—in other words, as security.

Framing their mothering as a security project makes sense when we recognize these twenty-first-century women almost universally discuss rampant *insecurity* in the world or in their own lives. They have financial

worries or see the United States as economically insecure and are concerned for their children's place in it. They see how undependable relationships can be, both their own and those they anticipate for their children. They are concerned about crime, sickness, and accidents. And as mothers, they often feel a level of personal responsibility to remedy all of this for their children. Even before their children are born, many mothers have a how-to in mind—how they hope their particular manner of mothering will, indeed, create some measure of security.

Common as the expressed concern with security is in contemporary mothering, however, there is great variety in what women actually mean by the word. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "security" both as "freedom from danger: safety"—which is an objective experience—and as "freedom from fear or anxiety"—a subjective experience. Mothers, too, speak of both objective and subjective experiences of security. They talk about security as protection from accidents, child abduction, or germs. They talk about it as solid paychecks serving as an insurance against men who might abandon them. They talk about it as a feeling of emotional safety with dearly loved ones. They talk about the *sense* of security when something can be counted on to remain in their lives forever and not just as a matter of whim.

Through these discussions, I came to understand that security does not have a fixed, commonly agreed-upon meaning, but rather it is an umbrella concept, similar to "God" or "love." Such concepts are so foundational that almost all people use them to explain their actions and motives, despite having vastly different meanings to different people. All of those widely varying meanings converge and become concentrated in a single potent container symbol—the word—the usage of which is culturally mandated and the substance of which powerfully influences people's choices and how they interpret their lives. As rhetorical theorist Michael McGee argues, human beings are conditioned "not directly to belief and behavior, but to a vocabulary of concepts that function as guides, warrants, reasons, or excuses for behavior and belief."[3] Security has certainly become such a concept in American society today.

It is worth notice and study that security has become a must-invoke concept in the vocabularies of mothers of young children—during the so-called critical years of children's development. But equally worth notice

and study is the fact that most of these women see the mother-child relationship not merely as one means through which security (however defined) can be brought to their families but as the primary means. This assumption brings its own set of consequences for families.

While psychologists have been focusing for decades on attachment and emotional security in the mother-child relationship, sociologists have largely failed to delve into their own dimensions of security as they relate to this first and arguably most important social relationship that humans experience. This is a great oversight in the twenty-first-century United States. National security issues, terrorism, economic volatility, job insecurity, psychotherapeutic framings pinning insecurity to early childhood experiences, divorce anxiety, and worries about health and safety all loom large in the national consciousness, yet we know little about the effect of these widely shared forms of insecurity on how parents bring up their children, particularly on how parents attempt to make themselves and their children feel more secure. This book addresses that issue. It shows how mothers manage the threats they see all around them—threats once collectively managed but now frequently viewed as within the purview of individual families—by using a variety of highly patterned security strategies in their mothering. As our collective burdens fall upon mothers and compel them to utilize such strategies, it is an extreme disservice to then dismiss their behavior as "mommy madness" or to fail to recognize the load they are shouldering and the reasonableness of the quest for security underlying their actions.

This research shows how incredibly common it is for mothers within the current social climate to try to carry enormous weight. It also shows how displacing economic, physical, social, and existential fears onto the project of child rearing generally does not make it all better. In fact, despite women's best efforts, it often does just the opposite.

TOWARD A NONPATHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF INTENSIVE MOTHERING

There is broad consensus that mothering has intensified during the last four or five decades. Although women's paid work hours have also in-

creased during precisely the same decades, mothers paradoxically spend more time with their children now than they did in 1965.[4] Working mothers today (whose numbers have dramatically increased since the 1960s and who now make up the vast majority of American mothers) spend a higher proportion of that time actively engaged with their children than their stay-at-home counterparts in the past or present.[5] The subjective difficulty of mothering has increased since a generation ago.[6] And both the financial outlay on behalf of children and the emotional absorption in those children are at levels that may be unprecedented in human history.[7] The strength of these trends has stimulated a flood of research and commentary, bringing to light what has been alternately called the "ideology of intensive mothering," "parenting out of control," "hyper-parenting," the ethic of "total motherhood," and "mommy madness."[8]

