THE HEART OF THE FLYING MOTHERS:
TAIWANESE FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANTS’ WORK AND FAMILY LIVES

By

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To my former colleagues, you are the earthly angels with wings
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This dissertation presents my five-year feminist ethnographic project exploring the work and family lives of contemporary Taiwanese female flight attendants. Contemporary Taiwanese women are caught between traditional cultural expectations and awareness of gender equality. I adopt the concept of “doing gender” to investigate their family lives. The emotional efforts and the self-identity are all highly influenced by their situated position between the occupational requirements and family responsibilities. I define these women to be “flying mothers” for they always need to hastily move between multiple duties, and because of their occupational characteristics, the struggles and the negotiations they face are not always the same as those working mothers in general. Data-collection methods include interviews, participant observation and textual analysis. Constructive grounded theory was the guiding analysis strategy, for it best reflected the researcher’s unique role in interpreting and interacting with the data as a former flight attendant and an in-training feminist sociologist in the field.

Like many other working mothers in double-salary Taiwanese families, flying mothers also depend on their family members to accommodate their need for child care.
The negotiation and struggles in flying mothers’ daily lives with their family members reveal the cultural expectations about so called “good mother,” “good wife,” and “good daughter-in-law.” Second, flying mothers construct their motherhood not only through practical strategies for family responsibilities but also through the gendered emotional efforts they make, such as the ways they console their family members’ emotions, relieve their own feelings, and adjust themselves in the ways they feel they should do as a flying mother. Last, flying mothers practice exclusive forms to define and to pursue the meaning of self between identities in the public sphere and in the private sphere.

I conclude this dissertation by questioning the out-dated concepts about motherhood and emphasizing the evidence about women’s agency and subjectivity. Through my examination on flying mothers’ experiences, I suggest that the current inadequacy in theorizing about work and family issues should be informed by intersectional perspectives. In this way, we could more clearly identify the social and cultural influences that are impacting contemporary working women.
CHAPTER 1
THE IDENTITIES OF FLYING MOTHERS

Between the Clouds,
In the Sky,
Girls Meant to fly.
Name of Theirs is Flight Attendant.
—From my field note, 2006

As the readers will see, identity is the most prominent keyword in my research. This dissertation explores lives of contemporary Taiwanese women who are employed in airline industry as flight attendants. It examines ways in which different aspects of their lives intersect and intertwine, how different aspects in their lives intersect and intertwine, and how these women would position themselves between responsibilities, requirements, oppressions and powers from multiple dimensions. Meanwhile, this dissertational research is done by a former flight attendant (the writer) who once worked in the largest international airline in Taiwan for 7 years before she took the new path of an academic career by becoming a graduate student in the United States. How I positioned myself in this research as an insider-out, how I interacted with incidents and people in the field, how I engage into the sense-making process with my former colleagues and how I interpreted the context flight attendants are situated in. All of these efforts relating to the researcher’s identity should be regarded as another important credit that would make what being presented in this dissertation stand out. Being a feminist researcher writing about the community I have been much involved with, I saw my goal was being fair enough to accommodate and to present the perspectives of women in my research—including both the researcher and the
researched. In all, I expect my readers to be able to see the identities and the standpoints of these women working in the airline industry in the contemporary Taiwanese society.

I started to do research in the flight attendant community since in the winter of 2005. The beautiful poetic quotes in the beginning of this chapter were excerpted from my field notes in the earlier stage of this research. I often came across such similar depictions of female flight attendants, particularly among the on-line discussion forums and blogs written by flight attendants or young college students who wanted to become a flight attendant. Female flight attendants are thought to be angles in their past lives. And because they still preserve their memories of heaven, in this life they cannot help getting closer to the sky, seeking what they are familiar with. Therefore, female flight attendants are meant to fly; they are meant to work in the sky. “But they are not ‘girls meant to fly.’” When I temporarily paused my research after writing my master thesis on the work aspect of flight attendants’ lives, I concluded that what I had found suggested that flight attendants are “girls made to fly”— women’s are supervised, monitored and disciplined to present a particular impression; to project a particular model and to fulfill the ideal women image airline companies aim to introduce to their patrons. They are astonishingly pretty and slim; they also behave gently and elegantly as a loving, caring, cheerful, friendly and patient woman that an East-Asian culture would admire. Airline companies hope to associate their passengers with such an impression. By taking the carrier they would be able to enjoy the in-flight service provided by such ideal women, which should be a guarantee of their satisfaction.
What I probed in my earlier study of flight attendant’s working lives provided the voices of women who are made to fly. Their struggles and adjustments revealed the other sides of the story which are not shown in the commercials promoting the airline industry. I also realized that all current or former flight attendants, including myself, consciously or subconsciously would adopt certain characteristics that are required at work and internalized them into their personas. This had become the initial point that urged me to probe further in related themes: could there be other parts of flight attendants' lives also affected by this occupation? If so, what are the effects? In my master’s thesis, I looked into female flight attendants' work lives and how are flight attendants’ personal lives affected? If one’s persona could be gradually transformed through the occupational characteristics, I would not be surprised to witness the influences this occupation imposes on women’s personal lives. In fact, when these initial questions gradually emerged into my thoughts on my research, I immediately associated them with the family lives of my former colleagues who are married and have children. “There must be something there,” I wrote this in my notebook, “I cannot play naïve because I have known so much about this occupation. I cannot pretend I do not know. I would hear stories from married flight attendants’ about their family lives, because I have heard several from my senior colleagues when I was working. I could grasp a vague picture of married flight attendants’ family lives, but so far the picture in mind is without complete details.” As an insider researcher, I knew there is something in the field. As an outsider researcher, my duty was going back to the field to fill the vague picture with more details.
On this basis I gradually formed my project and eventually decided the direction I would explore: the family lives of Taiwanese female flight attendants with children. When I began to draft my dissertation proposal, one of my initial interests was to understand how married female flight attendants strike a balance between their working schedules and their family lives. I defined their working lives as in the public sphere, and the family lives as in the private sphere. I hope to understand how Taiwanese female flight attendants negotiate the requirements and the responsibilities from these two spheres. In addition to the specific arrangements in flight attendants’ family lives, the other initial research interest was related to women’s emotion efforts. It is known that flight attendants are required to do emotional labor to provide good service for their passengers. When they might be emotionally exhausted from work, they still have other emotional challenges as they return to their private sphere. The gender role as a wife and a mother assign them the duty that they should be able to emotionally support their family members. I therefore planned to look closer into the emotional work female flight attendants need to perform at home, and to investigate if these emotional efforts could also be gendered as much as the emotional labor they have to do when they are at work.

The recognition of women’s self-identities is an important theme that could not be ignored. This emerged from the women’s voices when I listened to them and queried further. Women talked about their different roles in both the public and the private sphere: as a crew member, a wife, a mother, a daughter and a daughter-in-law. And they also talked about how these different roles together shape the ways they considered themselves. When role conflicts arose, they would evaluate themselves by
being able to balance between roles well enough, or being able to justify the decisions they make. While fulfilling the requirements from these roles, women discussed how they would position their self in-between, and they also hope to fulfill their self. Some actions they took involved changing, magnifying, and redefining their identities. And some strategies women adopted involved escaping from role to another. In such process, they would build up and strengthen their self-identities, make themselves feel complete and fulfilled, and accept the accountability for their situations. I had an impression of such a process before I formally investigated female flight attendants' family lives, but not until I engaged in in-depth interviews with my former colleagues, I had no clue about interpreting such sense-making process regarding their self and identities.

Even though this qualitative research has chosen to only center on working mothers in a specific occupation for in-depth understanding rather than doing a quantitative survey to incorporate other working mothers, I argue that examining female flight attendants’ experiences should not be considered as a special case study. Flight attendants are usually not thought to be capable of fulfilling their family responsibilities, as are traditional mothers. As we will read in following chapters, this is not what many flight attendants would agree. Taking the occupational characteristics of this position into account, we could therefore examine how power from different structures displays and wrestles in modern Taiwanese women’s lives, such as gender, work, cultural traditions, patriarchy, capitalism and globalization. The female flight attendants in my research demonstrate how modern Taiwanese women are situated in the intersections as well as their agency in resisting their oppressed position.
I hope the presentation of my research will allow my readers to understand Taiwanese female flight attendants’ lives through their own voices from their standpoints, understand the context in which these women are situated, and understand the ways I interpreted what I have heard and witnessed in the field. Accordingly this dissertation is structured in the following way. The first chapter is to familiarize the readers with background knowledge about the women centered in this dissertation. The occupation of flight attendant has been highly gendered. Because of the characteristics of the airline industry in East Asia, women in this position have been modeled in quite restrictive ways, emphasizing sexuality more than professionalism. Also I will discuss, the societal and historical progress Taiwanese women experienced in the past decades, when feminism was first introduced into Taiwan from western society by certain Taiwanese feminist scholars. This prepares us to understand how Taiwanese women are situated in the past and in the contemporary Taiwanese society, and also how the Taiwanese women of my focus may perceive their situations. Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical framework of this research. Literature related to the discussions of flight attendants’ work and family lives, emotional work, and mothering will be reviewed. Following the discussion of the literature, Chapter 3 explains the research methods, data collection, and analysis strategies as well as other considerations I had in my field work. I view this project on female flight attendants as a feminist ethnography conducted by a feminist researcher (in-training) with feminist research methods; I will also discuss my researcher’s role and reflexivity, as well as some issues I ever came across in doing this research. From Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, I will lead the readers into the lives of female flight attendants in both the public and the private sphere of by revealing the
micro-level, personal negotiations in their daily lives. Chapter 4 will let my readers understand how Time becomes the keyword in both work and family lives of female flight attendants. I present the strategies female flight attendants and their family members adopt to accommodate their child caring needs. Also I present the daily negotiations, struggles and conflicts in the micro level female flight attendants face with their children, their husbands as well as their family members, especially their parent-in-laws. Chapter 5 will demonstrate how I had explicated my previous ideas of doing gendered emotional labor at work in another level. I argue the emotional work flight attendants do in the private sphere is also gendered. Flight attendants construct their motherhood not only through the practical strategies they use to handle their child-rearing behaviors and family responsibilities but also through the ways they console their family members’ emotion, their own feelings, and adjust themselves (kimochi, as will be explained in later chapters). After looking into both practical and emotional aspects of flight attendants’ lives, Chapter 6 will probe how these women see themselves and their identities, and in such intersections how they consider the meaning of self, followed by the ways they make themselves feel complete and collected. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will conclude this project with my arguments on the current inadequacy of theorizing about work and family issues after examining how contemporary Taiwanese women are situated in the intersections between different power and their own subjectivity.

I need to define and differentiate the meanings of several terms that will repeatedly appear in this dissertation. While all my respondents are flight attendants, I created the
term flying mother\textsuperscript{1} in my dissertation. This specific term refers to the female flight attendants who have given birth to at least one child, and still continue their flying career. For flight attendants who were pregnant with their first child, suggesting that they had not yet experienced working as a flight attendant and taking care of the child at the same time, I borrow the term pregnant mommy from airline company policy to indicate them. More explanations and discussions of pregnant mommies will be presented in Chapter 6. The term flying mother implies that because of the occupation as a flight attendant, their family needs and adjustments are quite different from general working mothers’ families. For instance, their work usually requires them to be away from home for a few days, meaning that flying mothers might not always be at home every night when their family members return home from work or school as other working mothers do; or flying mothers might be able to accompany their babies during daytime in their off days or before/after their duty flights. It also means that these women might not be able to accompany their children and spouses in weekends or holidays, as general working mothers would do. In addition, the term flying mother could also precisely describe that they are like other working mothers who have to fulfill multiple requests from work and family, but because of they are not always in Taiwan, they need to deal with all affairs in their private sphere with their limited time and energy, as if they have to fly in a hurry between different tasks. In all, I invented this term flying mother to describe this very specific group of women among all flight attendants.

The term flight attendant refers to the occupation itself and staff who engage in this occupation. Depending on the airline company’s recruitment policy, males might be

\textsuperscript{1} In Mandarin it is pronounced as “fei-hsing-ma-ma” (飛行媽媽)
also employed as a flight attendant, even though females are still the majority in this occupation. But for the sake of smoother narrative, in this dissertation, flight attendant is used to refer female flight attendant, unless I emphasize the gender by specifying male flight attendant. So in presenting my findings, when I use the term flight attendant, I refer to all flight attendants regardless of their marital status or family situations. When I use the term flying mother I indicate the knowledge or the experiences in discussion are more likely to be shared among those flight attendants who already became working mothers, rather than be commonly shared among all flight attendants.  

Crew or crewmember\(^3\) is the term often used by flight attendants when they indicate themselves or their memberships in this community. I would use this term when their identity as a flight attendant is more emphasized in the context they would like to do so. Comparing to the term flight attendant, crew or crewmember is more related to the recognition of self. Here I am using an excerpt from an interview with my former colleague to illustrate the usage of these two terms,

> As you know, as a flight attendant, it is not that impossible to continue flying after giving birth to one’s child……as you know, we crewmembers always enjoy shopping around the world for our love ones.

In the first part, flight attendant is used when describing a general fact that interviewees thought the interviewer should also have observed in the field. In the second part, the interviewee was describing a phenomenon she saw as quite common among the colleagues. Since she knew my identity was a former flight attendant, she said we crewmembers to indicate our common identity. She expected that without much

\(^2\) Even though flight attendants who are not flying mothers would more or less learn certain facts about flying mothers’ lives, I see a gap still exists. For one of the illustrations of such a gap, please refer to Chapter 3 for my reflections on my identity as a single (former) flight attendants versus flying mothers.

\(^3\) In Mandarin the translation is Tsu-yuan (組員)
explanation I would understand what she was talking about, since I also had the same memberships in this community, and probably shared the same experience (“enjoy shopping around the world for our love ones.”) Like this example above, in my dialogues with flight attendants, both terms might appear at the same time and could be used interchangeably. As the result, the sentences therefore have different implications in different context.4

The last thing I would like to bring to my readers’ attention is the language issues I had in writing this dissertation, particularly the difficulties in translation. While the jargon and the professional terminology in the airline industry has been something I could be familiar with when they were spoken and written in Mandarin, they could be quite difficult in translating into English. It could be because I was not familiar with its English terminology so I had to find out the correct terms. It could also be because they actually do not have an English term respectively. So in this dissertation when I indicate the terms I could not find appropriate translation, I would translate from its meanings by myself, and also indicate its pronunciation (Ping-yin) and characters in Chinese in the footnotes.

I was very thankful for my identity as a former flight attendant in this research. This has given me a unique standpoint in writing about flight attendants’ lives. Seeing the world I have been used to through a sociological lens amazed me in different ways. For instance, I argued that flight attendants are girls made to fly but this was not something I could clearly realize and articulate when my identity was as a flight attendant. While saying I am now a former flight attendant, I know in my heart I will always be a

4 Therefore for the analysis of the data, it is important to always pay attention to the context of the discussions.
crewmember in my life, because this is still a community I feel connected to and I care about. In this dissertation, I would like to explicate what I see about flying mothers with an identity such as mine. And this is my fundamental standpoint of this dissertation.

**Flight Attendant as a Gendered Occupation**

Flight attendant is highly female-dominated position, an example of a gendered occupation. Gendered occupation means that the occupation, as one of the social institutions like family, marriage or education, is shaped by the assumptions about gender. For instance, female flight attendants, particularly those working in the East Asian airline companies are made to project many highly-appreciated feminine characteristics such as elegant, gentle, considerate, cheerful, and helpful, just to name a few. This is an example of the display of gender differentiation in the institution. Gender differentiation refers to this process that elaborates and exaggerates the biological differences in male and female; then accordingly creates and presumes their differences in behaviors, attitude, interests or activities (Reskin 1988; West and Zimmerman 1987). In this differentiation process, the gender hierarchy that favors men over women and produced inequality has been constructed. The term gendered stresses this social construction process to privilege men (Acker 1990). So it is important to note that in addition to an institution or an organization, the term “gendered” could also be used to describe other scenarios that also involve such a constructing process; and as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, we will witness other examples of such process.

Even though today we could see male flight attendants, the majority of people engaging in this occupation are still female. Gender segregation is one of the illustrations of how occupations could be gendered. Occupations are often labeled as
more appropriate for male or female, as “men’s work” or “women’s work.” This gender division of labor is often linked with the cultural expectations about the gender roles. Since women are often assumed to be mainly responsible for the child care, housework and family affairs (Parcel 1999) they are channeled into the employment that could enable them to meet such needs and to qualify them for the expectations. Following this logic, it is not hard to see why flight attendant is considered to be a women’s job. Today the two major international airline companies in Taiwan are China Airlines (established in 1959) and Eva Airways (established in 1989.) Only China Airlines has recruited male flight attendants. As I found in the field work, it was related to the historical background of its company role in the early development of the airline industry in Taiwan. China Airlines used to be operated as the airline of the Taiwanese government before 1959. Because of the political tension between Taiwan and China in the 1950s and 1960s, there used to be armed, male security personnel on duty in every international flight to ensure flight safety and to prevent potential hijacking. When it became an independent airline company in 1959, and those male security personnel were no longer needed to be armed in flight, in order to accommodate these employees in the company, they were transferred to jobs as a male flight attendants. And afterwards, China Airlines would recruit male flight attendants. On the other hand, Eva Airways was a comparatively younger airline company owned by a private entrepreneur. It does not have intertwining relations with the earlier development of the airline industry in Taiwan as China Airlines did. It has also be known to favor the Japanese-style of management which emphasizes more power of the authority, and the differentiation between male’s
and female’s duties. Until today Eva Airways never recruits male to be their flight attendants.

Gender segregation explains why women’s work is often devaluated. The sexual division of labor associates how “natural” it is to be assigned to certain gender in coherent with their assumed characteristics. So the occupations that involve helping, serving, nurturing or other characteristics that have been regarded as women’s responsibilities tend to be the female-dominated pink-collar occupations (e.g. nurse, secretary, primary school teacher), illustrating that women are also expected to play the nurturing, supportive role in the workplace (Howe 1977). These occupations are often treated as subordinate, supporting positions with lower income in contrast to the major, important occupations or positions with higher salary that are often occupied by men. This distinction is associated with the wage gap between men and women (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). In addition, women engaged in female-dominated occupations may not be able to accumulate skills and knowledge at work that are considered important and professional enough to meet the qualifications or the requirements for pursuing the major or higher-paid positions and competing with men (Williams 1995).

However, with this said, the job of flight attendant in Taiwan does not fit with previous understandings of women’s jobs. First, it requires that applicants must have at least a bachelor’s degree. As reported in the related recruitment news published by the airline companies or the news media, there have been more applicants with a Masters degree who would also like a chance to be a flight attendant. There have been many applicants who have studied abroad and could speak fluent English, Japanese or any other third foreign language. In other words, flight attendant is not a job requiring
lower education or lower skills such that anyone could successfully be admitted. The recruitment process is always very competitive, as 2000 to 5000 people compete for very limited opportunities. Depending on the recruiting airline companies, only 20-150 applicants could successfully get in. This phenomenon relates to the second fact about this female occupation I have to indicate. The salary of flight attendant is a crucial factor that attracts so many applicants to this job. The average monthly salary of a new college graduate is approximately 22000 NT dollar (735 US dollars); for flight attendants, the monthly salary is approximately 55000 – 70000 NT dollar (1800-2300 US dollars.)

Unlike previous assumption about women’s jobs, flight attendants could make quite a decent salary that could allow them to be financially independent and support their families. In addition, the ways to calculate male and female flight attendants’ salary are the same, with the acknowledgment that male flight attendants might be likely to be promoted to the management position as in-flight purser with almost double monthly salary (above 100000 NT dollars; equal to 3300 US dollars) than the general flight attendants’.

The highly-paid salary implies that flight attendant is undoubtedly a quite professional position: considering this in this way: if this is just a waitress job as it might look like, how come airline companies which aim to make profits are willing to pay so much money to hire these employees? The major reason to have flight attendants on board is for the flight safety. In case there is any emergency situation, under the pilots’ instructions flight attendants are the ones who can assist with passenger evacuation.

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5 The actual salary involves quite complicated calculations based on the flying hours and the monthly duties. Therefore, the actual salary differs each month, and every flight attendant’s salary is different as well.
and save people’s lives. To accomplish such goals, all flight attendants need to be trained to equip themselves with knowledge about different aircraft models and emergency procedures. And every year they are required to review the training and pass related exams to validate their qualification to operate the flights.

Emphasizing the feminine characteristics of occupations also make other hidden aspects not be fairly presented in the public’s judgment, such as the physical, emotional and skillful demands of the occupation. Hochschild (1983) indicated the emotional labor done by flight attendants at work is to create a comfortable atmosphere for the passengers by suppressing their true feelings. Jobs that are considered to be women’s often involve invisible emotional work such as negotiating relationships, which is thought to be natural for them. This invisible emotional labor women need to do has provided another explanation for the salary gap between women’s jobs and men’s jobs, and illustrates why women’s work is often underestimated (Guy and Newman 2004). Even though both female and male flight attendants are supposed to perform such emotional labor, in the field I found male flight attendants are more likely to be assigned to galley duty in several East Asian airline companies. Galley duty refers to meal preparation duty which is quite different from cooking a meal at home in the kitchen. In-flight meals need to be moved from the refrigerator to the oven for heating, and then put on the trays into meal carts individually. Moving the heavy meal racks to the oven or changing the meal carts requires physical work. One flight attendant shared her story about how, when she was assigned to galley duty because there was no male flight attendant that day, she woke up her boyfriend who was taking her flight to Los Angeles as a passenger to help her out, “I woke him up to help me move all those meal racks
carrying 319 meals, one by one into the oven. Afterwards he told me, ‘oh your job is tiring! This should be a man’s job!’ I told him, ‘you’re telling me!’ He said, no wonder I always see more females outside (in the cabin).’ Her boyfriend was right about such an untold pattern in duty assignments. A purser said that he preferred to put female flight attendant in the duties that involve interacting with the passengers, because “they are good at it compared to men.”

By examining all these occupational facts about flight attendants in Taiwan, we can observe its similarity and its distinctions compared to other female-dominated positions. This also point out the ambiguity of this occupation. Many outsiders who could only see the glamorous aspects of flight attendants from their appearance and the salary might make a biased judgment about the easy components of the job as the service part seems to be; and therefore would ignore all the hidden struggles flight attendants need to face. The gap in-between makes it more difficult for flight attendants to reveal their suffering in their daily lives. As mentioned above, there have always been a lot of applicants competing for the limited chances to enter this occupation. They are highly-educated and have strong language abilities. For many reasons, including the tempting financial benefits, they would hope to become a flight attendant, and might continue working in the next few years, even after getting married and having children.

Who are these Taiwanese women in contemporary Taiwanese society? How they were educated and socialized as they grow up to be an adult women?

**Taiwanese Women in Contemporary Society**

The focus of this dissertation is on the female flight attendants in their late 20s to 40s, implying that they were born after the late 1960s and before the 1980s. It would be helpful to understand in which social and cultural settings these generations were born
and educated. Compared to their parents’ generations, these women were experiencing a lot of changes in Taiwanese society when they grew up, as the society had gradually become more open-minded toward women’s gender roles, and become more aware of the gender inequality issues in those years.

One contribution to the social development regarding women’s rights was the introduction of feminism from Western society. Feminism was first introduced into Taiwan in 1970 and it gradually boomed in the late 1980s through the waves of the women’s movement. The women’s movement in Taiwan devoted more energy on revolution and reform in the societal and political dimensions. Later it also gradually extended to and influenced other fields, such as education and employment rights. It must be noted that liberal feminism had first helped the formulation of the critiques of gender inequality that existed in societal and political systems since 1920s (Chang 2009). But feminist dialogues since the 1970s have been more relevant to the changes that instill more awareness and attention to gender equality in the society. For instance, gender equality has gradually become a major theme in education among Taiwanese scholars, lawmakers, and educators in the past decades. Without those active pioneering Taiwanese feminists in promoting women’s rights after 1970s, Taiwanese society would not have undergone much improvement in gender dialogues.

Western feminism had been borrowed in developing local dialogues in the Taiwanese women’s movement. Feminism, known as nu-hsing chu-I in Chinese, is a relatively new discussion that emerged in the past decade (Sung 1994). As mentioned previously, liberal feminism first impacted Taiwanese feminist dialogues in the 1920s but it did not prosper until 1970s. The major advocates in Taiwan were a pioneer group
of feminists led by Hsiu-lien Annette Lu. According to Chang (2009) Hsiu-lien Annette Lu, who became the Vice President of Taiwan later in her life (2000-2008), should be regarded as the most significant pioneer in the development of Taiwanese Feminism and the autonomous women’s movement. She published a book called New Feminism in 1974 which first urged for the transformation of women’s thoughts and requested for the release of more rights from men’s controlling power. The major concerns of the women’s movement at this initial stage were emphasizing gender equality and the reflections on the predetermined gender roles. Lu used Margaret Mead’s work Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies to illustrate that gender roles are socially constructed rather than naturally determined, therefore we all should reconsider the gendered socialization process in Taiwanese society. Also, she brought Betty Friedan’s work The Feminine Mystique to support her arguments. She argued that Taiwanese women should not be satisfied only with their roles in the kitchen. Educated female students should also make good use of their knowledge to fulfill themselves and to contribute their abilities to the society. Lu had advanced scholarly dialogues to the level of pursing gender equality in employment. This should include equal pay, equal opportunity in hiring and promotion.

In the late 1970s to early 1980s, Taiwanese society was experiencing major changes in its socioeconomic structure. Because of the rapid economic development and the prospering of business, a lot of smaller enterprises and business emerged in Taiwan. More manpower was needed for there were more open positions to be filled. Also it was likely that anyone could accumulate wealth as long as one was determined to work hard in such a prosperous golden age. In such an atmosphere-- and with the
highly increasing employment opportunities-- more women devoted themselves to paid work outside home. At that time, what women would do, women’s work such as secretary, operator or cashier in the department store was more consistent with pink-collar jobs. These easier and more flexible jobs enabled women to make some money for the family and still fulfill their family responsibilities, including housework and childcare. In 1980s, another feminist, Lee Yuan-chen, was the major character who contributed to the women’s movement during the rapid social changes of the decade. She and her associates created the foundation called Awakening. Lee realized the formulation of feminist thought in this period was influenced by the coexisting liberal feminism, existentialism and radical feminism (Chang 2009).

The ideal society in Awakening’s prospect was a society with equal and harmonious gender relations. Even though Taiwanese society had become more open, Lee recognized the fact that the Taiwanese society was not yet fully prepared for feminism. Therefore, in the beginning Lee and Awakening addressed all kinds of gender-related or women-related topics in various spheres with a milder approach. Undertook included holding educational workshops, publishing articles and books to stimulate more dialogues, and seminars for women scholars. Some of the topics Lee and Awakening paid attention to were relationships within the family, the household division of labor, women’s health, and homemaker’s participation in labor force.

The milder approach Awakening took effectively initiated the discussion and advocated gender concerns. It eventually stimulated more enthusiastic and even radical discourses in the late 1980s. In the late 1980s, Taiwanese society underwent dramatic political change because the martial law that had been imposed for 38 years was
abrogated. In the post-martial law period, it was the first time the whole Taiwanese society was in the atmosphere that all the existing power and the authorities could be gradually challenged and overthrown. In such an atmosphere, the women's movement advanced toward other more radical topics related to women, gender, and sexuality. Organizations and dialogues concerning environmental protection, juvenile prostitution and licensed prostitution, divorced women, lesbianism, sexual harassment and sexual liberation were all founded or initiated in this period.

In addition, the political changes after the post-martial law period impacted on the women's movement since 1990. Women began to advocate women's political participation and women's legal rights. The bill of Gender Equality in Employment was first drafted by Awakening in 1989 and eventually passed the Legislative Yuan in 2001. In 1990s, women's rights were more actively considered and protected by laws. Feminist lawmakers petitioned to review and abort the inequality in existing laws, such as Sexual Assault Crime Prevention in 1997 and The Amendment to the Domestic Violence Prevention Act in 1998.

By reviewing the progress and the development of the women's movement and feminism in Taiwan since 1970s, we can identify three periods: the initial stage in 1970s, which was mainly under the impact of liberal feminism; the rapid period of growth in 1980s when several branches of feminist thought coexisted and in the 1990s when the women's movement eventually advanced to the legislative level and aimed to improve all Taiwanese women's lives.

Regarding the influence of feminism and the women's movement on education, the first significant landmark was the creation of first Women's Research Program in the
National Taiwan University in 1985. This program began to design an interdisciplinary curriculum gender studies and addressed feminist concerns that women’s experiences in the male-dominated social sciences have been marginalized. Consistent with the concerns about gender equality and the legal efforts feminists had promoted in the 1990s, the Gender Equality Education Act was first drafted in 1997 and finally passed in 2003. This resulted from the introduction of the gender mainstreaming concept into education, which was proposed at the Third World Conference on Women in 1985 and formally featured at the following (Fourth) World Conference in 1995. Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels…the ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. Under its influence, the Taiwanese feminist movement organizations gradually pushed the Commission on Women Rights Promotion under Executive Yuan. Their efforts finally succeeded in 2004. Afterwards, gender mainstreaming was incorporated into the formation and practice of gender equality in education (Huang 2004).

The incorporation of gender mainstreaming into education was an illustration that after the year 2000, awareness of gender equality and women’s rights in Taiwan has obviously been improved, particularly in the legislative level. Another example was that more specific details in the Gender Equality in Employment Law were enacted. The Gender Equality in Employment Law passed in 2001 and gave pregnant women the right to ask for child-care leave within three years after giving birth to a child. The maximum length of child-care is two years. However, without any subsidy many Taiwanese women hesitated to ask for such a leave due to financial reasons. In 2009,
the act of child-care subsidy provided by the government was finally passed. Employed Taiwanese parents (including both the fathers and the mothers) could take turns to ask for child-care leave, and each of them could receive a subsidy of up to six months during the time they take leave from work. The amount of the subsidy provided by the government will be 60% of their monthly salary. This also motivated private enterprise to be supportive to such a social policy. Even though this was considered to be still at the initial stage, Taiwanese families began to see how national support could actively help with their family responsibilities.

Dialogues regarding Taiwanese feminism and women’s rights are still quite young in their development. This explains the reason why there has not yet accumulated enough research (and researchers) addressing contemporary Taiwanese women’s circumstances, not to mention forming local theories. Second, these dialogues have so far focused more on the political, legislative, and institutional dimensions. Even though the direction of the development will keep going upwards as the trends have shown (Hsien and Yang 1999) we have not closely examined how the efforts Taiwanese feminists made after 1990s impacted Taiwanese women’s lives in the micro-level.

**Understanding Taiwanese Female Flight Attendants**

Regarding the occupation of flight attendant in historical perspective, in 1930 the first flight attendant named Ellen Church was employed for cabin service by Boeing Air Transport, which is United Airline’s predecessor. Later more women joined this occupation. They were called hostess or stewardess which implied the occupation required females engaging in food-service as waitresses or welcoming guests into their home. The recruitment policy at that time was that these women had to be not only young but also slim and attractive. These employment standards might be regarded as
the roots of the beauty myth coming along with this occupation. While the position of flight attendant always attracts much public attention, surprisingly, there have been not many empirical researches on flight attendants.

The majority of the social science research related to this occupation in the post Hochschild era was quantitative. Some suggested strategies flight attendants and airlines could adopt to improve working conditions and the mental and physical health of the workers (e.g. Boyd and Bain 1998; Chang 2006; Haise and Rucker 2003; Ren 2004). In such discussions, the subjectivity of women workers in the occupation was not the main concern at all. Among the qualitative research on women in this occupation, the classic one is undoubtedly Arlie Hochschild’s (1983) research on Delta Air Lines’ flight attendants, in which she proposed that emotional labor was produced as the major responsibility in the service-orientated work. In the recent research, Whitelegg (2005) probed the struggles and negotiations flight attendants face at work and in their personal lives due to the mobility of the occupation. His research was based on the experiences of female flight attendants whose base is in Atlanta working for an American airline company.

At this point, studies of flight attendants have been based on western women’s experiences. While these studies were all significant, flight attendants working for the western airline companies face completely different requirements and context in terms of their work regulations and job contents. For instance, it is obvious that the grooming rules in East Asian airline companies require their flight attendant with more details, such as the color of their nail polish or the hair style when being at work. In addition, since airline companies in East Asia highly emphasize their service quality, the job
content for a flight attendant is much more demanding. I would like to cite from a respondent to illustrate the difference:

Flight attendants in the United States…their lives must be much more easier than ours. Have you ever seen those with no make-up, only wear pony-tail, or let her hair down like a Japanese woman ghost? (I laughed and said, you’re so funny but so accurate!) ….it’s true right? There is no hot meal but some drink and snack service. If there is hot meal, they give the meal out and, done! That’s it! I said “give” the meal not “serve” the meal. If the passenger doesn’t like it, they don’t have care about it like us, like we beg for forgiveness.

As this quote shown, it is important to distinguish the in-flight services and the expectations provided in different contexts because this directly impacts flight attendants’ occupational lives. Focusing on this occupation in the Asian context, Hsu’s master thesis (1996) briefly depicted the facts of this occupation in Taiwan in 1990s. In the first-stage of my own research, I had argued Taiwanese female flight attendants have to do gendered emotional labor in all work-related contexts and eventually such efforts make them internalize the model of femininity they are required to project at work as part of their nature (Chang 2008). Concerning emotional labor at work, Liu (2008) had a different focus as she tried to make a connection between resistance and modern capitalism. Finally, Lee’s research (2009) discussed the family strategies that female flight attendants in Eva Air adopt. Her research was closest to the theme I aim to investigate in my dissertation. Her conclusion was that the family strategies flight attendants took would emphasize the mobility and flexibility, because in doing so it was more possible for them to strike a balance between work and family lives.

In many ways we could conclude that flight attendant is a gendered occupation. Reviewing the societal and cultural context in which Taiwanese live, and the current understanding of women in gendered occupations, I aim to address the root question of
my research, which was: what are the lives of the contemporary Taiwanese women in this gendered occupation like? Current scholarship has visited women’s experiences in different ways; however as I pointed out, the presentation of East Asian women’s experiences are not often seen. This is the contribution I hope my dissertation can make. In this dissertation I attempt to explore Taiwanese female flight attendants’ experiences through the lens of doing gender to understand their identity between work, family and self. The research questions that guided my research were:

- How do Taiwanese women position themselves between their occupation lives, personal lives and family lives?
- For women in this particular occupation, what are the experiences shaping their identity?
- What are the women’s experiences in doing gendered emotion in/across the public and the private sphere?
- What is the situated knowledge women learn from this social location?

I believe Taiwanese female flight attendants serve as an exemplar of many women who are in similar social locations in contemporary Taiwanese society. In other words, I argue this occupation should not be seen as an exceptional case in presenting contemporary Taiwanese women. Instead, it is a representative one that could contribute to our understandings of professional women’s situation in contemporary Taiwanese society and in the East Asian cultural context. Pink-collar positions (Howe 1977) used to share general characteristics: lower educational level requirements, less professional knowledge or pre-job training needed, and all together these could imply lower salary for these lower status jobs. However, as in the case of Asian flight attendants, female-dominated occupations in different social and cultural contexts might not always completely fit into the out-dated pink-collar job definition. Qualifications for
airline recruitment of flight attendants involve multiple standards: physical appearances (i.e. beauty), educational standards (i.e. at least with bachelor’s degree) as well as other professional abilities (i.e. nursing background as a plus in recruitment; language abilities.) On the other hand, we also observe the ambiguous facts of this occupation. While the principal responsibilities of flight attendants are actually to ensure flight safety, this female-dominated occupation has been portrayed more in terms of its lower-level skills and feminine characteristics (Chang 2008). As a result, while many well-educated women chose this gendered occupation voluntarily, their intelligence is not always reflected on what they need to do at work, or is not considered important. The fact that flight attendants are actually professional women “in disguise” could serve as an example of how women’s work is often devalued, and what the women’s reactions are likely to be.

**Summing up**

In this chapter I have given an overview of this dissertation research and the main themes that will be developed in the following chapters. I also indicated and explained certain key terms that my readers will come across repeatedly. I then illustrated the meaning of gendered occupation, the social and cultural context in which contemporary Taiwanese women are being educated and socialized, as well as the guiding questions of this research. This discussion serves as the preparation to familiarize my readers with this occupation and the background of the Taiwanese women I will discuss. In next chapter, I will further elaborate the established literature in current sociological and feminist scholarship that I regard as the theoretical frameworks to understand female flights’ lives.
My dissertation about female flight attendants is crucial because it will provide a way to approach the power and the oppression Taiwanese women experience, and how such oppressive relationships are exhibited in their daily lives. By examining women who engage in such a gendered occupation, their experiences in doing gender both at work and in the family will provide us a chance to identify sources of the power from the macro-level, and how such power existing in the structure manipulates women through the micro-level mechanisms, as demonstrated in their every day experiences. Last, studying women in an East Asian society will contribute to the current scholarship dominated by Western women's experiences. This is one of my motivations in fairly presenting these Taiwanese flying mothers' experiences to the academic audience.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE UNDERSTANDING

Don’t interview me. Ask someone more important. My experience is not important.

You should ask someone else; some special cases……we are too normal, like many other crewmember mothers.

—excerpted from my field notes

These quotations were from two flight attendants I came across in 2006. The first one was from a very nice senior flight attendant in her forties who had two children. She was very kind to me when I was working in China Airlines, and once in our off days in Taipei, she brought me to a religious practice gathering organized by several flight attendants to pray for some health issue I had at that time. Once we came across each other on the crew bus from the airport to the crew center, we chatted happily along the way. She complained about her teenager daughter’s recent strange behaviors after being in junior high school, such as buying a lot of things on-line. She asked me about Yahoo! auction shopping (similar to eBay) because she was not familiar with “that part of the world as you younger generation are.” I explained to her what her daughter might be addicted to in the language I thought she could understand. I thought we had built up some friendship before, so when I heard her refused to do interview regardless of our existing rapport¹ because she thought she was not important, I was in shock and felt quite confused. The second quote was from two pregnant flight attendants who were working as a ground staff in the office. I came across them and asked if they could

¹ This also reflected my own expectation as a green researcher in 2006 when I was looking for potential flight attendant respondents. I was hoping my personal relationships with my former colleagues could benefit my recruitment. And for most of the time, it could. So this case became even more impressive to me.
answer some questions I had.\textsuperscript{2} They did the interview with me yet in the end, both of
them said the way they regarded this occupation was “just a job” and emphasized that they were too “normal”
to be interviewed.

These two quotes haunted me afterwards when I considered my next step in my research after finishing my
investigation on flight attendants’ work lives. While my respondents said they were normal cases, many
outsiders do not think in this way. I often came across people wondering about my research because “They
cannot keep flying...should be transferred to the ground staff position or find another job, right?” I would
not blame the gap between the perspectives of outsiders’ imagination and insiders’ real lives. In the
beginning when I had just joined the airline industry, I had the same assumption too. Yet in a few years from
what I observed through my senior colleagues I gradually realized it was possible to keep flying after being
married and having children. Such a gap between the outsiders and the insiders reflect the limitation of
our thoughts in people’s work and family lives. On the other hand, reviewing the existing literature on family
and work, East Asian mothers’ voices had not much been revealed. Whether flight attendants’ family
arrangements are normal or special cases as they might be, I have to argue women’s perspectives are never too
insignificant to be understood, because there has not been enough attention paid to them even in
academic scholarship.

In this chapter I will review and establish the theoretical framework of this research. There are several
overlapping areas that inform this dissertation. The body of literature of gender serves as the fundamental
framework. So based on this, I summarize the

\textsuperscript{2} This also happened in the first stage of my research so my key questions were about the work lives of
flight attendants.
scholarship in the following aspects: doing gender, gender and emotion; gender, family and work. Then I would like to discuss feminist family theory and feminist standpoint theory to explain the critical contribution this dissertation could add to the current body of knowledge on intersectionality. I will not only point out the major themes in the literature but also link them with my own project.

**Gender Scholarships**

**Doing Gender**

West and Zimmerman (1987) proposed the concept of doing gender to reject biological interpretations of gender. It is neither an innate quality nor an internalized identity but the construction in gendered institutions through interactions in everyday experiences. Gender is perceived as a “routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (p.125) and “the local management of conduct in relations to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for particular sex categories” (p134-135). West and Zimmerman think gender is relational and situational and varies according to the context. This argument would suggest that the different cultural expectations of men and women would occur because they are being treated differently. The accountability of one’s gendered behaviors is crucial in justifying if this person deviates from “normal” or not. Those who fail to perform in an accountable fashion (because they do gender differently whether due to choices or circumstance) would be punished. Power relationships and inequalities are reproduced and strengthened in this process.

In all, the doing gender perspective operates more on the micro-level interactions. This concept will serve as the theoretical basis for my examination of women’s
experiences in both public and private spheres where women need to behave and react to maintain their accountability.

**Gender and Emotion**

Emotional labor should be regarded as one of the most important keywords in studying flight attendants. This term was first defined by Arlie Hochschild (1983) based on her studies of flight attendants working for Delta Air Lines in 1980. Her definition is “management of feeling to create publicity observable facial and bodily display…for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (p.7). It involves people engaged in service work to manage their emotions regardless of their internal feelings, and the process is controlled and supervised by the employers. Emphasizing the feminine characteristics of occupations sometimes leaves the physical, emotional, skillful and more demanding aspects of the work ignored; therefore the occupational facts are not fairly presented in the public’s judgment. For instance, Hochschild also indicated that the emotional labor done by flight attendants at work is to create a comfortable atmosphere for the passengers by suppressing their own true feelings. This invisible work could result in emotional exhaustion but is not publicly recognized. In my own research on Taiwanese female flight attendants I also found them feeling underestimated and being called a “brainless flower vase” (Chang 2008).