To date, the most convincing arguments regarding the causes of this sort of extreme mothering are found in the research on class differences. Social class—an amalgam of financial, social, and cultural resources including one's educational background, income, and wealth—has clear ties to security. Those with greater resources can better protect themselves from various social and economic dangers. Yet despite that, the "haves" of our society are anything but relaxed about their social position,[9] and the effects of social class on parenting reveal an unexpected pattern. In fact, the most well-established contributor to mothering intensity is economic anxiety—among the privileged. Well-off parents fear that their children may lose their class status without the boost of intense parental involvement, and sociologist Annette Lareau shows how these parents therefore frequently take a managerial approach to motherhood: hiring tutors, scheduling enrichment activities, and pouring ever greater resources into their progeny to increase the likelihood they will succeed.[10] Likewise, sociologist Margaret Nelson documents how a fear of downward mobility can drive professional parents into "out of control" child surveillance and micromanagement.[11] Both Lareau and Nelson thus offer explanations of why parents on the upper end of the social-class spectrum, with everything to lose, engage in such high-intensity practices.

Sociologists Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas show how, at the other end of the class spectrum, poor single women with nothing to lose have everything to gain from motherhood and thus frequently seek their own

emotional security, life grounding, and even *salvation* in their relationships with their children.[12] These women, like their middle-class sisters, dream of good jobs and stably employed partners, but for them, that dream is unreachable. Well-paying and meaningful career options are not available in their neighborhoods, particularly to people with their educational backgrounds, and their social networks do not offer them solid prospective partners. With dependable work and partnership foreclosed as avenues to security, they take the route that remains: having a baby and centering their lives on motherhood.

The findings of these two types of class-based study seem to contradict one another, with Edin and Kefalas showing how it is the underprivileged who forefront motherhood and Nelson and Lareau showing how it is the privileged who do so. Taking security as the clarifying concept, however, both of these findings make sense. Resource-rich mothers sometimes bear an eerie resemblance to the poor women Edin and Kefalas describe because the privileged *feel* anxious and insecure as well; it is simply a different form of insecurity. Theirs is a "what if" insecurity about a hypothetical and disastrous future rather than the "what is" insecurity of the poor navigating their current realities. The poor therefore "put motherhood before marriage" for one set of security reasons while the privileged "parent out of control" for a different set of security reasons. The results? A whole lot of focus on mothering at all points on the social map!

As various forms of insecurity have become more pervasive, class no longer suffices as the single dimension with which to understand either security or, relatedly, differences in mothering. It is necessary to broaden our investigation at this point to include how mothering relates to job insecurity (which can occur anywhere along the class spectrum), divorce anxiety, fear of terrorism or child abduction, and the long list of the other security concerns that women repeatedly raised in their interviews with me.

It is particularly urgent to look at this relationship between security and motherhood now, given the historical context in which it is embedded. Indeed, we may have greater compassion for the mothering "madness" of recent decades if we recognize the connection and perfect synchronization between two seemingly disparate phenomena: the advent of a "culture of fear" or "risk society," on the one hand, and the intensification of mothering, on the other.

A radical break took place around the early 1970s when concern with various forms of insecurity began to escalate and we saw the emergence of a "risk society."[13] Just as people's perceptions of risk shot up, we saw a dramatic upsurge in a "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" form of child rearing, which sociologist Sharon Hays later termed "intensive mothering."[14] I argue that these historical trends are related and that, as families have felt increasingly under threat (and less and less protected by social safety nets and other forms of support), they have pinned their hopes on intensive mothering as the security solution for their own individual families.

When a child is born, many of today's mothers' first orders of business, whether conscious or unconscious, is to devise what I call a *security strategy*. A security strategy is an ideologically driven set of mothering practices intended to maximize the security derived from the mother-child relationship. How women do this—their actual practices of intensive mothering—varies tremendously. One can hover over one's toddling child lest she stumble (accident prevention), train her to be tough and fit for independent survival (resilience building), or hold and breast-feed her around the clock (physical and emotional comfort giving), to name a few.