Women in emotionally demanding work often experience emotional dissonance, implying burnout (i.e. emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Previous studies found that this is an important mediating role between work characteristics and depersonalization and suggested that the impact of emotional dissonance on personal lives beyond the workplace (Leiter 1993; Heuven and Bakker 2003). On the other hand, latest research shows that emotional satisfaction in family life will bring
positive effects in the family-to-work spillover situation (Stevens et al. 2007). Studying flight attendants’ case further would be able to continue this conversation about the positive spillover between family and work.

Hochschild’s definition of emotional labor refers to the labor an employee is required to do in order to get paid, which is different from the unpaid emotional work at home. Women are expected to be responsible for the management of emotion work in the private spheres, such as love and intimacy in heterosexual relationships (Duncombe and Marsden 1993). In terms of emotion, there are gender differences in the expression, behaviors, reaction levels, and involvement with children (Brody 1999, Minnotte 2007). Men are much more privileged in the private sphere, for family is an institution which also reproduces and maintains the social inequality existing in the society (Barrett and McIntosh 1982, Glenn 1987; Walker 1999), therefore, emotional work is an example of the division of household labor which is characterized by gender inequity (Duncombe and Marsden 1993, Minnotte 2007). For instance, men are the ones who receive the benefits of the emotion work produced by women. Such an imbalance in emotions is a major source of dissatisfaction for women in marriage (Duncombe and Marsden 1993, 1995). In the very limited research so far in the literature on emotional work in the family, Erickson (2005) proposed the theory that gender ideology, time availability and relative resources could be used to explain gender differentials in domestic labor. Minnotte et al. (2007) further tested this theory and found that even though gender differences could be the predicators, this is not an accomplished mature theory yet. They pointed out there is still a gap in the family literature in predicting the emotional work performance
among dual-earner couples. As a side note, these researches are mainly based on quantitative data which imply that further probing in qualitative data is needed.

At this point, we could conclude that emotional labor/work has been known to be work that needed to be done behind the scene by women and therefore devalued. Literature regarding emotional labor at work and emotional work at home both identify the obvious missing gaps. My qualitative research on female flight attendants who experience emotional dissonance at work and emotional dissatisfaction at home would be able to address the gaps in the literature in these two fields.

**Gender, Family and Work**

A great body of literature on work and family has been built up in the sociological scholarship. Related issues regarding work and family have thoroughly been discussed from different stances. With the consideration of doing gender as the fundamental approach in this project, I mainly adopted the following concepts as my major framework to approach my research questions in understanding female flight attendants’ experiences between work and family.

The first one is the second shift model proposed by Arile Hochschild (1989). Because both work lives and family lives demand time and energy, many dual-earner families are overwhelmed by the demanding schedules, trying to accomplish their obligations at work and within the family in a limited time. Her concept proposed in the 1990s is revisited in this project for it signifies how it still dominates the hidden presumptions of working women in approaching work-family conflicts today, particularly in the cultural context where filial piety is still a highly-admired family tradition. The original concept of second shift was based on middle-class women’s experiences in the U.S., by adding Asian culture into the picture it should provide a more complete sketch
of women’s changing family obligations in different societies. Women’s experiences and identity are shaped by work, family and cultural expectations at the same time. For instance, as briefly described earlier in the background introduction, flight attendants as working women and working mothers still come across doubts from the outsiders (i.e. family members) questioning if they could balance between their work and family, while they see their job’s benefit more for their children. And the second shift duties also include assumption about taking care of elders as a daughter-in-law. In my previous interviews I also noticed some flight attendants’ mothers-in-law required them to resume child-rearing duties or household work that they temporarily take over but should be able to return to the daughters-in-law as soon as they come from work, regardless the facts that they might be physically or emotionally exhausted. This is a parallel to Hochschild’s description of women experiencing more emotional frustration between their paid work and their unpaid work at home, “there is no more time in the day than there was when wives stayed home, but there is twice as much to get done” (2003 edition, p.8).

Since lack of control in time is the significant source of stress for working parents, especially working mothers, many long for flexibility in their working schedules (Barnett and Rivers 1996; Coltrane 1996). Among them, mothers are more likely to take action by sacrificing their career or taking part-time jobs in order to accommodate their family needs to solve the time conflict (Blossfeld 1997; Folk and Beller 1993) This also resembles the pressure female flight attendants come across from their family members. I attempt to recognize and build upon the second-shift model in the Taiwanese female
flight attendants’ case to understand its practice among the mothers in such an emotional demanding occupation.

In Arlie Hochschild’s book, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (1997) she researched on women and men occupying the executive positions in a Fortune 500 corporation with family-friendly policies. Hochschild surprisingly found out many workers would turn to their workplace to find recognition and to escape from their home lives which have ironically become more stressful due to work. These findings, which were based on working parents in upper-level managerial positions are criticized for not being applicable to all cases because other factors like job autonomy or workplace relationships could also come into play as the decisive factors in the individuals’ commitments to work organizations (Bielby 1998). Hochschild’s arguments (along with the critics of her work) demonstrate that the increasing level of commitments to their work among American could diminish their commitments to their families. Applying this to the flight attendants’ case, in the beginning of my research I also found several of my respondents described how they treasured the time and space they could have for themselves when they were away from home and children. One respondent mentioned she purposely chose to have a flight during Chinese New Year to be excused from the time and energy consumed by housework obligations in such important holidays. I sensed there could be other stories to probe further because either the concepts of the second shift and the time bind might simplify the complicated realities women in a non-typical “women’s occupation” may face.
This also relates to the recent literature on work-family conflicts that informs my dissertation. In the past two decades, women (including working mothers) have increasingly devoted more time at work (Jacobs and Gerson 2001, Spain and Bianchi 1996). Research began to address the workplace arrangements that have become friendlier to the family, and how these arrangements could be beneficial to individuals (e.g. Barnett and Hyde 2001). In terms of parenting, much attention has been given to the “time squeeze” debates, and suggesting both the quantity and the quality time spent with children may be compromised by the structure of work (Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Garey 1999; Preseer 2003). The structure of work is the key to defining meaningful time both for mothers and children (Hochschild 1997; Galinsky 2000). These discussions over time and parenthood provide a possible approach in understanding flight attendants’ experiences in terms of motherhood. Specifically, I would like to understand how flight attendants as “flying mothers” consider motherhood as their identity in terms of quality/quantity time they arrange to spend with their children, and how the emotional dissonance from work that is likely to affect the emotional work they perform as mothers to their children.

In their book *The Time Divide: Work, Family and Gender Inequality* (2004), Jacobs and Gerson discussed the hidden social problems and gender inequality behind the extra-long working hours employees today need to spend on jobs. While fathers today need to put much more time on work to ensure financial security, working mothers face the options of squeezing time for the second shift and squeezing money by giving up a career. In the conclusion they suggested that the contemporary motherhood dilemma is not only a women’s problem; in fact it represents the structural and institutional conflicts
that confront all workers in the society. This serves as a theoretical foundation to argue that what female flight attendants face between work and family should not be considered as a case study but an illustration of the institutional powers that shape women’s choices.

**Gender as a Social Structure**

Barbara Risman (2004) conceptualizes gender as a social structure, an idea which was built upon Martins (2004) and Lorber’s (2007) notion of gender as a social institution. She argues by seeing gender as a structure, it not only meets all the criteria that classify gender as an institution but also avoids the problem of using “institution”, the term which has been often used to mention the aspects of society (e.g. family; marriage; religion) but now being used to indicate a social structure (e.g. gender; race; class). Risman asserts that gender is a social structure to fully analyze the pervasive effects and theorize the changes in it, and in doing so it would put gender “on the same analytic plane and gives it the equal social significance as other social structures such as politics, race, economy, class, sexuality etc.” (p.431). She also indicates that power exists in both the structural level and the individual, cultural and interactional levels. So gender as a structure “shapes individual choice and social interaction” (p.433); keeps with the expectations attached to women and men in particular social locations. Meanwhile, Risman acknowledges that one’s agency could also shape their gendered selves and “creates, sustains, and modifies current [gender] structure” (p.433).

This concept informs my dissertation as it attempts to observe the individual, interpersonal level of doing gender as a way to approach the power in the structural and cultural levels. My goal is to first present the stance of female flight attendants in such a social location and further explore the power that shapes their gendered selves.
Feminist Scholarships

Feminist Family Theory

Feminist family theory was rooted in the feminist movement in 1960s-70s. Before feminism began to inform study on the family, structural functionalism had been an established theoretical approach in this field. Structural functionalists assume all systems have functions, the central function of family is to procreate and socialize children. For instance, Talcott Parsons (1951) believed the functional family is one that has men playing the instrumental role in supporting the family financially and materially, while women on the other hand, are supposed to be emotionally supportive, care-giving and nurturing as their “naturally born” expressive role implicates. Feminist family theorists began to question how the family as an institution confines women’s opportunities, developments, experiences and rights. For instance, Bernard (1972) demonstrated that and women actually had different experiences and perceptions in marriages, which she called “his marriage/her marriage.” Women are less happy and more frustrated in their married lives while men benefit much more from being married. This is an example of how men’s power dominates family.

Feminist family theory shares several common assumptions (Baca Zinn 2000; Osmond and Thorne 1999; Sollie and Leslie 1994). To begin with, gender is socially constructed. Parsons’ model of family-work division is based on biological assignment (sex). Feminists argue that it was biased to maintain male’s privileges and put women in a subordinate social position. This is also linked to how power relationships pervade family life (Baca Zinn 2000). As a result of gender stratification, women’s unpaid work at home, such as housework or child care, is unvalued in contrast to men’s paid work outside home. Second, families should be understood in a social, structural and
historical context. Families are social not natural; they are shaped with the historical and cultural changes (Baca Zinn 2000, Skolnick 1992). Feminist theorists see it as important to understand the larger social forces influencing the micro-level, interpersonal relationships of families (Ferree 1990). Doing so will enable us to advance our understanding of ways in which women are oppressed in social relations in different aspects. Following the previous assumptions, the third emphasis of feminist perspective on families is the acknowledgement of the diverse forms of families and their reflection of social change (Allen and Baber 1992). The traditional nuclear family model can no longer fully accommodate the families in contemporary society which might involve divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, single-parenting, same-sex couples etc. The nuclear family model could not fairly address the cross-cultural and ethnic diversities either. In all, feminist family theorists aim to uncover and change the existing power dynamics in the society particularly in the family, which has been considered as the private realm. Feminist family theorists further recognize women’s second-class status in the family, workplace and the gendered society (Okin 1997). I consider my dissertation to be an attempt to continue such efforts in scholarship by centering working women’s experiences in the family.

**Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminist standpoint theory is the major theoretical framework justifying my attempt to study Taiwanese female flight attendants, Standpoint, as Nancy Harsock indicated, “is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged” (2004, p.36). The key concept of feminist standpoint theory is that the neglect of women’s voices has made the production of knowledge skewed with male bias.
Feminist standpoint theory emerged in 1970s-80s claiming that the production of knowledge had been excluding women’s experiences. In the mid-1970s there had been discussion to challenge the so called “objectivity” promoted by positivism in scientific research. Feminists further indicated “adding” women to the sociological presentation is not enough, because sociology has been historically a male-dominated realm that not only keeps women out of the content but also the decisions on what is worthwhile being known. In this sense, standpoint theorists began to question the existing epistemology.

Dorothy Smith pointed out the dilemma women scholars faced,

As women members of an intelligentsia, we had learned…to work inside a discourse that we did not have a part in making feminist research, that was not ours as women. The discourse expresses, describes and provides the working concepts and vocabulary for a landscape in which women are strangers. (1987. p.52)

The devaluation of women’s work could be seen as parallel to the traditional relationships between wife and husband within the family. Hochschild (1989) indicated that unpaid work in the household such as child caring and housework is women’s second shift (contrasting their paid “first shift`). The study of domestic labor has been focusing more on the second shift until recently when the emotion work women need to do at work was incorporated into the conceptualization (Minnotte et al 2007). In the private sphere women are expected to be responsible for the management of emotion work which is characterized by gender inequity (Duncombe and Marsden 1993). This is a comparatively new area in the sociology of family scholarship.

Standpoint feminists urged the shift to a paradigm that recognizes knowledge as constructed and shaped by the location of the producers. Such an idea could draw intellectual support from the Marxist framework for it argued that the proletariat produces knowledge (on capitalism particularly) that cannot be known by other classes. Marxists
reject the universal consciousness, “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (Marx and Engel 1976, p.37). Similarly, since men are not oppressed in a patriarchal system as women are, they fail to produce the knowledge from the stance of the oppressed women. Dorothy Smith (1990) argues all women face the bifurcated consciousness dilemma in that they absorb the patriarchal ideologies as their “opinions” but women’s “lived experiences” cannot be authentically articulated. To more fairly address women’s experiences, feminist standpoint theory also promotes the methodology for feminist research (Harding 2004) and seeks to address women’s needs from their point of views (Lorber 2005).

In addition to putting women’s experiences in the center, standpoint feminism also emphasizes the concerns of social location issues. As argued above, the social location shapes individuals’ viewpoints, people in the marginalized social location—not limited to women—are still less likely to participate in the knowledge production. This is one of the criticism of standpoint feminism. As Hill Collins pointed out (1997) there is a group-based standpoint; the marginalized racial and ethnic groups whose standpoints are not represented cannot access the power. Assuming the consideration of women will address all viewpoints is dangerous because such assumptions see all women’s shared universal experiences with White, middle-class, Western, heterosexual women regardless of their racial, ethnic, sexuality, nationality or other social characteristics differences.

In conclusion, I adopt feminist standpoint theory as my major theoretical framework for studying Taiwanese women for the reasons discussed below. First of all, regarding the examination of women’s lived experiences; the key concepts of standpoint
feminism best address my concerns. As my earlier research findings demonstrated, in East Asia female flight attendants are constructed to create a glamorous impressions at work while in reality there is a huge gap between the general public’s imaginations and the disciplinary facts of the job. Another general assumption about female flight attendants is that women in this occupation could not and should not continue their work after getting married or having children since they cannot fulfill their wife/mother responsibilities. Adopting standpoint feminism could allow me to reveal the unheard and the underrepresented women’s voices. Furthermore, by centering the women’s point of view, I aim to probe their needs: for women who choose to continue their career and become a flying mother, what have been the challenges to them? Even though previous conversations might also center women’s experiences in their theorizing process (e.g. the second shift by Hochschild), female flight attendants provide cases from the location that is different from other typical, general career women’s standpoints. For instance, this female-dominated occupation differs from low-waged jobs even though the occupational characteristics devalue women’s physical and emotional labor at work (i.e. emphasizing femininity and services more than their roles in flight safety.) By working as a flight attendant, women are able to also financially support their families. However, frequent travels because of paid work might not excuse flying mothers from the exploitation of unpaid domestic work, especially if we take the cultural expectations placed on women into consideration. In such circumstances, I argue we could not examine the oppressions and inequalities without examining their locations first. I seek to understand what has shaped their choices regarding family and work before I proceed further to reveal the challenges they experiences and the changes they long for.
Adopting standpoint feminism also manifests my efforts in contributing diverse standpoints of women in the paradigms. And considering the context in which women in the study are positioned, the paradigms I indicate here actually refer to both the social sciences and the area studies (i.e. East Asian studies, Taiwan studies). Feminist standpoint theory has noticed the underrepresented viewpoints of the marginalized groups. Bringing East Asian women’s experiences into the non-western cultural context should contribute to knowledge production in sociology and gender scholarship. Besides, the fact that Taiwanese women sharing the same cultural background with other Chinese women in Asia (i.e. China; Hong Kong; Singapore) often directs Taiwan Studies to an ambiguous situation. Regardless of the political, economic and nationality differences, Taiwan is denied nation status by the United Nation and is often seen as a province of China. Such a political situation also impacts the academic dialogues in area studies. Having said that, Taiwan Studies is isolated, muted, and sometimes mistakenly incorporated under the bigger umbrella of China Studies. China Studies is not equal to Chinese Studies or East Asian studies but unfortunately these three realms are not always clearly distinguished. This misrepresentation often ignores that the social reality Taiwanese women face is completely different from the reality Chinese women in China who experience different political, economical, societal context. I argue by identifying the standpoints of Taiwanese women (as a group) the marginalized position of Taiwan Studies in the academic dialogues would be improved. Taiwanese female flight attendants’ experiences could serve as an example to challenge the homogenous assumption about Chinese women.
**Theory of Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a complex theory which seeks to examine how race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality interact and intersect oppressions. The development of intersectional theory emerged in 1980s to respond to the racism and sexism in the earlier feminist movement and the civil rights movement (Ward 2004). Many feminist scholars have contributed to the development of intersectional theorizing. And I see my research will be able to add another layer to the development.

Intersectional theorizing was initially begun by the gender and race scholars who criticized that past discussions tended to focus on one oppression at a time and exclude others. They began to examine the intersectional nature of oppressions (Browne and Misra, 2003; McCall 2005; Ward 2004). The race literature might examine institutionalized racism (e.g. Feagin 2000) yet pay very little attention to how racism intersects with other institutionalized oppressions. On the other hand, the gender literature might only further their original approach to accommodate an analysis of race and class. The “Doing Difference” piece by West and Fenstermaker (1995a) which was elaborated from “Doing Gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) was an example. With the reference to race and gender, intersectional theorizing argued these are not independent categories to be added up; instead “combating one form of oppression while supporting others” is the central concept of the intersectional approach (Browne and Misra, 2003; Ward 2004).

Since the beginning of the dialogues, women of color criticized the single-identity of the feminist movement claiming that it has been based on oppressions white, middle-class women experienced without recognizing that women of color would experience other forms of oppressions which were quite different (hooks 1984). In the
current discussion, intersectional theorizing has been developed to include not only
gender and race into the examination of the oppressions. It has extended an invitation
to conceptualize other oppressions resulting from ethnicity, class, nationality and
sexuality in the macro-level context such as racism, patriarchy, and capitalism (Hill
Collins 2000). Meanwhile, some intersectional theorists argue the examination of the
situated interactions in the micro-level will reveal social inequality as the consequences
of the domination (West and Fenstermaker 1995b)

Intersectionality theory is a significant theoretical contribution in social science
scholarship. As Leslie McCall (2005) argues “feminists are perhaps alone in the
academy to the extent which they have embraced intersectionality” and she argues that
intersectionality might be the “most important theoretical contribution that women’s
studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (p.1771).

After reviewing the theoretical foundation that informs my dissertation research, I
would like to incorporate intersectionality theory to explain how my dissertation
research on Taiwanese female flight attendants can make a significant contribution; and
in understanding Taiwanese women’s experiences will add to the body of the feminist
scholarship dominated by western women’s experiences.

In the earlier stage of this research project, I mainly focused on the
intersectionality of gender and work in this occupation, and how women’s lives and
experiences were being shaped and changed. I concluded that women in this
occupation internalized the ideal Asian femininity model Asian airlines aim to project
through their female flight attendant’s bodies (Chang 2008). By bringing the
intersectional oppression from the macro-level approach, this conclusion could be
further elaborated. Taiwanese airline companies operating international routes advertise and promote their business in the age of globalization by constructing women (female flight attendants) as symbols of nations. Even though this is not in the same context as Hill Collins (2000) argues about White/Black womanhood, the common issue of controlling sexuality and bodies has been one of the components in the matrix of domination women face. The images of the ideal Asian femininity emphasizing the submissive and considerate feminine characteristics in flight attendants is another demonstration of how patriarchy and capitalism intersect and conspire in such a female-dominated occupation, urging women to produce the gendered (feminine) emotional labor.

Gaps in Current Scholarships

Reviewing current scholarship on gender, work and family, I found that there are many gaps in existing literature that my research on Taiwanese flying mothers could contribute. As explained, the second shift model (Hochschild 1989) based on the western middle-class women’s experiences cannot fully address these Taiwanese women’s experiences. Their occupation makes these women fall out of the more traditional working mother category, because unlike the ordinary working mothers, they could not return home every day for their family responsibilities. In a cultural context where filial piety is a highly-admired family norm, female flight attendants are often seen as not being able to fulfill their responsibilities as good mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law. However as I will demonstrate, the challenges flying mothers face are different from the impressions people might have. These challenges could be similar to the general working mothers, and they could also be different because they need more flexibility. In the initial stage I heard that many of flying mothers think being a flight
attendant would benefit their children and family, because they see that their work could provide them more financial and material resources that other working mothers might not be able to provide. In addition, some flight attendants do love this occupation and regard this as their important identity. The challenges do not always come from work but from family members, especially the mothers-in-law who might tend to adopt the more traditional role. I am not arguing that cultural values become the source of oppression. Rather, I see when gender roles as well as the good wife/mother image are embedded in cultural traditions intersecting with paid/unpaid work; the oppression might be produced depending on the context.

My dissertation is to study these Taiwanese women’s situated knowledge in this particular position—in the intersections between gendered occupation (public sphere), gendered family lives (private sphere) and the gendered self— and hope to understand what has shaped their identity in such position. Seeing through the lens of doing gender, female flight attendants are expected to produce emotion labor in this gendered occupation. Continuing the discussions on the gendered emotional labor at work, as women are also expected to do gender as a wife, a mother, and a daughters-in-law, this indicates the emotional work women need to produce at home is also gendered. Love, intimacy, motherhood, filial piety as well as other attitudes, behaviors, and values women are expected to demonstrate could be incorporated into the realm of gendered emotional work.

Meanwhile, doing gender could be linked with doing gendered emotion in different spheres and discussed separately (gendered emotional labor at work vs. gendered emotional work in the family); it could also be discussed by visiting the possible
conflicts/spillovers between work and family. Therefore one of my goals in this dissertation was to explore women’s negotiations between their occupational lives and family lives. Specifically, I approach this question by examining how women do the gendered emotion work when thinking from the stance of “in-between”; with the acknowledgment of their own self-identity. In other words, I attempted to examine for these women in the intersections between their occupation, family and self, how they do gender with a special focus on the emotion aspect. I also made efforts to understand what shape their identity, and how they learn and accumulate their situated knowledge in their daily lives.

Female flight attendants as “flying mothers” are likely to be assumed to be the privileged ones, because their glamorous occupation is usually misunderstood to be as simple as some waitressing work, and they could still make decent salary by doing such an easy job, travelling all over the world and enjoying their lives. However I would argue as Patricia Collins (2000) has indicated, every individual could possibly be the oppressor, the oppressed, or simultaneously identified with both identities depending on the context. Considering its glamorous and demanding occupational characteristic in the East Asian context, women engaged in this occupation actually need to constantly and frequently change and adjust themselves between the public and the private spheres. I argue that gender, family, paid and unpaid work, patriarchy as well as capitalism would intersect and together create the oppressions imposing on women’s lives. And as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, examining what has shaped the ways flying mothers do gender in the micro-level is an effective approach in examining these intersectional oppressions.
Summing Up

In this chapter I review the academic scholarships I used as the theoretical framework of my research. My dissertation is to study these Taiwanese women’s situated knowledge in this particular position which is in the intersections between the gendered occupation (the public sphere), gendered family lives (the private sphere) and the gendered self. Seeing through the lens of doing gender, female flight attendants are expected to produce emotion labor in this gendered occupation. Continuing the discussion of gendered emotional labor at work, as women are also expected to do gender as a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law, this indicated that the emotional work women need to produce at home could also be gendered.

Before I end this chapter, I would like to point out the significance of studying flying mothers. Combining the earlier discussions in Chapter 1, my initial attention was raised to several unaddressed gaps in the current body of knowledge on women in gendered occupations. First, even though some characteristics of a “women’s job” could still be observed, the former definition of pink-collar occupation does not always meet up with the current reality women face. Flight attendant as a female-dominated occupation is an example that female-dominated positions might no longer be poorly-paid in many East Asian countries. Instead, it has strict skills requirements before admission and females in this occupation are actually professionally trained and are routinely checked to maintain their professional abilities and knowledge. Second, in terms of the gendered domestic division of labor, less attention has been paid to the working women (particularly mothers) in the occupation that requires them to be physically away from home on a regular basis. Third, discussion of the demanding emotional work women
need to perform in both occupation and family like flying mothers has not been adequately examined.

Flight attendant as a gendered occupation is a perfect example in revealing women’s experiences between work, family, and personal lives. In some ways, it is a typical female-dominated pink collar occupation; while in the meantime, unlike the previous assumption this one could provide women physical and financial independence. On the other hand, with the consideration of its occupational characteristics, female flight attendants face different negotiations with their personal lives and family obligations as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. In addition since female flight attendants are in such a highly gendered occupation that is emotionally demanded at work, studying their experiences could reveal the emotional challenges women face between work and family.

As I aim to center Taiwanese women’s experiences in this dissertation, my goal is not only to bring the marginalized voices into the paradigm of scholarship, but also to make my former colleagues realize their experiences are much more valuable than they might assume. As a former flight attendant and as a member of this women community, I see myself having such responsibility to ensure that my writing and my research could provide feedback to certain extent, as I will continue to discuss in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3
STUDYING AND PRESENTING ON FLYING MOTHERS’ LIVES

Topics that ignite your passions lead you to do research that can go beyond fulfilling academic requirements and professional credits. You’ll enter the studied phenomenon with enthusiasm and open yourself to the research experience and follow where it takes you. The path may present inevitable ambiguities that hurl you into the existential dislocation of bewilderment. Still, when you bring passion, curiosity, openness, and care to your work, novel experiences will ensue and your ideas will emerge.

—Kathy Charmaz, Constructing Grounded Theory

I had an article published in a Chinese book in 2010. This book was a collection of Taiwanese women scholars writing on their lived experiences as they ever studied or lived in the United States, either as a student, a visiting scholar, an employee, or a dependent coming to America because of a spouse. My article was about my reflections on my identity after studying in the United States for 5 years. I thought from now on, there would always be part of me connecting to these 5 years I spent on studying sociology in the University of Florida. “Sometimes you wouldn’t know how much you miss it until you leave it; you wouldn’t know it has been embedded into your blood.” I wrote, “I always say that my research is my identity. And now my life in the U.S. also becomes one crucial piece in my identity.”

I would not know my identity as a flight attendant has been embedded into my blood until I left my job and began my new career path in the United States. I would not know until that afternoon talking to a professor—a feminist professor who had not yet become my advisor, my mentor, and the Chair of my dissertation committee—that I could study on female flight attendants and that having been one of them would not diminish my credibility for not being neutral or objective enough as a researcher. As time went by, I received more academic trainings in the discipline, and reflected even
further on my identity and my research. I would not know in which way my identity could contribute to my research until I had taken the course on advanced qualitative research methods and saw how to incorporate my identity into my research after reading Charmaz’s *Constructing Grounded Theory*. And I would not know the importance of acknowledging the researchers’ identity in the interpretation of the data until feminist research methods had enlightened me. My interactions with my research have been shaped by my identity since the beginning before I ever realized this fact.

In this chapter I would like to let my identity(-ies) take the lead in explaining my research rationale, research methods, analysis strategies and final presentations. My readers will find in this dissertation I always provide very specific illustrations of the ways I interacted and interpreted with my data. With my identity in different stages, I was therefore led to my concluding remarks. Thus in this chapter, I see it is important to prepare my readers to recognize where my standpoints are, and how, with my standpoints when themes emerged from data, I would interpret them, how I would make sense of the meanings in the context my respondents were in. In this chapter I will also reflect on my identity (-ies) in my research to let my readers see the merits and the limitations of the researcher. With the acknowledgement of those pros and cons, I discuss how I make decisions and justify my choices in my research. My readers will definitely also read about my struggles, confusions, dilemmatic feelings as well as other positive and negative emotions I had in the field as a feminist researcher. There would also be some of my personal lives presented here that my readers might doubt if I forgot this is an academic dissertation, and please trust me, I have my point to make by bringing those in. Instead of pretending the research was done in a super-objective
vacuum tube (which is something I argue to be impossible), I would like to fairly present my readers my vision for my research, and with this vision how flying mothers speak their stories and experiences in my presentation.

**Overview of the Research Process**

My research on Taiwanese female flight attendants is a long-term project first initiated in December 2005. It had involved multiple research foci; different research questions and analysis strategies; formal and informal data collection periods; countless visits to different settings for fieldwork purpose; last but not the least, the changing roles, identities, maturity in research skills and relationships with the respondents of the researcher. Since it is quite complicated, I would start by giving an overview of this long-term research process before further explanations on the details.

As said, this project was first initiated in winter 2005 and until the time I began to write up my dissertation it has continued for 5 years. In these 5 years, ethnographical research methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and textual analysis were all strategies I used for data collection. Depending on different periods and different settings for my field work, the specific strategies were different. In some data-collection periods, I might apply one or two strategies because of the limited time I could be in the field, or because I could not access possible resources; in others, all ethnographical research methods were used at the same time.

I divide data collection into both formal and informal parts. The formal data collection for the project could be roughly divided into two stages. The first stage included the two individual periods in the field: from December in 2005 to January in 2006; then from May to early August in 2006. The former period was about 20 days. I went back to Taiwan during winter break and began conducting some interviews with
my former colleagues after finishing my first three months in graduate school. The latter was approximately three months in my summer vacation in the following year so that I could return to Taiwan and continue doing my research. At that time, I conducted more interviews, observed at more work places\(^1\) as a participant and collected textual materials. The second stage of the research project was approximately about 12 months. It began in late July 2009 and lasted till November 2010 when I finally stopped actively recruiting interviewees and doing participant observation in the field. It was a continual stay in Taiwan with a 3-month leave back to the United States for my academic work.\(^2\) For the informal data-collection part, I have to fairly say, it has been a non-stop, on-going process since I decided to devote myself to this research project in 2005; I am ardent in developing this project into even an broader one in the future. Whether I could be physically in Taiwan or not, almost everyday I would check materials related to flight attendants and the airline industry from different resources, such as the on-line discussion forums, the news reports, the airline websites, airline commercials or related videos, or any possible textual or media resources I could access. I have been frequently talking to my former colleague friends as well as people working in the airline industry to keep up with the latest updates, whether for social reasons or for research purposes.\(^3\) I never stopped doing so even later as I began being occupied with my

\(^1\) The work places were defined to be all work-related contexts, including the crew center, in the aircraft cabin during the flight, or the crew lounge in the hotel where flight attendants stay when they are abroad.

\(^2\) To clarify the timeline of the second stage indicated here, the short-term leave back to the United States happened during my formal data-collection period, so I calculated the time I spent on formal data-collection in the field in Taiwan was 12 months. Also the actual time I stayed in Taiwan was much longer, and after I stopped actively recruiting interviewees I still collected data informally while I began writing my dissertation.

\(^3\) All my close colleague friends have always been aware of my research on us since the beginning. I will further reflect how I interacted with my former colleague friend later in this chapter.
dissertation writing. I have a strong commitment to my research so I sincerely regard this project to be my life-time research which I am really enthusiastic about; probably I could say I am even more enthusiastic in learning the latest news related to this occupation compared to those years when I was a flight attendant—when my time and energy was limited after my tiring flights.

I also use these two data-collection stages as the clear-cut divisions of my research. In the first stage of my research, my focus was on flight attendants’ work lives. My research questions were to understand their lived experiences in this female-dominated occupation. The findings had been presented in my Masters thesis in 2008. In the second stage of my research, which was targeted for this dissertation, my research focus had been changed to the investigation of flight attendants’ family lives. It was because in the first stage of my research, I had noticed that the ways flight attendants talked about their jobs were different if they were a married woman, or a mother with children from those who were single. In addition, from my understanding in the interviews I had accumulated then, flight attendants who had children seemed to face different issues in their lives compared to single flight attendants. It is fair to say that the second stage of my research was motivated by the first stage. In other words, on the basis of my Masters thesis, my dissertation research was conceived in order to explore further the questions I raised to myself which remained unanswered when I stopped the first stage of my fieldwork in 2006.

Interviews were the major resources of the data I had collected. Because my project has lasted for such a long time, and the main purposes for conducting the interviews were diverse, it often takes me some effort to clearly explain how I would
count the numbers of interviews for writing this dissertation. In the first stage of the research I recruited 32 women interviewees, including single women, married without children, and married women with children. My focus was on their work aspects, so the fact that the interviewee was a parent or not had my minimum attention when I began recruiting the respondents.\(^4\) In the second stage of my research, I recruited approximately another 35 interviewees particularly for this dissertation project; however, data from some of these interviews were not used for this dissertation with the consideration that the main focus eventually became flight attendants who are working mothers.\(^5\) In total, 67 interviews had been done from both stages, and I used data from both stages for my analysis and in my illustrations.

However, I would like to carefully identify the specific numbers of the interviews that haven been included into this dissertation for presenting flying mothers’ lives, and regarding different themes the numbers could be different too. When discussing flying mothers lives, I mainly depended on my analysis on data from the interviews with married flight attendants with children (4 interviews from the first stage; 17 interviews from the second); married flight attendants who are currently pregnant (3 from the first

\(^4\) Also, at that time I just began to learn how to conduct a social research project. As a quite junior social researcher in training, even though I gave it a thought beforehand, I was not able to fully perceive major differences between my respondents regarding their marital status and family situation before I did my interviews on their work lives. Now looking it back, as a more experienced researcher, if I did the research on the same topic with the same group of people, I might be able to be more sensitive toward the differences after acquiring some data in the field and more quick to grasp the clues shown upon in my field notes. Yet I would still keep being open-minded about their marital status in recruiting respondents.

\(^5\) In the beginning I came across difficulties in recruiting qualified participants, so I decided to interview any married flight attendants that were willing to talk to me instead of wasting my valuable time in the field. Later I still did so if I ever come across one because with the motivation that I could probably keep these interviews for my future research. So among these 35 interviewees there were single flight attendants from Eva Air; male flight attendants; married female flight attendants but chose not to have children and one single mother. In the end I sensed I had recruited enough numbers and then decided I would focus on the ones who are married mothers.
stage; 2 from the second); former flight attendants who resigned from the occupation due to marriage and family reasons (2 from the first stage; 2 from the second.) So illustrations presented in this dissertation on flying mothers’ family lives were drawn from these 30 interviews with flying mothers. In addition to these 30 interviews, I had a chance to briefly talk with two spouses of the flying mothers, I also quoted from them in explaining some of the scenarios when necessary. On the other hand, when I discussed some prevailing phenomena among crew members’ occupational cultures, or the general comments flight attendants made on the facts of this occupation, I also counted on data from the interviews conducted in the first-stage with the flight attendants regardless of their marital status. All these 67 interviews were the resources for my references in my writing whether I directly quoted from the interviews or not, but I would specifically focus on the 30 interviews for understanding flying mothers’ lives.

I conducted face-to-face, one-on-one in-depth interviews with my respondents. In the first stage of my research when I asked about work lives, all in-depth interviews were quite long; they would last from 1 hour to 4 hours. In the second stage of my research on family lives, the interviews lasted about 1 hour to 1 and half hours, but sometimes I spent more time with my interviewees afterwards for chatting freely, for social occasions, or for my feedback time for them as I will discuss in later section. These 30 flying mother interviewees were from both China Airlines (26 interviewees) and Eva Air (4 interviewees.) Their age ranged from 26 years old to early 60s; the

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6 One of the interviewees was thinking about resigning after getting married and having children, and what really motivated her to resign was because of her health issue. I counted her interviews among this category.

7 I did not recruit flying mothers’ spouses so those were not formal interviews. Both of them were aware of my aim was to talk with their wives about family lives.
The majority age group is within late 20s to early 40s (27 interviewees). As for the young children of these flying mothers, the age ranged from 0 (in pregnancy) to 11 years old.\textsuperscript{8} The majority of them were less than 5 years old.

For the participant observations, in the first stage of my research, I could take the initiative to visit the crew center; to take international flights; to talk to my former colleagues when they were not quite busy during the flights and were chatting in the galley; or to join their social activities when they had a layover in the United States. In the second stage of the research, the field sites I could choose to enter for observation were quite limited. I could only participate in their family or social activities or events that I was allowed to or I was invited to participate in, and then I could have the chance to observe the interactions between flying mothers and their children. Or sometimes when I was lucky enough, I happened to be on the spot to witness the interactions between a flying mother and her child without advanced anticipation.\textsuperscript{9} Since in the second stage my focus was on the private sphere in one’s personal life, my field observations were more likely to happen in a casual setting, such as in a flying mother’s home, in a café or in a donut shop. The only formal, institutionalized setting I went to for my field work was China Airlines’ newly-built property called BOT near Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. I visited there twice to observe the pregnant flight attendants working as the office staff.\textsuperscript{10} In whichever situation of my field work, I would write my field notes right after the observation.

\textsuperscript{8} The only exception was one of my interviewees in her 60s who was a former flight attendant when she was young. Her adult children were now in their 30s so I did not take them into account.

\textsuperscript{9} For this specific case please refer to Chapter 6 for the flying mother and her daughter I came across in a donuts shop.

\textsuperscript{10} They are known as “pregnant mommy” and I will discuss them in Chapter 6.
In the second stage of the research, I collected almost no appropriate documental
text or media materials directly related to flight attendants who working mothers. The
materials I came across were more related to flight attendants in general, the airline
industry; or the history of aviation development in Taiwan. I collected them for my future
usage as well as for preparing myself with more background knowledge in this field. But
most of these collected documents were not formally analyzed for this dissertation, even
though I might cite from them. On the other hand, in the informal data collection I had
always came across interesting on-line discussions by flying mothers and I will discuss
it later in this chapter.

**Considerations in the Data Collection Journey**

In the long process of data collection, I came across a lot of situations I found
difficult, uncomfortable, interesting or meaningful. They needed my careful evaluation
upon the situation or they demanded me to cope with thoughtful strategies. Some of
them were worthy to probe further; inspired me to examine the related themes in the
data and the final results are presented in this dissertation. Some of them reminded me
of my identity, roles and limitations in the field so I was stimulated to pay more attention
to my reflexivity in the research.

The first issue worthy for further consideration struck me as soon as I returned to
the field. I arrived in Taiwan on the first day of July in 2009, and formally began with my
dissertational research at the end of that month. In the beginning, I came across a lot of
difficulties in recruiting appropriate respondents for interviews. Before I entered into the
field this time, I did have some concerns regarding the recruitment of my potential
respondents but I did not expect the situation to be so frustrating. Since I had been in
touch with my former colleagues via Facebook™ and reading flight attendants’ blog posts, I could not help noticing the significant changes in the working culture of the occupation and the facts about the booming airline industry in Taiwan in the past few years after I resigned from my job. For instance, the uniform of China Airlines’ flight attendants and ground staff has been replaced by new designs in new colors, which was a claim to reflect the new enterprise spirits of the company. Flight attendants either from China Airlines or Eva Air told me how their working schedules and workloads were even more demanding and inhuman, “treating us as a robot which doesn’t need to rest,” as a flight attendant said. The numbers of direct flights between Taiwan and China were increasing; and the destinations in China, Japan or other countries where Taiwanese airline companies could operate increased as well. Chinese tourists now could visit Taiwan by joining group tours, which was impossible in the past due to political reasons. All these facts suggested that my former colleagues are even busier and more exhausted than before with their all packed monthly schedules.

And it was even more difficult than I expected in recruiting respondents. For one reason, I had just moved back to Taiwan. I needed to spend part of my time and energy to settle down myself. That summer in 2009 I was both physically and emotionally exhausted because of a series of issues that happened in my personal life during the previous months before I could return to Taiwan. Now looking back, I realized I had spent more time and energy than usual to collect myself before I could be ready for work after the intercontinental travel and the relocation in my mother land. It was different from 3 years ago when I returned to Taiwan in my summer vacation as a graduate student, collecting data for the first stage of my research. I was able to begin
my interview and my field work almost right away. I have to attribute part of the frustration I had to the realities I faced in my personal life.\textsuperscript{11}

Another reason I encountered my difficulty in recruitment was because summer has always been a hot traveling season in Asia, and with the significant changes in the Taiwanese airline industry and flight attendants’ work as described above, my potential respondents were even harder to be reached at this time. Flight attendants were too busy to meet me even though some agreed to have an interview. Since they could not find time in their highly-packed schedule, they asked if I could wait until the summer ended—when I was about to have a short-term leave back to the United States.

Third, the characteristics of my targeted group for interviewees also made it difficult to recruit them. In the first stage of my research when the marital status and family situations were not my main concern, a lot of my respondents were single flight attendants and their schedules were much more flexible. But for married flight attendants, particularly if they had children, the flexibility of their schedule was always quite limited. They would prioritize their family and children’s needs in their free time. So the difficulty in recruitment I came across in the beginning of this stage of research was not a singular occurrence in a specific time. During the 12 months in the field, I was gently turned down by several flying mothers for interviews, which was the situation I seldom faced in the first stage of my research. Some of them presented good reasons that definitely made sense to me; some of them gave me excuses that were more like a gentle way to say no. Here are some examples:

If tomorrow is not raining then we could meet. I don’t like to go out if it rains.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} I will elaborate this further in the discussion on the researcher’s emotion in the field later.
I’m very tired lately. Maybe two weeks later. Call me then.  

I had to accompany my mother to go shopping, could we cancel our interview today? I'll call you.

I’m quite busy lately. Let me check with my husband for his time…for taking care of children…and if it works I'll call you back to confirm time with you.

My baby will be crying if is he is aside, then I could not talk to you, we'll always be interrupted. Let me check my mother’s schedule and find a time she could look after the baby and you could come to my place to talk.

Those who said they would call me actually were very likely never to ring my phone. When I could not settle an appointment for an interview immediately, the chance was 50/50 that I would hear back from her again. Even if I successfully scheduled an appointment, comparing to the previous interviews with single flight attendants, the appointment could be more likely to be canceled at the last minute due to family reasons. And when such thing happened, I was not always able to schedule another interview. In either situation, I sensed the flying mothers I approached might feel uncomfortable to turn me down directly, or they were indeed too occupied to spare time for things unrelated to their family or personal lives. Or they were after all not quite attracted to my invitation so when something came up, they used that as a convenient excuse. Depending on the cases (i.e. if I sensed one did have difficulties in her schedule; how much rapport we had built before; the tone when she spoke to me) I might or might not choose to follow up by sending a text message later on.

In my data collection process I did not always want to push anyone for scheduling an interview or giving me a chance to observe their family life. I knew

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12 The next day was raining so I texted the flying mother for a reschedule. She never replied my text message and I considered it was her way to refuse for an interview; the weather was just an excuse.

13 I texted this flying mother and left a voice message on her mobile phone. She never replied.
because of the rapport we had, the identity we shared as former colleagues and the uneasiness of rejecting someone in need (particularly for flight attendants who always tried to be helpful to people around them), if I ever push harder for some cases, I could successfully achieve my goal. However, how could I do that when I regarded myself as a feminist researcher writing in/for my community by making use of my identity? I would rather wait for my next potential respondent instead of forcing someone to speak to me, to “give me data because I want it,” as this is what I wrote down in my fieldnote after failing to schedule an appointment, “that will be an exploitation.” By taking my potential respondents’ feelings and positions into consideration, I chose to send the text message for (re)scheduling an appointment because it would be easier for them to refuse me if they did not want to have the interview. They could easily ignore my message or choose to say no in their reply text message. But by doing so, I also understood there could be a possibility that the potential respondents were actually willing to talk to me but they might forget to reply my message, I might miss them for not following up because I thought they had no intention to be interviewed.

Sending a text message to build up a contact was also because my understanding of this occupation as an insider made me aware that when flight attendants are abroad, phone call for trivial things could be quite annoying. Also, thinking about their irregular working schedule, it could be hard to determine if a flight attendant was ready to talk or not. A phone call could interrupt a tired flight attendant’s sound sleep and make her upset. The most polite way when contacting a flight attendant would be sending a text message—as a member of the community I had no excuse for not having such a tacit understanding. And whenever possible, I would also
ask about a flight attendant’s working schedule during that month to get a sense of the appropriate time to give her a phone call if I needed to contact her again.

Some potential respondents gently refused me with the reasons similar to the last two quotes in my examples given above: for lack of a substitute caregiver for letting her give me her time for interview. Some would use similar reasons to let me understand it was not because they were not willing to help me out but because practically speaking, they could not arrange a good setting for our interview. I proposed several solutions like I could visit their place; I would not mind being frequently interrupted, or I proposed we could find a place that her child could play around when we talked, I still came across some hesitation and eventually could not successfully schedule an interview. It was the first opportunity to let me recognize how time is crucial to this group of flight attendants’ lives. I therefore was even more thankful for those flight attendants who were willing to squeeze their valuable time for me.

In addition, from these encounters I also recognized that childcare responsibilities are considered to be a mother’s job, and these responsibilities were put on these flight attendants as soon as they returned to Taiwan. I once interviewed a flight attendant who was on her maternity leave. She asked me to come to her home on the weekend because “that’s when my husband will be home too. So he could take care of our daughters when we talk.” This flight attendant just gave birth to her second daughter. This beautiful three-month old baby girl was sleeping in her mother’s arms when we began the interview. During the interview, their first daughter, an outgoing 4-year-old girl kept coming to us for our attention. She first brought an English book and

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14 This will be discussed more in Chapter 4
asked her mom to read for her, and then she approached me to check the flower ribbon on my ponytail. In the beginning the husband was trying to take this little girl away with him, but very soon I noticed that he gave up and sat at the dinner table to read his newspapers. Later when the newborn baby woke up and began to cry, the husband was asked to prepare the milk. He brought the milk back to his wife to let her feed the baby. When the mother was busy with the baby, the little girl returned to me with her toys. So it was like at this side of the living room, two women were fully occupied with two children; at the other side of the room, a man who just finished the errand demanded by his wife was enjoying his peaceful Sunday morning. When the baby fell asleep again, the mother tried to pick up our interrupted conversations, but the little girl had been engaging in playing her doll with Auntie Louisa too much to let her new friend go back to the mother. I finally heard my respondent say to her husband in a slightly upset tone, “Could you please come to take away your daughter? We’re trying to talk here.” He did come to take her away, but at the moment seeing his reluctant facial expression I sensed it was about time I should stop my interview and leave.

The frustrating beginning of my research in the second stage was like the famous four-note "short-short-short-long" opening motif in Beethoven’s Symphony No.5.: Fate knocking at the door of my research. This striking opening motif introduced me to several vague impressions and some fragmental insights that are worthy of being probed further. I reflected more on my identity changes, time conflicts, care-giving responsibilities, and the reality a feminist researcher would face in her life, just to name a few. Some of my initial reflections were the first contact I had made with some major themes presented in my dissertation, even though I had no clue at that time. I even did
not quite remember I ever had that first contact until I finished my writing and reviewed
the moment when fate fell on me.

While the recruitment did not always go smoothly, I also had interesting
experiences in the process. Some of my respondents regarded my invitation for an
interview as a good opportunity for making time for themselves: because it was a
reasonable excuse for them to have a break from children and family responsibilities.
Once, at end of an interview I said “thank you” to my respondent, she immediately said,
“No, it's thank YOU!” She said because of me she could ask her husband to take their
daughter to his parents’ place to spend that afternoon there. And by doing so, after our
interview she could enjoy some free time all by herself. She had planned to go
shopping in the department store nearby. “This is the reason why I hope to meet here.
I’m so excited! I have been anticipating today for a long time!” In several cases, my
respondents carefully planned in advance so that they come to meet with me outside
their home because without their children they could, for the first time, focus on their
(social) life as an independent woman; as one respondent said “like a single girl again”.
They would have to ask a favor from their mother, mother-in-law or husband to take
over their duties for a few hours; and afterwards they might bring home some thank-you
gifts (e.g. a cake; some desserts, some soft drinks such as bubble milk tea).

In the beginning of the research I did not see these hidden efforts my respondents
might strive to make our interviews possible, neither did I see the implications of this
hidden work. In a way, this is also a type of emotional work a married Taiwanese
woman would do as a mother and a daughter-in-law. After I realized so, I was
somewhat in shock with my ignorance, “How come I never thought of this?” This made
me reflect on my identity: as a single woman without any childcare experience. It could hinder my understanding of the mothers’ world, so I needed to make efforts to make-up for this potential drawback.

Another lesson I learned from my data-collection process was: recruiting respondents needs both patience and strategy. For the patience part, I mean the researcher should prepare herself/himself well enough for the interview opportunities that the researcher might not have at first, but they could arrive at later after being in the field for a while, particularly if the researcher is using a snow-balling method for recruiting participants as I did. I began the second stage of research by getting back to my former contacts in the field and sending out interview invitation emails and flyers. When I found I did not hear many positive replies, and when I also found mentally speaking I was not fully ready for doing research, I intentionally did some warm-up exercises. I kindly asked my best colleague friend Yi-fang to hang out with me whenever she had an off-day in Taiwan, and by talking to her I was able to update the latest news in the company. I also invited some old colleague friends for social gatherings without some hidden purpose such as recruiting respondents. In other words, I did not approach them with the mindset that I am a researcher who is trying to dig things out from them. For me, keeping in touch with my former colleagues was never because they could be beneficial for my research, but because they are my friends and I treasure our friendships. And as friends, having conversations with former colleagues was also my way to familiarize myself with people who I care about again. After all, at that time when I returned to Taiwan, I had resigned from China Airlines for 4 years. Later in that summer, I also met and talked with some other colleague friends that were
willing to participate in my research on flight attendants. And if I came across anyone who might not be qualified as a married flight attendant with children, as long as she/he was willing to talk to me about her experiences in this occupation, I would conduct the interview with her/him as well. My mindset was that even if I would not use them for now, it would still provide me much information about the context in which my targeted group (married female flight attendants) work. Eventually, before the end of summer I successfully conducted several interviews with the group of my target for my dissertational research, even though with struggling moments at first. But generally speaking the recruitment went much more smoothly in the following year.

For the strategy part, I think highly of the efforts a researcher would make on collecting the background information and hidden knowledge of the group one would like to study. I would say collecting such information and knowledge as early as one could, and as much as possible, because the researcher might later find these trivial little things to be useful at any possible moment. For instance, for flight attendants in China Airlines, the working schedule of the following month is usually distributed on the 24th or the 25th of the current month, and the peak time to swap flights with other flight attendants is within the three days after the schedule is distributed. It is important to keep this in mind and circle the dates on the researcher’s personal planner. My identity as a former flight attendant working for this company definitely prepared me for such information. However, I wasn’t aware of a similar peak time in Eva Air, so I could not avoid it when approaching their flight attendants to schedule an interview. Whether formally collecting data in the field or informally collecting background information, it is
crucial for a researcher to be open-minded and to be careful with all of the detailed knowledge pieces—whether these fragments seem to be related or not at the first sight.

**Analyzing Data**

In the second stage of my research, as soon as I conducted my first interview with flying mothers, I began to transcribe it by myself and did the same for the following 14 interviews. Afterwards, I chose to first listen to my interviews again, and then decided if I wanted to transcribe the complete interview or only partial content of it. The interviews not with female flight attendants who were not transcribed; and some interviews with female flight attendants but they were not mothers might be partially transcribed for the part I would like to excerpt for analysis or for quotes. I had to make this decision due to my limited time and energy. I chose to transcribe the interviews by myself instead of employing someone to do this work not only because of financial consideration, even though I could afford twenty interview transcriptions or so. In the first stage of my research, I also did the transcriptions by myself. At that time, my main reason was because the interviews were full of occupational jargon that could be quite confusing for outsiders. Also, the conversations often included some negative complaints about the airline companies and the occupation. My respondents felt comfortable to make these comments in front of me because they treated me as part of them, as an insider; so I saw it would be a betrayal if I released the content to a third party. In the second stage of my research, I made the same decision for two major reasons. First, my respondents were flight attendants, and I realized there is always certain curious attention toward women in this occupation. If I could not find an appropriate person I felt comfortable enough with to trust, I would rather do the transcriptions by myself. Second, I had a possible solution for the transcription issue but it did not make it eventually. Considering
my first concern, it suddenly came to me that if I could find a current/former flight attendant to do the transcriptions; this would probably be the best. In other words, I realized if I would like to keep my commitment to prevent from or to diminish any potential harmful effects on this community, I could find another member of this community to release the information I got. Since this member also has the identity to access the mutual knowledge and resources shared within the community, it would be less likely to make me, the insider researcher, betray the commitments. But very soon I realized there could be another ethnic issue: this possible member I would like employ to transcribe the interview might know the interviewees in person. My interview questions to flying mothers were about private family lives, so would not releasing their answers to someone they know make me betray the trust my interviewees had in me? They might feel comfortable talking about their private, personal lives because they were told by me in the beginning of the interview that I would not reveal their identity in my final writing. Would they still feel the same degree of comfort if they knew another colleague who could identify them would also listen to their interviews? I was debating for the potential ethic issue. At that time my temporary conclusion was maybe I could scrutinize the interview for transcription by listening to it first. If I sensed the content was “safe” without too much private conversations I could have it be transcribed by a community member, otherwise I would do it myself. Yet in the end, I could not successfully employ a community member to do the transcription for no one responded to my recruitment announcement.

Responding to the discussion above, for a similar reason I would pay much attention to protecting the real identity of my respondents. My readers will find in the
next chapters the identity of the person I quoted remains anonymous because I might introduce the quote as “a flying mother said.” If I specify a name to clearly indicate the respondent so that the following description could go smoother, undoubtedly my readers should expect the name is a false one which has nothing to do with the respondent’s real name either in its Chinese characters or in its pronunciation.¹⁵ If the quotes or the illustrations could still make sense in the context, I sometimes would intentionally change the gender or the age of the children. Sometimes when I discuss the incidents that had happened to a respondent I had mentioned in other sections, I would purposely ignore this fact by giving the respondent another fake name, or by plainly describing the incidents itself. Therefore, unlike some other final presentations of qualitative research might have, this dissertation will have no detailed background information chart of all respondents as an attachment in the end of it. I chose to do so to protect the identities of the respondents from being figured out by their colleagues, especially many of them who were forwarded by their friends for my interviews.

I adopted constructive grounded theory as my data analysis strategy. Charmaz’s book Constructing Grounded Theory served as my bible when I proceeded to this stage. Putting the data in the context for interpretation is an important theme of constructive grounded theory, and in my analysis I aimed to stay close to the context when making sense of the data. For instance, when interpreting the meaning of time for flight attendants, I found it was important to identify how they divide their time (whether consciously or subconsciously) into three aspects: for work, for family and for

¹⁵ The only two real names that would show up in this dissertation was my own English name (Louisa) and my best colleague friend’s (Yi-fang) since she was not one of my interviewees in the second stage and hoped to be mentioned by her real name in my dissertation.
themselves. But a time period could have different meanings when viewing it from different standpoints by different persons in different positions. One of the examples is the time of flight attendants’ layover abroad. From the company’s viewpoint, the time during layover abroad is blocked out for rest hours. They are still considered part of working time even though the crew members are not working on the aircraft. It is because of work that crewmembers are abroad with a travel stipend of US 2 dollar per hour (in China Airlines) or NT 60 dollar per hour (in Eva Air) during their layover. Meanwhile, they have the obligation to stand by for any possible duty change (i.e. departure time change for immediate aircraft issue) since they are at work. From flying mothers’ viewpoint, the time period may be considered the time for their own (self). Since they are physically disconnected from the family, they could temporarily be disconnected from the duties they need to do in the household such as child care or housework. They could have such time for themselves due to their work. So this time period abroad could have at least two coexisting meanings.\(^{16}\)

Another example of the meaning of time is that the company and the employees could have different interpretations for their working time. There is a gap between the duty hours defined by the airline company, and the actual hours flight attendants spend on work-related affairs. And there must be individual distinctions because of different personal situations affected by their marital status, child care arrangements, commuting distance, etc. So for a researcher, interpreting the meaning of time in its context

\(^{16}\) Sometimes flight attendants or pilots would bring their family members to fly with them. The family would share the hotel room and spend time together in the layover as a family vacation. The only distinction from ordinary family trips is that at least one of the family members is on duty as a crew member. Therefore in such cases, the time period could also be considered as family time. For instance, a flying mother talked about such family time abroad to be “still rearing the child but only in different place….abroad.”
becomes a crucial key to understand the gaps between different standpoints, because this meaning could reveal how these women make sense of their circumstance in their daily lives.

I think by briefly describing the analysis process or the timeline could be too abstract to make my readers fully understand how I applied a constructivist approach to my research in presenting women’s lives, and practically speaking how it worked out in the analysis stage of my research. So below I would like to present the coding process that helped me to identify and define a key idea as an illustration. This coding process was similarly practiced on all my field notes and interviews.

I began writing the first draft in the fall of 2009 when I temporarily returned to Gainesville, Florida for my academic work in the United States. Maybe I should not call my writings at that time a draft because they were more like some fragmental paragraphs full of scattered, vague, indefinite floating ideas based on few new interviews I conducted during the summer. But it was during this time my idea of “flying mother” emerged from the data I had collected. It began with my initial coding. I produced some codes such as:

- Sending children to the nanny’s
- Preparing and going to work
- Picking up children from mother-in-law
- Women FA\(^{17}\) are flying around the world
- Moving between duties in hurry

\(^{17}\) FA refers to flight attendant in my coding.
Charmaz refers to initial coding as “stick(ing) closely to the data” and the researcher should “attempt to code with words that reflect action” (p.47-p.48). I also indentified what Charmaz called in vivo codes from a mother’s comments in her interview,

I am like a little bee, here and there…the company thinks that’s your family business not the company’s business. They only care if you come to fly or not, they don’t care how you make it for your own business in your own time. So I’m like a little bee, keep flying in-between.

In vivo codes “capture the meanings or experiences” (p.55) that are significant to the participants, and might be told in their own words. I identified the in vivo code “flying in-between.”

Then I proceeded to the focused coding to decide which codes are more meaningful for analytic purposes. I reviewed the initial codes and categorized them. From the example codes listed above, I compared codes with codes; codes with data and grasped three meanings: (1) flight attendants are going everywhere; (2) for mothers the “everywhere” could be a flight destination (i.e. a city) or could be a place (i.e. the nanny’s house; the mother-in-law’s place); (3) they need to move between work duties and family duties in a hasty fashion as “flying in-between.”

So “mothers are flying” was first used as the code I tested and refined in the following interviews I began conducting after returning to Taiwan, as Charmaz suggests “Through comparing data to data, we develop the focused code. Then we compare data to these codes, which helps to refine them” (p.60). Finally I considered these flight attendant mothers were flying between their different responsibilities from work and from family, so I would like to call them “flying mothers” to conceptualize such “flying in-between” actions they are taking, and with such actions how they react to different situations. I then accumulated a list of codes beginning with flying mothers like:
Flying mothers being at work
Flying mothers being at home
Flying mothers’ feelings

Flying mothers had become a category as the data-collection and analysis proceeded. Later it was counted in my research as the center in theorizing all the meanings, actions and efforts of these women’s world.

The theories of flying mothers in contemporary Taiwanese society I constructed and presented in this dissertation were based on the emerging codes from the data in the process. In retrospect, the 12 months during 2009 to 2010 that could be counted toward my fieldwork period was like a long journey. There might be exotic fantasy in the story-telling of one’s journey; however if we look closer into reality, the romantic veil of the journey will be removed and we will find the messy, perplexing, struggling facts hidden behind. Either the concerns emerged in data-collection or the time-consuming coding process in data analysis were only some examples of the difficulties a qualitative researcher would come across.

When the Researcher’s Identities Speak

Since I used to be a flight attendant myself, my identity has become an anchor in my research. My insider identity as a flight attendant had helped me a lot in my first stage of the research when I studied flight attendants’ work lives. On the other hand, my outsider identity as a researcher was getting more salient in the second stage of my research when I studied flight attendants' family lives. Because I have been doing a long-term research, I could clearly recognize ways in which my two identities in the community inform my research, and how these differ in the two stages of the research because of changes in research topics and in me, the researcher, myself. As a young
feminist scholar in training, in these 15 months when doing the field work and writing my dissertation in Taiwan, I came across several situations where I could identify these differences; or I realized that it was because of my twin identities ("insider-out" and "outsider-in"). I had to face more challenging dilemmas, to acknowledge my limitations and to justify the decisions I made when doing my research.

The first thing I realized after entering into the field was that I became more aware of how my identities would shift when interacting with a former colleague friend when she becomes my respondent. I always felt it was good to hang out with my former colleagues for our friendships in social settings. I could simply show up with an easy mood, feel relaxed and carefree; enjoy the time and laughter we would share together. Our social gatherings were always joyful. Later when I began to write my dissertation, sometimes my colleague friends would stop by the donut shop where I was writing and hang out with me for a while. I sometimes would tell them what I was writing about; ask them if they thought I made sense. With my colleague friends’ support, the stressful writing process became easier. Sometimes my former colleague friends would bring some souvenir from the company or from abroad for me, such as a pack of playing card with a new design I never saw, or a tube of hand cream from Germany all we crew members love.

However as a researcher, my mindset was totally different. I needed to prepare and plan in advance. There were things I had to put in my bag such as a recorder with extra batteries, some paper documents and my notepad for my field notes. I also needed to check the traffic routes via Google Maps in advanced for fear that I might be late and keep my respondent waiting. I wanted to carefully choose an appropriate place.
for our meeting, in which my respondent would feel comfortable to talk. And I wanted to ensure the surrounding was not too noisy to record the interview, or that there was no distracting equipment such as a television in the place. I had to prepare to pay the bills for the drinks or even the meals. And of course, because it was an interview for research purposes, I would have to carefully consider the questions I wanted to ask and have a brief scheme in mind. I could never arrive with no mental preparation or see myself being in a relaxed, social mode.

My first interview with a flying mother did not happen until the beginning of August, and she was also a colleague friend of mine. During the one and half years when I was in Taiwan, she and I met up from time to time before and after this formal interview, but I could clear sense my nerves when our relationships was as the interviewer and the interviewee, even though the atmosphere during the interview was still more like chatting, and her attitude toward me was not toward a scholar but still toward a colleague friend. She remained the same, but I did not. I quickly realized it was my two different identities coming into the play according to the different settings. I had similar experiences when interviewing some other colleague friends later on. Yet, I did not sense the same degree of mental pressure coming from the change of my identity when I was in the first stage of my research. I asked myself: why?

I concluded that my twin identities (insider/outsider) in the field caused such conflicts in my mind. Considering the timeline of my research and its relationship with

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18 These concerns and consideration I would had before the interview appointments for my dissertation also show how I as a researcher had gradually improved my interview skills through the years. For instance, I would consider the distracting equipment in setting was because of an interview I had in the first stage of my data-collection. There was a television mutely showing the live news channel in the café we met, and my respondent chose to sit at a seat she could see the TV. The quality of interview was undoubtedly affected.
my identity, such conflicts could be understandable. I resigned from China Airlines in summer 2005 and went to the graduate school for pursuing my Master’s degree right afterwards. The first stage of data-collection in 2005-2006 was within one year after I left my former workplace. My memories were still quite fresh, particularly when I was investigating work lives. If I draw a line with my twin identities being put at each end of it—one end is the insider, the other end is the outsider—in the first stage of the research, my position was more close to the end of insider. In 2009 when I returned to Taiwan, I had left my former job for 4 years. And in these 4 years I had received my M.A. degree and begun the pursuit of the Ph.D. degree. I had also taken my qualifying exams in sociology, and had presented my research papers in academic conferences several times. In these 4 years I had been trained as a Ph.D. student, a young scholar who aims to pursue her academic career. So my identity was closer to the end of outsider. In all ways I always felt I was in the middle between two ends. My thoughts and my behaviors were more like an outsider when I was wearing an identification card that read as an insider. I still had some privileges in the field as an insider and held some common knowledge insiders share, but it was not as salient as before, especially as mentioned earlier, there had been lots of changes in this occupation and in the airline industry. So in a formal interview, I might still behave and talk as an insider (a colleague friend) and that was also probably what most of my respondents expected from me, but my outsider identity was alert to the true characteristics and the main purpose for our appointment.

My position in the field could be ambiguous if I did not pay close attention to this identity shift and behave accordingly. One example was an incident which happened in
late November 2010 when I wanted to focus more on writing. I began “hiding myself in my cave” and avoided social activities. Via my Facebook™ status I announced my determination to my friends that I hoped to have some quality time for writing my dissertation. Please understand my decision and please do not take it personally if I do not reply to your emails because I disconnected the internet; if I do not pick up your calls because I turn my phone off; and please do not ask me to hang out. For my Taiwanese friends in academia, they could understand what I said about “hiding myself in my cave” and the reason why I needed to focus. Some of them said they would have the moments when they wanted some uninterrupted time and individual space, focusing on writing. But it was very hard for my former colleagues to really understand this mindset resulting from my identity as a Ph.D. student. On the very next day after my public statement, a former colleague friend left a post on my Facebook™ wall: “We’re meeting this Friday for lunch, you should come to join us.” I was a little bit surprised to get such message since the day before I just announced that I no longer wanted to have any social events in my life. I gently declined the invitation by repeating what I had posted “Because I need to focus on myself now so please don’t ask me for hanging out.” Another colleague ignored the meanings in my reply and also invited me to join them for lunch: “It’s just a meal, what’s the big deal?” The friend who initially wrote this post replied next to her, “Everyone has to eat, and it’s not good to write every day.”

I suddenly realized the gap in-between when viewing these messages: my former colleagues could not see my outsider identity as a Ph.D. student because this was beyond the boundary of their occupational lives; and even if they saw, they could not fully understand the obligations, emotions and duties coming along with this identity as
a Ph.D. student. Instead, they still interacted with my insider identity as a flight attendant, and expected I was able to join them for lunch. My outsider identity as a Ph.D. student might regard the activity “having lunch together” as a social activity, because I knew it could never end within one hour, so it was conflicting with the commitment (i.e. focusing on writing) my outsider identity made. But for my colleague friends, having lunch together was thought to be more of an activity all of us needed to do in our daily life. It could be some social event since “everyone has to eat”\(^\text{19}\), and it would not bother them that much for a 2-hour long lunch to be followed by a 1-hour coffee break (“…just a meal, what’s the big deal?”). Many flight attendants see hanging out with their colleagues and discussing what has been happening at work to be a way to release their emotions, to refresh and recharge themselves. So they somewhat felt hurt when I insisted that I did not want to engage in any social gatherings with them, even though I would respond in the same way if my other friends who are not crewmembers asked me out. To me, I was quite confused. I was not sure how to deal with the situation because I did not want to hurt their feelings, but I still wanted to keep my commitment from my other obligations. My insider identity knew how they felt, but my outsider identity said I need to set up some boundaries.

This ambiguous position led me to further consider my relationships with people in the field. While they had always been so helpful and supportive for my research, and I recognized one of the reasons was because I was their colleague friend; now I turned them down because of my outsider identity which they did not fully perceive. Did it look

\(^{19}\) As a side note, it is very common to see crewmembers set an appointment to go out for dinner or breakfast together particularly when they are having layover abroad. Also I noticed such phenomena also exist among crewmembers working for Japanese or Korean airlines.
like I betrayed them? Did they feel this way? Would they have any doubt that I had made use of them when I needed their help in recruiting my respondents or in doing field work, and since I no longer needed their help I disposed of them?

I often talked to my former colleagues and my standpoint was as their (former) colleague, friend and sister. Instead of pretending to be an unrelated stranger outside, I saw that an important position for me was as an insider out. And it was indeed what they expected from me. I could not play naïve toward this community because I was not. As a feminist researcher I was concerned with the power relationships between me and the women I write about. The incident described above was one example when I was negotiating between my twin identities. I hated to be thought of as a researcher who exploited their friendships since I never had such intentions. But the feelings and the emotions people would have were always so real, I needed to take how they feel about my behaviors into my thoughts. I was thinking, the exploitation does not always exist in facts, but it could exist in feelings. Even without any specific facts, behavior, or evidence that a researcher exploits the participants, if the researched people has doubtful feelings of being hurt or being betrayed because the researcher failed to fully deliver and articulate her/his identity(-ies) in the field, isn’t exploitation occurring?

I have to say when I did my interviews, grasping these moments was not easy at all. Most of time, flying mothers could describe the specific arrangements, such as how to share childcare responsibilities or who takes care of the children when they are away from home. Later the topics might proceed to the decision-making process or some more thoughts, opinions, or any “softer” aspects. It might not be because the flying mothers do not want to engage in such topics, but because both the interviewer and the
interviewees need warm-up before deeper topics could be discussed. The rapport
might be able to generally build up through the talk, interactions, or mutual experience-
sharing. In some cases, it is also because not everyone knows how to articulate their
thoughts clearly to other people---no matter how much they see the interviewer as their
colleague---and it does need time to warm-up. As one flight attendant told me, she was
interviewed by another graduate student who also studied flight attendants. She was an
outsider so when she did the interview, she was just listening, the interactions were
much limited, “she could not ask questions like you do. It’s not like now I am talking to
you. It was an interview. Ours is more like conversation.” I told her about an article that
graduate student wrote in a published book. She did want to give feedback to “we” flight
attendants, even though I recognized she lacked some basic knowledge about flight
attendants’ cultures.20 This flight attendant said, “Well I believed she is in good will but,
it’s different. From the way she talked I knew, the atmosphere between us…she is not
us. So the interviews were different.”

When it comes to identity, on the other hand, there was definitely something
crucial I was “naïve” about; something with which I had no personal experience so far in
my life: being a mother and taking care of my children. Since I had been single, and in
the past I never had a chance to take care of young children or even younger brothers
or sisters because I do not have any, very soon I found this could be my potential

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20 For instance, the graduate student called the flight attendant she interviewed “Jie-jie” as if she was one
of the colleague to “shorten the distance with them.” As I read this I immediately knew that was probably
one of the biggest mistakes she made in her interviews. The relationships between “Jie-jie” and “Mei-mei”
cannot be easily built-up by addressing the interviewees in such language. As I confirmed with several of
my former colleagues, this would also make them feel awkward or resistance feelings. The misuse of the
language also challenged this researcher’s role in the field, it seems to me that she is trying to acquire the
identity she does not have and build the fake rapport with her interviewees, even though she might not
mean so.
limitation when I investigated mothers’ lives. As mentioned earlier, one example was I could not think of the advanced arrangements my respondents may have to make before meeting up with me for interviews. Reading academic papers or literature about motherhood or family-work conflicts allowed me to determine how the past discussions would shape and inform my research in terms of the theoretical perspectives, however, they could not fully prepare me for the practical negotiations a mother would need to make in the everyday life.

The abstract meanings in academic languages disconnect the realities from women’s everyday life simply because in many cases, the languages are too distant, too isolated or too indifferent. For instance, none of the flying mothers I talked to specified the term “the second shift” in the interviews. Only two of them ever mentioned something similar, “I felt that…I now realized the meanings of ‘burning the candles from both ends.’” The expression “burning the candles from both ends” was once a well-known term to describe the career women’s lives in Taiwan.

My identity as a single woman without child-rearing and child-care experience might also become a limitation in my interview when I asked questions. As expected, flying mothers would talk about their responsibilities and duties from both work and family, and if I asked them carefully I could learn more details in the children care duties that could be too trivial to be first mentioned in the conversations. With the limitations of my identity (a single woman lacking childcare experience) I would not even know how to ask about the details because I did not know they exist. These details are not always something I could learn from the academic literatures, because they belong to the messy data-collection process which is often not able to be perceived in the final results.
One of the strategies I used to cope with my limitation was to acknowledge what I did not know. I indicated my identity as a single woman at the beginning of the interview or when I contacted the potential respondents for an interview. I aimed to make sure these flying mothers see my limitation: first, I had no marriage and childrearing experience so if they thought there could be things I would not understand as a single woman, please point them out no matter how trivial they could be. Second, even though I shared the identity as a flight attendant with them, I was not familiar with the difficult or cheerful aspects they have experienced as a flying mother. Last but not the least, I really meant that I humbly hoped that my respondents could teach me about their lives. I was not saying so out of politeness and respect because of the hidden hierarchy between us (i.e. a senior Jie-jie v.s. a junior Mei-mei, and most of my respondents were elder than me in age, or were senior than me at work). I really needed them to help me see those details I did not know because of my limitation, and remind me of the details I should/could ask further about if I wanted to know about flying mothers’ experiences.

My respondents responded to my confessions on my limitations in different ways. Some of them recommended me to read their favorite books on children’s education; some would “lecture” me about marriage or mothering; some even provided me advice on romantic relationships. Some would tell me things I had never thought of. For example, a crew member commented after I admitted my limitation, “I know what you mean. There are things singles don’t know.” She then shared her experience about how to ask for maternal leave from the company “in the right time”. She told me the definition of the right time during the year was not always determined by one’s family needs but by the consideration about work and money. She explained the complicated
operating system the company used to calculate the seniority of the position and concluded that making sure one is officially at work on January first is important. So if applying for maternal leave in the right time, it would impact less on the seniority in one’s working years, which are used as the basis for calculating for the year-end bonus. “And this was something I would not know when I was a single flight attendant; no one told me so and I found out myself when I needed to ask maternal leave.” What she told me made me become more sensitive in the following interviews with other respondents when they commented on their maternal leave.

My efforts to overcome my limitation gradually reflected on the interview questions I posted to them. The questions changed from asking more technical details (e.g. How would you swap your flights? What’s your preference in flights on your monthly schedule? What is the most important thing for you regarding swapping flights?) to asking more questions about the details (i.e. if you have to send your daughter to the nanny for an overnight stay, how much would they charge for one night, or was it included in the monthly package?). I gradually had more questions to approach the abstract, and ideological theme behind the daily life routines (e.g. If you couldn’t get the flight you want, what would be your arrangements accordingly? How would you talk to your mother-in-law about this?) I also began to have more questions about one’s feelings (e.g. How did you feel about the situation as (description of the situation such as childcare responsibilities arrangements)? What is a so called “good flight” for you and why?) In this sense, I also gradually refined my interview questions so that the distant, disconnected academic literature could be more successfully translated into the practical daily-used languages. I would not ask a question like “How do you see
motherhood?” because the word motherhood sounds a big term particularly in Mandarin, I was worried that my interviewees would associate such big term with my identity as a scholar, implying that I could own more power because the language I used sounded more intelligent and knowledgeable. So instead of using those big terms in my interviews, I would ask a question like “To you what is a good mother?” or “To how much degree do you see yourselves as fulfilling your qualifications as a good mother? Would you like to change anything if possible?” I see paying attention to the language makes my outsider identity become more modest and humble in the field.

In the interviews flying mothers could easily describe specific arrangements, such as how to share the childcare responsibilities or who would take care of the children when they are away from home. Yet later when the topics proceeded to the decision-making process or the thoughts, reflections, opinions as well as other “softer” aspects, grasping the moment to have the interviewees speak was not easy at all. It might not be because the flying mothers do not want to engage into talking such topics.

I also wanted to make efforts to construct the meanings in the context together with my respondents. Meaningfully speaking, I threw away my interview guide in the middle of the first stage of this research project on flight attendants. I had noticed in my earlier data-collection experiences that my respondents were usually very kind and thoughtful. After all flight attendants are very used to perceiving other people’s mind and needs as if it is one of their occupational habits. I sensed that there were differences in the tone and the descriptions of daily lives if they had read the interview guide and if they had to answer the questions that came to me in our conversation. I tried not to give them chance to “make a beautiful and complete story” in advance, or to give me
answers according to the listed interview questions which they could make a guess (and it was often correct) on which part of their family lives I would like to know. This would also hinder my probing scope and also might make me miss some interesting dialogues that were not related to the listed interview questions. I wanted to know their authentic voices.

One of my respondents might have heard from the flight attendant who forwarded her to me about some possible questions I would ask in the interview. When I asked how she and her husband would share the housework and the childcare, she briefly said “everything was divided fairly between us” and tried to change the topic right away. I sensed some awkwardness and realized she was alert to this question for some reason I did not know, and she was unwilling to talk about it more. And later after the formal interview, when she already gradually became more open-minded to me in 90 minutes, I was suddenly told some secrets regarding her interactions with her spouse (that could be not written in my dissertation) and understood why she avoided the question. I was wondering if she was not aware of the questions I was going to ask her, why might be her reaction?

Without an interview guide on the table I also found my interviewees and I could be more flexible in our conversations. It could be because of my personality and my style in doing interviews; or it could be because my twin identities came into our interactions again: when I had an interview guide as a template of the conversation, I was more like an outsider; and since my interviewee tended to treat me as an insider there was a conflict. The interview guide subconsciously reminded both of us such ambiguity. But I sometimes would show my interviewees the list of the possible
questions if they did not know much about me as a colleague, or they might have some uncertainty about my identity, particularly those who were not working for the same airline company with me. If I did not show the respondents my interview guide or the question list, when I first approached them I talked to them about the theme that I wanted to know was their lives as a flight attendant who is a mother. I wished to have a casual conversation regarding this topic, and hoped they could tell me their experiences as a mother. I purposely maintained the atmosphere as a casual conversation style to reflect my identity as an insider, with a note in the beginning of the interview that I was doing this for writing my dissertation. In the first stage of data-collection, I had noticed the slight but crucial difference that when I have an interview guide on the table, my interviewees would be more serious and more formal when they interact with me. As a beginner researcher, with an interview guide at hand that I could refer at any time eased my nerves, but its side effects were obvious. As times went by I was more experienced in interviewing, I felt much more comfortable without any template in hardcopy and gradually learned how to preview different scenarios in my mind beforehand. Such change also reflected the improvement of my skills in different stages of my research, and how such an improvement would affect the data I could collect in the field, which depended on which degree the flying mothers were willing to reveal their personal life to me. I hoped that I could construct flying mother’s world from the point of view from the relationships between me and my respondent—as colleagues, friends, Jie-jie and Mei-mei—because that is exactly the nature of our conversations reflecting the fundamental characteristics of our interactions in the interviews. I was never a so called objective
interviewer because I did have my peculiar position in my research with my twin identities.

So the conversation between the flying mothers and I could go quite smoothly and could be beneficial for both of us, because it was an interactive give-and-take dialogue. It was an interview, while sometimes my questions might make my respondents consider what they did not reflect on that much and felt they acquired something from our conversation as well:

By talking to you I just realize our company is good to us in a way, not everything is bad, because I do have a family leave.

(I: In a way not everything is that bad. But I know not everything is fair either.)

Yes there are so many things to complain about. But I suddenly feel better; you just made me think and see the positive side of the things.

The presentation is constructed by the dialogues between us by exchanging our thoughts, our feelings, our emotions as well as some useful information. I was not always a passive listener without much facial expression. Sometimes my respondents asked me for information they thought I might know because I was more familiar with the “outside world,” so I found information for my respondents about some computer software, the entrance exams for the graduate school in Taiwan and an English tutor for her child. This was the minimum feedback I could give them, yet I tended to regard this as sharing information with my friends and colleagues instead of some intentional feedback from a researcher toward her respondent.

21 A flight attendant who was once interviewed by a Taiwanese graduate student say it was the way that student behaved in the interview. She felt she was like playing tennis with a solid wall and somewhat lost some interests to speak more. “Because it was not interesting at all...for us it was like we were chatting.”
The Donut Shop

We are seldom able to witness the messy process many social researchers experience in doing research, therefore we might doubt ourselves if we are not able to conduct our own research in a very neat and efficient format: go there, do the job, get the results and write a clear, to-the-point conclusion. I have learned from my own research that if we ever have such doubts about ourselves, we are just fantasizing about the research process itself.

Researchers could never be like the ambitious Caesar: I came, I saw, I conquered. The reality is that all researchers have their own limitations. Besides the research, we all have a life to live. We need to cope with all aspects of our daily lives: teaching, studying, making money, paying bills, doing laundry, going grocery shopping, socializing with friends, spending time with family and significant other, and hundreds of other details in one’s life. We all have our emotion and weakness as a human being. We all experience the moments that we are struggling, hesitating, feeling perplexed or having no motivation for writing. We may all have a secret wish that when we wake in the next morning we would find that the research paper had already been mysteriously finished by our guardian angels or by our enthusiastic house elves. By realizing this hidden truth that all researchers would share very similar experiences in doing research and writing, I became much aware of the frustrating feelings that I could anticipate to have because of my conflicting obligations. I made efforts in advance to prepare myself for them and to minimize the negative effects as much as I could. I dare not say I have overcome all of my limitations, but I could say some strategies I adopted were beneficial to my research beyond my imagination. I actually carefully thought about every move I made and one of the examples was that I carefully considered and chose the best place for
me to work on my data analysis and to write my dissertation, which is a donut shop near my home.

I was able to go back to Taiwan in 2009 to continue my research on flight attendants because of a one-year in-residence scholarship I got from Academia Sinica, the top academic research institution in Taiwan. I was honored to receive the scholarship as a Ph.D. candidate to do my research and to be affiliated with the Institute of Sociology. I received a monthly stipend that supported me to focus on my research and field work without worrying about my financial situation. I also had an office in the Institute of Sociology where I could work on my research. After my scholarship ended, I decided to stay in Taiwan to continue my dissertation writing. In the following 11 months, financially I depended on myself by making a living as a part-time English teacher. I no longer had the resources I could get from an academic institution; including a proper place I could focus on writing and doing other dissertation-related work.

That was indeed a crisis for me in my research process. Financially, I had urgent needs in finding a new income source. This meant that part of my valuable time for writing must be used for making a living so I could support myself. In addition, I began seeing the limitations due to my current position in the field, such as the consideration I had on my identity as a single woman researcher, as I discussed in the previous section. I was in the middle of my data-collection, and gradually sensed that I was not always familiar with the current facts about this occupation in the airline industry. Since there have been so many changes in the past few years, flight attendants lives were different from what I experienced personally. And my mind was no longer always occupied with issues that happened among flight attendants or concerns flight attendants would have.
Of course it was not because I did not care about this occupation but because I was not in this occupation anymore. So I was wondering if there was something I could do to better my understanding and interpretation of flying mothers’ lives in the current context. After evaluating every aspect, I chose a donut shop near my home as my base when I worked on this dissertation project.

In Taipei, I lived with my parents in a community quite close to the domestic airport. There are many airline employees living in this neighborhood. As far as I know, many of my colleagues in China Airlines would rent or have an apartment in this neighborhood because it is more convenient to go to work.²² When I still had an office in the Institute of Sociology at Academia Sinica, from time to time I would stop by this donut shop when I still wanted to do some dissertation work for a few hours before I walked back home, or when I was not in the mood to spend an hour on commuting time to work in the office. Later, I gradually saw that this donut shop could be the perfect location that is convenient for me and the people I was meeting since many flight attendants lived in this neighborhood. So I began meeting my former colleagues here for formal interviews or for informal social gathering.

When I began making a living by myself, one of my part-time jobs was tutoring adult students for English lessons. I accidently came across a male student who was preparing for his English interviews with China Airlines for pilot recruitment. Since we both lived in this neighborhood, we chose this donut shop for our tutoring sessions.

²² For instance, the crew center of China Airlines used to be next to the domestic airport before it was moved to Taoyuan. This old crew center was within in the walking distance from my home. It was like yesterday that I walked to the crew center to participate in the flight attendant recruitment interview of China Airlines. Even though the major buildings and the main office have been moved to its new location, this old crew center is still in use now for crewmembers who report to work in Taipei. Also there are commuting shuttles departing and arriving here as before.
Tutoring him meant that I could expect at least once a week I would discuss something about the airline industry, or read an English news article related to the aircrafts. It lasted for four months and eventually this student passed and had become a student pilot in my former company. Meeting with this student on regular basis first gave me an idea that I could turn this donut shop into my base for working on my dissertation since this place had become a setting where I would actively engage into some dialogues with people regarding flight attendants’ lives and the occupational positions in the airline industry. It also inspired me to consider my research in a larger milieu with different angles.

As described above, in this particular location, I had conversations with my student on the airline industry and the aircraft; with my colleague friends on their work and the latest gossip in the company, and of course with several flying mothers about their family lives and child care responsibilities. This donut shop had worked quite well for setting me into the mode for considering all airline-industry-related issues particularly after I purposely had such a mindset. Where I spent time working on my dissertational work seems to be some behind-the-scene trivial that should not be important enough to be mentioned in a dissertation. However, to me, the time I spent in this donut shop actually had urged me to keep reflecting seriously on my researcher’s role; my identities;

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23 As a side note, this was not the only student I tutored in English with the mindset of preparing for airline recruitments. Other students I tutored in Taiwan included some young women who hoped to become a flight attendant, and I did not meet with them in this donuts shop for their convenience. Therefore I found I have to mention my encounter with this student because it was indeed a special incident in shaping my understanding about the context my researched group was in.