I find that these strategic differences directly relate to which particular forms of insecurity are most urgent in the woman's own life, which themselves vary widely. Many women are concerned about economic insecurity—both their own abilities to provide for their families and their children's prospects for eventually getting well-paid jobs. Additionally, doctors, parenting books, and well-meaning friends barrage women with information about potential physical threats to children. Almost all of the mothers I spoke with mentioned concerns about SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome), in which a seemingly healthy baby dies suddenly and inexplicably. Mothers are concerned with toxins, allergens, and germs, and many brought up the common belief that feeding a baby bottled formula rather than breast-feeding deprives the baby of immunological protection against such risks.[15] Many mothers also worry about violence against children or abandoning men—dangers they believe they can mitigate with the proper parenting choices.

A mother may further feel her child's emotional security is at stake. She may believe the child's self-esteem will be compromised if he sees himself as losing or failing, which could in turn make him feel unloved or

unwanted. In short, the child is seen as a fragile being who could be scarred for life by improper handling, so his main handler (meaning his mother) had better get it right.[16]

Within this flurry of concerns, the mother flips on the nightly news and sees Al Qaeda's latest terrorist threat, pedophiles tracking smartphone photos of children, the outbreak of a new rapidly spreading strain of disease, and a heartbreaking Day 37 update on the search for a kidnapped girl. This is followed by a report on today's overscheduled, overmedicated, or overweight children, with the commentator saying what a shame it is that kids no longer run around outdoors or create their own play.

A woman who tries to weave a security blanket for her child of such threads may well feel daunted, yet this is only half of the mothering-for-security story, from the perspective of the child's interests. However, children are not the only ones whose security is at stake. A mother is, after all, not merely preparing her child to live in an insecure world; she is living in that world and feeling all that insecurity herself. Her own job security may be eroding as waves of social, economic, and technological change splash over her. Her partnership may be imperiled, or she may not have a partner in parenthood. She may be anxious about highly publicized large-scale threats such as global terrorism. Where, we might ask, are mothers seeking their own safe havens?

Perhaps not surprisingly, my research shows that they are frequently seeking it in the same mother-child relationship that is supposed to provide a safe haven for the child. Fifty-one percent of mothers of minor children rank their children as the single greatest contributor to their personal happiness and fulfillment (whereas only about half as many rank their partners as the most important element, and even fewer point to their careers).[17] Given this priority women place on the mother-child relationship for their own well-being, it would be a great oversight to look at motherhood merely as a form of child socialization in which other-oriented women give to security-hungry children what those children need to survive in an unreliable world. Women need security as well, and for many women, motherhood is a primary source from which they draw their own coping resources.[18] This additional element of the security equation has received far too little attention in the sociological research

on intensive mothering, which usually frames women's extreme efforts as being made for the benefit of their children.[19]

Psychological research likewise overwhelmingly focuses on the child's perspective and frames mothers as security *objects*, not as security *subjects*, with their own stakes in an intensive mother-child relationship. However, ignoring a mother's subjectivity and her own security needs and yearnings conceals a crucial aspect of the intensive mothering phenomenon: some women vehemently attach themselves to the mother-child relationship because it makes *them* feel secure.

It is time to update our understanding of intensive mothering. When Hays collected her data in the 1990s, she found intensive mothering to be "child-centered,"[20] but at this point I find that intensive mothers typically go into less detail about their actual children than they do about the mother-child relationship. The twenty-first-century variant of intensive mothering is not as much child-centered as it is "mother-child-centered." Whether geared to the mother's needs or the child's, it is the *relationship* that is endowed with the precious power to produce security, and the correct execution of that relationship on which many mothers focus their energies.

The effects of societal insecurity on the mother-child relationship, then, are arguably twofold. On the one hand, many women do take on the onus of providing security for their children. The combination of perceived threats (high insecurity), the assumption of a "breakable child" (high stakes), and a widely shared belief that mothering determines how a child turns out (high responsibility) can conspire to create anxiety and a somewhat desperate attempt to practice "correct mothering."[21] The assumption is often that the mother-child relationship *should* be able to keep a child emotionally, physically, and economically safe, so the goal is to figure out how to do that and then hold tenaciously to that mothering model.

On the other hand, instability in work, marriage, and other possible sources of security for women themselves prompts many mothers to seek their own security havens within the mother-child relationship, often the one relationship they feel they can count on to be there for the long haul. Here, the focus is on the mother's needs rather than the child's, but again the goal is to maximize security through the right type of mother-child relationship.

Given the security that the mother-child relationship is expected to provide to both the mother and the child, motherhood is becoming a taller and taller order. It is increasingly regarded as *the* relationship to make it all better.

I use the term *motherload* to describe the subjective importance of the mother-child relationship and the power ascribed to it to provide security to the mother, the child, or both. Metaphorically, the motherload is the weight that many women carry into motherhood as they view the mother-child relationship as a singularly powerful form of protection, amelioration, or even salvation in an undependable or seemingly threatening world. And, as I have suggested, this awesomely potent medicine may not be intended to save merely the child; for some women, it is the way to save themselves.

MATERNAL DETERMINISM

In the last several decades, the motherload has become heavier. Plausibly, this could have happened either because threat perception went up and there was an increase in the felt need for security, or because mothers were relegated greater responsibility for providing that security. In fact, both have occurred.

Many parents now view themselves as being "alone in the tasks of raising children and as having sole responsibility for their children's safety and psychological well-being."[22] This sole responsibility is partly due to a "great risk shift" in the last several decades wherein the hazardous consequences of our social and economic organization have been passed from the broader society to private families, who increasingly bear the brunt of society's problems.[23] Anthropologist David Harvey claims this shift began in the 1970s and 1980s when a doctrine of neoliberalism took hold in much of the world.[24] State protections weakened, inequality grew, and families were increasingly forced to find individual solutions to higher and higher levels of risk. But when we say "the family," who precisely is it that we are talking about? In her study of American families today, Sociologist Marianne Cooper finds that it is "the women in these families [who are] expected to be the family's security guards . . . charged with

keeping insecurity at bay, while their husbands [are] comparatively less burdened . . ."[25] That is, in the current gendering of family life, security and motherhood have become inextricably linked. However, managing increasing amounts of security work at precisely the historical moment when the state and public sectors have backed off from their own responsibilities puts a great burden on mothers.

While the rise of the risk society and the shift of the burden of that risk from public to private domains have both occurred during the period from the 1970s through the present, maternal determinism dates back much further. Since the late nineteenth century, when Sigmund Freud first pointed the finger of blame for people's troubles at their early, even if unconscious, childhood experiences with their mothers, people seeking to understand their lives have tended to exonerate the society in which they find themselves. Instead, when things go well, they credit themselves and their own individual merits. And when things go badly, one low-hanging fruit they can easily pluck is a "bad mother."[26] In other words, when trying to understand why their own or others' lives fall apart—why some people can't stay partnered, why no one will hire them, why they murder—people typically explain it in terms of personalities rather than social forces, and often view undesirable personalities as the outcome of "improper parenting."[27] This rise of psychotherapeutic framings has led our society to psychologize social problems and to place both the culpability and the burden of remedy in private hands—especially mothers'. During the period between World War II and the late 1950s, women's quality of mothering came to be held responsible for every possible outcome in their offspring, from schizophrenia and male homosexuality to bed-wetting and even color-blindness.[28] Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*, a vitriolic attack on the damage "overbearing mothers" were wreaking on society during this period, argued that our nation was in a deep "nightmare now and mom sits on its decaying throne."[29] Mothers, having been sent home from their wartime jobs and banished to the suburbs, allegedly lacked anything to do and therefore smoked, chewed gum, ate bonbons (*Vipers* was the origin of the bonbon-eating myth about stay-at-home mothers), and created a whole generation of emasculated sons who could no longer contribute to society. In other words, Wylie argued, the downfall of civilization was due to smothering

mothers. On the other hand, society at large viewed mothers who *with-held* affection from their children as equally viperous, and the commonly accepted cause of child autism was "refrigerator moms," whose coldness purportedly brought on this dreaded disease in their children. A mother was therefore damned if she did, damned if she didn't during this histori-cal time period, which was arguably the apex of mother-blame: the dark side of maternal determinism in which all that is wrong with either indi-viduals or the social order is due to bad mothers.