24 For instance, I began wondering about work and family lives of people in other positions in the airline industry. I also began evaluating the survival strategies airline companies have to adopt (e.g. cutting down the costs) from different viewpoints and the influences on flight attendants’ daily lives.
my relationships with others in the field as well as the advantages and the disadvantages of my current standpoint in my research.

For instance, after deciding to have this place as my working base, I noticed I did often come across people working in airline industry in this donut shop. As I mentioned earlier, this was one of the characteristics of the residents in the neighborhood. I decided to make the best out of such privilege by sparing some of my attention to other customers whenever I worked on my laptop here. People I came across might not work for China Airlines and even if they did, they might not be my acquaintance. People I ever came across in the donut shop included flight attendants (both male and female; in both international and domestic airlines), pilots (from various airlines companies as well), ground staff as well as some people whose positions I could not figure out but assumed that they were in the airline industry from their conversations with one another. I could recognize these people as soon as I heard some airline-related terminology in the dialogues when they talked to their family, friends, colleagues, or when they were on the phone with someone. I did not mean to overhear other customers’ conversation, but I could not help catching the keywords whenever I heard them.

Therefore I realized an important thing that later became a key when I mapped out my findings, and a key that shaped my understanding of my data: the airline industry is a lonely industry, because it involves a lot of professional knowledge that is too peculiar to be fully understood by people who are not in this industry. How airline employees construct their world could be very hard to be comprehended by the outsiders. For real outsiders, what airlines employees talked about could be meaningless to them, or the jargon could be too hard to follow. I assumed this was one of the reasons the airline
employees I came across in this donut shop did not always care if other customers could overhear their dialogues or not. For instance, even though I used to be a flight attendant in an international airline, when I came across some flight attendants working for the domestic airlines, I could not figure out everything they discussed because of the different work settings (e.g. the aircraft; the working schedule; the company culture) and the different jargons they used (e.g. the service procedure; the assigned rosters). When I came across some airlines pilots, since I did not have much knowledge about operating an aircraft, their conversations were hard to be completely follow.

Whenever I came across any airline employee, I would write down whatever I casually overheard in their dialogues. I could not seriously define such efforts to be part of my fieldwork even though I kept this as part of my field notes. All these encounters had made me carefully reflect on the gaps between the imaginations outsiders have and the realities insiders face, and furthermore, when such gaps exist between the flying mothers and their family members, what the outcome might be. I was thinking, since my identity is not a real outsider, in which way could I contribute to shorten the gaps between outsiders and insiders, to make people who work in the airline industry become less lonely?

After I paid more attention to people around me in this donut shop, I also noticed something I did not notice before: I always encountered mothers and their children here.

25 Particularly, the customer (I) sat next to looked like a student working on some school work with her laptop. I once came across two different groups of airline employees in the same afternoon. I happened to be there, sitting between these two groups. On my left-hand side it was a pilot and his flight attendant girlfriend. I could clearly hear their discussions about their working schedules and their complaints about the company, as they did not quite care if I could hear them or not. Later, a group of three male pilots from another company came in and sat on my right-hand side. They were loudly discussing the aircrafts they operated as they sat down so it was not hard to know their occupation. The couple on my left-hand side immediately became low-keyed and kept it that way until they left the donuts shop, which happened earlier than the pilot group.
Thus putting myself in such a setting was a strategy to emerge myself into the mothering world my respondents occupy. I was convinced that spending time in this donut shop is another way to make up my limitation as a single woman studying flying mothers.

This donut shop is a branch of a chain business coming from Japan, and it has been quite popular since first being introduced in Taiwan several years ago. I often observed that families would come in together to have donut for dessert after dinner; young mothers would bring their toddlers when they meet other mothers for a coffee break; middle-aged mothers would accompany their children to work on their homework; or grandparents would come in with their grandchildren during the daytime on weekdays when the parents were at work. Since the donut shop is family-friendly, I could easily observe the natural interactions between mothers or caregivers and children.

Such observations were much more helpful and much more inspiring than I could ever imagine. I remembered when in graduate school I once made a joke with my cohort, “We don’t need to commit a crime to study criminology; or to commit suicide to study Durkheim right?” In the same logic, I don’t need to get married or have children before I do my research. However, I was after all a single woman with no children. I must admit the possible limitations I would have. By putting myself in a setting where I could observe mothers’ interactions with children, I was I would be better able to discuss topics, ask probing questions and make reasonable interpretations when I

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26 I came across at least twice that two flying mothers came into the shop for their afternoon tea. They both brought their children and when the children were enjoying their donuts, they could chat with one another.
interviewed flying mothers. I believed that all efforts one is willing to make would never be a waste of time and energy. They will eventually pay you back at certain moment in the future.

One evening I witnessed an exhausted working mother scold her son for dropping a donut on the floor. I recorded the scenario in my field notes as followed,

The little boy was about in the first grade in the elementary school. He had been trying to make his mom talk to him. “Mom! Look at this!” “Mom! My friend Ming gave me a toy today! Could I give him my robot tomorrow?”

His mother was approximately in her late thirties. She was dressed in a formal blue suit jacket. The look on her face was serious—or I should say it might be due to fatigue. She was reading a news magazine (not a serious type but more about celebrity gossip, an easy-reading.) Her responses to her son were patient in the beginning, but gradually her patience was used up. It changed from “After finishing your donut, finish your homework and then we go home okay?” to “Be quiet! I’m tired!” “Don’t talk to me now! Eat your donut!” “Do your homework!”

I didn’t see how it happened when the little boy dropped his uneaten strawberry donut on the floor. She immediately freaked out and shouted, “How did you eat? I told you to be quiet! Why couldn’t you just behave yourself?” She spanked her son and the little boy cried. Very soon they left the shop. I heard her upsetting scolding voices as they stepped out.

To me, dropping the donut was obviously an action the son took to attract his mother’s attention. As an observer, even though I did not pay full attention to them, I still could clear sense the mother’ emotion from her words and her behaviors. She wanted some quiet quality time for herself after a long day, and it was impossible when her son was around her. She must have felt the little pleasure she could have for herself was ruined as she stepped out the donut shop. But from her son’s view, he hoped to grasp his mother’s full attention to play with him.

Observing the interactions between mothers and children from incidents like this could not be included in my field work on flying mothers’ lives, but they were quite
helpful to me in understanding mothers’ viewpoints and feelings. When I considered flying mother’s self as presented in Chapter 6, I compared two completely opposite types of interactions I witnessed between a mother and her child in this very the same donut shop and asked myself what could be the contributing factors. I probably would not be able to locate certain codes in the analysis process without my efforts in immersing myself in the mothering world. By saying so, I must clarify that I do not mean to generalize the interactions between all ordinary working mothers/flying mothers and their children into the same category. Also I was aware that even though I did witness some scenarios between this mother and her child in this donut shop, my observations could not be presented as a formal research finding as comparing mothers in different positions because my motivation of being in the donut shop observing other mothers was not for locating a possible case for doing a comparison in my research on flying mothers but an effort to better shape my understanding of mothers’ world. If I would like to do a comparison I would have to carefully pay attention to my research design beforehand.

**What Could Be My Feedback?**

My reflections also went to the meaning of feedback. The longer I was in the field, the more I felt I am obligated to write about this community. Yet in my mind, some concerns were also raised regarding the so called feedback a researcher could give toward the researched through the final presentation in one’s writing. I ask myself: could such feedback to people you care about, people who had provided you information you needed for your dissertation be a perplexing myth itself? Or is the idea of giving feedback through one’s writing and its final presentation like an isolated beautiful island? You could observe it from distance, you long to reach it, you are invited by your
admirable belief and passion to visit it someday in the near future—yet the future could never come. In other words, writing about flight attendants’ lives in my dissertation might benefit my community in the long term, but to these people I care about, such feedback might not be immediate and personal enough.

I was bothered by such thoughts. I realized when I faced my former colleagues they were never numbers to me. They were my sisters; they were women who could have been me and they were willing to give me some time to share their common knowledge with me. I did hope—particularly whenever they complained about something—I could do something for them immediately. It was anxiety, yet I doubted if the idea of giving feedback itself would it bothered me more than bother them? Or to put it in more direct way, does getting feedback from me ever occur to them? While some might sincerely tell me they had enjoyed talking to me about their own life situations and felt they were getting something from our intimate and personal dialogues as sisters, I thought they seldom considered that I might be able to give them a key to solve the problems they faced in their situated standpoint. Sociology, or my dissertation, or any feminist thoughts or theories might be too distant and unreachable for them, like those big terms they would never know and would never use in their lives. So for the feedback that my writing could give in return, I was anxious that when we finally could launch the boat to the mysterious beautiful island called feedback, these people I cared about already passed the point when they really needed some help to survive all the sufferings.

While I was considering the meaning the feedback, one day my close colleague friend Yi-Fang gave me an inspiration after I used my personal hobby I had developed
for 8 months to give some suggestion regarding an issue she had with her significant other. She said she would like to buy me a cup of coffee in return as a feedback to my time and energy on reading Tarot cards for her. “Bingo!” This idea flashed into my mind. Maybe I could make good use of this personal hobby as a way to give my respondents feedback in return for their time and energy spent on my interview. Reading Tarot cards could be an interesting way to say thank you. It is not as serious as a formal fortune-telling predicting someone’s life ever after, but is more like revealing the possible directions one’s life is heading toward, so one could take initiative to change fate by one’s will. I think reading the Tarot cards is a positive tool to give people some suggestions when they feel confused, and no matter what, the process could be fun that both my interviewees and I may enjoy. After this idea flashed in my mind, when I recruited new respondents I began telling people that after the interview, I could read Tarot cards for them to address their worries or issues that occupied their mind, as my way to give feedback in return. Of course if my respondents had no interest in doing so they could say no.27

I have to say in the beginning I decided reading Tarot cards as my feedback was much more for to make myself feel better. Before I did this, I tended to buy my respondent a cup of coffee or a piece of cake as my appreciation for their time. Sometimes they would insist that we go Dutch since “you are a student without income.” Sometimes they would even pay for me. My respondents were probably too kind to me so that I could not help myself from feeling guilty. I finally felt I was giving something real to my interviewees that might benefit them. I had no idea when and how my dissertation

27 In the end only 2 respondents gently turned it down. One was for religious reasons, the other had to hurry back home. But both of them were still willing to do the interview with me.
could concretely benefit flying mothers’ daily lives, but at least by reading Tarot cards now, I did give them something to take home. At that time I had only learned about reading Tarot cards for 8 months. Because of such commitment toward giving immediate feedback toward my respondents, I treated this hobby of mine even more seriously than before by reading related book and polishing my skills and knowledge. What I did not know was this new feedback strategy later brought me even more feedback toward my research itself.

I need to put a word here concerning the ethical issue that might be involved because of this feedback strategy. What my respondents told me about the worries occupying their mind during my Tarot-reading was never used in my research. I clearly indicated to my respondents that what we talked about in the Tarot-reading would not be in my data. Also in my field notes after the interview, I never specified the detailed questions my respondents asked me to address in the Tarot-reading. With so many interviewees, I could never clearly remember their specific questions afterwards. In many cases, after I ended the interview both my interviewee and I felt the excitement that we would do something fun together from now on. Since this has been my hobby, I very much enjoyed doing it too. From my point, this feedback time after the interview somewhat broke up the hidden power relations between the graduate student/researcher and the respondent. I knew it was not a typical way a social science researcher would use to give feedback, but I asked myself: why not? What is wrong with being creative?

With the above said, I also want to recognize some interesting, blurring moments because of this feedback strategy I adopted. First, I found that most flying mothers have
worries regarding their family. Very often I found the questions they asked for guidance were related to our previous dialogues concerning their family lives or children, or they would continue the issues we had discussed in the interview so I then heard more about reality in their daily lives. Sometimes, what they told me after the interview in my feedback time was even juicier for data analysis. For instance, when they proposed the questions for the Tarot card reading, they might reveal the completely opposite side of the same topics that we were just discussing in the interviews. I therefore observed some hidden drama under the surface which might not directly come up in the interview. As they talked to me more in the feedback time, they seemed to feel even more comfortable to open their heart, either consciously or subconsciously. This was particularly true if the respondent was not my original acquaintance and did not know me well. But with my commitment, I could not list what they said during this time in my data. I tended to regard what I heard during Tarot-reading time as my background knowledge of this respondent, so when later I reviewed the interview transcripts and conducted the analysis, I would be more able to put what this respondent said into the context and understand how she was situated.

Second, the feedback time also benefited my interviewing and led me to ask more to-the-point questions. For instance, because of the Tarot-reading we might further talk about some details in family life or child-rearing I was not aware of, therefore I knew what I could ask other flying mothers in the next interview. Sometimes because of our in-depth dialogues, new questions might come to my mind that I want to ask for interview purpose. I would stop and explain that a new question just came to my mind, could I turn on my recorder again to ask you this and that? I was never rejected for
these types of make-up interview questions, and I would turn off the recorder again right after I finished asking them.

Reading Tarot was my non-typical way of giving feedback to my researched, and it turned out to be better than I expected including the easier recruitment of respondents. After I adopted this strategy, the flying mothers I contacted sounded more interested in setting an appointment with me. A flying mother called me the day before to confirm that we will definitely meet for “the interview and the Tarot-reading right? I am anticipating.” I once therefore had a flying mother bring her husband along, since he also had something in mind and hoped to do the Tarot-reading as well. That was the first time the husband of a flying mother was willing to participate the interview.\footnote{I interviewed the mother first. Later her husband who was taking care of their child at home to let his wife talk to me came to the café shop at the end of the interview. After I read tarot cards for him, he was willing to answer a few questions about his perception of childcare from me.} I also found that after the feedback time ended, my respondents were more willing to forward other respondents to me. In a way, I thought it would be easier for them to say to their friends: “Are you willing to help her out? She just needs to talk to you for an hour or so. And she will read Tarot cards for you afterwards to thank you for your help.” I was not just asking for help and taking things from them; I was immediately giving something back to them. This give-and-take process became a mutual interaction process which was more meaningful than a cup of free coffee.

Thinking back about the interactions and results after I adopted this feedback strategy also guided me to reflect further on the nature of doing qualitative research on families. We tend to consider issues in the family as private matters that should be solved personally. Also private matters, both the researchers and the respondents might
find it hard or uncomfortable to provoke or to be provoked to dialogue further. It could be embarrassing to reveal some personal matters to the outsiders. Regarding personal issues, all others are considered as outsiders, aren’t they? This reflects the difficulties we would find in studying family life as well as other topics that are regarded to be in the private sphere.

**Emotional Outlets after Work**

Besides this non-typical feedback strategy, another strategy I used in my data-collection process was probably not quite typical either. At least, it is usually not mentioned or fully discussed in a traditional research method textbook. I closely observed the online activities flight attendants engaged in, including their blog articles, photo albums and Facebook™ status. Instead of regarding this as formal data collection, I tended to see as a way to inform myself about the context my respondents were in as well as to familiarize myself with the latest issues this group of people came across. What I have learned from such observations was basically not incorporated into the data I would use for analysis or cite for writing, and if I wanted to do so I would contact the flight attendant directly asking if I could cite from her in my dissertation. Among these on-line observations, Facebook™ as a popular social networking website was an important source I depended on to learn more about the flight attendants’ current lives and to interact with them. I did not use this as a way to keep in touch with my colleague friends as much as I did to keep in touch with my other friends, but I also use this as my way to exhibit my identity and my belief: what research I am engaging in, what my future aim would be as well as what kind of person I am. This also gave those former colleagues who were not much familiar with me when I approached them for interviews
an opportunity to evaluate if I was a person they would feel comfortable talking to. After the interviews, in a way I could still be in touch with my respondents as friends. Sometimes the rapport gradually developed after the interview because of the on-going interactions we had through this social networking website, like this heartfelt message that sent by a flying mother on Facebook™ that left me in tears: “Even though we didn’t work together when you were in China Airlines, now I know who you are. And because of the identity as a colleague we are always family members no matter where you are. This will never change.” Last but not the least, responding to the concerns I had about the feedback I could give to this community I feel so attached to, I also decided that after I finish and defend my dissertation, I will translate the abstract into Chinese and post it on my Facebook™ page to share with my former colleagues—and of course, I would not use those big terms but write in a language that people who are not sociologists could also understand.

The major benefit I acquired from the interactions with flight attendants on Facebook™ was my further thoughts upon interviewing and understanding people’s emotions. For flight attendants, the internet has become an outlet for releasing their emotion by talking about their experiences, sharing their mood of the day, and complaining about the hard time they had with difficult passengers, colleagues and supervisors. Facebook™ is the most popular social networking vehicle among flight attendants, compared to other ways people choose to reveal themselves on-line, such as blogs, on-line albums, twitter and on-line messagers. This was quite different from my past experiences. When I was working for China Airlines, the company management

29 More discussions could be found in Chapter 5.
slightly monitored the employees’ on-line activities but would not take much formal action to control. In my interviews with flight attendants in 2006, I began to hear that the airline management was putting certain regulations on flight attendants’ on-line activities. For example, flight attendants were not allowed to post their photos in uniform in any on-line album. Some flight attendants therefore chose to close their on-line blogs or albums to avoid any annoying conflict issues with the management office, at least temporarily. At that time, the airline company had found that most newly-recruited young flight attendants were active and enthusiastic internet users. These young flight attendants, usually in their 20s, were also the major group who would interact with their colleagues and friends on the internet, doing things like leaving comments on each other’s blogs articles complaining about the passengers they came across, the negative aspect of their jobs, and issues within the company. Because their blogs and albums are open to the public, the outsiders could also read the negative remarks these young flight attendants made out of their authentic emotions, which would harm the airline companies’ public images. In my fieldwork in the early stage, I saw it was a slow but firm process that the management of cabin crew would develop the strategies to monitor, to supervise and to hinder these negative comments prevailing on the internet. In the following years I kept hearing about these strategies. For instance the crew management staff would try their best to identity the writers of the blog articles with negative comments related to the work, and the flight attendants could be punished for what he or she posted on the internet, on their personal space, in their personal life\textsuperscript{30}. It

\textsuperscript{30} A male flight attendant was punished for his blog article in which he is thought to criticize a manager he had issue with. However, in that problematic article, he did not identify the name or any characteristics that could make the readers recognize the identity of the staff. That manager called him into the office and told him: “I know it’s me you’re criticizing…I’m going to punish you for this no matter what you say.”
is important to clarify the so called negative comments I refer here. Generally speaking, they are not inappropriate messages related to violence, nudity or illegal issues, but the remarks are like these examples below:

Flight to XXX (country name) always smells so bad because of the passengers. And they are so greedy. Why they keep pushing call buttons?

I hate to fly to Mainland China. The Taiwanese passengers are usually those who live there for a long time; think they are rich so they are greedy, bossy, and self-centered...with bad manners too. They are used to have a lot of servants at home so when they are on board, they treat us as their servants!! Who do they think they are?

Those managers in the office are stupid!!! They don’t understand how hard it is to finish all these service procedure in such a short time!!! Go to hell!!!

The company has big management issue as...... (indicating certain examples)

When I returned to Taiwan for field work with flight attendants in 2009, I soon noticed the great changes in flight attendants’ internet use habits. First, many flight attendants have an account on Facebook™. It is not only because of the popularity of this social website but also because of the privacy setting this website could provide. Compared to blogs and on-line albums which are open to public, Facebook™ give them the opportunity to choose their audience to be their friends only. In other words, flight attendants could avoid the company’s supervision on their personal lives, and they could choose only to interact with people they knew on their Facebook™. Second, not only are the younger and junior flight attendants active on the Internet; those senior crew members who are in 30s, 40s, or even 50s would also acquire a Facebook™ account to interact with their colleagues. All these crew member users would also try to swap flights through their Facebook™ status or messages; they also have several close
groups to discuss company issues.\textsuperscript{31} This implies that flying mothers are also likely to use Facebook\textsuperscript{TM} to share their family lives and personal experiences with other flying mothers--- which I quickly found was true. Actually many flying mothers were very active on-line interaction with their colleagues. My interactions and observations of flying mothers’ updates were actually an important, helpful source to better my understanding of my targeted interviewees. Reading their posts or messages also helped me develop my interview guide as well as some possible questions. When it comes to the analysis, with this background understanding I felt more confident to judge if I had put my interpretations into context to understand the meanings.

Many flight attendants see their interactions with their colleagues on Facebook\textsuperscript{TM} to be an emotional outlet after work. They regard this to be a must if they want to be mentally healthy. A flight attendant friend of mine posted this comment below on her status,

\begin{quote}
Watch out what you post on your status!! Lock your profile to show it to your friends only! Latest news: the office is monitoring our Facebook\textsuperscript{TM} status as well!
\end{quote}

Many of her other flight attendants friends left similar comments to remind one another about the privacy issue. Some also suggested to “remove those ‘friends’ who are close to the office” and “don’t forget the case of Irene Jiejie’s photo on the Facebook\textsuperscript{TM}\textsuperscript{32x}.

\textsuperscript{31} In the field I found crew members working for different airline companies also have similar online bonding or community. For instance crew members working for Cathay Pacific have a Facebook\textsuperscript{TM} page of their labor union.

\textsuperscript{32} This referred to an amusing photo posted on a male flight attendant’s Facebook\textsuperscript{TM} album, which was only limited to be viewed by his friends. The crew members got along very well and become good friends in that one-week-long flight, therefore they took some funny pictures in the galley, when they were on duty and of course were all in the uniform. Everyone in those photos was punished by the management, including this Irene Jiejie, who did not participate in the photo-shooting, but happened to be there in the galley to make drinks for a passenger.
What caught my eyes were these three continual comments posted by different flight attendants,

This is our only space to release our emotion! How come they supervise on our private life even when we are not in the uniform?

Well said. They even want to deprive our rights to complain with other (colleagues). All we need is a place to talk about what happened at work after work. What’s wrong with this?

A good Ka\(^{33}\) is the key to good working atmosphere, isn’t it? They just don’t want us to be good friends. They want us to swallow everything by ourselves. No complaints…but we are not robots. We’ll become crazy.

Countless quotes, incidents, or scenarios shown in my fieldwork notes echoed these flight attendants’ thoughts about their on-line activities, particularly on the interactive social website. While flight attendants are required to project a certain impression the airline companies force them to perform at work as part of the service and work evaluation standards (Chang, 2009), they need an outlet, a space to for themselves.

After carefully examining my data, the idea of how emotions are gendered becomes even clearer to me. In Chapter 5 I would demonstrate my ideas about gendered emotion, but before I proceed to that, I would illustrate a theoretical thought I induced from my observations on Facebook™. I call this to be the emotional work after work, which is more related to the public sphere. It is important to note that this is done by all flight attendants and not only limited to the flying mothers. Therefore I choose to present this in this Chapter, and I see this is also a way to explain how I apply this non-typical strategy in the data collection process. Please keep in mind that by probing this idea more, in Chapter 5 I will illustrate how “the emotional work after work” is practiced by the flying mothers in their personal, family lives.

\(^{33}\) Ka is a Taiwanese word meaning a partner, a colleague or a friend.
Emotional Work after Work

I name the efforts flight attendants do regarding their emotion as “the emotional work after work.” This is not the same as the general pursuit of a better mood after a bad day. I do not regard this as complaints, anxieties, or upset which we may all experience in our daily lives. Many flight attendants are aware of their negative thoughts they are likely to have after work. They could expect themselves to be in a certain mood, so this is to undo the emotional labor they are required to do at work, in order to release them from those negative feelings. In some cases, they are aware of such emotions on the spot of the unhappy encounter, but they would perform their emotional labor as usual, and purposely delay their anger or upset until later when they are released from their duties and when they are in the behind-the-stage mode.

A senior female flight attendant wrote a note on Facebook™ about her unhappy flight on that day. She ended her article by talking about her viewpoints of the emotional labor flight attendants need to do at work for the company.

Excellent international airlines should have excellent hardware and software. Hardware means aircraft, equipments, or amenities that could be provided in-flight, including newspapers, meals, blankets, pillows, toys, playing cards….now because our company is cutting down the costs, all these resources are not always available, or are always not enough for all passengers on board. Solution? Making up to them (the passengers) by the “software”—the soft body of we flight attendants. There is no good hardware, so we use our soft body to apologize, to beg them customers for their forgiveness and understanding, to make them happy.

Her interpretation of “software” was the soft body of flight attendants, echoing my earlier research findings that how female flight attendants do the emotional labor in a feminine way (for more examples, see Chang 2009.) This viewpoint attracted tons of feedback from other colleague friends who agreed with her. Among their comments and
discussions as they responded to this article, I first gathered the ideas on how flight attendants would undo the negative effects of their emotional labor by doing certain emotional work toward themselves. For instance, here are some dialogical-type comments between several flight attendants:

FA1: I cannot agree with you more. Particularly when I have to apologize for running out of newspapers, I offered my sincere apology with fake smile. I don’t think about this much on the spot but just apologize as part of routine. However, if I think about it later after the flight, I sometimes would ask myself: why? Why do I need to apologize to the passengers like a menial servant? I apologize for something that is NOT my fault at all! I feel anger in my heart!

FA2: In my head I would shout to them: if you could afford the airfare, couldn’t you afford a copy of newspaper? And you’re upset for 15 NT dollars? Go to hell!

FA3: We should ask the office to apologize to them! Those stupid heads got promotion for successfully cutting down costs but make us become “software.”

FA1: And how pitiful we are…we only dare to shout out loud on Facebook™ but not to them. If I’m quitting, on the last day at work I’ll say whatever I want to say, give them a lecture.

FA4: Well even it is just an imagination it makes us, at least me, feel better…

These flight attendants, my former female colleagues, could clearly perceive their obligations and oppressions ascribed by the occupation: a good female flight attendant should be able to provide excellent service by doing gendered emotional labor, not only to satisfy the passengers’ needs but also to cover up the gaps between the customers’ expectations (i.e. requests for newspapers) and the company’s goal to make the largest profits (i.e. offering fewer copies of newspapers to cut down cost). Such emotional labor involves more complicated, influential factors and reasons, makes it differ from what

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34 A copy of newspaper usually costs 15 New Taiwan Dollar which is approximately 50 cents.
flight attendants in Delta Air Lines provided when Arile Hoschild did her interviews in 1970s. This is usually what contemporary Taiwanese flight attendants have to experience and get used to about making up the gap between the passengers’ expectations for service and the enterprises’ expectations of saving money. The frustrating emotion results because the flight attendant is between a passenger who is quite demanding and the company which exploits them as the “software.” So mentally and emotionally speaking, it is understandable that these female flight attendants need to make even more efforts to adjust themselves to such repeated exhaustion. And in these comments they demonstrate some of the strategies many would use. They would intentionally or unintentionally ignore their true emotion on the spot with their adept service techniques (i.e. body languages like smile, communication skills like apologetic words; the appropriate response toward the passengers’ complaints) as they have been disciplined and trained to be able to do so since they entered into this industry. Later, the negative emotion might revisit them; haunt them with bad feelings (i.e. feel inner anger as being a menial servant). At this point since they were no longer working in the cabin, these upset flight attendants would try to undo the emotional labor they actually did already, by speaking out what they really wanted to say to the passengers, by imagining to have those people in management having to do such emotional labor toward the upset passengers, or by complaining what they have experienced. They did so in the community where they would feel being supported and understood by other people.

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35 Even though this illustration is from my former colleagues in China Airlines, I had observed that flight attendants in Eva Air need to produce similar (and could be even more stern) gendered emotional labor to cover similar gaps between the customers and the company.
members, where they feel comfortable to release their true emotion. And this is what I call the emotional work after work.

I often observed cases that could also illustrate the process and the production of such emotional work in social networking websites from flight attendants working in different airline companies, even though I would not be able to include all quotes and specific scenarios in this dissertation. As far as I know, there are at least two groups on Facebook™ that could give flight attendants working in different airlines a supportive, understanding community. Like a flight attendant commented, “They could imposed the rules on us but we could ‘act on our own’ in our way later.” After flight attendants successfully produce the required emotional labor in the public sphere, they may need to make further emotional efforts in the private sphere to recover from the overwhelming, frustrating emotional experiences. The process I call “the emotional work after work” is an illustration of “acting on one’s own later” which could be interpreted as the agency exhibition of flight attendants. Even so, however, it is somewhat pitiful since this behind-the-scene process was not much valued and emphasized because emotion is usually considered to be a personal and individual issue in the private sphere and women are usually considered to be good at emotional work. From the airline company’s stance, a good flight attendant is considered to be able to swallow the sufferings by “adjusting their mood by themselves to cope with all situations,” as a supervisor in the crew management said to me in the interview, “or should not engage in the service industry.”

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36 One is a closed group, and only the insider group members could invite people to join. The other is an open one, meaning all posts and comments could be viewed by anyone on the Facebook™. For the latter, not only the flight attendants but also the pilots would actively join the discussions.
Meanwhile, it is important to note two things. First, how female flight attendants perceived their emotional labor (even though I had almost never heard any flight attendant identify this term when I was in the field or in my interviews with them) suggested the gendered aspect of emotion in their public sphere. They could see how their bodies are linked to the compensatory service provided to the passengers, or they might also discuss the different interactions male flight attendants would probably have with the passengers and colleagues.37 Second, I realized that the majority of the female flight attendants could clearly identify the source of their pressures as well as the oppressions from the company (i.e. the stupid heads in the office.) Office staff members are very often mentioned in different scenarios when flight attendants complain about their work. They might not refer to a specific person or names; if they need to specify a person they would use that person’s nickname, which is known in the community as hidden knowledge. The term “people in the office” represents the bureaucracy and the hierarchy in the airline company, and those who own the power that could make flight attendants’ lives suffer so much. The relationships between the flight attendants and the people in the office are obviously opposite to each other, full of tensions and doubts. In other words, flight attendants were very much aware of their positions and status in the

37 Comparing to my previous interviews when my focus was still on work lives, surprisingly I heard more examples and observations from female flight attendants on their male colleagues’ interactions with the passengers while this time my focus is on female flight attendants’ family lives. One of the reasons could be because I spent much more time in Taiwan to conduct interviews, and my interview techniques may also have improved as I am more experienced now. Because comparing the differences between the male and female emotional labor production process is not my main interest at this stage, I currently have not probed this part, with the acknowledgement of these differences. On the hand, I seldom heard female flight attendants’ in-depth comments related to male flight attendants’ family lives even if I posed such questions to my interviewees. One of the reasons could be explained by this comment made by a flying mother: “We seldom talk to guys about such (family issues). If the conversations happen in the galley they might politely listen and might comment, or briefly talked about their family cases. But we seldom try to begin the discussion with them…men have different roles in the family and they don’t really know. Unless it’s their wives we’re talking to…which is usually not the case when the conversations happen in the galley.”
organization. They could locate their rivals and the power that manipulate their lives---
even though they might not have the ability to map out the whole picture.

As indicated earlier, this time in my fieldwork I found that more senior flight
attendants interacted with their colleagues on the internet via social networking
websites. Several reasons contributed to this phenomenon: first, in the past few years,
both of the major international airline companies in Taiwan have been promoting the
intranet within the company to convey the messages, pass information, circulating
public announcement via emails through the website for employees. Even the senior
flight attendants in their 60s needed to learn how to use this new technology. Besides,
there were more training and educational programs or tests required to finish online for
all employees in the airline companies, including flight attendants. Moreover, as
mentioned earlier, many flight attendants are initially motivated to use the on-line social
networking tools such as Facebook™ because they found it would be easier swap their
working schedules with other flight attendants. Therefore, all crewmembers must be
equipped with certain computer skills whether initially they were familiar with the Internet
or not. Eventually using networking websites or other on-line communication tools had
become a trend among crewmembers.  

As a result, while I had been interviewing flying mothers, the social website also
provided me an opportunity to observe this specific group. Like other flight attendants,

ing mothers would exchange information with one another on-line, and would also
make it an outlet to share their emotional moments regarding work and/or personal lives.

38 As a side note, finishing training via intranet also makes it possible for the management monitoring
each employee’s learning progress. The changes and trend I have articulated here are not peculiar
phenomena among airline companies. Similar cases are prevailing among other companies in Taiwan.
When reviewing their status updates, the photos they posted, and the comments they left on one another’s walls on Facebook™, I also asked myself the “what’s so different?” question if I compare these colleague friends to other friends. With this question in mind, I read those similar posts of the child-rearing or child-caring issues from my other friends who are working mothers, including those who used to be flight attendants before they became mothers. After probing further and carefully examining my theory, I found that the emotional work flying mothers do after work, like other responsibilities they need to take care of because of their mothering role, shares both similarities and differences with single flight attendants, or married flight attendants without children, or working mothers in general. This is what I will demonstrate and discuss in the following chapters.

**Summing Up**

In this chapter I explained the timeline and the process of my research on Taiwanese female flight attendants since December 2005. Depending on the different themes I was probing, the research methods I used also differed. In all, ethnographic research methods including interviews, participant observation and textual analysis were used for data collection. My analysis strategy followed constructive grounded theory. In addition, I also fully discussed and carefully reflected my identity (-ies) shifts in my research, and how such shifts shape my interpretation of the data along the way.

I sincerely treasure all the findings I present in this dissertation. They represent the generosity of many flying mothers who were willing to sacrifice their valuable time and energy with their family members to talk with me. What I will present in Chapter 4,

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39 This question was posted to me by a Taiwanese feminist scholar, which I will further discuss in Chapter 4.
Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 not only demonstrates the efforts I made to interact with my data and to carefully examine my theoretical thoughts through the emerged codes in the analysis, but also the efforts I made to justify my data collection and feedback strategies with careful consideration, and my efforts not to harm my former colleagues and friends. I gave up many quotes, scenarios or examples that could best illustrate the findings had I included them in my dissertation because if I did so, this could bring harm, betrayal or other negative feelings to flight attendants who revealed their secrets and personal issues to me. As a feminist researcher who aims to understand women’s lived experiences, I aimed to fulfill my goal without being unfair to women in the field.

Along the way of my research, I could clearly see how I, as a sociologist in training, have improved my skills and become more mature and experienced. Undoubtedly, such improvement also shows its effects on my research in different stages. I also interestingly found how a researcher’s personality could be clearly identified through the presentation of a qualitative research, because through a lot of live conversations and scenarios, I know my readers will be able to know my characteristics in reading this dissertation. I think this logic is like the interactions I had with my colleague friends on Facebook™ truly revealed to them the kind of person I am. Through all of the details in life, authentic emotion could not be disguised forever. “The emotional work after work” flight attendants would do is one example.

40 What I gave up using is usually the data I acquired from fieldwork, casual dialogues, after-interview chatting, social occasions. One of the situation was I formally interviewed a flying mother but later on from a former colleague and friend of mine, I accidentally found the flying mother I interviewed did not tell me the truth about her family issues, and the fact was totally in the opposite situation. While the details of this case could make me write another section in Chapter 5 on gendered emotion, I had no hesitation to give it up. Whether this flying mother would read my English-written dissertation or not, I see this is what a feminist researcher should do.
Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to again emphasize that as a feminist researcher, I made all efforts possible in order to fairly listen, understand, construct and present the meaningful stories of flying mothers, with the acknowledgment of my limitations. Instead of pretending that I am a naïve, objective researcher which I argue I could never be in my research, I hope these efforts I contribute could lead my readers to see the visions I had in my research, as well as the position of Taiwanese women could be situated between different sources of power in the contemporary Taiwanese society.
As stiff twin compasses are two....
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

—John Donne, *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*

The majority of people employed as a flight attendant in Taiwan are women. Frequent travels make a married female flight attendant become the one wandering and circling the world, as opposed to being a fixed center of twin compasses which would not go anywhere but wait for her husband and family. In addition, when taking the Chinese/Taiwanese cultures into the consideration, we could see that the occupational characteristics would even challenge the qualifications of being a so called good daughter-in-law in the husband’s family, as the tradition expects.

How working schedules would impact female flight attendants’ lives was one of my initial thoughts that motivated me probe experiences further. Comparing to the general career women who are more likely to have a routine daily schedule, flight attendants always need to make more efforts to negotiate their time. I am not implying that general career women’s lives are easier than flying mothers’ but pointing out that what flying mothers face is an irregular working schedule that requires more possibilities and flexibilities to accommodate their needs in their personal lives. And for this part, women are likely to depend more on their personal resources rather than on the support from the institution. Therefore, through flying mothers’ negotiating experiences we could

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1 In my interviews some flying mothers discussed their personal observations on general career women and working mothers, with a conclusion that in comparison being a mother "on the ground" could be even more tiring with less freedom and time for oneself. I will discuss more in Chapter 6.
examine what the traditional expectations are for women’s role in the Taiwanese family, the different ways modern working mothers may adapt to family responsibilities, and if it is possible for women in a non-traditional job successfully to confront the good mother model, or to define this model differently.

In this chapter I will describe the practical strategies flying mothers adopt to cope with the multiple demands from their multiple roles. These strategies include careful consideration on child bearing and child caring issues before childbirth; the solutions to the problems that reveal later after childbirth; time and workload distribution arrangements between family members and the individual or the family resources they could access and rely on.

I use the word practical to describe these strategies by borrowing its meaning in Mandarin: concrete and workable; being practical refers to concretizing some ideological issues (“bigger issues” as quoted from a flying mother’s word) into certain workable tactics so they could be dealt with in daily life. These discussions may seem to repeat the existing themes in the well-developed work-family conflict literature, yet, because of the occupational characteristics, flying mothers’ experiences could contribute to current dialogues for its challenges to the traditional expectations on the roles of wife and mother in Chinese/Taiwanese cultures. Also, as I will explain below, the timeline of flight attendants’ everyday lives is usually not a continual, uninterrupted or predicable routine; this differs from the challenges other working mothers face. Last, I will also discuss the Chinese/Taiwanese cultural expectations on daughters-in-law that

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2 In Mandarin it is 實際 (Shih-chi). This word could be translated into “realistic” in English, yet I have to decline to use realistic to describe these strategies because it could not precisely grasp the meaning of “concrete” the term Shih-chi also has.
could also cause some conflicts or tension within the family. All these discussions could contribute to the gaps in existing literature on work and family conflict which are more mainly based on Western women’s experiences.

What’s So Different?

In 2009 when I had just gone back to Taiwan and was about to initiate my fieldwork, I received a sharp comment from an established Taiwanese woman scholar when I was talking about my research. The scholar asked me: “What’s so different about female flight attendants? All career women need to think about their families, and all working mothers need to take care of their children. What’s so different? What’s so special?” I was speechless on the spot when hearing such comments. For one thing, I had not yet formally talked to many flying mothers at that time. As I said, I was in the initial stage and was just about to begin to recruit for my research. The very little knowledge I knew was what I had heard or witnessed from senior colleagues when I was a flight attendant, along with some impressions I had had from the interviews I conducted in 2006, which were not solid enough to respond to her question. For the other thing, as I was absorbing her message, I became surprised because I had received more comments suggesting that my research is a case study since flight attendant is a unique occupation. For the first time I got comments that my research could possibly be repeating some old stories, something “not so different.”

It was not until a few months later when I was close to the final stage of analysis, I gradually figured out the reason why I could get such a contrary comment: after all, the people I study are working mothers who have been known to struggle between work and family. For the scholars who are not familiar with the facts of flight attendants’ lives as outsiders, they could misunderstand that I am just picking up a whatsoever
occupation I want to study, so I might risk repeating what has been discussed in current family-work conflict literature. I assume that the senior colleague who had criticized my was simply to remind me that “it is meaningless if you just repeat the same things that have been told.” While acknowledging her point, I also acknowledge women in different positions (i.e. social classes; race; nationality) would tell different experiences and we should never generalize all standpoints into one category. For instance, could we really say Taiwanese working mothers have similar experiences in taking care of their children, especially after knowing that so many Taiwanese families hire foreign women domestic workers to take care of the house chores, including child-care? Since I believe all women’s stories are worthy of being articulated, my goal is to present these working mothers’ standpoints and depict the context they take care of their family, whether it is so different or not.

Still, I had this question “what’s so different?” being kept in my mind since the beginning of my fieldwork. And as my research proceeded, I was gradually able to give a more complete answer to this question from multiple angles. I would say the most prominent keyword that would contribute to the differences between generally working mothers’ and flying mothers’ experiences is time. The most self-evident example is the unpredictable, unstable and changeable working schedule of flying mothers.

Roster Fever

Roster, the duty assignments of the month always play an important role in flight attendants’ lives. For China Airlines’ flight attendants, the 25th of each month is when the working schedule of the next month is released. They have a term “Golden 72 hours” meaning that within the 72 hours after the schedule is released, all crew members are feverish in trying to swap flights and settle their schedules for the next
month so it is most likely to successfully find a partner to swap the flights. All their thoughts are occupied with the complicated flight swapping issues, and it is not wise for a researcher to approach any potential interviewee at this time. From people’s status on Facebook™ and on the Windows live messenger, I could easily tell who are crewmembers at one glance and realize it’s the end of the month again. Just as a flight attendant said, we always realize another month has passed when we receive our working schedule. Time flies, doesn’t it? Flight attendants would indicate the flights they wished to get or to get rid of, off-days they hoped to have or other requests they hoped to fulfill after swapping flights for the next month. Their status on the social-networking websites often looks like these:

I want to have off-days on 13th to extend my annual leave

Trying to get rid of my long-haul flight on the 7-day New York! Prefer to have area flights in Southeast Asia and one-day turn-around.

All Mama Ban flights are welcomed.

Hope to be in Taipei in weekend. Or early flights I could return home before evening.

Mama Ban in Mandarin means “Mama's flights.” This refers to the flights that flying mothers would prefer to have because the schedule makes it possible to take care of family needs, especially the flights that do not require them to leave home for quite a long time. Shorter long-haul flights, for instance, only require them to be away from home around 3-4 days or even shorter. An example is the flight to Los Angeles or San Francisco departing Taipei around midnight. So during the daytime flying mothers could be in Taipei, and they would begin to get ready for work after dinner. Before they leave for work around 8-9 p.m., their children already return home after school, have dinner, settle; for the little ones, they are accompanied by their mothers for the whole day, and
now are about to go to bed. At this time, their husband might be at home and could take over the children. These flights are called shorter long-haul flights because flight attendants only have to layover abroad for 24 hours or 48 hours depending on different patterns. The returning flight to Taipei arrives in the early morning at 6 a.m. or so, this means even though they could be exhausted after staying up all night, on the day they arrive at Taipei, they have almost another complete day, just like the day they leave for work.

By looking into the details of time distribution and scheduling, it is obvious why flying mothers prefer to operate such flights, entitled Mama Ban. I have to point out that not all flying mothers really enjoy operating such flights that do not allow them to “have some fun abroad because the layover is too short,” and these flights could be “quite boring because every month is the same.” A flying mother said flying Mama Ban makes her feel that “I am not like a real flight attendant…but it (Mama Ban) allows me to leave home for sacrificing least in time that I could spent with my family.”

As the example of Mama Ban illustrates, working schedules of flight attendants could be different from the majority of ordinary career women and working mothers. Flying mothers could not always be at home every night as mothers in other families, but their work could also allow them to be at home all day to make up the time they are absent from the family. With the mindset that they hope to be around with their children as much as possible, many flying mothers make great efforts to swap for Mama Ban during the golden period. Actually both in China Airlines and in Eva Air, flight attendants did not know their assigned rosters till the end of the month before.³ This means that

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³ The announcement of the rosters involves company administration issues. A flight attendant quoted from her friend working in Singapore Airlines that the roster is assigned six months before, which makes it
until then, flight attendants do not know either the dates or time they are available in Taiwan nor the duties they will operate, which decides the length of layovers they will have abroad.

Flight attendants have limited freedom to make changes or decide on their work schedule assignments. In all, there are three ways to have some autonomy over the arrangement\(^4\). The first is to apply for annual leave in advance to guarantee the dates they hope to be off in Taiwan. Depending on the seniority and the company regulations, the given annual leave days range from 7 to 30 days a year. The second strategy is to switch flights with other flight attendants after they receive their duty assignments for the next month, as described above. The third is to ask for a leave of absence for sickness or for personal reasons, which could result in a salary reduction as punishment, and might also cause a lower score in the year-end achievement check which would influence the amount of the annual bonus they could receive.

There are differences between the two major Taiwanese international airlines in terms of employees’ rights and benefits as mentioned above. For Eva Air, it is commonly known among flight attendants that the annual leave cannot be always approved by the supervising administration, particularly in busy traveling seasons, like July or December. Many flight attendants in Eva Air therefore have many unused

\(^4\) It is important to note that even though there are still a lot of limitations on the autonomy of the working schedule, flight attendants had gained a little bit more flexibility comparing to the past. For instance, when I was working in China Airlines between 1998 to 2005, crewmembers only had one chance, and later became two chances to swap flights with another crew member. Also according to two former flight attendants now in their 60s, there was no such benefit when they were working for China Airlines before getting married and were required to quit their jobs.
annual leave days—even though they may hope to make good use of them. These unused annual leave days will be transferred into subsidies in the end, even though this might not be what they really long for,

I want to take a break in summertime when my son is in his summer vacation. My husband could also ask for some days off then we can go somewhere together for a family trip with our discounted air ticket... but it is hard whether to ask for a few days off or to standby and to get a seat. The benefits are like something ‘you can see but you cannot eat’... I don’t want money, I want days off!

Flight attendants in China Airlines do not have to go through the censoring process when they apply for their annual leave via the internal website for employees. As long as one applies three months in advance, and she or he is among the daily quota of 60 each day, there request for leave will be guaranteed. Generally speaking, it is not difficult to apply for annual leave except for some popular dates, such as Christmas Eve or Valentines’ Day. For those dates people would have to wait in front of their computers to compete for “whose internet speed is faster” before “the quota is killed within seconds.”

When it comes to swapping flights, the story is the opposite. China Airlines allows their flight attendants to swap flights up to three times for the whole month if they have a full attendance record in the previous two months. Eva Air does not have such regulations on the number of times their flight attendants can swap flights regardless of their attendance record. Their flight attendants can swap as many times as they want, and this is the freedom flight attendants in China Airlines long for. For outsiders it might

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5 The annual leave application system opens since the midnight of 1st three months before.

6 Annual leave, asking leave because of getting married or for family relatives’ funeral is not counted as absence. Full attendance means one does not ask for sick leave, leave for personal reasons and is not late for work.
sound that flight attendants have much flexibility in adjusting their working schedule at will. But the truth is, in my fieldwork, I had observed flight attendants in both airlines complaining about the difficulties in finding a partner to swap the “right” flights, and it is getting harder and harder, because the original assignment of the roster is already quite tight and the schedule is always packed\(^7\).

You guys (flight attendants in China Airlines) envy we flight attendants in Eva Air for the unlimited swapping, but I have to tell you (she then took out her mobile phone to show me her roster of the month)...look, all packed! One off day followed by work day, another one day off and another work day...how to swap? Everyone’s roster looks like this. Swap to where?

It is harder to swap flights because there are always many one-day turn around flight to China. There are more and more such flights now. Everyone’s roster is quite similar. If you want to have continual days to be off in Taipei, this means you’ll have to work continuously for a few days after swapping flights.

It is not easy to find a suitable match that could make two schedules meet each others’ needs. Not to mention there are many detailed and complicated regulations on the operations of flights which increase the difficulties in successfully swapping flights, such as the rest hours between flights, the qualifications in serving different classes, the qualification to do public announcement, just to name a few of the factors that might come into the play.

**Out of the Blue**

Asking for a leave of absence for sickness or for personal reasons is a comparatively easier way to adjust one’s working schedule, even though some punishment comes along. Because absence for personal reasons will cause more salary being deducted than the amount of deduction due to absence for sickness,

\(^7\) And as I would explain in a later chapter, this was caused by the booming East Asia economy particularly after the operations of the direct flights between China and Taiwan.
sometimes flight attendants would ask for sick leave even though they are not really too ill to go to work, but by doing so they could take care of unexpected issues that require them to be physically in Taiwan. One of my interviewees had an experience that her daughter was vomiting all night so she needed to take her to the emergency room at 3 o’clock in the morning, while she had to report to work at 4:30 A.M. for an early flight. Her husband happened to be on a business trip and would not be back until that morning. Originally, she would go to work at 4:30 A.M. and leave her sleeping daughter with the domestic worker. Now because of this emergency situation, the plan must be changed. She could not find anyone to accompany her child to the hospital besides her Indonesian domestic worker who can only speak little Mandarin. She could not do anything but ask for sick leave to make things work out. She told me that the ground staff in the same airline company could ask for leave for a few hours at a time rather than for the whole day. Other working mothers who to report to work at a later time might be excused for being late to work by a few hours if necessary in such a situation. However, for flying mothers, there is no such option—even though if there was then her emergency case would have been solved.

All I needed was just a few hours before my husband or my parents-in-laws who live on the side of the city could come to take over, and I could go to work afterwards. But we flight attendants don’t have such flexibility as the mothers working in the office asking to be away from work for a few hours or for the half day. (I: “why do you think there is such difference in-between?” General working mothers and flying mothers)…..Because of our job I think. Flights need to take off on time so we cannot be late for work. (I: You’re right yes. The flight is a continual period.) Yes, a complete time in

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8 As soon as she mentioned the possibility to ask leave in hours, some vague thoughts came to my mind. So I asked her this question and we then engaged in some discussions and together concluded that the job characteristics result in such differences. Later in my fieldnotes, I reflected this to be one of the illustrations that I aim to construct the meaning of the experiences (data) with my respondents.
flight...in the cabin. You either get on board or not. You cannot say I’ll be there a few hours later. The flight cannot wait for you.

See, like my sister-in-law is also working, she is very busy too working in the Hsin-chu high-tech company. But for an emergency case like this it will be okay for her to come into the office a little bit later than usual....(I:...you’re right. And maybe she could find someone to take over because she didn’t have to report to work at 4:30 in the early morning.)....Time is the issue! And when we are in flight we cannot use cell phone to “remote control” things going-on.

Another flying mother interprets the situation that she needed to ask for “fake” sick leave because of her children as:

It’s “sick leave” anyway. It is just not my sickness; not the mother’s sickness but my children’s. What’s the difference? It’s called sick leave.

During the hours flight attendants are on board to work in the aircraft, they are physically disconnected from their personal lives until they are released from duty and returning Taiwan. It is important to note that physical disconnection is not always equal to emotional disconnection, which I will discuss in the following chapter. Like the meaning my interviewees and I had constructed together: a flight is to occupy flight attendants a continual, complete time period to be physically in the cabin. Such job characteristics differentiate flying mothers from general working women who might be able to acquire more flexibility to accommodate the emergency out of the blue. For most working women, when they cannot be physically with their children, it is more likely that it would have convenient to keep in touch with the substitute care-givers. This could not only ensure everything is under control before they return home at the end of the day. 

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9 This sums up one of the findings my interviewees and I constructed together in our conversations. While pointing this out, as a researcher who has never done formal interviews with general Taiwanese working women/mothers, and who has not seen many qualitative researches in literatures examining the micro-level lives of current Taiwanese working mothers, I see there could be stories that are different from our “imaginations” on Taiwanese working women’s daily lives.
but also assure the mothers’ worries as well. Such accessibility is taken from flying mothers as soon as they stepped inside the cabin.

To cope with things that come out of the blue is what all flight attendants are familiar with. Meaningfully speaking, this is part of our daily lives. I remember when I just joined China Airlines, in my ground training an instructor told us, “From now on, you need to learn to adapt to whatever comes to you…in flight attendants’ lives, there is no word called certainty.” A flight could be delayed because of the weather, aircraft failure, or any possible reason that keeps you from arriving in Taiwan on time as scheduled. A typhoon could change an ordinary turn-around flight from Taipei to Hong Kong into a 3-day layover. We all know we should always keep an overnight kit in our luggage wherever our destination is. When I talked to my former colleagues, the flying mothers, I gradually recalled those memories of uncertainty and tried to get the picture when the uncertainties conflict with family responsibilities and the emergency interferes with work requirements.

Standby duty is another uncertainty every flight attendant faces mostly every month. This is another factor that might change the settled roster of the month after the hardworking swapping flight process. Standby duty means the flight attendants need to prepare for work during a particular time. It usually would last at least for a few hours.\(^\text{10}\) During the standby period flight attendants could be assigned for any duties where they are needed, such as replacing another crewmember who cannot report to work (i.e. asking for sick leave or forgetting to bring a passport). Flying mothers therefore often try

\(^{10}\) The length of the standby period depends on the airline company’s dispatch arrangement. Some airline companies may require their flight attendants to standby for the whole day. Also the location of the standby could be in the company, at the airport, or at home.
to swap their standby duties to avoid “unexpected ‘surprises’ like being notified at the last minute that I have to be away from home for 10 days!” as a flying mother shared her personal experience, “Being away for 10 days for we mothers…it is hard. It is not impossible but you need to arrange everything in advance. You need to prepare your kids mentally. Make sure everything will be all right when you come back so that the house will not be burned down that kinds of thing (laugh)...but all of sudden like that time, it was a mess. But what else could you do? It’s your job. You try your best to avoid such situations but this type of thing happens.”

Mama’s Flights

As explained earlier, flight attendants who are married--and particularly after they have children--most likely prefer to have duties that require them to be away from home for at most 4 days on their working schedules. So called Mama Ban could be the duties that have the crewmembers stay in the United States for 24 or 48 hours before they board the returning home flight. The 2-day duties with one night layover abroad are also popular. Such duties are usually the flights from Taiwan to other Southeast-Asia countries, Japan, or South Korea. Most flight attendants, including myself, enjoy such good flights because these are the flights with “no jet lag issues,” that would allow me to “have some quality time for myself,” “not only making money but also relaxing as if I’m on a vacation.”¹¹ Turn-around flights are tiring, because they always involve at least 8-hours of solid working time. Nowadays the majority of such turn-around flights from Taiwan to China (including Hong Kong) and some flights to some countries in

¹¹ This will be further explained in chapter 6
Southeast Asia such as Vietnam. For flying mothers who prefer to or have to be in Taiwan almost every day, the turn-around flights could possibly allow them to do so.

Even though diverse roster dispatching management exists, flying mothers from either China Airlines or Eva Air share quite similar thoughts about how their rosters could help them strike a better balance between their work and family lives. Yet, it is important to note that flying mothers have different preferences for duties in their work schedule. Some flying mothers may not prefer to have Mama Ban, but they hope to be in Taiwan in the weekends for some quality time with their family. Some flying mothers would rather not have turn-around flights which make them “return home every day as other moms but make them too exhausted to do anything.” Difference preferences and choices of flying mothers therefore could reveal many stories behind the scenes: the position of being a mother in the family, family needs and practical arrangements, negotiation, and women’s agency.

Another issue flying mothers face is the irregular available time in their daily schedule. Compared to the earlier interviews I did in 2005-2006, in the interviews I did in 2009 I heard more flight attendants complain about their assigned roster. Because of the busy air traffic between Taiwan and China, the number of turn-around flights to China had increased a lot. Continual working days with irregular working time are critical challenges to flight attendants physical energy, emotional exhaustion, and personal

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12 Different airline companies have difference arrangements in deciding if the crewmembers would have a layover abroad, as long as it corresponds to CAA rules. Take flights from Taipei to Singapore for example, the flight time is about 5 hours. In China Airlines this is a 2-day roster with 1 night layover. Eva Air make it a turn-around roster for their flight attendants, meaning crewmembers need to work approximately 12 hours including the advanced preparation time. Even though this arrangement could still meet up with CAA rules, the exhaustion in energy and emotion of flight attendants is expected. So for Eva Air’s flight attendants this is not a good flight, but for China Airlines’ flight attendants, it could be regarded as an enjoyable duty in roster.
lives. The roster might require them to get up very early in the morning, but the flight the next day might take off in the later afternoon, meaning they will not be home until midnight. Continuing to work for 5 to 6 days may not sound extraordinary since most Taiwanese people work at least 5 days a week, from 9 a.m. in the morning to 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. in the evening. In the Taiwanese working culture, working for extra hours is quite common. Many career women could not arrive at home until 8 p.m. or even later than that. Generally speaking, most working mothers have a daily routine and their schedules are predictable. Flying mothers, on the other hand, do not always have a daily routine schedule to follow. They might also need to work during non-traditional working hours (i.e. until midnight or in the early morning) and it could be quite irregular.

One of the challenging aspects of flight attendant’s job is to adjust to such irregular schedule assignments in a very short time. The flight attendant below points out the struggle all crewmembers experience:

The company thinks we are superwomen. They think we could get up at 3 A.M. to prepare for an early flight today, and the next day for another flight we could not return home till 2 A.M. and wouldn’t be in bed till 3. They think...everyone could fall asleep immediately as soon as arriving home. If we complain they would say it is your responsibility to have enough rest. I’s your problem you cannot sleep after you go home. Our dispatch...already give you rest time and the rest time between flights is legal so it’s not our problem. Oh yeah it’s legal but it’s not human. Not everyone has no personal issues to deal with but they’ll say it’s your own business.

Not being able to sleep is one’s own problem. So following this logic, the company would see for flying mothers, not being able to go to bed immediately after work because of what they have to do at home as a mother, such as house-keeping, cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, is undoubtedly also considered to be their own business. From the company’s standpoint, when crew members are not in the aircraft, that should be considered as rest time regardless of the fact that flight attendants need
to spend time on daily chores, family responsibilities or any other obligation in the private sphere. Then in such a context, how do flying mothers and their families make arrangements accordingly to accommodate the mother’s working schedules, family needs as well as other responsibilities?

**Working Hours**

You (the passengers) sit in your seat. I know the space is small and you complain about how uncomfortable it is. You may also complain about the lousy meals and the lousy movies. But you could sit, eat, and try to get some sleep while we keep walking back and forth in the narrow aisles in Boeing 747. So I always say: we walk 14 hours to the United States.

This is quoted from the blog belonging to a former colleague who is also a good friend of mine. “You fly to New York. We walk to New York.” She concluded this blog post with this to-the-point sentence. In passengers’ views, duties of flight attendants seem to be like a waitress serving meals and providing good services as what airline companies emphasize in their advertisements. My colleague was trying to highlight the fact that even if we were just waitresses in the air, the physical tiredness due to long working hours is more challenging than general assumptions.

Jet lag is the most associated term when it comes to flight attendants work in the international airlines. I was often asked by my friends who are not flight attendants, “How do you overcome the jet lag?” Some might also have some comments about their suffering experiences after recent inter-continental travels. I personally see adjusting to jet lag as an ability I gradually developed as time went by. As I got more used to the job, I gradually saw how I could adjust my own biological rhymes to keep the pace. And of course I learned some techniques from other colleagues when they shared their experiences. Most of the flight attendants I interviewed said “sleep at the right time” is the key. “Sleep at the right time” means choosing to follow the time in Taiwan or the
local time. If the layover is too short to go anywhere for sight-seeing and stay in the hotel room, like the Mama ban mentioned earlier, many would choose to sleep according to the time zone in Taiwan. Also this term means to get some rest in the right time to recover from the tiredness. For example, one may take a nap for a few hours after checking into the hotel, then go out for dinning, shopping, or exploring the city so the biological rhythms could be adjusted to the local time. Because these adjustments are more like some hidden knowledge, and definitely involves individual differences, I seldom reflected on the possible mechanisms behind them, the reasons that determine how a flight attendant decides what is the right time to sleep—-not until I began to interview flying mothers, to discuss with them and also discuss what I have heard with some of my single colleague friends. A good example is a conversation I had with my good colleague friend Grace. Grace is going to get married this year. We were discussing the possible changes after she gets married. Our conversation refreshed the common memories we shared. Grace said maybe she’ll begin to have to “take the rest in the second shift in the returning long-haul flights” in the near future. In the long-haul flights, flight attendants take turns sleeping for a few hours. The other one will be on-duty to respond to the passengers’ request in her zone in charge. There are two shifts and each shift lasts about 3-4 hours. Generally speaking, the senior flight attendants would have the priority to decide she would rest in the first shift or in the second shift. In the returning flight to Taipei, it is very common to hear the senior flight attendant gently say to her partner, “Would you mind if I choose to be on duty in the first shift and rest in the second shift?” In the beginning I did not know why senior crew members often chose to rest in the second shift until a senior crewmember explained to me her reason:
“Because after going home, I have to take care of my baby right away.” Senior flight attendants are more likely to be flying mothers. And by taking a nap for 3-4 hours, this could recharge them a little bit, boost their energy to face the workload before the flight landed as well as the workload they’ll have to face at home.

I noticed the differences between singles and married flight attendants in their strategies to cope with possible jet lag issues as well as their physical tolerance. As a single woman, my body belongs only to myself; I only consider my personal viewpoint when I predict the degree of my tiredness, and prepare for that accordingly. Yet, as a flying mother, her body also belongs to her family. The way she considers her tiredness incorporates the negotiations she should face and the expectations that are imposed on her after work.

The reason flying mothers prefer MaMa Ban could be an illustration of this argument. Like these quotes from two flying mothers, their considerations about the jet lag problem are not mainly based on their personal standpoints:

I don’t like MaMa Ban…but I fly them now because I don’t have to deal with jet lag problem anymore. Unlike others, I happen to be the type always suffering from the jet lag, and it always takes me at least 2 days up to a week to get back to normal if I fly 012. In the past this is okay, but this is not okay now because I have to take care of my son. I’ll be exhausted if I have jet lag. Then I have no energy for him. Then who will accompany him to play?

Earlier in the interview this flying mother said one of her interests is travelling. Before she got married she always liked to fly long-haul flights which allowed her to explore the local destinations. In the interviews she talked much about those travelling memories.

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13 CI-012 is the flight from Taipei to New York via Anchorage.
she enjoyed and treasured. She said she had jet lag problems, but since she enjoyed traveling a lot she was willing to tolerate the suffering afterwards.

Here is another quote from another flying mother,

MaMa Ban means I don’t have to think about jet lag. Since the stay is short, I just sleep according to Taipei time. So when I come back I don’t need to worry whether my biological clock is the same with my husband and with my children. So I could be back to my routine very fast.

Their comments illustrate the strategy flying mothers consider to reserve their physical tolerance, which is linked with their family roles. Single flight attendants do not have to worry if they have to save enough energy for the role of mother in the family. As shown above, coping with jet lag is not as personal, private, and individualistic as it seems to be. It actually intertwines with gender roles in the family. We will see more examples about similar associations between body and gender when we look into the possible conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

The working hours of flight attendants are much longer than is generally understood. The block of work time on flight attendants' working schedules could range from 70 hours to 99 hours. If we use the standard working time as 8 hours for a day to calculate, it looks like flight attendants only need to work 9 to 13 days in one month, which might strengthen the myths about this occupation: the job is easy, the salary is high, there is a lot of travelling for free and lots of off-days. However, the blocked working time does not reflect the exact time that is spent on work. Particularly for female flight attendants, preparing for work takes much more time because “we cannot be like men (meaning male flight attendants)...get up, comb the hair with fingers; put on their suit then go! Men could finish their grooming and get dressed in 10 minutes. But it could
take up to an hour for us.”

Because the grooming regulations for female flight attendants are more strict with lots of requirements, before work female flight attendants need to reserve more time for putting on make-up, setting their hair and dressing up. In addition, the commuting time to crew center and then to the airport is often ignored. Not to mention that if this is an international flight which has a layover abroad, there would be even longer preparation time: packing up luggage beforehand, going through immigration and customs upon arrival, waiting for the crew shuttle bus to the hotel, commuting between the airport and the hotel, waiting for check-in and finally getting a room. In all, it could take up to one hour and a half, sometimes even longer, before the crew members could really enter into the hotel room, shut the door and leave any work-related issues behind. But let me remind you, it also takes time to settle down in the hotel room: unpacking luggage, removing make-up and taking a shower, and sometimes one might want to have a light meal before going to bed. In total, three hours may have passed before the flight attendant could really relax and get some sleep after the passengers get off the aircraft.

For outsiders, the physical tiredness of flight attendants is most likely to be associated with adjusting for jet lag, the hidden working time described above seldom come into their minds. Many flight attendants emphasize how such processes consume

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14 This quote was from an interview I conducted in 2006 when my main goal was to understand female flight attendants’ work lives. I have more interview questions on their grooming, uniform, and femininity.

15 However, flight attendants in Eva Air need to share room with another colleague. So entering into the hotel room does not always mean one could completely escape from the work ethnics in their off-time, such as respecting the seniority. According to flight attendants in Eva Air, if one is senior than the other, then more or less, the junior needs to yield to the senior’s will even in the trivial issues like who use the restroom first or when to turn off the light to sleep. Comparing to China Airlines’ management style, this suggests Eva Air’s management on flight attendants is more controlling and disciplinarily.
their time, energy and sometimes emotional tolerance when our conversation turns to
the work time issues.

When close family members cannot really understand the physical challenges the
flying mothers need to face, or they are not willing to be considerate toward their
exhaustion after work, the possible conflicts become another source of mental pressure
for flight attendants. This particularly would happen between flying mothers and their
mothers-in-law: the latter might see they help with the childcare, but they are not taking
it to be their responsibilities; or if they are taking over the childcare work, and do not
agree that their daughters-in-law are responsible enough to be a good mother. Several
flight attendants talk about either minor or major conflicts they have with their mothers-
in-law:

She was not willing to see us have a nanny to take care of her grandson
and said she’d like to help taking care of him for us…I appreciate her
indeed. But I neglected an important thing: what she meant for the word
“help”: she sees this is my job and she is a helper, so when I am in Taiwan
this is my job no matter how tired I am.

I would hire a nanny and with our (the couple’s) salary we could afford one.
But my mother-in-law insisted to take care of my son by herself….for a
nanny I could leave my son to her when I want to; but for my mother-in-law?
There are definitely situations I feel uncomfortable to ask.

I know this is not her (the mother-in-law) job, but as soon as my flight lands
she’ll call me to see when I could arrive to pick up my daughter. Once my
flight was delayed and also I miscalculated the time I could arrive at my
parent-in-laws’ place, she called me every 10 minutes to check where I was
until I arrived! And of course she was very upset.

These quotes suggest the possible conflicts that existed between the daughters-in-law
and the mothers-in-law because their different expectations about the childcare help
and on the duties mothers should do. From the descriptions I heard from my
interviewees, many of their mothers-in-law see their role in childcare as “a helper when I
(the flying mother) am away...meaning it is not her (the mother-in-law’s) business when I am in Taiwan." Whether they volunteer to help or not, and for some cases they insist they want to help, they expect flying mothers to take over and as soon as they arrive at home, like other working mothers.

However flying mothers are not always ready to take on their second shifts when they are just released from work; the work that would impose much physical and emotional challenges on them; the work that differentiates them from ordinary working mothers. When the outsiders who cannot really understand are their mothers-in-law, the ones who help flying mothers’ tend to mothering responsibilities when they are away, the tension and conflicts undoubtedly would appear.

To avoid possible conflicts with their mothers-in-law, flying mothers use different strategies. In cases where the mothers-in-law insist the childcare responsibilities should be fulfilled with their help rather than hiring a nanny, flying mothers would strategize to make their mothers-in-law understand the difficulties and physical tiredness because of this non-traditional, demanding job. I have to that through the interviews it had only been the physical tiredness the flying mothers would try to make their mothers-in-law understand. Not even one flying mother would purposely make their mothers-in-law also understand their emotional exhaustion experiences after work (such as too easily losing patience) even though they might identify these experiences in the interview.

Flying mother Moon told me her efforts to let her mother-in-law understand the real time she needs to spend on work. “Our working hours are much longer, beyond the general public’s imagination.” Moon said, “But I have to let her know. If she doesn’t understand so, I’ll always be even more tired after going back home because I have to
deal with her expectations on me…being able to take care of my daughter right away.”

This echoes the earlier discussions on how flying mothers associate their body (i.e. the physical tolerance, the energy) with their gender role as a mother, and also as a daughter-in-law in the family.

So here was what Moon once did before a long-haul flight. She called her mother-in-law when she had to begin preparing for work, “Mom\textsuperscript{16}, my flight to Los Angeles will depart at 11:30 p.m. tonight, but I have to get dressed now.” “11:30?” Her mother-in-law said, “…but it’s only 7 o’clock now!” “Yes, that’s true. Because I have to prepare, get dressed, do make-up, do my hair, feed Daisy (her daughter), send her to your place, then I have to drive to the crew center to meet up with my colleagues. We all get together for a report first, then we go to the airport together. We do the preparation work before the passengers board, so our working time begins almost 4 hours before the flight departure time.” Moon patiently explained the process in details to her mother-in-law and made sure she had heard the key sentence “4 hours before the flight departure time.”

After she arrived at the hotel in the United States and settled down—this means after she had taken a shower and finally she could go to bed—she called her mother-in-law again, “Mom, I call to check if everything is fine. What time is it in Taiwan now? 5:30 p.m.? I finally arrived at Los Angeles and checked in the hotel…I’m exhausted now and need to get some sleep.”

\textsuperscript{16} Taiwanese daughter-in-laws address their parents-in-laws as “mom/dad” or “mother/father” rather addressing them by their first names. Actually it would be regarded to be very rude if they dare to address them in other ways.
Moon said her mother-in-law as an outsider once commented that flight attendant is an easy job, “She told me that I know you flight attendants have to adjust to the jet lag but besides that, you only have to work for a few hours in the airplane.” She used this chance to let her mother-in-law see her job is quite tiring. She began to prepare long before she boarded the flight, and it cost almost 22 hours before her “(my) head could touch the pillow again.”

I believe readers of my dissertation would wonder and ask the question as I did, “so after you come back, did your mother-in-law have any comment on this occupation again?” “Yes she did make the comment I really hoped to hear,” Moon said after she arrived home, the mother-in-law said to her, “Oh, I didn’t know. You have to work so long. It costs almost a day. Was it because it was a flight to America?” Moon then had a chance to describe more details of flight attendant’s duties to her mother-in-law. She explained that even though not every flight would cost her almost a day before she could lie on a bed to sleep again, it always took her much more time than people may assume, “dressing-up, commuting, preparation work before flight….all takes time”.

Understanding more about Moon’s job somewhat relieved the tension between Moon and her mother-in-law. Moon and her husband lived across the street of her parents-in-law’s place. Her mother-in-law took care of her daughter when she was away. As soon as she came back, her mother-in-law expected her to pick up her daughter right away no matter how early or how late she arrived at home. This means that Moon did not have any time to rest after she went home from work. Moon knew that she would be given back her daughter because,

My mother-in-law thinks now it is my turn to take care of my daughter since I am back. It should be my responsibility. She was a working mother when
she was young. She thinks if she could take care of her two sons after work instead of hiring a nanny, so I should be able to do what she did, I could make it as well.

Moon not only grasped the ideology behind her mother-in-law’s attitude but also saw the differences between two generations,

I don’t know her job was busy or not, but her job definitely didn’t require her to stay up all night long or to get up at 3 in the morning. She didn’t have to adjust to the irregular working schedule like me. I believe more or less she suffered from…between work and taking care of two sons, but it had been a long time ago, she must have forgotten everything. Forgot how it feels.

Instead of confronting the ideology her mother-in-law held, Moon exercised such a practical strategy in her daily life, hoping to work things out. After this incident with her mother-in-law, Moon found her mother-in-law had become more tolerate if she picked up her daughter a little bit later than before. “When I call her on my way driving home, she now says you can go home, eat something and take a shower first, before you come to pick Daisy up to sleep.” She paused, waiting to see if I got it, and obviously I had no clue about what she was trying to say to me. “You don’t get it? To sleep, you see what she implies? She means I could have only the time enough for changing clothes, taking showers, things like that. But I have to get her back to take a nap with me. I have to take care of her because I’m back now…then I’d better pray my daughter is willing to sleep as well, instead of longing for play.”

**Good Daughter-in-law**

When Moon’s mother-in-law was young, she was a traditional daughter-in-law in her husband’s family. Even though she was working, after work she still needed to perform all the duties a good daughter-in-law is expected to do. In addition to taking care of her two sons, she also needed to cook for the big family, do the housework including doing the laundry for all her husband’s family members who live under the
same roof. Now she has become a mother-in-law herself, it is understandable that she would tend to reproduce the same relationships within the family because this is what she learned through her past experiences. Moon’s mother-in-law’s job content was not clear, so I could not be sure if she was in a pink-collar type job or not. For her generation, a pink-collar job could be quite common for women who choose to work outside the home. I assume her job did not have a significant title or that she was in a position that was not easily ignored, or Moon would definitely have heard about it. Also for her generation, the positions women generally held were not as important as men’s. These assumptions imply that the job left Moon’s mother-in-law with more time and energy after work for her family, especially compared with Moon’s occupation. For the mother-in-law’s generation, when they were young it was gradually becoming more common to see women working outside home, but the jobs available to them were more likely to assume that women prioritized their family responsibilities. This could become another reason that the mothers-in-law of flying mothers could not always understand their daughters-in-law’s failure in fulfilling the expected duties.

Moon’s mother-in-law’s word “to sleep” impressed me. It shows basic understanding between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law do not always guarantee support from mothers-in-law. Mothers-in-law may be more likely to adopt the traditional expectations about the role their daughters-in-law should play in a Taiwanese family, even though they more or less perceived the sufferings their daughters-in-law experience.

Some flying mothers adopt another type of practical strategy in the negotiation. They realize it is impossible to make their mothers-in-law understand their occupation,
or to make them whole-heartedly stand on their side. Instead of revealing their suffering
to appeal for sympathy and mutual understanding as Moon did, these flying mothers
take the opposite direction, by “making use of” their unfamiliarity with the occupation:

Since they don’t understand the arrival time, departure time, whatever
time…so I think I just tell them when I will be back. And that “when” is
flexible, depending on the flight….the degree of tiredness I think I’ll
have…for a long-haul flight arriving in the very early morning, I would tell
them I’ll be back and go to their place around noontime so please take care
of my daughter till then.

Another flying mother who also use such strategy confessed,

I want to be a good mother, I want to be a good daughter-in-law to them. So
sometimes a white lie is necessary. To avoid possible conflicts. I don’t
mean to lie to her you know. But if I don’t, I’ll be really, really tired.

I was amazed when I listened to my former colleagues describing these scenarios. I see
how sarcastic this strategy was: because the close family members are outsiders to this
occupation, it could be difficult for them to understand the tiredness flying mothers suffer
from; on the other hand, it is also because of the outsiders’ ignorance, flying mothers
could negotiate between the expectations of their mothers-in-law or other family
members may impose upon them and the reality that exhausted flight attendants are
not “superwomen who could be still energetic after a long-haul flight with no rest time”
as a flying mother said.

Another flying mother Ling used to live with her parents in Taipei before she got
married and moved to Tao-yuan to live with her husband and his family. Tao-yuan is
where the international airport is located, so usually Ling would go back home directly
from the airport. Ling’s parents-in-law took care of her son when she is away. This
arrangement made her feel “assured, relieved…I can fly away without worry because I
know my son is in their hands and they take care of him well.” Ling’s husband has a big
family so other relatives, including her husband’s brothers’ families are also in the neighborhood. “I know the family members are all around so my son would not feel bored because his uncle, aunt, nieces…will accompany him to play. If he misses me he will not cry for long because he has many companions.” Ling described the family arrangement of her childcare in a happy, carefree tone and it sounds that she was satisfied with the situation—if I just stopped my interview here. When I continued to explore more details about the time distribution, like what she would need to do when she is in Taiwan; or how she would arrange her time during the day after coming back from work especially a tiring long-haul flight, I then also heard the hidden part of the story:

Well…you see, when I am away my parents-in-law and sometimes my husband’s brother’s wife or my husband’s sister would all help to take care of my son, so when I am home I think I should do my job as a daughter-in-law…I’ll have to take care of my son by myself of course. Now you’re back it’s your job of course. And I’ll also do the majority of housework…cleaning, mopping the floor, cooking….it’ll be my job as soon as I arrive at home. And I do have to do these or, you know, it’ll look bad and they might gossip behind, saying I’m a lazy (daughter-in-law).

As a daughter-in-law, particularly under the silent supervision from other family members of her husbands, Ling actually had concerns about whether she is a good daughter-in-law or not. And to be a good daughter-in-law she needed to sacrifice her sleep time after the long-haul flight.

For long-haul flights such as CI-004 that arrives very early, I might be able to get home at 7 a.m. My husband would be getting ready to work then. We quickly exchange talks and I see him off. Then get myself settled around 8:30 or so. My mother-in-law is kind enough and she would take care of my child when I sleep. I might take a nap but I set alarm to get up after one hour and half…at most two but not any longer. I wouldn’t feel I should rest till I want and I couldn’t…something will be upon my mind so I cannot fall in sound sleep anyway. (I: why?) I have to get up to cook for them and do the housework.
Even though Ling emphasize several times that either her parents-in-law or her other family members are very kind, supportive and understanding, her sense of responsibility as playing the role of a daughter-in-law in the family would urge her to fulfill the duties which others have covered her when she was away. The family members might not really gossip about her but she is afraid she would not be a good daughter-in-law “and I cannot take advantage of them because they are kind to me.”

This does not mean Ling was not as exhausted as others after working for a long-haul flight. She told her strategy to “steal time” is to go back to Taipei to her own parents’ home after work when she feels she needed so,

Of course I feel tired. So sometimes when…my working schedule is packed in that month or I am especially exhausted recently, I would say I’ll go to see my parents in Taipei first after my long-haul flight. Then I could sleep till whenever I want to get up, and my mother would cook a big meal for me…being their unmarried daughter again.

Ling was not the only one sharing such stealing time strategy with me. I actually found many flying mothers would steal time by visiting their parents and by changing their roles: from a daughter-in-law to a daughter. Many flying mothers would escape from or delay in doing their expected responsibilities in the family they have with their husbands, or in the husband’s family. They go to their original families as a temporary shelter, even just for a few hours.

I drive to my home (referring to her home with her parents before getting married)...It’s like I have drive for two hours, including going to retuning trips, just for a 3-hour long sound sleep. Driving from Taoyuan to Taipei is tiring. But I know if I go home (referring to her home with her husband) directly I’ll be even more tired.

Another flying mothers use the excuse of showing her parents their grand daughters as a way to rest for a while after the long-haul flights,
I would go to my parents-in-law’s place to pick up my children and then I go to my parents’ directly, without stopping by our home. Then my parents could take care of my children when I take off my uniform, remove my make-up, take a shower, sleep for a few hours. I don’t have to worry about my children, And it’s a trip to take my children to visit their mother’s side grandparents. My parents make jokes of me: we are your child care center when you’re back from the long-haul flights.

**Mother-in-law’s Role in Childcare**

Similar to Moon and Ling, some married flight attendants depend on their mothers-in-law taking care of their children. The degree of the involvement of childrearing and child caring of their mothers-in-law is different. Such differences directly put influence on flying mothers’ interactions with her mothers-in-law, who are ascribed more power in the Taiwanese family hierarchy. To what degree does the mothers-in-laws provision of the resources and support to the flying mothers’ childcare work contributes to the rapport, the intimacy, the potential pressure, and possible conflicts within the family. And of course it is not hard to understand that the childcare resources flying mothers could acquire from family members\(^{17}\) relieve the stress flying mothers feel, and this is one of the keys that decide how difficult or smooth flying mothers consider their childcare experiences, and decide if flying mothers consider it is possible for them to continue flying because things in the private, domestic sphere could be settled or not.

Flying mother Ching-ching’s mother-in-law “happily volunteered to take care of my child before I was pregnant, because she was afraid that I would not want to give

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\(^{17}\) Here I define “the main resource from other family members” to be people who could play major role in taking care of the children when flying mothers are away. Among my interviews, the majority of such help was provided by flying mothers’ mothers-in-law and their own mothers. For most cases husbands also have full-time jobs, so they mainly involve in taking care of the children when flying mothers are not at home in Taiwan. I also come across some cases that the father is unemployed or could work at home, then they become the main child-care giver when their wives are away.
birth because of worrying about the childcare.” While Ching-ching was telling me this, she stopped for a few seconds, seemed to recalling more details, “actually, I think she told me so before I married to my husband…yeah, I think the dialogue actually happened when she and my husband’s sister accompanied me to choose my wedding dress.” Ching-ching said,

She (the mother-in-law) asked me if my mom will be able to take care of my child in the future. I didn’t know how to respond because I never had talked with my mom about this. I didn’t think that much at that time…all my mind was occupied with my wedding! She probably thought my hesitation implied that my mom couldn’t, then she said to me, “please don’t worry about child-rearing and childcare, and you can keep flying if you want to. I’ll definitely take of your children…so don’t worry about having children!”…I probably looked embarrassed, my sister-in-law said, “mom, you’re making her blush, it’s too early to think about this!” My mother-in-law said, “No, it’s not too early. Having children is the-sooner-the-better thing. They two are not young anymore…I want to see my grandson!”

“Oh, she said ‘grandson’? Or she meant for ‘grandchild’? Wouldn’t she take care of your child if you have a daughter?” I asked, “there is a slight but major difference regarding the implication of the wording…”Ching-ching laughed, “Yes you’re right! I didn’t think of it! I guess she would still take care of my child if I had a daughter rather than a son because she told me so. But she did prefer a grandson. My husband is the only son in his family, so there is no one else to give birth to a grandson for her. Even though she didn’t say so I knew that.”

Ching-ching’s mother-in-law was afraid that Ching-ching did not want to give up her work and her freedom, so she made her point clearly that she will be the supporting resource Ching-ching could depend on, in exchange for having her give birth to the grandchild (grandson preferred) to continue the family’s blood. Today many

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18 In Mandarin the word ‘grandson’ could generally refer to grandchild either male or female, or it could emphasize the meaning of a son not a ‘daughter.
Taiwanese young couples choose not to have children for various reasons. Worrying about childcare issues, financial burdens, and loss of freedom are three of the major factors that contribute to this social phenomenon. For the generation of the couples’ parents who are more traditional, who long for having their grandchildren, they would try to persuade the young couple, negotiate with the resources they could provide to encourage or to urge the birth of the new family generation.

After Ching-ching’s son was born, her mother-in-law did what she had promised to do, help with childcare. Actually, from what I heard from Ching-ching’s description, it was more like her mother-in-law took over the major responsibility and really enjoyed doing so “My mother-in-law said it’s a blessing to have the grandson being around and being very close to her.” as Ching-ching said. Indeed, in the Chinese cultural tradition, it is considered a blessing for the elders being surrounded by their children and grandchildren, as a big family together. Ching-ching’s case was one of the most live-together-and happily-ever-after examples among all of my interviewees. Before the end of my interview with Ching-ching, she told me she had another social gathering after mine and later a male friend of hers came to pick her up for lunch. I have to say, few of my interviewees did not have to be somewhere in a hurry after our interviews, and few of my interviewee did not have to worry about picking up her child from somewhere, such as from her mother-in-law’s place. In my impression, Ching-ching was a carefree young wife without being tied by her child, even though she does have one and loves to take care of him when she wants to. This was not because she loves her son less compared to other women who are tied by their family 24/7, but because

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19 This also implied her mindset about talking to me was more like a social gathering and I sensed the atmosphere during our interview was like a coffee break for both of us.
she has a full-hearted supporter behind her, who does not change the attitude and the willingness in taking care of her son when Ching-ching was in Taiwan. In other words, Ching-ching’s mother-in-law did not take up the traditional expectations that mothers-in-law generally have about the good daughter-in-law (i.e. taking care of the children well), but did embrace another cultural tradition as a blessed grandmother who could see the birth of the grandson, and even take over the care-giver’s role.