In the 1960s through the early 1980s, new ideas flooded the cultural landscape and maternal determinism became wedded to the idea of security—a seemingly more positive spin on the supreme power of moth-ering, in which the sensitive (i.e., good) mother was viewed as her child's nearly sole security source.[30] Psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ains-worth brought these ideas to the fore and elaborated the determinative effects of early mothering through their development of attachment the-ory. This theory states that an infant's attachment security hinges on its relationship with one sensitive and responsive adult (often described as the mother or mother-substitute). For example, Ainsworth discovered that babies' attachments were more "secure" if their mothers quickly and affectionately responded to their cries, held them with tenderness and affection, and breast-fed on demand rather than on a set schedule.[31] Since mothering in this time period was viewed less as viperous and more as a critically needed human good, and as middle-class women's labor force participation was steadily growing, it was now a mother's absence rather than her presence that was primarily pathologized—as what Bowlby called "maternal deprivation."[32] Public awareness of Harry Harlow's famous rhesus monkey experiments added an element of hor-ror to the already-brewing concerns over the security consequences of a mother's absence or insensitivity. In Harlow's experiments, young mon-keys without a mother present became crazed and clung to the little rags in their cages as if for dear life. Furthermore, given the choice between a terry-cloth substitute mother and a wire mesh substitute mother with a bottle of formula jutting from its chest, the little monkeys chose to be with the softer, nonfeeding mother any time they were not actively drink-ing, preferring that sense of comfort over food.[33] The take-home point for many mothers was: It's not about what you can provide; it's about *you*.

Your continuous loving presence is the magic pill your child needs in order to thrive and grow securely.

The deal was sealed in the 1970s when bonding research (now in disrepute due to faulty methodologies and for inferring too much about human babies from baby goats and other animals) showed the long-term consequences to children and to mother-child bonding when there was even a several-minute mother-child separation after the birth.[34]

This near-total responsibility for young children's emotional security that early attachment theorists placed on mothers' shoulders (and in their arms and at their breasts) resonated so well with popular audiences that Bowlby's and Ainsworth's conclusions, along with those of the bonding researchers, jumped the academic fence and were absorbed into the public consciousness.[35] At the same time, a swelling supply of advice books trumpeted the thesis of maternal determinism.[36] One likely reason advice books converged on this thesis relates to sales. Sociologist Ofer Sharone finds that the self-help industry fosters a belief in personal agency, which makes prospective book buyers feel that everything will be okay if they can simply do what the book says.[37] Just as with the selling of deodorant, teeth whiteners, and expensive cars, selling expert parenting books relies on convincing people both that there is a problem to be anxious about and that the product (or, in this case, the form of correct mothering espoused in the book) can solve that problem. The expert parenting literature thus peddles individual control, a distinctly nonsociological view of how the world works, but one that sells books. As such books began to fly off the store shelves and homeward, both the mother's crucial role in providing security to her child and her ability to right a thousand wrongs, if she is willing to mother properly, came to be taken for granted.

The scientific concept of attachment was thus beginning to shape the very behavior it was created to explain.[38] Rather than receiving attachment theory as a descriptive—the observation that a child's attachment security relates to its mother's sensitivity and responsiveness—mothers were instead increasingly receiving it as an imperative: thou shalt make thy child secure. Taking up that yoke of now-pop psychology with vigor (and perhaps fortified by middle-class female guilt about entering the workforce in droves in the 1970s), women exceeded the theory's original intent by assuming responsibility not just for their children's emotional

security but for other forms of security as well. For example, mothers often see it as their responsibility—and theirs alone—to steer their children clear of social and academic failures, to mitigate their children's exposure to environmental toxins, to deflect potential crimes against their children, and so on.

The rise of this maternally deterministic view of security in the 1970s and 1980s fit devastatingly well with the forces of neoliberalism shifting risk from society at large to individual families (and specifically to mothers). While the first of these social changes struck on the cultural level—the absorption of psychotherapeutic framings into everyday understandings—the other hit on the socioeconomic level—the privatization of risk. Either of these shifts alone would be grounds to argue for an increased motherload, and their emergence in tandem in different realms of social life only amplified the effect, completely naturalizing women's responsibility for maintaining security, and giving us the perfect set of shoulders on which to place the burden of our social problems.

Furthermore, at the very same moment as we designated Mother as the ultimate security source, the need for security skyrocketed, adding additional weight to the load.