Comparing Moon’s and Ching-ching’s cases, we could observe the mindset of two types of mothers-in-law. They might both hold and follow some traditional viewpoints upon family. Moon’s believed women should fulfill their domestic duties whether they are working outside the home or not; Ching-ching’s mother-in-law thought giving birth to a son is crucial. But their responses to the social changes and their attitude towards their children’s generations in contemporary Taiwanese society (represented by their daughters-in-law and the demanding non-traditional women’s work) are quite different. Moon’s mother-in-law still expected Moon to follow the traditional expectations about mothers and daughters-in-law, even though she might be more tolerant after knowing more facts about Moon’s job. To Moon’s mother-in-law, a mother/daughter-in-law should play a certain role in the family; there was not much room to challenge the authority and the power the mother-in-law represents. Ching-ching’s mother-in-law, on the other hand, was more willing to negotiate and to yield to the social changes, under the condition that her daughter-in-law could fulfill her major responsibility by giving birth to the next generation of the big family. Ching-ching’s mother-in-law took rearing this youngest generation of the family as her responsibility, which illustrates the traditional
part she does hold in her heart that women should be the main care-givers, and to ensure, to protect the family blood.

As a side note, Moon decided to resign from her job as a flight attendant after she gave birth to her second child. She knew if she kept flying, she would have to suffer from extreme tiring process again since her mother-in-law “did not understand her situation enough.” She is a working mother now who could go home every day. “Even though it’s tiring too, at least it will not conflict too much with my mother-in-law’s ideal daughter-in-law so things could work better.”

The expectations from mothers-in-law indeed were a major source of pressure. Flying mother Wen-ni’s mother-in-law did not volunteer to take care of her grandchild as Ching-ching’s. Her mother-in-law was more like Moon’s mother-in-law, who was willing to take care of the child as a temporary child care giver, as a substitute when the real mother is away. And basically because they have hired a female domestic worker, it was not her mother-in-law doing all the child-caring work. Wen-ni said she always does not tell her mother-in-law the actual time her flight will land in Taipei. Instead she only indicated a general time,

I always say it’ll be noontime, afternoon, or late evening I will come to pick up my son. If she insists to know the time I’d say something like approximately 4 p.m…. and I make sure I’ve saved enough time for my own break. Or she’ll call to ask where I am and say, “Your son is missing you!”

What a classical response, “Your son is missing you!” In my interpretation, by saying “Your son is missing you!” the mother-in-law was actually telling her daughter-in-law “I’m doing you a favor when you’re away. Now you should come to take over as soon as possible.” The mother-in-law has superior position in the family hierarchy to her
daughter-in-law and she is using the childcare duty to remind the inferior daughter-in-law to be thankful and to be responsible.

This very one sentence also illustrates the power relationships between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. When the real mother comes back, it should be her responsibility whether she was exhausted or not, whether she stayed up all night long because of work or not, whether she was ready to take her second shift or not. I found more or less, many of the flying mothers’ mothers-in-law have such a mindset if they are involved with the childcare duties. Therefore the conflicts could be raised, because the two sides have different positions and ideology: the mothers-in-law may understand that flying mothers cannot be there for their children as other working mothers. Many working mothers would take back their second shifts as soon as they arrive at home, so flying mothers are expected to be able to do the same. After all, the tradition considers this is the mothers’ responsibilities, this is what mothers should do, mothers should sacrifice for their children. For flying mothers, sometimes it is particularly difficult for them to fulfill her role as a mother to her child when she is exhausted after work. And the degree of tiredness sometimes is much more than general working mothers. Conflicts lie in the intertwining expectations on gender roles, culture, family and work from different generations and different positions women in which women are situated.

**Mother-in-law Is Not Mom**

Flying mothers would have their own mothers to cover them when they are in need, like stealing a few hours for sleep as the cases I described earlier. I also found that whenever flying mothers could have this option, many of them would prefer to turn to their own mothers for help in taking care of their children instead of asking their
mothers-in-laws to do so. Some flying mothers have their own mothers instead of mothers-in-law to take care of the children because “things are different when it goes to mom,” like one of my interviewees said. Many flying mothers expressed similar thoughts and differentiate the interactions they have with their mother and with their mothers-in-law:

Even though my parents-in-law are very nice people, and they are very nice to me…not until some family issues happen, you won’t see there is still difference.

No matter how nice your mother-in-law is, do not take this for granted. And you need to distinguish her kindness from the kind help you acquire from your own mothers.

We Taiwanese…mothers-in-law are not moms. There is a huge difference between even though we address both of them as “mom”. It is important to note to your western readers this point since you’re writing about our Taiwanese families. 20

When listening to similar comments about the different interactions with their “moms,” my follow-up question was always, “so what are the differences between mother and mother-in-law? Could you give me an example?” Their responses were quite interesting. Some could not articulate clearly so they might simply tell me, “it’s a feeling things…the feel is different.”21 Others could give me a few examples right away without any hesitation, like the quotes I have here:

For mom you could ask her for help at the last minute. Just give my mom a call, “mom, could you do this and that for me? I don’t have time to deal with it today but I have to go to work now.” But for mother-in-law you will hesitate to ask her so unless it is a real emergency.

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20 At the end of the interview with flying mothers, I always asked them if there is anything else that comes to her mind she hasn’t talked about and wants to bring to my attention, whether about the questions I asked, things I want to know, or the topics in our conversation. This was this flying mother’s feedback. In the beginning I told her I am writing my dissertation in English so my major readers for now might be western audience. This is her last comment before we stopped the interview.

21 I will discuss more on the “different feelings” in next chapter.
My mother-in-law is quite busy for her own colorful life. Her time is occupied with all kinds of activities, such as volunteering work, folk dance, 2-day tours to Southern Taiwan…if I need her help I’d better notify her in advance, “make a reservation”….or she would let me know she is very unhappy. But for my mom…I know she had to rearrange her schedule to accommodate my needs but she wouldn’t give me a hard time you know…mom is mom.

Say for example if I want to go to hang out with friends for an afternoon tea or some social, of course I wouldn’t be frank when I ask them to take care of my child. Or I might ask for help only once or twice for a long time, not too often.

If I want to go out for fun, not for work, I would leave my daughter to my mom. If I am leaving for work, that’s “normal reason” so I could depend on my mother-in-law.

(For the time picking up kids) For mom, it is okay to be a little bit late. For mother-in-law, I dare not to do so.

Since my interviewees know I was not married yet, sometimes I would be kindly “lectured” about the relationships with mothers-in-law. I always told these flying mothers before the interviews formally began: there must be things I do not know about marriage and motherhood so I hope to know about your thoughts and your experiences. Please tell me. They did share their experiences with me, as a big sister telling her unmarried one, as Jie-jie sharing her lives with Mei-mei. Not all my interviewees were elder than me, some of them might be younger than me in age. Some might call me Jie-jie because when at work I was senior to them. However, when the topics turn to marriage lives, their tone would change into a more mature woman. Sometimes such change could be quite subtle that I did not notice until I replayed the interview to do the transcription.

Ting-ting was a young flying mother, a junior colleague to me. In my mind I usually treated her as a little sister, as she is a naïve and innocent sweet girl. She likes fashionable clothes and bags; our dialogues were sometimes about shopping and
discount information. She also likes cute, “girl” stuff. Once we went to McDonald’s
together, she ordered two child meals: one for her son and one for herself. I asked why
she does not want to order the bigger meal for an adult. She told me because she is
collecting the gifts coming along with the child meal, which was a small Hello Kitty
case—and it was not the first time I noticed she bought toys for her own collection
instead of for her son. While we had this dialogue about parents-in-law, that naïve,
innocent sister impression has transformed into a mature, sophisticated woman. Ting-
ting told me what she learned from her interactions with her mother-in-law about the
hidden knowledge every daughter-in-law would know, her facial expression and her
tone were completely different from the way she usually talked to me:

Every daughter-in-law will know this, sooner or later….that mother-in-law is
not mom after all… They (the parents-in-law) may be supportive; they could
be nice people, but it is important to keep in mind you’re not their real
daughter. There should be politeness; there should be some basic
boundary that cannot be crossed…(you) cannot do things at will as to (your)
mom.

Ting-ting’s emphasis on the differences between mother and mother-in-law made me
reflect on the possible relationships I might have with my future mother-in-law--- even
though I do not plan to get married in the near future, and I don’t have a specific woman
figure I could project upon for this role. A few days after the interview with Ting-ting, in a
bookstore near my home I came across a book that teaches what modern daughters-in-
law should do to have good relationships with their mothers-in-law. The author’s key

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22 Ting-ting was not the only flying mother that had given me mixed feelings and impressions when we
had conversations about marriage, family, and children. When I was working for China Airlines I
sometimes I heard my colleagues talk about their marriage and family lives. However those conversations
happened when at work so it could be more like casual chatting, and it wouldn’t last quite long. When
doing the in-depth interviews, my former colleagues gave me a chance to see the other side of their lives.
Such impact had made me to reconsider the impressions flight attendants would give to the outsiders, the
general public as well as to the colleagues. I will discuss more in later chapter regarding sexuality.
points were to "treat your mother-in-law as your mother and "beware of the words you use when you talk to her, make sure they are all polite terms" “always show your respectful attitude to her seniority.” Also the author proposes that it is important to be considerate to her, trying to put yourself into her shoes. “Well,” I was thinking, “This is more like common sense in Chinese family cultures.” Even though as a single woman at this moment I cannot imagine my interactions with my mother-in-law in the future, what this book talks about is not something strange to me. The issue is: it is easy to say so, but it is not always easy to be a good daughter-in-law. From the impressions I acquired from Ting-ting as well as other flying mothers who may or may not have issues with their mothers-in-law, I more or less, understand why they differentiate their relationships with their own moms and their mothers-in-law.

And it should be fair to say, such differentiation between mother and the mothers-in-law could be an important key that makes the relationships with their daughters-in-law work. The attitude toward the mother-in-law shows a much more subtle distance between two family members in a polite way, and this demonstrates the respect the daughters-in-law have in their minds. Ting-ting said something I always heard from my own mother, my aunt, and my other married female friends, “As soon as my husband and I decided to get married, I gradually realized why the old saying goes, ‘getting married is not two people’s thing, but two families’ thing.’” Because the intimacy Taiwanese family members share with one another would highly value seniority, respect, filial piety, and togetherness, it is important for the junior members to be able to demonstrate such values. When a joined family member like a daughter-in-law could be seen as an outsider in certain situations, she needs to make more efforts to acquire
membership in the husband’s family. The daughter-in-law needs to be acknowledged by her parents-in-law, and when this acknowledgment involves help with childrearing and childcare the parents-in-law could provide, the interactions and the relationships between the seniors and the juniors are more complicated. Power is always wrangling between daily interactions of family members.

“But I Want My Own Life Too!”

Many working mothers in Taiwan depend on their mothers or their mothers-in-law to take care of their children. For childcare, double-salary families in Taiwan are struggling with the resources they could acquire outside the family when they cannot or do not want to depend on their family members’ help, which usually refers to the help provided by the elders.

It is also important to note that not all grandmothers in Taiwanese society can take over the major responsibilities of taking care of their grandchildren. Some may not be in good health, some might be still working and do not have time, and some of them live in another city in Taiwan, which is too far from the young couple’s nuclear family and the young couples do not want to live far away from their children. For flying mothers, because their occupational characteristics they need more flexibility in childcare to accommodate their needs, elders are usually the ones they first turn to ask for help. When the mothers-in-law refuse to take care of the children, or when the flying mother can longer tolerate the conflicts and the pressure imposed by their mother-in-law’s expectations, flying mothers turn to their own moms for help. “Mom is usually more understanding; willing to help; and it may sound bad but, mom could be taken advantage of …as people say, ‘daughter thief…”Ting-ting said.
Daughter thief\textsuperscript{23} means the married daughter often gets free stuff from her parents when she visits her family of origin. Her visit to her own parents' place is like a thief stealing anything she needs for her home with her husband, from groceries to household utensils. Yet, when a woman addresses herself or the parents call their married daughter a “daughter thief” it is usually not in a blaming tone. Instead, this is something one would feel blessed and would be proud of, for this daughter is still treasured and loved by her parents after marrying onto another family. This term implies her parents are kind to her; do not treat her as “a bowl of water that has been spoiled outside the home.” She is still “a pearl in their hands.” \textsuperscript{24} Therefore she could still obtain resources from her original family. It is a blessing that the daughter still has her original family to return.

For a loved, blessed married daughter, she might be able to obtain material resources from her parents. Moreover, she might require some invisible resources from her parents, especially from her mother: significant assistance in childcare duties. Obviously because of work flying mothers could not always fulfill their child-care responsibilities, they become a daughter thief for getting support from the original families. For love to their daughters, many flying mothers’ mothers take over the responsibility when they are asked for help.

When I listened to my interviewees explain how their mothering responsibilities are shared or taken over by their mothers or mothers-in-law, a question raised in my

\textsuperscript{23} In Mandarin it is Nu-er-tsei 女兒賊

\textsuperscript{24} An old Chinese saying describe married daughters are like a bowl of water that has been spoiled outside home (In Mandarin 嫁出去的女兒潑出去的水); they now belong to the husband's family and should not return to the original home. On the contrary, there is another Chinese idiom that describes the loved, unmarried young daughter to be her parent’s treasure, like a pearl the carefully hold in their palms. (In Mandarin 掌上明珠)
mind: what if their mothers do not want to help with the childcare, wouldn’t they say no to their own daughters? It sounded to me that everyone involved saw it as a pleasure to have such an arrangement, either flying mothers themselves, the mothers-in-law and mothers of flight attendants who now have to afford the childcare burden given by their daughters. The picture described by the flying mothers seemed to be too peaceful to be true. “Really?” I wondered. There must be cases that the mothers do not want to experience the child-rearing process again, like my own mother.

I began to have doubts because I related what I have heard from the flying mothers in the conversation with my own mother. “Don’t anticipate you could depend on me,” my mother has said this to me many times since I was still working as a flight attendant, “I wouldn’t take care of your child for you in the future after you get married, you have to keep this in mind,” my mother clearly expressed her attitude regarding my childcare responsibilities even though I was not married and I had never asked if she would take care of my children. “It’s okay that I help you sometimes, or if you hire a domestic worker and I’ll be aside watching, that’s okay. But don’t expect me to do all dirty work again. I want to have my own life.”

My mother was a housewife, a stay-home mom before I went to senior high school. She later began to have a part-time job as a private nurse to take care of elders. She enjoys her retirement life quite well. In the past few years when I was abroad studying for my Ph.D. degree, my mother has developed many new hobbies, such as travelling in Taiwan, going to Karaoke with her friends to sing. One summer when I returned to Taiwan for my vacation, she played a CD on the first night I arrived at home. When I recognized the songs were sung by her, I was in shock. “Mom, are you
becoming a singer? Would it be that when the next time I come back, you’ll have a live concert or something?” I also found she had visited so many places in Taiwan in the past two years by joining one-day tours. My mother has her own social circle, her old and new friends and indeed her own life—that was the key term that came to my mind when I analyzed the transcriptions of my interviewees. I am very sure that if I were a flying mother now, my mother would not agree to give up her one-day tours or her singing career—whether she is going to have a live concert or not—for taking care of my child. Is my mother the only one who wants to have her life after retirement wholeheartedly? I really do not think so.

Therefore I began to pose more questions to flying mothers if they tell me their mothers or mothers-in-law are the main care-givers to their children when they are abroad. I ask if these seniors volunteered to help, or they were asked for help; if the seniors ever talked about their thoughts on taking care of the grandchildren. The story behind the scene was not always as peaceful as it seemed to be.

Sasa told me her mother-in-law did not want to take care of her baby daughter, “she is quite busy and has her own life.” Sasa said. I came across Sasa’s mother-in-law once in a clothes’ shop Sasa owned. She stopped by to give Sasa some clothes she needed Sasa to send for dry cleaning when several of my former colleagues and I were hanging out, chatting together in her shop. Sasa’s mother-in-law was wearing a blouse in rainbow colors along with a leopard-striped legging. Her hair was in light orange. When I praise her luxurious bag from Louis Vuitton’s latest spring collection, I did not know she was Sasa’s mother-in-law. I thought she might be a regular customer of Sasa’s shop, and I wanted to say something nice to her, for the shop’s business sake.
This fashionable lady happily smiled and responded, “Thank you! It was a gift from my son and my daughter-in-law. They are very filial!” Later when my colleagues and I realized about this elderly fashion lady’s identity, we were all in awe. “She looks amazing!” “She doesn’t look like a mother-in-law!”

Sasa’s mother-in-law not only looked quite young for her age but also has a very young heart, always being energetic. She is a very popular in her social community and has countless friends. Her life is occupied with different activities. Therefore when Sasa’s daughter was born, her mother-in-law gently implied to her son, Sasa’s husband, that she has “no time for the little one because I’m busy.” Sasa therefore turned to her mother for help. When I began to dig more facts about Sasa’s mother, surprisingly I found that she is another fashionable woman who also has lots of friends and activities after retirement, just like Sasa’s mother-in-law. “Sasa, since your mother is also…so outgoing, is she willing to take care of your daughter?” Sasa carefully thought about my question, looked a little bit hesitated, and said,

Hmm......I think......actually, no...I know my mom doesn’t quite want to babysit for me but she knows I have no choice when I am away (for work). And it was not a babysitting occasionally but a regular thing...babysitting occasionally that my mother-in-law would do... we (husband and I) don’t have confidence in hiring a nanny. And hiring a nanny is expensive. I have calculated all the finance things. If I must hire a nanny I would rather give my mom the money.

Sasa then explained to me about her thoughts upon giving her mother a “subsidy” for taking care of her daughter.

This is a way, like an accountable “excuse” to give my mother some money, more like the financial support to her, in the name of asking her to take care my child. It’s also a filial piety thing. After being married I still give my mother some money every month and my husband knows that. We give his mother money too. But having my mother taking care of my daughter it is more accountable to give her a little bit more. My mother also understands this and we have such tacit. So even though she once complained “But I
want my own life!” eventually she did. But we two both suffer for negotiating our schedules.

It is very common in Taiwanese society that the adult, full-time employed children give their parents monthly subsidies as a filial expression. The tricky part is, for the married daughter, the amount of money they could give her family of origin could be limited, depending on her employment status, her nuclear family financial burden, and her husband’s will. I sometimes hear my married girl friends’ stories about how they secretly give their own parents some financial support.

Sasa and her husband gave their parents of both sides the same amount of money. I understand what Sasa was implying: she wanted to give her mother more money, but she was somewhat afraid that her husband might not quite agree with her, or might have some unhappy emotions about this, so she has been trying to use another strategy to make such behavior accountable. As a Taiwanese daughter myself, our mutual understanding of the situation was immediately built. What interests me is that filial piety could be mixed with childcare needs, which is something I had no clue before I began doing my fieldwork. And the more I think about this, the more I sense this has less to do with the childcare needs of flying mothers because of their occupation, but could be more about the married daughter’s identity.

Sasa’s mother likes to play Mahjong with her friends. Sasa said therefore she needs to accommodate her mother’s schedule as well. And sometimes her mother was not quite happy about not being able to play Majong the whole night because she had to take care of Sasa’s daughter. Similar to Sasa, I also heard about some flying mothers who have to depend on their own mother for childcare have some conflicts about time,
especially when their mothers were somewhat hesitant to do so, but still doing it because they know their daughters have no other solution. Another flying mother said,

I don’t want to sound like I’m not grateful but, indeed I dare not push my mother-in-law when her schedule conflicts with mine. But for my own mother, it is easy and hard to push her to accommodate my needs. We…sometimes have some minor conflicts. My mother said she wants to relax, she is tired of this…go hire a nanny. I know she does thinks so but she wouldn’t really make me to do it.

Elderly family members are often the ones who could provide help for childcare, however these childcare needs from the young couples could also impact elder’s welfare after retirement and hinder them from pursuing happiness in their own lives.

From the attitudes flying mothers adopt to interact with their two moms, we could observe that the familiarity and intimacy between mothers and daughters make the negotiations of the responsibilities-sharing become more a direct and open discussion process. This might not always happen between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Understanding the viewpoints of flight attendants’ in-laws and also the standpoints of their mothers could be another interesting topic to probe. I did not have the chance to interview the elders’ about taking care of the flying mothers’ children mainly because I was afraid it would be distracting at this stage when my focus is on the flying mothers themselves. In addition, if I wanted to interview the flying mothers’ mothers and their mothers-in-law, I would have to make contact with them through their daughters and daughters-in-law. I was wondering to what degree they are willing to be honest with me since they are aware that I am a friend and a (former) colleague of their daughters or daughters-in-law. I am not sure if therefore they will have concerns or hesitation about my identity when they speak, when they reveal some scenarios that they might later regret and worry if I would tell my friend—their family member. I could be trapped into a
potential dilemma because of my identity, for instance, if I heard any unhappy complaints, anger, or any possible negative emotional comments due to misunderstandings, particularly from the mothers-in-law, how should I react to the situation? I saw there are many aspects I have to seriously consider before I approach any potential respondents. Eventually I chose not to jump into probing this part for now, even though I was tempted for these thoughts in mind. I have to acknowledge that my research role does have its limitation, and for this part, the limitation comes from the insider role I have, which might have helped me a lot with my interviews with flight attendants, yet not so much with my interviews with their family members—to them I’m an outsider after all.

**Summing Up**

In this chapter I review how flight attendants negotiate with their working schedule in order to meet up with the family responsibilities. The past work-family conflict models cannot fully match the flight attendants’ cases. Family members are still the main support in terms of childcare, which is quite personal and limited within the private sphere. In the daily-basis interactions within the families, we could observe how modern women negotiate with the traditional cultural expectations. In these micro-level encounters we see the power that manipulates women’s lives.

Also, flying mothers face the challenges and struggles which come from the company and work requirements and family expectations. The past studies focus more on the practical parts of family and work conflicts and practical details, and in this chapter I also explain the similarities and the differences regarding flight attendants’ families compared to others, and in the next chapter I will introduce the parts that have
been ignored in previous literature, which discusses emotions and doing gender, and how emotion work is gendered.

Flight attendants are used to being seen as those who cannot be a good mother while flying and are expected to become ground staff worker so that they could take care of the families. I find this is not always true. For many successful cases taking care of the children is still possible—with other family members' support. In the way we see this is similar to common career women who also acquire help from family members and the childcare system. This suggests the same difficulties working mothers face in Taiwan. Our images on motherhood should be updated. More and more women dedicate themselves to their career and their time is occupied by work. They could still be a good mother who can support their children. Our definition of motherhood has not always been kept up with the social changes even though women’s lives do reflect them.
CHAPTER 5
DOING GENDER, DOING GENDERED EMOTION

The music of your feelings has its form,
And its symphonic solitude affirms
The resonance of self, remote and warm,
With private acmes at appointed terms

—J.V. Cunningham, *The Man of Feelings*

The practical family strategies flying mothers and their families adopt involve intersecting factors and arrangements accordingly. In this chapter, I will discuss when flying mothers face the intersecting aspects in their lives, the emotional facts, efforts, and adjustments they would have. Similar to the practical arrangement flying mothers adopt to cope with the challenges between work and family, the emotional strategies they adopt are also practical. I see when flying mothers try to strike the balance between work and family, they actually also try to acquire a balanced emotional self. They engage in an occupation that requires them to produce emotional labor, which could cause emotional exhaustion. When they are back to their family lives, they are expected to provide emotional support toward their family members as a wife and a mother. Being loving, caring and considerate has been assumed to be the nature of women, so the possible emotional exhaustion might challenge their abilities to fulfill the emotional work they are expected to do in the private sphere. Besides, family affairs, including the interactions with their other family members, might also require flying mothers to produce certain emotional work to fulfill their role in the family, such as a daughter-in-law. In the previous chapter, we have witnessed that because of the occupational characteristics flying mothers could really struggle with the ideal model as
a good mother or a good daughter-in-law. And emotionally speaking, these occupational characteristics could also diminish flying mothers abilities in fulfilling the ideal models.

Or, flying mothers need to cope with additional positive or negative emotional results due to the occupational characteristics. The emotions flying mothers may have result from their intersecting roles at work and in the family. In all, in this chapter I will examine flying mothers' efforts in producing emotional work for their loved ones, in balancing their emotional self as well as in acquiring the accountability as a good mother, a good daughter-in-law, and also, a good wife.

I begin this process demonstrates how emotions are gendered, as the illustration of my proposal of the idea of gendered emotion: doing gender intertwines with making emotional efforts. As my previous study has shown, when at work Taiwanese female flight attendants would produce the required emotional labor in a highly gendered way, such as purposely emphasizing their femininity when interacting with their passengers. I define it to be gendered emotional labor. When flying mothers face their family roles, the emotional work they would produce is also highly gendered. Gendered emotion involves the emotional labor for paid work in the public sphere as well as the emotional work for unpaid work in the private sphere. For flying mothers, their feelings could be complicated not only for by both the public and the private spheres need their making efforts but also for the challenges imposed on their identities.

The Difficulties in Investigating Emotion

To me, the most attractive thing about sociology is: when you see through a sociological lens, every common, ordinary piece of life could become so different and so meaningful, as the beautiful view in a kaleidoscope. My previous findings on gendered emotional labor motivated me to probe further on women's emotions. I sensed there
could be something similar to the gendered emotional labor in flight attendants’ personal lives, or at least it could be related to emotion in a certain form, as we flight attendants cannot help but gradually internalizing certain characteristics into our persona through a continual disciplinary process at work. That something is out there, whether we are always aware of it or not; or we are able to articulate it well or not. I have been intrigued to identify this something.

But I also sense this something could be difficult to identify, because it is related to emotion and feelings. And emotions and feelings are not like specific family arrangements I could ask direct questions about, and expect people to clearly recall and repeat to me. They might not always be willing to give me an honest reply either. Or even if they are willing to, they might not always be able to collect all their thoughts and figure things out in order to respond to a direct question with a specific answer, unless I “caught them on the spot” when I witnessed the scenarios myself. To have such a chance to witness emotional moment is not a guarantee. In the beginning I was somewhat lost: what should I do to dig out that something related to women’s emotion and review it through a sociological lens? Is it practical for me to claim that I would like to write about gendered emotion work flying mother produce in the private sphere?

Even I myself could not always figure out my own emotion and my own feelings and articulate them clearly. When I tried to come up with possible interview questions to investigate emotion, I recalled an incident that happened in November 1998 when I began my on-the-job training as a trainee flight attendant. I operated a one-day turn-around flight from Taipei to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. The flight departed at 7:30 A.M., meaning I got up at 3 A.M. to prepare for work. When I returned home it was
almost 5 in the afternoon. Fourteen hours had passed since I got up for work. As a trainee, everything was new to me: the aircraft, service procedure, the interactions with passengers, the duties I needed to do in-flight, and of course the in-flight working culture, meaning the relationships with other senior crew members. In all, it was not a bad flight, my in-flight supervisor said my working attitude was very good as I did things spontaneously with a big smile and extreme politeness; the senior colleagues were very nice to me, the passengers were fine. No one gave me a hard time. At the end of day, I was very tired, but when I finally was released from work, I felt very good about this job and myself.

But even though it was an excellent flight, still it was a big challenge to me: both physically and emotionally—the latter I was not aware of until I came back home. I shouted to my old father because of some trivial thing I cannot even remember now. I lost my patience immediately when I had to answer him for second time. In retrospect, it was still like yesterday, because I could recall the good feelings I had at work as a flight attendant, and within two hours after work, I was overwhelmed by the guilty feelings at home as a daughter. I asked myself, how could you be so impatient to your own father, while you were so nice to your passengers and colleagues? You are now a flight attendant, you should be elegant, cheerful, kind and helpful to people around you—as you claimed so when you were in the job interview—how could you lose your patience so easily especially to your father? How come? What happened to you?

And later I figured out myself, there was “something invisible” in my work. This something made me suppress my true feelings toward whomever I have come across at work. I needed to be loving and cheerful at work. I needed to be tame and yield to other
people, particularly to people who have more authority and power than I, such as senior crewmembers and the in-flight supervisor. So after I could remove the fake mask from myself, the suppressed things burst out into shouting, not to mention I was physically exhausted.

This incident came back and haunted me. First it made me realize the possible direction for my further probing of women’s emotion. Now I could identify that “something invisible” was the emotional labor I was required to do at work. As I had found it not only needed to be done between flight attendants and the passengers as described in Hochschild’s book, The Managed Heart; but also for Taiwanese female flight attendants such emotional labor is needed to be done between colleagues and supervisors. The emotional exhaustion could be even more severe. At that time I could not figure out the source of my emotional moments, but I only had the guilt feelings. If I felt so guilt when I perceived the emotional failure to my close family member, how about other flight attendants? Do they have similar experiences? What could be the scenarios? Particularly, for the flying mothers who have small children at home, when they return home physically and emotionally exhausted, how would they interact with their spouses and other family members? Have they ever lost control with their little ones? What could be the situations?

Second, I began to think about my approach in investigating flying mothers’ emotional efforts. Indeed I’ve observed how emotional labor is gendered in the work context, and this observation had motivated me to probe further. Yet at that beginning moment, I was not sure how I would define the gendered emotion in my data. To put this into perspective, I wondered, what kind of questions could be used to identify the
emotional efforts? Do I simply ask them about their feelings? How would I open up the
dialogues about emotional moments? How do I ask about the possible scenarios that
require emotional moments? How would I identify this as being gendered and also
eotional efforts? When analyzing data I collected which scenario I could proudly
acclaim: “There you go! This is the evidence of gendered emotion!”

I thought my problem was: gendered emotion is not a familiar term in current
gender scholarship dialogue, so I do not have a bible, a case study, or a specific
example that I could imitate when I investigate. I could not expect a confirmation that I
am heading toward the right way because I was on my own. Also, I was not sure if the
codes and the examples are convincing and self-evident enough to support my ideas.
For a sociologist still in training, I might feel I could make sense of flying mothers’ family
experiences even though I was not a flying mother myself, but I felt much more
confused and uncertain about learning flying mothers’ emotional experiences, even
though I believed I would definitely find something about this. I have such confidence
but I have no clue if my approach and my interpretation would make sense. In the end I
have to thank the ideas of the constructive grounded theory which acknowledges and
appreciates that the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewees. It also
emphasizes the sense-making process is constructed by both of the interviewer and the
interviewees. This indeed guided me when I was in doubt particularly when investigating
women’s emotional efforts: bringing my own role and my own experiences into my
research helped me better interpret the flying mothers’ situation and the invisible
emotion.
This responds to the characteristics of emotion: it is hard to grasp the moment unless you are on the spot. It is also hard to fully present the scenario in retelling. When discussing the emotional scenarios, there could be also different interpretation of the same issue. For instance, a flying mother told me that generally speaking she handled her emotions quite well. She also adjusted herself to the best situation before returning home. Like many flying mothers, she also emphasized the separation between work and family, “I would think as long as I’m off duty I’d leave everything behind. Don’t let those things keep bothering you.” It seems that she could successfully separate the emotion she probably has because of work from her personal lives. Later when I talked to her husband with this flying mother be present, I asked if there is any moment that his wife would come home with bad mood after work. He immediately said, “Of course! Every month from time to time when she returns home she says nothing, I would know not talk to her right now and I would not let our daughter bother her much.” He also said it might not be because she is in bad mood, but might be because she is tired or hungry. “And after she takes a shower, a nap, or has some light meal, she is more relaxed and is ready to speak.” From the flying mother’s point of view, she assumed she was able to keep her emotion from work away from her family life; from the husband’s viewpoint, his wife might not always be able to successfully accomplish the emotional separation between work and family. He also interpreted the situation as could being due to some other reasons rather than an emotional failure (i.e. probably bringing her bad mood from work to home). But to me as an outsider of the scenario based on their descriptions, I might interpret the situation in different ways: the flying mother could be in a bad mood even though she was not aware of it. She might have such emotion because of what
happened at work (e.g. an unhappy encounter with colleagues or passengers); because of physical tiredness (e.g. staying up all night long for working in-flight); or because of other things that occupied her mind (e.g. family issues that the outsider of this family could not be aware of). Whatever reason it could be, the fact is she would look like and behave as if she was in a bad mood, and therefore her family members reacted to the situation accordingly.

As this example shows, there could be a lot of missing gaps when (re)describing, (re)interpreting and (re)telling one’s emotion. There must be reactions and consequences following the emotion as well, whether from the person who has such emotion, or from other people who receive the effects of the emotion. So it is crucial to incorporate emotion into the framework when we look into gender-doing. In probing, in my interviews when I heard, sensed or doubted when observing any potential, likely, undoubtedly and obvious situations that emotion (work) would involve, I would ask “how do you feel about this?” Sometimes, instead of asking direct questions regarding their feelings, I ask their behaviors or the actions they may take to approach their emotional status, and try to confirm my interpretation of the situation with them. I also ask them about other people’s reactions as well. I found investigating people’s emotion involves empathy, careful techniques, thoughtful evaluations of their situations, diligent checking as well as patient confirmations.

If I only adopt the question “How do you feel about this?” as my only approach to investigating emotion, I could miss a lot of informative details. Also it is not realistic to anticipate that people could always clearly explain their feelings and reveal to others completely. There have been many times that the emotional aspects were not revealed
until the flying mothers and I engaged in in-depth conversations. For instance, a flying mother had been telling me about her lovely family members: her husband and her son. But for some reason, her tone and facial expression were a little bit awkward when I asked about her husband. I could not see if anything could go wrong based on her descriptions of their relationships, and I could not think of an appropriate way to ask about this (Isn’t it rude to directly confront a woman who is telling you how much she is in love, about her awkward facial expression?) I was keeping this alert in my mind and was thinking to write it down in my notes later. Yet before she left I was lucky enough to find out the story behind the scene. In the tarot card reading after our interview, I accidently (and unexpectedly) heard from her that her husband did something that upset her recently. I then could use this chance to have more conversations on her interactions with her husband. And in our discussion she said, “I wasn’t sure but I guess not until now when I’m talking to you, I didn’t know: I haven’t forgiven him. I’m still upset.”

This is an illustration that, posing the direct question “How do you feel about it?” sometimes could only achieve a superficial layer rather than the authentic emotional interactions. Meanwhile, when interviewing people I gradually found I shouldn’t assume the possible dialogues and topics about gendered emotional work. Facts about women’s emotion and how it could be possibly gendered would flow into the dialogues on any topic in the interviews at any time. And sometimes I, or both I and the flying mother I had an interview with, did not quite realize the conversations we have are related to the gendered emotional work I wanted to investigate. As data were gradually collected, the stories emerged and accumulated; these stories told me more facts about
the gendered emotional work flying mothers need to do in the private sphere. In all I might have had a clearer sense about the possible, practical strategies when investigating flying mothers’ family arrangements, yet I had to be much more open-minded and be more patient when investigating flying mothers’ emotional aspects. It was quite challenging for the interviewer because I might have no idea where the direction of the interview might go before I did my interview; and I had to be quite sensitive toward what I heard.

**Sources of Emotional Pressure**

Limitations in time and energy are basically two major sources of pressure imposed on flying mothers. These are also the decisive factors affecting their abilities in performing the emotional work. In Hochschild’s discussions, flight attendants’ emotional exhaustion resulted from the emotional labor they had to produce when working in-flight. What I found from Taiwanese female flight attendants’ experiences suggested the compressed time they could have for their families when they are in Taiwan along with their physical exhaustion could also be the sources of their emotional exhaustion.

To begin with I need to talk about time and the work schedule issues again. I could not help but notice a major difference as soon as I reentered the field this time in 2009. Compared to the interviews I had conducted in 2006, I found that crew members were becoming even more exhausted, and it was definitely not only because I was looking into different aspects of their lives. In 2006, my main focus was on flight attendants’ work lives. Flight attendants I interviewed were quite enthusiastic particularly when they complained about the negative part of the work. Sometimes, my respondents would begin to talk (or to be more specific, complain) as soon as we met. Once a respondent began to talk to me as soon as we found seats in a coffee shop and sat
down. After two hours when she finally stopped talking and excused herself for the restroom, I found she had covered all questions on my interview guide, and we had not ordered any drinks yet. Obviously when it comes to work, especially company management, flight attendants always have a lot to say. At least that was my impression in 2006.¹ When I reentered the field in 2009, I seldom had interviews similar to the case described above. At first I had doubts if it was because my identity as an insider might “expire” now since I had resigned from China Airlines about 4 years before. Yet very soon I realized it was not the case, when I had participated in some social gatherings with my former colleagues (e.g. afternoon tea party; social lunch or dinner together, or simply hanging out), I still saw my membership in this community. In front of me my former colleagues still felt comfortable complaining, discussing issues and latest gossips in the company. The reason why I no longer came across “hot” interviews as before was not because flight attendants did not complain anymore. They still needed an emotional outlet by being together and discussing things they were not quite happy about, and by exchanging information. I sensed it was to how much degree they were willing to spend their limited off-time together to complain². As mentioned earlier, monthly rosters are quite packed and it has been like this since 5 to 6 years ago. For the time that flight attendants could have when they are in Taiwan is even more limited. Also because of the busy working schedules, it seemed to me that flight attendants

¹ This is also a scenario I have to acknowledge what my insider identity could contribute to this research. Since I am familiar with their working context, my respondents feel comfortable talking to me and don’t have to stop for explaining the background knowledge. Therefore the interview could go quite smoothly.

² A flight attendant said that complaining together with other crewmembers in the galley during the on-duty hours in the long-haul flight is like having a group therapy. Another flight attendant working for Eva Air also talked about similar scenarios existing among their crew members. When they have layover abroad they often have the complimentary breakfast or dinner together, and it is usually the time crewmembers like to gossip and complain together.
were too tired to complain even though they might have such a chance. When flight attendants got together when they were abroad, topics they would discuss might involve their work lives. When they are back to their personal lives, what they might do was to use their Facebook™ status as their emotional outlet. From the responding messages, it was not difficult to observe that other crew members might have the same feelings or experiences. As a flight attendant said to me, “I am just too lazy to post anything about my mood…unless I’m very upset…but complaining too much, it could be giving me some negative energy and I’m very tired already. Viewing others might have the same feelings as I do is a good outlet and that’s enough.”

Besides, as I was asking about family lives instead of work lives could be another reason. The emotion of flying mothers was usually quite calm, and sometimes introverted in the conversations about family lives; unless they began to talk about some emotional incidents. I could observe flying mothers also have certain complaints about the work as well as the company managements, yet their emotion regarding work itself might not always come into the dialogues we were having on their family lives. “There are always things to complain about whether work or family,” A flying mother said to me, “after work I just want to leave the work part alone and focus on my family. I then have completely different things occupied my mind. Then work complaints seem not that important.” This explains one reason why I had observed more calm flying mothers instead of passionate flight attendants in my interviews this time. This also implies the emotional strategies flying mothers might use as I will discuss in next section.

Generally speaking, I need to conclude that my former colleagues looked much more tired than a few years ago. When I reviewed my field notes, the descriptions of my
former colleagues are often related to the keywords like “looks exhausted,” “tired,” “sleepy face,” “red eyes,” just to name a few. The emotion they have toward work and company still exist, but they became, in comparison, too tired to spend much time and energy on complaining. As complaints are identified by some flight attendants to be negative energy, they might not quite want to embrace that, for fearing it might influence their emotional balance, which would be crucial for flying mothers since they need to deal with the emotional work her gender role ascribes in the family.

**Separating Work from Family in Emotion**

All flight attendants experience the emotional stress because of limited time and stress. For flying mothers, this means they need to carefully consider their valuable time and energy they could have for their families. When they are abroad, they might be able to temporarily disconnect themselves from their family responsibilities. When they were in Taiwan, they would prioritize their family members as the resource the family members could depend on. What I mean by resource refers to both physical and emotional availability, such as being able to accompany their children to play, or being able to exchange intimate, deep thoughts with their spouses.

With such a mindset, flying mothers would take different strategies. What I most often heard was separating work from family emotionally. Flying mothers were aware of their efforts in doing so because this is what they intentionally did:

I do not let the affairs happened inside the cabin interfere with my personal lives…things should be solved on the spot in the cabin.

I don’t want to see….I don’t want to let my personal time and my valuable off-days be interrupted or be ruined because of things happened on the aircraft.
I’m more patient, or at least I try my best. I don’t want to have conflicts with my colleagues or the passengers…then I’ll have to go back to the office to write report.

Whatever happened on the aircraft should be solved on the aircraft. Don’t bring it along with you.

In these quotes, when flying mothers talk about leaving “affairs that happened inside the cabin in the cabin,” generally this refers to issues that happened at work when interacting with people:

Any issues happened inside the cabin…like the passengers’ complaint or passengers’…not satisfied with the service, no meal choice…try to sort it out, do make-up service, make sure they are happy before they leave. It’s better than receiving a complaint letter afterwards. The passengers are happy then I could be happy.

This quote above is an example that flight attendants could see doing emotional labor at work is a way to ensure their happy emotion after work when in their personal life. If the passengers are satisfied with the in-flight service, including the emotional labor the flight attendants could provide inside the cabin, then flight attendants don’t have to worry about dealing with the frustration after work such as getting a complaint letter and being requested to report to the office for further explanation, which would occupy their personal time. Also, as many flight attendants indicate, dealing with “people in the office” could be a quite stressful experience itself. In my earlier research on flight attendants’ work lives, I had talked about flight attendants also having to do emotional labor with the management staff (the “people in the office”) to ensure that they are thought to be tame and naïve, as a disciplined flight attendant. So flight attendants in

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3 In addition to passengers’ complaint letter, some flight attendants also talk about another possibility as being reported by the in-flight purser for failing to do certain
both China Airlines and Eva Air said their interactions with “people in the office” could be quite frustrating, particularly when there are cases or unclear situations to be sorted out, such as a complaint letter from a passenger,

They don’t protect crewmembers. As long as passengers complain, it’s crewmembers’ fault. They just want to settle the issue with someone…by blaming the fault for someone, by having someone to take the responsibilities so they could close the case.

Don’t conflict with them, always smile. Acting kind…they treat you as you were a criminal. They question you purposely in different ways and try to trap you with their questions. And for any step you didn’t answer it right, then Bingo! You’re the one who did it! Whether it is true or not!

Senior crewmembers told us how to talk to the staff on the 8th floor. Sometimes there is no dignity. And be prepared for that. Just be nice, pretend to be good, pretend you listen to their lecture as you are a stupid student.

Passengers could be nice. If you’re nice to them they are “nice you back.” I would rather be nice to the passengers instead of return to the office to see those mean faces!

Since many flight attendants considered their interactions with the management officers also require their emotional labor, which is “even more tiring than dealing with passengers!” It is understandable that all flight attendants do not like to be called in by the management supervisors in the office to deal with troubling issues happened at work in their personal time. Even though single flight attendants might have similar comments about separating “what had happened in the cabin” from “personal time,” flying mothers’ mindset was different. For flying mothers, the reasons they try to avoid such situations were more specific:

I definitely do not want to waste my valuable time I could spend with my children because of issues at work.

I am quite busy at home and I am quite busy when I have off-time in Taipei. I need to take my son to the playground. I need to go to market to buy
Since flying mothers are in this situation as one of them identified, “no longer as single flight attendant who doesn’t have to consider much about other people when doing things…now I have to think of my husband, my child, my family,” they make efforts to separate their work lives from personal lives. Dealing with work-related issues with “people in the office” requires more time, energy, and undoubting bring them more emotional efforts to accomplish.

For a job as flight attendant, it is possible to separate work lives and personal lives for most of time, because flight attendants’ major work duties are in-flight responsibilities (i.e. flight safety and service) and the location is within the cabin of the aircraft. Unlike people (including some groups of working mothers) who need to bring their unfinished work with them home, as long as flight attendants perform the job well when they are on duty, they could leave everything that happened in the cabin behind their minds till their next flight. And generally speaking, flight attendants who got married and given birth to the children imply that they have achieved that to a certain age. They are not new college graduate who are just begining their first job; so they have developed better adeptness to interact with people. They are more likely to have

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4 This flying mother meant her mother-in-law took care of her daughter when she was away so she should let her take time off from this childcare duty when she was in Taiwan.

5 By saying so it is also important to acknowledge flight attendants need to spend their personal time preparing for work before every flight; study for annual examination on their work-related knowledge, including emergency evacuation, aircraft and service; as well as other required training sessions and workshops.
acquired more seniority in this work, implying that they could have been more disciplined by the requirement of the job, including but not limited to, doing the expected gendered emotional labor toward their passengers.

What I have observed about flying mothers’ emotional exhaustion was: it was not mainly because of the gendered labor they need to perform at work as Hochschild discussed before. Since generally speaking flying mothers are more experienced flight attendants who may have been in this occupation several years, they have worked long enough to develop a certain life rhythm that best suits them. What I mean by life rhythm here refers to many detailed, specific, micro-level, personal strategies one would adopt to cope with their lives, such as what has been mentioned in the previous chapter about the time they preferred to sleep to adjust to possible jet lag, or which the shift they prefer to rest in the long-haul flight to ensure they have enough energy. Of course, these strategies could include the ways they control their feelings at work, or the ways they regard the negative or positive emotion resulted from work after they return to their personal lives. For instance,

I take deep breath before I step down the door-to-door shuttle bus from crew center to my home, before getting my keys to open the door. I tell myself: now I’m home. No matter what had happened in flight...happy or unhappy; arguments; difficult passengers, lousy boss(purser);lazy MeiMei...I am home. Leave those things behind.

No matter how tired I feel, no matter how upset I feel, those emotion will be gone as soon as I see the smiling faces of my two daughters. When I’m upset at work, or when I almost lose temper (at work) I’d think, why bother to make a fuss? Whatever passengers want, just give to them! Whatever they complain, just apologize! I don’t have to care. I have happy faces waiting for me at home.

From these quotes we could see flying mothers’ efforts in separating work from family.

On the one hand, they intentionally avoid the issues on the aircraft interfering their
personal lives which would cost them extra time, energy and emotional labor (i.e. when interacting with “people in the office.”) On the other hand, they intentionally shut the emotion from work outside the door when they return home. By fulfilling such goals, flying mothers would be willing to do better emotional labor when at work in exchange for the emotional peace and relaxation in their personal lives, in which they prioritize their family members.

**Practical Emotional Strategies of Separation**

Before further discussions of the possible emotional strategies flying mothers are likely to adopt for successful separation between work and personal lives, it is important to acknowledge that the strategies discussed in this section are also likely to be used by all flight attendants. So to speak, even though some details might vary according to one’s marital status (e.g. some single flight attendants think as soon as seeing the boyfriend, the parents, their pets, their mood could become much better) these strategies are more like the common techniques and knowledge flight attendants create and share together. I’ll also specify the differences in practicing these strategies that are particularly related to the identity as a flying mother.

The first emotional strategy is trying to transform negative emotions by thinking positively. By doing so, flight attendants are more ready to leave what they have experienced at work behind.

Don’t argue with them (the passengers). You lose if you get serious about their ignorance and greedy. You lose when you get angry.

Comments similar to this quote were often heard when talking to my former colleagues whether in formal interviews or in informal social chatting. I sometimes saw some flight attendants post such a philosophy on their Facebook™ status or comments on the
colleague friends’ post. I regard such situations as a mutual reminder between flight attendants when dealing with their negative emotions, as they encourage one another to transform their negative thoughts. By indicating that they do not need to be angry, they try to differentiate themselves from their passengers: with our (more superior) perspective and vision there is no need to be upset with those who are inferior to us. Being angry at them is to lower our level so we should leave them behind. The term inferior here is the direct translation from Mandarin, it has little implication on the passengers’ social class or racial background, but is used to refer the lower vision one has because of lacking experiences or cultivation.

In the interviews with flying mothers, if this philosophy came into our conversation I might also hear comments similar to below:

I would think why bother to care about such trivial with passengers. I have my husband, my son to think about. My kimochi should be saved for more important people.

Sometimes when facing my son I would think of this philosophy, if you get angry you lose. He is a 5 year old. I’m his mother I have to teach him. And teaching him sometimes makes me upset of course, sometimes no matter what you say he just doesn’t want to follow, no matter how many times you say he forgets....So passengers...I am not their mothers I don’t have to teach them how to behave. I don’t have to be angry with them

Kimochi means mood in Japanese, and this word is understandable and commonly used in the daily conversation in Taiwan.

There could be another type of transformation in emotion: by thinking something that would make them feel happier about the negative situation and the negative emotion. For instance,

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6 In Mandarin is 層次較低
I would think well, maybe these are people who ever helped me or served me in my previous life. So I’m serving them now, giving back what I owed them. The karma thing…So when the flight landed I’m like returning others’ favor for me one more time.

I’m kind to them…like collecting karma for my children. I do good things and the karma will be returned to my children, my family.

No matter how difficult the flight is, it wouldn’t last more than 15 hours right? So as long as I think of that…after a few hours I could rest or I could pick up my son, hug him in my arms.

Besides the transformations of one’s views about the negative emotions, another strategy is would not thinking about their negative emotion at all. When we talk about separating emotions from work to personal lives, it is likely that people would assume not thinking about what had happened at work. I would say indeed many flight attendants would leave things that had happened behind their minds, but this does not always mean emotions they have because of what had happened is also thrown away as soon as they are released from work. For instance, a senior flight attendant talked about the conflict she had with another junior colleague. According to her description, this junior flight attendant was very lazy and irresponsible at work. She did not do the duties she should do, including selling duty-free items in the business class area which is considered to her duty-free sale zone.\(^7\) The senior flight attendant was therefore scolded by an upset passenger who did not get what she wanted to buy. In the end, this senior flight attendant “lectured” her junior colleague for not doing her duties and it was because of her fault, the senior one had to apologize to the passenger. “She made me…have to say sorry for something that is not my fault! And I really don’t like that kind of feelings!” The senior flight attendant said in fury. The junior in the end apologized to

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\(^7\) This junior flight attendant only served in the economy class but during duty-free sale time, one of her duty assignments was to promote the duty-free sale in the business class with her cart, and in this case is what she did not do.
her. The senior flight attendant thought she had forgiven the junior and left “things happened in the cabin behind.” Yet the fact was,

I thought it already ended. But the feelings were there. In the following few days I felt...it’s weird feelings you know. You don’t know how to say about this but it’s there. (I: is it because of the conflicts?) Yes. Because of the passenger scolded me and because of her laziness. Things could be left behind but emotion is still there. (I: So what did you do about it?) I try not to think about it. I don’t think about what happened of course. And I try to ignore the weird, uncomfortable feelings I had.

Trying to forget what had happened during the flights could be easy, but trying to ignore the negative emotion due to what had happened, that is a different story. A flying mother who had witnessed a depressing scenario also tried to not think about it,

I saw an old man travelling alone. He is like my father who had passed away. He travelled alone to China...he...oh mine he is such an old man. I worry about his travelling. Is it okay for him? Will he be safe? Would his Chinese relatives be kind to him not because of his money?...I told myself not to think about it but emotion is there. So I prayed for him. I believe God will lead him he’ll be fine. I began to tell my daughter about the stories of my father, her grandpa.

This flying mother coped with her emotion by not thinking about the depressing feelings she had because of an old passenger she came across. She chose to occupy her minds with praying and telling her daughter family stories. In this way, she was not thinking about the incident as well as the emotion due to the incident—even though she could still recognize what do all these come from.

Third, I need to talk about the strategy of tolerating what happened at work, from rude passengers to difficulty working schedules and assignments due to company policy for cost-saving reasons. Particularly for flying mothers, they are more willing to tolerate the unhappy or difficult situations without regarding them to be a sacrifice or loss of dignity. Sometimes they do have doubts and complaints about being so tolerant, but their love and responsibilities toward family and children override the upsetting
feelings that emerged from the issues at work. Below is a representative quote which illustrates many flying mothers’ logic and thoughts about the emotional labor at work particularly after acquiring the role as a mother:

I don’t know if it was because of getting older now, or because of becoming more mature now, or because, I am a mother now….after having children…I am more patient compared to before. And I am willing to tolerate things I was…probably not willing to tolerate when I was younger and when I was single. Because I don’t want to spend time on this after work; I want to spend time with my daughter, I am willing to tolerate little, trivial unhappy issue. I think my valuable time should be spent on important things such as taking my daughter to the park and play there…

If I need to go to the office I need to arrange a lot of things, such as having my mother or my mother-in-law take care of my daughter. They take care of her when I am away and I should not deprive the time they could have. Thinking all troubles I’ll have to go through I would let it go.

As soon as I think about all these (husband, children and family) I am willing to tolerate without any complaints…the emotion, my feelings is just one time, temporarily upset on the spot, but if I don’t tolerate it there would be more troubling issues later on. I would rather not (come across the issues) but think everything would be fine after I go home and see my daughter.

From these quotes, we see the nature of the gendered emotional labor flying mothers would do at work or in any work-related context has slightly changed. Taiwanese female flight attendants are expected to demonstrate their femininity when interacting with people at work. Emotional labor they perform emphasizes the characteristics of being considerate, gentle, thoughtful and caring, based on what airline companies hope to project as the company’s image and service through their flight attendants’ bodies. Now for flying mothers, the emotional labor flying mothers do is more complicated than it seems to be if we closely examine it. While flying mothers are like all flight attendants being expected to do gender at work as the occupation requires, their gender role as a wife and a mother in their private sphere comes into play. Flying mothers could see doing emotional labor at work in the expected form (i.e. emphasizing femininity) as a
guarantee that they could leave work behind (“what happened in the cabin”) when they return home to face their responsibilities ascribed by their gender role. Doing gender in the private sphere urge them to do gender in the public sphere— the boundary between the public sphere and the private is blurred and could be crossed.

**The Identity as a Mother When Doing Emotional Labor**

So when it comes to the emotional part, flying mothers adopt the strategies as thinking positively, not thinking about it at all, and tolerating the situations when they make their emotional efforts to cope with work-related issues. They do the gendered emotional labor with the mindset that they believe is most beneficial to themselves and their family. Flying mothers perceive the emotional labor they do at work could potentially directly impact on their family lives, therefore their emotional balance is a crucial key since they now prioritize their families, compared to the past when they were single and “don’t have to think much about other people.” Flying mothers see their attention, energy and emotional availabilities to be reserved for their family members, who are much more important in comparisons.

It is even more obvious to witness how emotional efforts could be gendered by examining further in the quote listed earlier above:

I don’t know if it was because of getting older now, or because of becoming more mature now, or because, I am a mother now…

The role in the family as well as the identity as a mother would also contribute to the emotional labor flying mothers perform at work. Very interestingly, I have heard similar comments from different flying mothers who do not know one another, would draw similar parallel between their service receivers (the passengers) and their care receivers (the children.)
Being a flight attendant, we have to be patient right? Being a mother, also means I need to be patient. These two sides have something in common. But the difference is you cannot scold your passengers but you can scold your child when he doesn’t behave himself!

I draw parallel between passengers and children. Just treat them as my children and things are getting easier. Children don’t always know everything so you educate them kindly, telling them what to do and what not to do. Passengers are children because when they get on board they don’t know things about in-flight, so also telling them kindly what to do and what not to do.

I found these comments intriguingly amazing. Since I was single with no child when I was a flight attendant, I never had any thought of my passengers in this way. To be honest, I was not always the type of flight attendants who would want to pamper children in-flight or would spend much of their free time to play with them. Of course when I come across babies or children on board, I treated them nicely; I distributed toys and playing cards to children in the cabin; I responded to them if they wanted to talk to me, with a sweet smile—all these were because this is my job. But beyond that, I wouldn’t do more. I would never want to borrow a cute baby from the parents to carry him or her around, or take small children back to the galley, play with them or take pictures with them—while there are some of my former colleagues who are children-lovers would do. To me, I see they are the passengers’ kids; they are not mine; they are not even my friends’ or relatives’ children who I would truly love and would sincerely want to spend time playing with them. I knew I was not the only one, because I knew some of my single colleagues also held similar thoughts. I remember once a colleague said, “I don’t even try to do baby-talk with the children on board! I don’t know how to do that! And I am not interested in learning that!” For me, how ironic it is whenever I see in some airline commercial a caring female flight attendant is holding a child in her arms or pointing out something interesting in the sky to attract the children’s attention. I might
be good at interacting with adult passengers, but I dare not say I spent equal time and energy on doing my emotional labor with children on board. I am the only child in my family, and without any younger brother or sister, taking care of small children has been something I am not familiar with so far in my life.

So I could not help wondering about the parallels drawn between children and passengers: is this because these flight attendants are always the type who really adore children? Is this because these flight attendants are experienced in taking care of children even before they have their own? Could it be the situation that they probably hold similar thoughts as I did before?

So I asked flying mothers (whether they clearly drew such a parallel between passengers and children or not) to consider and to compare if there is any difference in doing work before and after becoming a mother, particularly when they interact with the passengers. Partial answers I got were related to the differences in emotional labor after acquiring the identity as a mother.

Becoming a mother has trained and prepared women to deal with different life responsibilities, and such growth seems also contributes to their work. For flying mothers, since both their occupation and their mother role require their emotional efforts, their mental maturity and awareness of being in difference life stages after becoming a mother positively enhance their abilities in doing emotional labor. Flying mothers’ new

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8 I did not specify or include the children on board in my question for fear that I may lead them in answering this question.

9 I also got answers that were related to the ways they divided time, the ways they saw their job, etc. Not all answers were limited to their interactions with passengers on board, and it could be because the wording I used when I asked the question or could be because that was what in their minds for answer. And these answers are discussed over Chapters 4-6 even though I might not specify the quotes were from the answer toward this question.
identity and new gender role in family as a wife, a mother, even a daughter-in-law require their emotional efforts, and such practice in producing these emotional efforts becomes an exercise for their tolerance, patience and empathy ability, and these could be the characteristics that are also required in their occupation:

After I became a mother, now I have more patience to those traveling with children. Or I should say now I know how they would feel. In the past I just gave them things they need according to the SOP\textsuperscript{10}...diapers, milk, toys...now I really know what kind of resources and assistance they need. I could give them in advanced before they ask.

I guess I know better about mothers' needs. For instance I would say to the passengers mother if you needs to go to the toilet I could hold your baby for you...I am now willing to provide more help, willing to pay more attention...sincerely to those babies and their parents in my working zone.

I once helped a young father change his son's diaper and the clothes. Oh men, why do they know? They are careless. Only mother knows how to make a kid feel comfortable and happy, not just change the dirty diaper or wet pants.

These quotes illustrate that the mother identity has prepared them when facing other mothers, and with sincere understanding and care they have learned from their mothering experiences, the interactions were more like between one woman and another woman, instead of the service-giver and the service-receiver.

In addition to the scenarios which children are involved, there are other reflections related to their identity in the private sphere:

I become more patient I guess. I have to think much more than before I get married. So now facing passengers...they seldom could irritate me now. I didn’t have good temper before you know.

Last time there was an old woman in my zone, business class, travelling alone. She began complaining since boarding, even before take-off. She complained everything. The leg room, the air-condition, the lighting in the the

\textsuperscript{10} Sop refers to standard operation procedure. Airline companies have different SOP regarding different issues on the aircraft, including but not limited to what should be provided to passengers who are traveling with babies or children under 12 years old.
cabin, the food...it was annoying, some mental pressure to me. Galley JieJie said, she might just want to talk to someone. Maybe her son and daughter-in-law doesn't want to talk to her. And this gave me a hint, because I thought that was the case. My mother-in-law is also the complaining type and actually she just wants to talk to someone. So after we finished service and turned off the cabin light, I approached her and initiated chatting. Things were easier later. She was a lonely old woman who wanted to talk, and I was just pretending to be her daughter-in-law.

Marriage gives flying mothers new identities as a wife, a mother as well as a daughter-in-law. And dealing with these new relationships because of marriage could provide them another approach toward the ways they do emotional labor at work. Flying mother Hsin-Yi told me about her unhappiness and tension in her marriage. Hsin-Yi’s husband sometimes abused her with verbal violence, such as insulting her in front of other family members or scolding her in public to make her feel humiliated. Hsin-Yi also indirectly admitted there was some physical violence toward her from time to time. When I began to write this dissertation, Hsin-Yi was about to take action to leave the marriage and now she has divorced. When she compared the ways in interacting with passengers after getting married and having her son, she said.

I’ve grown up. And you know after all I’ve been through, I’m more tolerant toward others because I’m more mature. Sometimes I feel, it is because I’ve been through so I could know how much I’ve got. I treasure my work more for many reasons....my passengers smiled because I did something I helped them, that makes me happy. What he (her husband) had shattered, my confidence, my heart, my...me as a person...I could get them back from work. When I brighten passengers’ day what they don’t know is they also brighten my day.

Through the cases discussed in this section, we see how women’s identity could inform both work lives and family lives. Flying mothers borrow their identities and requirements coming along from the private sphere; exercise the abilities they had acquired because of these identities in the public sphere. Particularly when examining the emotion aspect, we are able to witness how emotion could be gendered, could be fluid and
interchangeable between two spheres. Hsin-Yi’s quote at the end of this section shows her identity as a wife in the personal life would affect the way she saw her work life; the bad feelings she had in her personal life could be cheered up by the good feelings she had in work life, which makes her find it more joyful to create the pleasant setting and interactions with her passengers, makes her more willing to perform her job well.

**Different Ways, Different Emotion**

As discussed above we could observe women’s identity from the private sphere spill over toward their public sphere. Many flying mothers told me after giving birth to their children, the way they view their job changed more or less. Earlier in Chapter 4 I had talked about how the rosters, working schedule, sick leave and the punishments in crew member management system operating in the airline companies, and how such mechanisms impact on all flight attendants’ lives. Since flying mothers have their family lives to attend to, it is a prevailing phenomenon that flying mothers are less likely to ask for sick leave unless it was necessary or for an emergency situation. The main reason is because of the punishment of asking for sick leave: one could not swap flights with others in the next two months. Since flying mothers generally need to depend on other people to accommodate their family and child-rearing duties, asking for sick leave would limit their flexibilities in arranging their family duties. Considering their occupation in a different way after having a family was one of the topics that naturally emerged in the interviews I had:

> After having children…no, actually after I met my husband I changed. We were deep in love. And you know for ordinary salary men they only have weekends free. So I don’t ask sick leave because I want to be able to switch flights so I could accompany him. Now I try my best to keep my weekends off in Taiwan so we could have family trip somewhere. I’ll feel guilty if I let my husband and my child…if they want to go somewhere but I
can’t because I have to work, so they have to adjust to my schedule. I feel bad.

In the quote we could see flight attendants/flying mothers would try to adjust themselves to meet the expectations from themselves and from people they care about. This not only involves swapping flights or any other practical strategies to meet the expectation but also involves how they feel about the situation whether they could or could not make it.

Here is another quote that also reflects the relationships between the practical adjustments and possible feelings flying mothers may have:

Before I get married, I used to ask “fake” sick leave…you know, whenever I don’t quite want to go work that day, not in the mood you know. But after having child things change. I’ve changed. I don’t ask sick leave any more. (I: why?) Asking sick leave might be good on the spot but the punishment later…meaning in the next two months there will be moments I feel bad that I cannot adjust my schedule. I’m giving all the control of my time and my schedule. My husband would be lonely and I cannot accompany them (referring to husband and children). I would feel bad.

Another example from my former colleague. We used to be like partners for swapping flights:

Do you remember that I always don’t like long-haul flights? (I: Sure I do. Once I was so excited to swap your 7-day Tokyo-Honolulu with my 3-day Vancouver!) Yeah…you love that flight and I was so happy that I could get rid of it! How I wish you were still flying now then you could take more long-haul flights from me. I hate them even more after I have family. I feel even worse before the long-haul flights, no matter how “short” the long-haul flight might be. I don’t want to leave them (her family.) Once my flight to Los Angeles was cancelled at the last minute, when the crew center called to notify me that I don’t have to report to work that night. I was so excited! It was like that I just won a one-hundred million lottery!

These quotes from two different flying mothers demonstrate a large part of the frustration could come from losing control of one’s working schedule, and this might not always be the way they felt about their job, or in different degrees before their roles
changing from a single flight attendant to a married woman or a flying mother. The emotional experiences (guilt, depression, bad feelings, or excitement) resulted from their job but were more related to their family roles as a wife or as a mother.

In addition to the emotional results they would probably experience or would expect to experience when these flying mothers lose the control and the flexibilities of their working schedule, flying mothers would try to transfer their upset feelings or depressions into the positive attitude. This is one example of the previous discussions on how flight attendants would try to transform their feelings to leave issues from work behind their minds when they return home. For instance, flying mother A-Ya always enjoyed those very long-haul flights, such as a 10-day Taipei-Rome flight. A-Ya told me she could no longer take those duties anymore even if she wanted to, she frowned a little when she was speaking about it:

I sometimes feel I am no longer a flight attendant because now I don’t fly the long-haul as before. I don’t like Mama Ban at all, but I would think in this way: I just go to United States for shopping clothes for my kid. Go shopping that’s the main goal. So after the sufferings (in flight), I could enjoy the sweetness for shopping for my kid. I try to think in this way.

For flying mothers like A-Ya who used to enjoy the travelling benefits of this job, “Mama Bans” are thought to be quite boring for them since these flights are not much fun. All they may do would be visiting the supermarket next to the hotel, or going shopping in the mall if the layover is long enough to do so. They are not able to enjoy the best part they see they could get from their job because of their family responsibilities. This might give them some regretful feelings. A-Ya said,

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11 The operation of such flight is Taipei to Bangkok/Delhi/Abu Dhabi, (depending on the route the airline companies could operate) have a few days layover then depart for Rome or other European countries, also a few day later they will return to their previous layover city before going back to Taiwan. In total it could be a 10-day or even longer roster.
I discussed with my husband and we came to a common agreement. I could fly those really long haul flight maybe once a year after my daughter is old enough. She is a baby now. (I: why do you have to wait till she is old enough?) So he could take care of her when I’m away…I’m waiting for that day comes soon!

For flying mothers who might have some inner struggles between their preferences of work schedules and their childrearing arrangement realities, I observed many flying mothers would try to evaluate and to critic the situations in the ways that they could convince or to persuade themselves that their current decision and choice is the best solution to accommodate all needs and responsibilities from different aspects, whether this was really the best or not. But after all in this way they would begin to think they could feel better and consider the whole thing in a positive way. The identity as a mother affected the feelings when they justified themselves. Even though A-Ya told me how she longed for a fun, longer, long-haul flight, she later concluded:

It’s not that bad if you think about it at the second thought. You are a mother now and you’ve enjoyed those flights when you were young, go traveling, play, all over the world…now it’s time to settle down. Those fun flights are for young MeiMei. I would say this is what I should sacrifice—part of my happiness now in exchange of their(family) happiness, for family things could be arranged more smoothly. That is also my happiness…only different kind.

Another quote from another flying mother goes,

Children are sweet burden. Family is sweet burden. But why getting married and having children if one couldn’t face the truth and take it? I don’t mean like “take it” because I have no other choice, that kind of “bad” “take-it.” I mean, “take it” by really think and acknowledge this is a different stage in your life, as a mother--- women are different from men. When women become mothers things change because of the little ones. Men don’t change that much. It’s not that my husband isn’t taking care of kids, actually he is. It is the way to see one is a mother so need to regard the situation in positive attitude, in positive ways of seeing this, feeling happy.

These two quotes illustrated the way many flying mothers consider how they are situated in their lives now. After becoming a mother, they obviously could articulate their
role, their standpoint, and their position. In their position, they deal with expectations, responsibilities, stress and power from different dimensions at the same time. When they find things could be conflicting, one way to cope with their feelings is thinking positively; thinking “It is the best solution” “Take it!” “It’s life everyone does so.”

I also noticed that each flying mother’s personality determines the way she would think the changes after marriage and childbirth, and emotionally speaking, the personality affects the ways a flying mother considers these life changes, and then determines how she feels about her situations and the sacrifice she needs to make—if she ever sees that is a sacrifice.

What I mean is: women have different interpretations of their situations. Even the situation could be quite similar or even the same, different women have different ways to cope with the situations, and have different emotion and feelings toward the same situation. Some flying mothers “take (took) it” and expressed their happiness of being a mother. They see by becoming a mother and prioritize their children is blessing. As a result, any other possible negative emotion could be overridden by it and could fade away.

In the past it (referring to being flight attendants) was a job I enjoy, and now it’s now a job. Just a job and that’s it. It’s not because I don’t love it anymore. It’s because it gives me money to support the family. Children are growing so fast. They grow up when you are away before you even know it. So making a living is important, but spending time with children that makes me become even happier. If I feel bad at work, I would tell myself it’s just a job, don’t waste my time on being upset for the passengers I would never see again and influence my life.

Flying mothers now describe their job in different way compared to the past. Instead of viewing it as a glamorous one, a carefree one, a job that they could make the best of their lives, they way they view the work has been interestingly linked to their identity as
a mother and the wife. “It’s just a job,” like a flying mother said, “I still like it, enjoy doing it, but the way I feel about it has changed.”

I had discussed in previous chapter that flight attendants may use different excuses to ask leave of absence to adjust their working schedules, which is the easiest way even with some punishments coming along. Because of the job characteristics, flying mothers cannot ask for leaves just for a few hours. But sometimes all they need is just a few hours to handle the family issues, such as waiting for her husband to arrive at home, to have helper come in to babysit, to take a sick child to visit clinic, or just to have more time to comfort a crying kid so she could go to work. When flying mothers could not settle things before they depart for work, their concern and worries follow them wherever they go,

Some flying mothers said they used to ask sick leave whenever they want to, or whenever they don’t feel like “being in the mood for work.” They would talk about controlling and oppressing such feelings and struggles so that their family schedules will not be interfered:

In the past this is all right… I asked sick leave if my kimochi is not right. If I didn’t want to work then I didn’t go to work. It was all right but now no, not all right anymore. If I let how I feel drives my way, I cannot fulfill… like I cannot exchange flights… cannot have the off days I want, cannot take of my son when he needs me. My kimochi is still important but in different way.

You probably heard this from other flight attendants about how they assign the flights (I: what?) … the senior ones are usually assigned those one-day turn around flight to China, the most tiring flights… (I: why?) because the senior ones are less likely to ask sick leave. This is a salient secret everyone knows even though they (the crew dispatching staff) don’t admit it.

I always don’t like to ask sick leave. When I was in school I was the… “good student” type. And after I began working of course I don’t ask sick leave just because I don’t want to go to work that day, bad mood or something. But now, you see, sometimes my child is sick and I cannot go to work. I have to ask sick leave to take care of him. For a mother this is difficult to leave her
sick child at home and goes to work. (I: even if you know he will be in good hands because your mother-in-law would take care of him when you’re away?) Even if he is in good hands. My mother-in-law is really helpful, which I really appreciate. But in some cases I just feel I cannot go to work that day.

I asked a follow-up question here, because I had heard similar comments from other flying mothers who would try to comfort themselves by thinking their children are in good hands.

For example last month he had a very bad cold which lasted for almost a week. In the beginning the symptoms were okay, I still did my turn-around Shanghai flight. Later it turned to be bad, I asked sick leave for my long-haul LA. I struggled because...as I said I’m the good student type. I’m guilty for asking sick leave. It was a last minute thing, I struggled the whole day if I should ask sick leave that night, and if he was getting better I would still go to work. My son was getting a little bit better, but he said, “Mama don’t go to work today, stay to accompany me” in tears. Oh how could I go to work?

This flying mother kept emphasizing her struggles of her identity as a good flight attendant—a good employee who does not ask sick leave at will; a good colleague who does not want to make those in standby duties be notified for covering her vacancy at the last minute— and also her struggle as a mother who cannot leave her sick son. Her mixing guilty is resulted from the conflicts between her different roles.

I have heard flying mothers struggled to be a good flight attendant and a good mother at the same time. I also have heard flying mothers now thinks work itself is the last thing they care about. They would try to avoid any possible negative effects from work spilling over their personal lives,

I no longer care about the trivial issues happened during the flights. Whatever passengers want I just give them. Don’t argue with anyone, with passengers or colleagues or pursers...just do it. Have the work done. Don’t count all details. Why bothers? Why bother to be angry and let things influence my mood? When I go home I want to be a happy mom.

It’s just a job giving me money. I don’t quite care if I get promoted or not. I just want to live a peaceful life. Go to work when I have to go to work. And
go home to cook to feed my baby son. I adore him. He is a gift to me. The most important thing to me is I have him.

In other words, I cannot ignore the role women’s agency plays in discussing emotion. It would be unfair if we assume all flying mothers feel the same way about the work-family conflicts. To some flying mothers, they don’t see there is any conflict. There are flying mothers recognize their sufferings between work and family. There are also flying mothers do not see their sufferings in the same way. They wouldn’t quite agree if they are implied they are oppressed. They could really enjoy their identity as a mother and could possibly tell me:

I don’t need to be rich. I don’t need to be in important position. I don’t quite care what other people may complain about. All I want is a job, steady as it is. I have time for my daughters. I sometimes could take a break by going abroad. What else could I ask for? I enjoy my life so much.

When these type of flying mothers talked to me they mainly emphasize on their family lives and their role as mother. They might spend a lot of time explaining to me the education they would like to provide for their children; what to cook to make children eat enough vegetable; what activities their families would engage to make sure their children expose to the sun and exercise the little muscle. When talking to this type of flying mothers, I could easily forget I also want to ask about the possible impact from their work on their family lives as well. Their happy voices on mothering seemed to imply what always motivates them to feel in certain way is their family lives but anything else. Work would be the least thing upon their minds— it’s just a job and that’s all.

**Identities Shift through Emotion**

I heard many flight attendants, especially the senior ones who work at least more than 5 years; would use the similar descriptions of their occupation as “It’s just a job.” “I just want to have the work done.” “Don’t let the unhappiness at work influence my
personal lives.” Echoing to the earlier discussion, flying mothers Juju said she felt she now has much more patience after having her two sons, “since you cannot argue with a baby.” The mothering behaviors influence her tolerance which is understandable. What I find worthy to probe further was, as many flying mothers would also expressed similar thoughts but in different ways or with different scenarios, Juju intentionally does the emotional labor as a flight attendant in the way that it would not interfere her ability to perform the emotional work when she faced her husband and her sons after she returned home:

I clearly separate my kimochi at work from my kimochi in life. I don’t mess these two ends up. No matter what I experience at work I don’t bring it to home. I am a professional flight attendant. I am professional so I could separate both.

I asked Juju, a senior crewmember in her forties who has worked as a flight attendant for 17 years, “Jie-jie, you mean you never complained?” “No, I never.” “Not even just a few words with your husband?” “No. Seriously.” “That’s amazing! I… I could forget unhappy moments or other issues at work after I released from the duties. I could let things go. But… more or less I would say some things sometimes. I was not like those ‘complaining-again-and-again’ type but, from time to time I still have some moments I need to release my emotion. Jiejie is this because you’re senior? How did you do this?” Juju smiled and said,

Maybe, yeah, seniority counts. Seniority, meaning I’m more experienced, meaning I could control my feelings better than the younger Meimei. I’ve been in this industry for 17 years, what else have I never seen? I could perform better than the junior ones of course. Even just being “fake,” my fakeness looks more sincere than the juniors. Young Meimei might have more beautiful face or in better figure compared to an old mama with two sons like me. I don’t have those young feminine look, but I could have another kind of interactions with passengers, like a mother, a mature lady because indeed I am. So this is the way I interact with the passengers on board when greeting them, caring them…the language I use or the topics I
could engaged with… you know some first-class passengers are bosses, CEO…I present different ways via the interactions rather than via the look. That’s the differences between senior and junior.

What she meant echoed my idea of gendered emotional labor which was presented in my earlier research, that female flight attendants are disciplined and trained to perform the emotional labor in a very feminine way when they interacted with the passengers. Juju was saying that the gendered emotional labor she has been doing at work was not through the emphases on the sexuality as junior Meimei probably do. Junior Meimei implies that they could be younger and unmarried, without the identity as a mother. The gendered emotional labor Juju produced was more based on her mothering, mature behaviors which are also more coherent with her age and her real roles in life, as someone’s wife and as someone’s mother.

So in this way, I would less likely to have issues or conflicts with the passengers. And sometimes the issues were not from the passengers. Passengers are easy to deal with. It’s the interactions with others (crewmembers), particularly interacting with the pursers, and the tiring, complicated service procedure in business class or first class. And for those might bring me some kimochi things, I would tell myself on my way home: from now on no matter what was on my mind should be thrown away, in the fifty-minute driving. I should have my good kimochi ready for people I love. My husband, my sons, and other people, my parents, my in-laws…and this is my real life. And in my real life I am a wife and I am a mother. I might be angry when my sons don’t behave, and I scold them, but that comes from my real life.

I don’t feel that I’m oppressing myself for not complaining things happened at work because I don’t think there is any need to complain, that’s nothing important. Just separate the fake from the real. That’s nothing. The more senior you are, the better you could separate.

Juju regarded the in-flight working time was a faking life with faking emotion in contrast to the real life with real emotion as a wife and as a mother in family. Interestingly, the techniques she applied at work were based on her real identities in her real life (as a mother and as a wife) which have made her interactions with passengers more
accountable, persuasive, and effective (“less likely to have issues or conflicts with the passengers.”) The ability to separate the emotional experiences from faking life and real life is used to define her professional attitude. Juju admitted the emotional experiences in her real life (i.e. getting mad at her son) and even though she would lose temper sometimes, she wouldn’t therefore consider she is not a good mother. Her mothering ability is determined by the ability to differentiate the emotion in different spheres, not determined by the emotional expressions she probably had toward her family members.

It sounded to me that Juju produced the emotional labor at work according to the general assumptions on women’s gender roles at home, as she has been presenting the understanding, caring, and supportive emotional self. While in her real life, she might not present her emotional self in the same way to her children, meaning she might not always be as patient as she reacts to the passengers. I suspected this because later when we talked about her sons, one of the topics was her sons could be easily distracted when doing their homework, so she always lost temper particularly when teaching them math questions so her husband would take over. Similar to Juju’s confession, another flying mother talked about her experience teaching her son who was in the first grade in the primary school,

I sometimes feel bad about this. I don’t want to have such tension between my son. He cried, I have anger…I don’t want our mother-child relationship to be so bad. But his ability in finishing his homework...he is always very careless! He is easily forgetful…I have to teach him the same things many many times, but he could still mess up and gives wrong answer. Even the most patient mother would get upset I believe. My son once cried and said,

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12 Later in the interview I asked a question, “In your opinion what is a good mother? Do you consider yourself a good mother?” In her definition, a good mother should devote her attention to her children as much as she could, and under such definition she thought she is a good mother. She did not mention anything about emotion.

13 She did not tell me much about the interactions with her husband.
Mama you are so nice when you are on the airplane but you are not when you’re not on the airplane!\textsuperscript{14}

What I found intriguing was that flying mothers’ identities shift between the public spheres and the private spheres and how such shifting could be revealed through their emotional exhibitions, their emotional self. Flying mothers would talk about their mothering experiences give them more understandings and patience when they face the passengers, particularly the passengers travelling with little ones. Being a parent makes them become more considerate and more understanding, and this identity in the private sphere would make them perform their gendered emotional labor at work in the ways that are different from those flight attendants who do not have such identity.

Gendered emotional labor flying mothers perform is also feminine. It may not be in the feminine way the Asian airline companies initially aim to project, but in the way of emphasizing the mothering nature, the mature women style, and a hostess at home, as a wife and as a mother. While for younger flight attendants who have not obtained such identity in the private sphere, the gendered emotional labor was done with more emphases on the sexuality: young, pretty, glamorous, sexy, just to name a few.\textsuperscript{15} Some flying mothers could clearly differentiate and articulate to me about the ways they do emotional labor after they acquire the identity as mothers, and they knew this identity in the private sphere has made their emotional labor at work accountable and reliable.

However are mothers always patient and kind in real life without losing control on their emotion? Obviously we could say the answer is no. Flying mothers would borrow

\textsuperscript{14} Earlier in the interview she had talked about she occasionally takes both her husband and her son to travel with her when she is on duty. So her sons had several chances to see his mother working on the airplane.

\textsuperscript{15} How flying mothers perceive sexuality will be discussed in next chapter.
the identity from the private sphere to work when interacting with passengers. The emotional labor required at work is therefore informed by the impressions and expectations on women’s motherhood. Conversely, when we look closer into the private sphere, the reality is: flying mothers, like all other mothers, also have emotional moments. They would also lose control when their children don’t behave. The emotional work they do as a mother in private sphere might not always be the same as they project at work when they borrow their identity as a mother. Becoming a mother could make a woman become more familiar with others’ emotional needs; become more tolerant with situations that mother would truly understand. Yet it would be unfair to imagine that women’s emotional self is always steady, calm, patient as well as any other emotional characteristics that are often linked with mother figures.

Before ending this section, I need to emphasize again that not all flying mothers I have interviewed could clearly identify or articulate their emotion efforts in either spheres, their emotional self, not mentioning the identity shift in-between. For me as a feminist researcher analyzing the collected data with constructive grounded theory, I had to admit it had taken me much more time and efforts than I could had ever expected in sorting out what I have presented in this chapter, particularly these sections on separating emotion, borrowed identity and shifting in-between. Flying mother Juju was the first one who clearly pointed out this possible interpretation in my analysis. And after I interviewed her, I sensed I had grasped some vague ideas, then I went through other interviews I had done to carefully screen out possible codes that may related to what Juju talked about. At that moment I had no idea what I was coping with even though I had some fragmental codes at hand. I had no idea what was emerging from my
data even though I knew I was witnessing it emerging. For the interviews I did after Juju, I did not have questions intentionally on the identity shifts because at that time I had not figured out this is my interpretation. So I have to say these findings related to emotion were not quite clear until I had stopped interviewing flying mothers and had focused on writing, reflecting what I have heard in the field. I might have heard other interesting voices if I could specifically have questions regarding this theme.

I think the difficult and confusing feelings I initially had in making sense of what I am presenting here would echo flying mothers’ feelings about this as well. Like Juju, she was able to divide her emotion from work to family and therefore she thought she was a professional flight attendant, but she was not able to see the overlapping, spillover and the borrowing of the identity from the private sphere when she did her emotional labor in the public sphere. Many flying mothers could clearly identify their separation in emotion like Juju did, even though this was also what they did. And even Juju who could articulate the situations told me at the end of our conversations on the emotional separation,

Actually you know what? I didn’t quite know I could clearly articulate these thing…maybe it like my mental mechanism; things I don’t know till you ask me now and I begin trying to speak this to you. I feel this way, I know I purposely separate two sides but I never say it out loud.

The Identity as a Flight Attendant in Emotional Work

So far, we have examined that the flying mothers identity in the private sphere could also play a part in the public sphere. On the other hand, for the identity as a flight attendant in the public sphere, how would this affect the private sphere?

For this part, I would not say the identity as a flight attendant is also borrowed to the private sphere in the way as the mother identity is borrowed to the public sphere.
But being a flight attendant certainly affects flying mothers’ mothering behaviors, such as the family arrangements of childcare as I have described in previous chapter. When it comes to the emotional aspect, this identity in public sphere also informs the private sphere.

Juju considered the ability to separate the emotion from work and family is a professional ability a flight attendant (a flying mother) should have. Another flying mother Mei-li said she sometimes could observe her impatience when she faces her husband and child right after work. She emphasized that it was due to fatigue, not because she is an emotional person. Mei-li said whenever she realized she was going to lose temper because she had “used up all my patience today in the tiring flight”, the first thing she would do was trying to calm down herself, or just kept silent:

My husband and I have developed this mutual understanding: when I am very quiet after going home, he knows I’m not in good mood so he’ll take children out of my sight. He’ll tell children “Mama is very tired now, don’t talk to her, let her sleep first and she’ll play with you.”

Mei-li appreciated her husband’s consideration, “I know he could be tired too after one-day’s work. He is a salesperson so sometimes when his business not going well…you know what I mean. He once told me, ‘you’re considerate to passengers so you’re tired. So before you recovered I should be considerate to you, like you’re also considerate to me after I am considerate to my customers. It’s mutual thing.’” Mei-li said when her husband came home and was very quiet; she would do the same thing toward him.

“Before I am ready to be a considerate mother and wife again, I need some time, some space to get ready. I’m not a machine or a robot.” Mei-li concluded. She indeed viewing the ability to perform the emotional work she should do in the family is important.