OBJECTIVE INSECURITY

Whether one describes the last several decades using the terms "Risk Society," "The Great Risk Shift," or "The New Insecurity," people today are feeling insecure and there are some fairly compelling reasons why they feel that way.[39]

One common site of insecurity is work. Labor unions, created to protect workers, began rapidly disappearing in the 1970s, and in the 1980s we saw the burgeoning of a new corporate ethic of restructuring and downsizing.[40] In part due to these economic changes, the fear of job loss increased almost fourfold during the last quarter of the twentieth century, such that almost half of American workers were "frequently concerned about being laid off."[41] The recession of 2008 only heightened these fears.[42]

Work insecurity itself is not a new historical development, however. The preeminent sociologist Emile Durkheim, writing in the late nine-

teenth century, discussed how people in the West once had fairly well-defined life paths, with trades mostly passed down from parents to children.[43] The explosion of nonfamily industrial productivity undid that certainty and created a world abuzz with life options. Without a clear social blueprint for how to live or what to do for one's livelihood, this increase in personal freedom carried with it a new source of doubt for individuals who now had "no choice but to choose how to be and how to act."[44]

The number of vocations has simply exploded in recent years and with it the anxiety of the uncharted path. Parents today have no idea what the world of work will look like when their children are grown. The options are more plentiful, but a lot less is known about them. Furthermore, until recently, once one managed to land in an occupation, the sense of wayfaring uncertainty was generally over. But for the last three to four decades, particularly for the younger cohort of workers, there has been no such thing as landing.[45] That is, today's work insecurity is not merely due to the lack of guidelines, unknowns, and the vastness of the job market as one enters but is also due to one's constantly shifting location within that vast market. This is new. Among mid- to large-sized firms, there is "more hiring, more firing, and more companies doing both at once" than in previous times.[46] While periods of joblessness between positions may be short, even short periods without work or frequently shifting job descriptions create a new tenuousness in people's work lives.

The trend toward job-hopping among younger workers (who are the workers most likely to be parents of young children) has economic repercussions as well. Frequently changing jobs generates greater income instability, which is "almost five times as great as it was in the early 1970s."[47] That means that incomes go up and down more frequently now than in the past. Regarding the down, in a given two-year period, about half of all families will experience a drop in real income, and the amount of that drop has increased dramatically since the 1970s.[48]

Along with the financial roller coaster of increasing income fluctuation comes a fear of material loss and poverty that affects even those who do not actually experience a loss but who see the trends around them and wonder if they will be next. In the quarter century prior to the 2008 recession, home foreclosure rates had already increased fivefold, bankruptcy almost sevenfold,[49] and the recession only caused these figures to

further rise.[50] While the national child poverty rate hovers around 20 percent, the threat of poverty affects many more people than that. In fact, given higher income volatility and the increased likelihood that a child will live with a single parent at some point during her upbringing, the *majority* of US children now spend at least one year in poverty by the time they are eighteen years old.[51]

Thus, while the anxiety of the early industrial period might be characterized as "too much to *choose*," today's angst might be characterized as "too much to *lose*." With change a perennial requisite of continued success, the direction of that change could always take one either up or down the social ladder.

If a woman feels threatened in this insecure milieu, where can she turn for refuge? One might expect her to turn to her life partner, both for emotional and financial grounding. Yet even if she is married (and the likelihood of this is decreasing over time), her soul may not rest in that fact, as the half of marriages that will end in divorce make the other half feel less certain of enduring.[52] Indeed, this research shows that marriage not only fails to redress the anxiety over potential losses elsewhere in one's life but it also adds another arena of anxiety over potential loss. With US divorces occurring after a median marriage duration of only 7.2 years, marriage is losing its haven status.[53]

Marriage is not the only relationship on the security chopping block. Community ties, too, are providing less and less shelter from the storm. Political scientist Robert Putnam compiled extensive evidence that civic participation and both formal and informal social associations have declined in recent times and that people have fewer stable social networks on which to depend for support. For example, since 1965 there has been a 40 percent decline in schmoozing among friends, including parties, casual conversations, and simply hanging out together.[54] People are less likely to socialize and spend time with their neighbors and they spend less time in houses of worship.[55] Associations that still exist are often short-term, life-stage specific, and relationships of convenience.[56]

Between job insecurity, economic volatility, marriage unpredictability, and the decline of community support, we see ample evidence of objectively declining bases of security in American society in the last several decades. Pairing this with the cultural view of mothers as security pro-