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16 Also it affects the ways they consider motherhood as I will discuss in next chapter.
Different from Juju’s idea on separating the emotion from work to home, Mei-li’s (and her husband’s) idea was: when the inevitable emotional spillover comes from the work exist, one would recognize and confront the emotional exhaustion with the support from the family members before one could recover from the tiredness.

Physical tiredness due to work has been a key term in my interviews with flight attendants. And this is also an important factor that causes the lower emotional tolerance in many flight attendants’ personal lives. Flight attendants in Eva Air have even more tight working schedule compared to flight attendants in China Airlines, and this imply they could experience even more severe emotional exhaustion and probably have conflicts with their family members. A flight attendant working for Eva Air told me she and her husband once had very stressful relationships for a period of time, when Eva Air did not have enough crew members and did not plan to recruit more because of the recession in global economy. Like other crew members in her company, her working time each month was approximately 100 hours, which is considered very full-loaded for flight attendants’ working schedule. She easily lost her temper and might shout at her husband for no reason. Her husband asked her: “Why are you shouting at me? Why are you losing your temper at will?” She said, “I don’t know about it myself!”

To deal with the emotional exhaustion the resulted from physical tiredness, the best strategy would be having enough time for rest and relaxation. However, considering the demanding working schedules that compress the time available for flying mothers, and all those scenarios I have presented in Chapter 4, there is not always enough time and space for flying mothers to rest and restore themselves from physical tiredness before they face their responsibilities as a good wife, a good mother
and a good daughter-in-law. Not every flying mother has been as lucky as Mei-li who has a considerate husband, as I’ll discuss about it very soon.

The ability to regain the control of one’s emotion needs strategy. Mei-li and her husband both acknowledged the emotional work in the family could be done well only under the situation that the person who performs it (either the husband or the wife; the father or the mother) is in good situation physically and emotionally. They are both in the occupations that involve doing emotional labor in certain way. Therefore, the mutual understanding of the other’s feelings was more easily built.

Mei-li: Some Jiejie might be emotional…it’s their personality. They are easy to lose temper either to the passengers or to their family. Or sometimes it’s because they are…ill mentally. Many crew members have depression issue. It’s not their fault and they just cannot control themselves.

I: Hmm…I see what you mean…do you think these Jiejie are aware of this? Aware of not being able to control themselves?

Mei-li: I think people who are close to them like their family and friends would let them know. It could be a vicious circle. Some Jiejies always gives people hard time, always are not easy to get along with. Other crewmembers don’t like them, they might offend passengers and being called-in by the office or the pursers would write reports on them. So they are not happy at work. When they go home, similar things would happen when they are with their close ones…so they cannot acquire happiness in either side. Things will getting worse and eventually they’ll be sick unless someone helps them out.

As mentioned earlier, Mei-li stressed that her bad mood is always not because she could not control her emotion well (“not being emotional”) but because of “the tiredness after work.” Mei-li was trying to tell me it was not her “fault” when she could not do the emotional work as she was supposed to do when at home. And when she talked about being emotional, she recognized the sufferings some flying mothers might experience. I will discuss this in the following section.
In all, I use what Juju and Mei-li indicated here to illustrate part of my findings on the gendered emotion existing in two spheres. Flying mothers would see the ability to separate the public and private spheres and the ability to control one’s emotion in both spheres is crucial. In the public sphere, this ability determines if one is a professional emotional labor producer as a flight attendant. In the private sphere as a wife and as a mother, this means the ability to react to the close family members in appropriate way emotionally. When a flying mother could not do such emotional work, she should have an ability to regain the control over emotion. This is another qualification flying mothers would try to achieve in their emotional efforts. Like the quote below from another flying mother,

If I lose temper to my daughter for she doesn’t do her homework, or when she doesn’t have a good exam score, that’s an ordinary mom would be. But, if I lose temper because I no longer have patience after flight, not because my daughter does something bad, I’d be guilty. I tell myself: I was so kind to some strangers, how can I not be able to smile to my daughter? Or talk to my husband nicely? It’s unfair to them.

“*It’s Unfair*”

“It’s unfair to them.” I had same guilty feelings when I lost my patience and shouted to my father. When flying mothers recognize the situations when they are emotionally exhausted so they cannot treat those people who are most dear to them with patience and kindness, they have the same guilty feelings. Especially when the people they lose patience with are their children, the guilty feelings would intertwine with the self-doubt: am I a good mother?

Every flying mother may have such doubt in her mind, questioning themselves if they are qualified to be a good mother. We could approach their doubt and the resulted feelings from several aspects. The emotion flying mothers may have is related to their
feelings toward their family members that if they could physically and emotionally be there for them. It is also related to the feelings they might have toward themselves because of work. And these two ends could intersect and intertwine, making the feelings they have more complicated.

In Chapter 4 we have examined the fact that flying mothers and their families face the challenges of accommodating the mothers’ irregular working schedules. Flying mothers often try to avoid standby duties, which bring more uncertainty to their schedule that has been arranged well. In addition to the potential mess-up in their family arrangements caused by the working schedule changes, flying mothers also experience the emotional challenges:

Do you like standby duty? (I: well…it depends…) I guess that’s because you’re single so it’s okay and you don’t feel much difference.\(^{17}\) (I: Hmm…many crew members don’t like standby duties, but I’m personally okay with it as long as I don’t have something important on my calendar and the standby duties might change my schedule. I guess…I don’t mind surprises). But I cannot have too many “unexpected ‘surprises’ in my life, like being away from home for 7 days without knowing it beforehand. Sometimes, the flight delays, the aircraft has maintenance problems, the bad weather….that’s tolerable, because the flight is generally short. It may only affect a few hours. But standby duties make me sad, feel uncertain….concerned….because I don’t know where I’ll be going. My son asks, Mama where are you going today? When will you be back today? I couldn’t have a specific answer. The look on his face…

For many flight attendants, standby duty is like having a butterfly in the stomach---giving them uneasy feelings for not knowing if their schedule would be changed or not; where will be their destination; when they could be back from work. And for flying mothers, as this interviewee was trying to tell me, things are even more complicated. Not knowing if

\(^{17}\) I translate these quotes in present tense instead of in past tense. In Mandarin there is no change in verb to indicate the different tense; generally, time would be used to specify the tense. (For instance, what do you eat yesterday?) Instead of asking me if I like standby duty “in the past”, this interviewee had the dialogue with me as if I were still working in China Airlines as a flight attendant.
they are going somewhere or nowhere is challenging how they feels; it also imposes emotional challenges on their family members, particularly on the little children.

Knowing there will be certain emotional challenges on themselves and on their family members, flying mothers try their best to have some mental preparation to reduce the emotional impact, especially for their children. But as a flight attendant, life is always filled with unexpected surprises, like this scenario flying mother JingYi shared,

My son is big now and could understand things. When he was little he was a kid… without much sense of security… I should say, he needs more sense of security than other kids. I always have to tell him again and again that… which country Mama is going, when Mama will be back, Mama would call him to say good night… he was basically okay, but for standby duty, that’s the hardest one. And I was much junior than now, I was more likely to be asked to fly you know. And I cannot tell him specific time. Once there was a S6 I couldn’t find anyone to swap with me. A crewmember forgot to bring her ID card. She didn’t find it until she was in the standby room, and it was a flight she applied for; the 10-day Italy flight! I was asked to substitute her at the last minute. I was immediately in tears because I didn’t want to leave home that long. I didn’t want to leave my baby… no mental preparation. The crewmember who forgot her ID cried because she couldn’t go. I cried because I didn’t want to go. The purser was very kind and he gently asked the dispatch desk if they could have someone else for this flight. But for many reasons I should be the one, according to the rules… I called home and told my husband I couldn’t go home tonight and had to leave for 10 days. I tried my best to calm down first and then asked him to have my son on the phone. When I told him, my son that Mama has to be away for a few days, he was immediately crying out loud… oh that day everyone cried, every one was not happy. That was a very depressing experience.

As JingYi recalling this, her eyes gradually turned red, and so did mine. I had witnessed similar scenarios before when I was working. Sometimes a standby crewmember was asked to be on duty at the last minute without much mental preparation, and particularly

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18 One of the standards to decide who to call to work first in a standby duty is the seniority.

19 S6 refers to a standby duty approximately between 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Because many inter-continental flights depart at night, crewmembers in this standby duty are more likely to be requested to operate a long-haul flight and have to leave home for a few days.
when one was asked to fly a long-haul flight and had to leave Taiwan for many days; depression and sadness were obviously shown on her or his face, whether it was accompanied with tears or not. Even a person like me who felt “it’s okay to have some unexpected surprises in life”, I also had some moments that I would rather going nowhere but safe from standby and go home.

JungYi’s scenario also shows the emotional work flying mothers perform could be different from the emotional work general working mothers would do. For the childcare arrangement of the double-salary families (meaning both parents are working outside home) in contemporary Taiwanese society, some families of young couples send their children to childcare during daytime and pick them up at night. Both the parents and the children expect at the end of the day they will get together under the same roof. Some younger couples depend on their parents taking care of the children in replace of the childcare center option. There are also cases that the young children are brought up by the grandparents who might not live the same city as the parents. The grandparents may live in country side, said Southern Taiwan, while the parents live and work in the city in Taipei. The parents travel to see their children during the weekend. If we review and compare the emotion and feelings within the families in these three major types of childcare arrangements, we could assume that judging from the daily basis, general working mothers would less likely to face such extreme emotional moments (i.e. an unexpected travel because of work) as frequently as flying mothers. For those weekend parents who would also have to experience the sadness of the separation from their children, such feelings would work in slightly different ways from flying mothers’. Weekend parents separate from their children on regular basis but
could expect the family gathering at certain time. Flying mothers also have to separate from their children because of work, but the schedule is not an expected routine; there could be extreme surprising and depressing moments too.

In other words, the emotional work flying mothers need to do when facing their family members is closely associated with their occupational characteristics. For flying mothers, while they are having such extreme emotional moments of unexpected, sudden separation, they need to take care of their children’s feelings into account. Like what JingYi would do: she tried to calm down herself first by talking to her husband before she explained the situation to her son.

Many flying mothers who have children that are old enough to perceive their mothers “disappear” share some similar strategies in coping with the possible emotion their children may have.

I try to talk to him; make him understand I’ll be gone for a while because I have to work. My son asked Mama why do you have to work? I said, I work so you could have new toys, I work so you could buy the toy car you want. Then he better understood the situation. Work and money.

Echoing to previous discussion, when facing the emotional moments with their children or when facing the children’s feelings resulted from mothers’ occupational characteristics, flying mother would cope with their own emotion as well as their children’s feelings also by thinking the situation in a more positive way. This also reflects the way how flying mothers see their job changes after acquiring their identity as a mother: this is a job now, a job that could bring benefits, fulfill the financial needs of their children.

I feel sad before the long-haul flights and sometimes my daughter would also say “Mama don’t go to work tonight” to me...this kind moment my heart is breaking. I don’t want to go to work. Then I would tell myself, don’t ask sick leave today, count how much I could earn for this flight, and I should
feel happy that my daughter could have, a new toy, a new dress, or what. I tell my daughter in this way too. I tell her no matter where I am Mama would always think of you. Mama would miss you. So don’t feel sad baby. Mama goes to work to make money.

If their children are old enough to understand things, flying mothers would explain the situation in the language their children could realize. This might be a common strategy all working mothers would use, yet for flying mothers, since they would have to be gone for a few days instead of a few hours, they specifically want to ensure their children to feel safe and certain. So to their children they may also specify the time they will call them from abroad and the time they could expect to see her home, like what JingYi did.

I would say (to the kid) think like this: now after I send you to bed I go to work, tomorrow you go to school, when you return I’ll call you to see if you’re doing your homework. Then you go to bed again. And then when you open your eyes Mama is home. So you see, it is very quick right? And you could still talk to Mama even though I am not beside you. You could think Mama is talking to you from another room.

Another flying mother who has a baby girl that is still too young to fully understand the situation said,

When my daughter was a baby, of course she had no idea who is who. Someone is holding her, feeding her…now she could recognize me and would cry if she witness I am leaving (for work) without taking her. So I have to avoid that kind of scene. I have to sneak out to work…like a thief (laugh) Or if she cries I would want to cry too.

In this quote she mentioned the feelings she would have if her daughter cries. For many flying mothers, their feelings before they go to work could be determined by their children’s feelings and emotional expression. And to make sure there would be less emotional moments on the spot of the separation, flying mother use the strategies either to perform the emotional efforts beforehand by mentally preparing their children, by making them understand and accept the facts; or by avoiding the direct emotional confrontation. Flying mothers definitely would feel bad and guilty when witnessing their
children have difficulty upon temporarily separation. And such depression feelings could haunt them along the way to work.

And sometimes such feelings would stimulate flying mothers to reconsider their occupation lives. A former flying mother Ki-La who used to work in Eva Air also told me a similar heartbreaking moment because of a standby duty. For her case, the dispatch center did not treat her fairly for duty assignment. She protested about this but the dispatch staff implied that if she refused to go to work, she would be reported to the “office people in the 8th floor” immediately and undoubtedly there would be punishment.

He (the dispatch staff) said, okay if you want to refuse to do the flight, I’ll transfer this call to the office and you told them by yourself…his attitude was like, shut up and just come now! I was really mad but what could I do? I was crying when I do my make-up and at the same time calling my mom to pick up my baby daughter, calling my husband. I couldn’t stop crying in the duty assignment room, on the bus to the airport…even in flight I cry. I could not stop myself. I felt very upset and very bad about it. What did I do that had made me be treated like this? What company it is? As soon as I arrived San Francisco I called home to my husband, I said I want to resign, will you support me?

Earlier in the conversation Ki-La said she had been thinking about resigning her job for a while but “just think about it and might sometimes mention it.” It was not until this time “forcing me to separate with my baby daughter because of unfair treatment” that really motivated her to take action. Ki-La articulated how she felt that time,

I couldn’t stop crying because I felt, I am nothing to this company. I’m nothing. Why do I need to suffer for this at the sacrifice of my time with my daughter and my husband? I’m always so busy because of the full-loaded schedule. I always want to have a movie and dinner date with my husband like what we did before we got married. He has been so supportive to me…they are more important people. I was so disappointed at work.

Ki-La’s depression feelings were from her disappointment in her job (i.e. the company’s management) and her reflections on her relationships with her husband and family. She probably had held some thoughts over these two sides before but never seriously
collected them together. The incident was the catalyst that stimulated the outburst of her emotion. Not very long after this incident happened she submitted her resignation application.

**Emotion Work in the Private Sphere**

“Mama, have you rested enough? Could I play with you now?”

Flying mother Ming-li told me what her daughter said to her the day before, when she was lying on the bed to catch some sleep after a 14-hour long haul flight from San Francisco. Ming-li was one of the few flying mothers I talked to who hired a nanny when she was away. Generally she would leave her daughter with her nanny before the long-haul flight and then pick her up after she had enough rest after going back home, but the day before was an exception because something emergent came up in her nanny’s family, so she picked up her daughter right after work. Ming-li said she seldom had the experience of taking care of her daughter after staying up all night long, “I cannot imagine how others (flying mothers) could do this, it is exhausting!” Ming-li’s daughter Sherry was 4 years old, a quiet little girl with sweet personality. Ming-li told her to play for a while by herself and let Mama rest for a while. Sherry agreed. But I guess in Sherry’s impression her mother was seldom in such a tired figure. Since Ming-li said she usually wouldn’t pick up Sherry from her nanny until she had “slept enough and eaten something, feeling I’m in good shape.” Sherry is more used to her mom playing with her energetically, so she could not help asking if Ming-li had been ready to play with her. Ming-li said,

Seeing that little face…you want to hug her. Sherry knew I’m tried but she tried to be considerate, but she is only 4 after all. There is a sense of guilty in my mind. Next time if this kind of situation happens again I’ll ask my mother or my mother-in-law or someone…to cover me for a few hours.
Ming-li’s thinks it is important to have rested enough before facing Sherry, because without taking good care of herself first, Sherry could not be taken good care of. “In the long-term this is not good for both mother and child.” By saying taking good care of herself, Ming-li not only means that physically she is in good condition but also emotionally she is as well, “And these two sides are linked together. How a mother be patient if she is exhausted?”

In comparison, flying mothers’ families seem to depend on their family members more than on the paid service of child care, such as day care center or nanny. Based on the small sample from the flying mothers I asked, employing a nanny the average is cost approximately NT 18000-20,000 dollars\textsuperscript{20} per month. For flying mothers they could afford this amount of money with their salary yet finding an appropriate one, a nanny they could trust and a nanny who could accommodate their special working schedules could be the difficult part. A flying mother who had a nanny said she have more than 10 interviews to find her current nanny who could accept the situation that the baby-sitting time is irregular every month depending on her schedule. Another flying mother said most nannies expected the child would go back to their parents’ at night as most working mothers’ families would have such arrangement, she finally settled with the one she had now was because the nanny could accept from time to time she would have her kid sleep over with them at night with the cost of extra NT 500 dollar\textsuperscript{21} pay.

\textsuperscript{20} 600-700 in US dollars

\textsuperscript{21} 26 in US dollars.
As discussed in Chapter 4, having the children’s grandparents take care of them when flying mothers are away could involve a lot of negotiations which could not be perceived immediately. Hiring a nanny could make things easier,

Having a nanny to take care of...you don’t have to go through those issues like asking favor from your mother or mother-in-law. Even though they might be willing to help, there is still...you cannot take it for granted, you know, the relationships in-between is you’re depending on their favor to you. You’d have to negotiate. There is a lot of feelings, mood things inside. (I: what do you mean by feelings, mood things?) Like, you have to take more things into consideration. Considering if they are happy about it, if they think I’m taking advantage without appreciation.

Another flying mother also commented,

Nanny is more like service. You paid you got the service. As long as you could find the one that could accommodate our irregular schedule. Because you paid so she would have to meet up your time and your needs. But for mother-in-law you cannot. You have to ask her help so...there could be conflict, or it’s not conflict just like...small things that could make the other uncomfortable.

Even flying mothers could expect these merits of hiring a nanny, consideration of the money and the appropriate candidate makes it difficult to find one. Another thing is, it is also because of flying mothers’ occupational characteristics, hiring a nanny could be a waste— because if a flying mother could arrange her working roster in the way that could meet her family needs, sometimes all she needs is just a helper to cover the days when no one could take care of the children. From the nannies’ point of view, they would definitely prefer to have a case that has a steady monthly income. All these have contributed to the fact that flying mothers depend on their family members to take care of the children for better flexibilities.

Reviewing what we have been discussed on this option, then the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law also need a certain amount of emotional work. One night several of my former colleague friends and I had dinner together. It was
more like a girls-night-out: we made plans in advance and I reserved a famous fancy restaurant in one of the most popular areas in Taipei, to where we all were very looking forward to going. One of the girls hanging out together was the young flying mother Ting-ting who I had interviewed, the one I had mentioned in Chapter 4 who I always regard as a little sister. We chatted, laughed, shared our lives, exchanged the latest gossip from the company and took photos as a group of teenage girls. It was a fun night.

At the end of the dinner, Ting-ting asked for the menu again and ordered some dessert for take-out. I asked Ting-ting about this, she said, “Oh it's for my parents-in-law.” Ting-ting drove me home that night and on the way to the parking lot, I overheard her conversation on the phone with her mother-in-law. She reported to her that she is now on the way to their place to pick up her son. When her son was put on the phone, I heard her sweetly asked what did he do tonight, “Mama is going to your way now. Guess what? Mama bought some cakes home. Later let’s have Grandma and Grandpa eat together with you, okay? Now would you invite them to wait for the cake with you?” Ting-ting later said to me,

They(her parents-in-law) are taking care of my son for me tonight so I'd like to use some cakes to “bribe” them as a way to say thank you…you know, it is important to keep this in mind that you're asking them for help, it is not their responsibilities to take care of my son for me because I want some time for myself, some time for fun with friends.

Ting-ting thought our girls-night-out was a social event. It was not as accountable as leaving for work so she would “also somewhat feel guilty too because I was out to have fun.” At that moment, I suddenly sensed there is indeed a gap existing among the members in our dinner gathering—after all we are not carefree teenage girls. Our identities differentiate the ways we see this dinner even though we all enjoyed it very much. Ting-ting and I both agree it is important and interesting to hang out with our
girlfriends sometimes. But for me, as a single woman, it would not come across to my mind that when I enjoyed my night with my girlfriends I should therefore be responsible for someone else’s mood and possible consequence. Ting-ting saw bribing her parents-in-law by cakes is a way to comfort their feelings. The ideology behind it was that as a daughter-in-law, I respect and appreciate your time and energy to take my responsibilities, particularly I avoided my duties for my son because of my pleasure. Also, I see this is not only for the parent-in-law’s mood, it is also done for her own feelings as well. By doing so it could release her possible guilt feelings for not taking care of her son as a mother and pursing some fun as a woman who definitely needs her friends and social lives.

Many flying mothers have practiced a similar strategy in their emotional work by make-up or exchange with materials. This strategy is used to ease any potential complaints or even conflicts from other family members, to demonstrate the characteristics of a good daughter/daughter-in-law, and their own feelings as well. In the previous section we heard many flying mothers talk about buying toys for their children, this could be viewed as a make-up strategy for not being able to be with their children all the time to comfort their own feelings as a mother. For a paid service as a nanny, a flying mother might not need to spend so much consideration on the nanny’s feelings for not picking up the children because she wants to have some quality time with her girlfriends. Since in such cases she would not be challenged for avoiding her responsibilities for her own pleasure, her feelings upon the situation could be eased too.

As a daughter-in-law, the required emotional work in the family might be extended toward other family members and the strategy might also relate to giving gifts.
Another flying mother shared a lot of her own observations and interactions with her husband’s family members with me. She told me that she generally learned how to be kind to the family members in her husband’s side by acting kind, but keeping them from too much intimacy,

Intimacy brings contempt…and they will take what you do for granted. For example, don’t buy gifts to them every time you go somewhere. Then if you give them presents sometimes then they will be grateful and happy, think you always think of them. Don’t be too kind to them, but you have to be kind to them.

She also told me to take those family members as the passengers on-board then everything would not be difficult since we are flight attendants. She emphasized the appropriate distance and considered such acting kindness to be similar to the emotional labor done toward the passengers. By occasionally giving gifts, this could make family members have thankful feelings.

**Summing Up**

In this chapter I have reviewed the intersecting aspects in flying mothers’ lives through the examination of the emotional facts, efforts and adjustments. Flying mothers would take practical and specific strategies to cope with the emotional challenges from work, from family and from the possible spillover in-between. Even though not every flying mother could clearly articulate their emotional self, most of them recognized that limitation in time and physical energy are major sources that could bring them emotional exhaustion. Whether they were aware of their own efforts, flying mothers always tried to achieve a balance in their emotional self. They would try to separate work emotion from family emotion; they realize a successful separation between these two spheres not only suggests their professionalism at work, but also their devotion to those who are truly important to them.
On the other hand, we could also observe flying mothers’ identities as crossing the boundary between two spheres. Their identities as a wife, a mother, a good daughter-in-law inform the emotional labor they do when at work; these identities would also make them view their occupation in different ways. We saw how these identities would shift through emotion and could be borrowed between the public sphere and the private sphere.

Emotion itself, as I found when doing the research and trying to make sense of what I have heard in the field, is not always easy to record, to repeat and to retell unless one is on the spot and can catch the emotional moments immediately. Even so there could be gap between the facts and interpretation; between the people who have personally experienced the emotion and those who observe the emotion happening. When I began to write up my findings on emotion in this chapter, to my surprise I realized, by examining the micro-level gender-doing practice in people’s daily life, it makes it more possible to approach people’s emotion; because we could acquire more information on emotion via reactions, interactions, behaviors, descriptions and so forth. I sensed that if only the question “How do you feel about it?” was asked I could not get abundant information and details, emotion could be carried by people’s actual behaviors and actions; so understand these practices improves our accuracy in interpreting emotion. As to what I aim to present in this chapter, through flying mothers’ lived experiences, we could see how doing gender is closely embedded in all emotional efforts they make, including both the emotional labor for paid work in the public sphere and the emotional work for unpaid duties in the private sphere. Women not only do gender, they also do gendered emotion in their everyday lives.
Another significant point I need to make is: by examining how emotion is gendered we could also approach how these Taiwanese women are situated and positioned between the intersecting powers operating in their lives. The role conflicts of working mothers are not unfamiliar stories, but for flying mothers, such role conflicts might be different from the general working mothers. To examine and to compare the gaps between women who are in similar and different situations at the same time would help us to identify the powers that contribute to the differentiations. For instance, flying mothers’ working schedules already deprive them of partial time they could spend with their children, and the occupational characteristics would also make them fall out of the traditional expectations and requirements of a good mother. This doubt which arises because of their failure in controlling emotions would bite their hearts even harder. Now being able to articulate such emotions they have because of their identities, we are also able to identify what would define so called good motherhood; where these standards come from, and for women what are the struggles, the challenges and the punishment they would have to cope with in their everyday life as they juggle multiple expectations. I will further discuss this in next chapter.

As a side note here, even though I had mentioned and recognized that some flight attendants might have a mental illness such as depression, or might have problems in controlling their emotions, in my interviews I did not come across flying mothers who indicated they suffered from such emotional issues. I could only assume there would be some other stories worthy of being heard if I had a chance to reveal them.
CHAPTER 6
THE POSITION OF SELF

For my belief is that if we live another century or so…and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves...then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has often laid down.

—Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own

Less than one hundred years after Virginia Woolf’s classic A Room of One’s Own was first published in 1929, there had been a lot of changes and progress in women’s lives. It is important for women today to bear this in mind that the more equal opportunities we have now are the heritage passed down from the women of past generations who fought for women’s rights; there is still inequality, exploitation, and oppression existing in women’s daily lives, whether we women can identify and articulate our own sufferings, from our positions, and in our own voices. I have been attempting to “write exactly what we (flight attendants) think” in my dissertation for obtaining my Ph.D. degree, with lots of thought on what Virginia Woolf said about women’s own room in her times. I started to see such writing is a journey of discovering the self of mine, especially when I reviewed how flying mothers position their self in their life journeys.

Flight attendant used to be an occupation only young, single female were eligible for. In Taiwan now this occupation requires higher qualification standards on its candidates’ education level and language abilities, which reflects the fact that Taiwanese women have equal rights to receive higher education. Married flight
attendants no longer need to resign from their job and can continue to work after giving birth to their children; this reflects the fact that working mothers and double-salary families are the major family trends in contemporary Taiwanese society. After discussing the practical strategies flying mothers apply to their family arrangements and the emotional efforts they perform, in this chapter I would review the positions flying mothers would take between the intersecting dimensions with the stress on their peculiar standpoints since they are not typical working mothers. Particularly, please be advised that the overarching theme over the sections in this chapter is the position of self that flying mothers would take. My readers may find that some of the discussions and illustrations from this chapter are overlapping or repeating some topics that have been discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. I decided to revisit them or to explore them further in Chapter 6 because the scenarios I bring up here are related to the overarching theme of self in this chapter. I also found this is unavoidable that I could not separate the discussions completely into different chapters. For instance it is impossible to talk about different family arrangements without confronting women’s emotion; just as it impossible to talk about one’s emotion without reviewing the facts and incidents that stimulate such emotional reactions. When it comes to the discussions of motherhood, how everything would intertwine together is even more complicated. I see that we could not illustrate the facts without recognizing the intersectionality in women’s lives. The examination of one single dimension could never be adequate for us to depict the full picture because the reality of how women are situated in their real lives is that they are facing multiple powers from different dimensions whether they can identify them or not.
In this chapter I aim to gradually unwrap and introduce the self of flying mothers in the following order: the reasons that motivated flying mothers to stay in this occupation; the strategies and support the flying mothers commonly share in their community; the construction of flying mothers’ motherhood and its meanings; and how flying mothers consider their self, including some discussions on their sexuality. I hope after understanding how contemporary Taiwanese women position their self between different demands from intersectional perspectives I could answer this question: have Taiwanese women found a room of their own?

What Made the Mothers Fly?

One evening when I was working on my dissertation in the donut shop where I usually visited, an elegant, stylish woman stepped into the store and she immediately caught my eyes. She is probably in late 30s or early 40s; had a slim figure; with some light make-up that gave her face a natural look; in a simple but elegant dress. She kept smiling when she talked to her daughter in a very gentle tone. The little girl was around 10 or so; her book bag and her uniform indicated she was studying in the primary school in this neighborhood. This woman’s face looked familiar to me and very soon I realized she was a former colleague of mine. China Airlines has more than 2000 flight attendants, so it could be quite common that we might not know one another; moreover, even if we had worked together, the next time when we came across each other, we might know each other’s face but not the correct name. This was the case for me: I knew that she was a former colleague of mine, who was very senior, but I had no clue of her name. For her part, I guessed she had no impression on me. And I was not surprised by that since I had been out of my previous job for more than 5 years now.
My former colleague and her daughter chose to sit at the table behind mine, so this allowed me to hear their dialogues very clearly even though I did not mean to overhear their conversation in the beginning. The mother was asking if her daughter liked the donut and the sweet tea, chatting with her about what happened in school that day. Before I noticed, the mother had changed their dialogue topic into something more serious. I heard she was encouraging her daughter to study harder, particularly for her English class. She was not scolding her or lecturing her in any sense. Instead, she was speaking to her in a very patient, understanding and considerate tone. For a moment I thought I was overhearing my colleague talking to a passenger in the cabin:

Mama (referring to herself) could not always be at your side, but I know you are a very good girl, so I don't worry when I am at work; worry that my daughter is playing or watching TV; or worry when I am away or my daughter does not behave herself. Because you are such a good girl...your English is not as good as your classmates. Why do you think this happen? (She paused, and let her daughter spoke. I couldn't hear the little girl's murmuring answer.) Because you are not as good as your other classmates? No. Mama has taken you to many different countries right? You accompanied Mama to work right? We went to Bangkok; we went to Tokyo; we went to see Mickey Mouse in LA right? Remember?

If you cannot speak English could you talk to Mickey Mouse?....no, right? So English is very important, right?

No one in your class has more experiences than you right? So why this happened? Because we don't study hard enough right?....

No one in your class has more dresses and novelty than you have. And you could dance so well when you dance ballet. Remember NiNi’s mother couldn’t let NiNi go to ballet lessons? But you not only can dance ballet but you dance so well.

So what should we do? We should work hard! We should work harder than any others! And you’ll be the best! You already have more than others, right?

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1 The word “this” here seemed to refer to an unsatisfying score in an English test. I wasn’t quite sure about the specific situation but I assumed this was brought up earlier in their conversation when I was not paying full attention.
Her gentle tone almost made me shed tears. The way she talked to her daughter was so encouraging and comforting. The conversation techniques she used were quite impressive as well. For instance, instead of saying to her daughter “you should study hard,” she kept saying “we” with some gentle questions to acquire her daughter’s agreement and to show her daughter that they were on the same boat. I myself was almost convinced that I could do anything I wanted to do if she told me so, especially when I was in my difficult dissertation-writing journey and confidence was exactly what I needed. The way she talked to her daughter was impressive. She was like advising a passenger on-board, persuasive and insistent, and with extreme patience.

This was not an expected field observation but a scenario I came across by a lucky accident— I use the word lucky here, because I saw this was a real interaction between a flying mother and her children; I could witness it because I happened to be there. I think this flying mother was aware that I could hear their conversations because we were at an open, public place, but I also think she had least idea I was observing the ways she communicated with her daughter. The interfering presence of the researcher in the field was limited to the minimum, compared to other field observations I had when some flying mothers were kind enough to let me participate their family activities.

This flying mother was producing an effective emotional work. I had no idea if she intentionally associated her mothering conversations with the interactions with passengers at work. I also witnessed that some other flying mothers communicated with their children in similar ways. In addition to the caring and loving words that mothers would speak to their children, flying mothers used the techniques and the language that more or less reflected the communication styles they were quite used to when being at
work. On the other hand, I would not misunderstand that all flying mothers would communicate with their children in such gentle style in all circumstances, particularly when they were exhausted; hurried to go to work; or were irritated because of their children’s misbehaviors.

Still, while there must be differences in communicating with passengers and with one’s own child, for a flying mother these two sides do share similar characteristics in actual interactions. Acting as a mother or being a flight attendant, she would need to create the atmosphere that makes her listeners understand her; feel comfortable and cheerful. The major differences could be how much love is sincerely devoted to the interaction from the bottom of her heart.

Another important thing to point out is: what this flying mother said to her daughter reflected what many other flying mothers also considered to be the benefits that their occupation could bring to their families, especially to their children. Financial benefit is the most salient one, which could be seen as the fundamental motivation that flying mothers may hold in their minds:

It is impossible to support the whole family if we just depend on my husband’s salary.

Oh if I married to the rich then of course I don’t need to work! If married well who wants to keep this job! So tiring! But, practically speaking, in today’s Taiwanese society, almost every family is double-salary family.

We could still live without my salary but, if we want to keep living in the same living standards…good life quality then I could not quit the job.

Flying mothers considered their salary to be crucial in supporting their families, and they also considered their role to be another serious breadwinner in the family. For most cases I found, particularly those who ever considered finding an ordinary job that would not require frequent travels, they eventually chose to remain in this occupation because
they recognized the general financial needs of the household and the expectations for 
living a good life. Many flying mothers think quitting their current occupation for another 
job is possible if they are just looking for financial security; but they were expecting 
more, such as a decent quality of life, and this was what their occupation could provide, 
“Where else to find another job that allows you do this and that, and have so much 
salary, at our age, married with children?” Many flying mothers held thoughts similar to 
this one.

In one of the above quotes, a flying mother said marrying a rich husband could 
save a woman from continuing to work. Some flying mothers also told me the examples 
they knew or they had heard, about their former colleague friends quitting the job to 
become a stay-at-home mom due to their husbands’ (and probably also the in-law’s) 
opinions. I came across a former flight attendant in her thirties, whose husband was a 
brain doctor. She also left her job because her husband preferred her to “take a break 
from work” because “I could support you; we don’t need to worry about money.”

But there were also some flying mothers who chose to opt themselves out of the 
life path as a stay-at-home mom, for instance, a flying mother Yuan said,

> When I was pregnant my husband expressed his thoughts about it…he asked if I would consider to quit flight attendant and find some other job on the ground, which is more stable. Well I personally didn’t quite want to do that…I calculated the money, our family’s monthly expense, upcoming expense on our child and explained to him: it is crucial that I keep working, and only with the salary I could acquire from this job, his financial burden to support me and our child wouldn’t be that heavy. He never mentioned it again.²

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² This flying mother hoped to continue her work was mainly because of her other considerations and I am going to discuss them later in the section A Room for Myself; she used the financial reason to persuade her husband to support her choice.
Financial contribution was the most significant reason that kept mothers flying. In addition, like the senior crewmember I came across in the donut shop, many flying mothers thought their occupation could benefit their children in other aspects as well. Because of the mother’s job, her children therefore could acquire more resources than other children, such as novel stuff from different countries and frequent opportunities to travel abroad. These benefits imply that in flying mothers’ families, children would have abundant material goods, broadened visions with international views, and better education that other middle-class families might find more difficult to provide for their children.

The quote above from flying mother Yuan’s also suggests another motivation that could be held in flying mothers’ mind: securing their personal resources and power in the marriage relationship. Even though none of my interviewees ever formally and directly indicated so, some of them clearly discussed how this job could provide them sense of security. This has nothing to do with their current marital status, or their relationship with their husband. Yuan used her ability to financially contribute to the family as her power when negotiating with her husband. Some flying mothers also said being able to make money of their own could give them confidence in many ways:

I like shopping. And you know this job is so tiring…my only hobby, my only way to treat myself is to go shopping. But if I don’t have this job, I cannot buy things I want to buy.

If a couple has a quarrel, the one who makes money could talk louder. And I also make money so I could talk as loud as he does!

I insisted to keep my job after having children. It has little to do with my husband’s work…or if he could support us or not. It’s mental security. If I

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3 In the airline industry, one of the employees’ benefits is the discount air tickets for the employees’ parents, spouse, and the children younger than 21 years old.
have a job, I don’t have to ask him for money. I could support myself if my marriage doesn’t work---we are good, no problem, but just in case.

Keep this in mind: when you get married in the future, no matter what you should have your job, and it should be a job…full-time not part-time job. And it’s not “just for fun” type. This is important. I don’t know if you heard but lately many flight attendants get divorced. (I: why?) Different reasons…but don’t you think it’s because they have the job so they are not afraid of getting divorce?

In these quotes we see female flight attendants would associate their economic security with what this occupation could bring them: an insurance that they have enough resources for themselves and the power to resist any possible distressful situation.

Money was just one of benefits they could acquire from the job, because in addition to money, there are other attractive reasons:

I have a job I like, I have friends, I could get away from time to time…this is my life and I like it most. I wasn’t working in the office like others when I was pregnant, and every day I was just sleeping, doing nothing. That’s not me.

I felt like a lousy…yellow face wife\(^4\) in the year when I was a stay-at-home mom. I was in pajama when seeing my husband to work. When he returned I was still in the same pajama. My husband asked, “so you didn’t change clothes at all?” He made fun of me, “Where is that beautiful girl I married?” For going to work, at least you’ll have to dress up, put up make-up…not looked so bad.

It’s just a job now but…in a way, I mean…I’m making money. In addition to that I also see world outside…how to say…you talk to people even just chatting with other crewmembers…I guess I catch up with outside world, not just being a narrow-minded person and it is very easy to become that kind of person if you just stay at home. All your world is your kids and you’re going nowhere.

Flying mothers also acknowledged the good benefits a full-time job could bring to them, such as friendship, self-confidence and sense of accomplishment in oneself (i.e. from work; from interactions with passengers; from their appearance), or a chance to be in

\(^4\) In Mandarin huang-lian-po (黃臉婆) This terms here refers to a sloppy wife who does not care about herself particularly her appearance.
touch with the world outside their home. In other words, the identity as a flight attendant allows a woman to not be limited to her role as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law in the private sphere. While the identities brought from these roles were important to them, flying mothers also thought their identity as a working woman to be significant. As a working woman, the benefits she obtained from work provide them with sense of security, like a flying mother commented, “When my relationship with my husband was in tension, I was in bad mood but I felt so relieved when I thought of going to work: at least I have this job. I might lose everything but I have this job.”

At this point, I believe many readers would raise this question as many people would ask the same question: But why being a flying mother? For these women who highly appreciated their identity as a working woman, could they not be a working woman with another job which would also give them sense of security and sense of accomplishment? Was money the only reason that made they stay? Like a flying mother’s mother-in-law’s question, “Why must you be a flight attendant? Couldn’t another job be good for you as well? If you could find a job that allows you to attend to your children more after they go home, wouldn’t it be better?”

Sasa, who we had talked about her clothes shop in earlier chapters, said she had been debating if she should quit her job. Opening the clothes shop was a way to test the water temperature:

My husband also invests this shop and he always says if it goes well then quit the job to focus here. And I could take care of my daughter. I’m still thinking about it. (I: Why?) Because...I don’t know, first I’m not sure if I’ll make money out of this (shop), and I feel even if I can, it is more like I’m just making some pocket money, compared to the salary I could get out the job(being a flight attendant). That’s not enough for me. Of course my husband will support the household financially but that’s for the household; if I want to buy something good for me I have to ask him for money, and
that’s not good feelings. Sometimes you just want to have a treat for yourself right? I’m not the “wasting” type of person. But if you have to ask for it (the money) every time that’s different. And if I make money of my own I could decide the way I hope to spend it.

From this part we could see Sasa’s attitude toward this issue. In terms of background information, it took Sasa and her husband quite a while before they finally came across a good location for opening this shop. The place they chose was quite close to their home and the husband’s office. Their daughter could be dropped off by the kindergarten’s shuttle bus in front of the shop, which is quite convenient for the family as well. The clothes shop was very nice. The business had been growing, slowly but steadily. Yet for Sasa, whether she could still remain financially independent or not if she quitted her flight attendant job had been her major concern. She carefully evaluated her situation:

Now another thing is, say if I want to find another job, what else could I do? I have graduated from school for so long. All I know about computer is using the Internet, browsing websites, checking E-mails…these easy things. Who would hire me? The reason why I chose…and my husband also suggested…to open a clothes shop was because this related to my interests…I’m good at this (fashion).

In this part, Sasa pointed out the dilemma many flying mothers as well as some senior flight attendants faced in their everyday lives: it was not easy to find another job for them outside the airline industry. I would argue two factors that contribute to such situation. For one, flight attendants are professional regarding knowledge of the aircraft and flight safety; however, this professional knowledge is less likely to be valued much outside the airline industry. What flight attendants could learn from work could not equip them enough for another position that may require other professional skills, such as adeptness in computer. A former flight attendant Peko I interviewed in 2006 talked about her initial experience when transferring to her current career in computer science.
“In interviews they always have doubts, even though my undergraduate major was in the related field, and I also had got several professional licenses. They would still say, ‘but flight attendant...how does this experience help you with your professional ability in being an engineer?’” Peko was single and just became thirty years old when I interviewed her. For flying mothers, changing their career path could be even harder. Their age, marital status and the fact that they have children could hinder their possible transition opportunities. Lacking working experiences that are outside the cabin and other professional skills that are more appreciated and acknowledged could also limit their chances too. Since transferring to another job could be quite risky and uncertain for them, many flying mothers would hesitate in doing so for fear that they might lose all the benefits they could acquire from this occupation, especially financial benefits.

Second, for the flight attendants, the skills required at work are mainly service techniques— the so-call emotional labor—have not been given credits enough, at least not to the degree such labor deserves. Emotional work has been considered to be part of women’ nature, which makes female-dominated occupations always associated with less skills and abilities, implying less financial compensation. However, as the illustrations I have demonstrated in Chapter 5, there is a very subtle mechanism operating when women make their emotional efforts to fulfill their paid and unpaid work. Also, because the product of emotional labor is not a visible, applicable, material outcome, like other concrete outputs that could be clearly identified and evaluated, it has been underestimated and undervalued. A flight attendant commented, “How do you evaluate the kimochi things? For this passenger, he might feel good; for another, with
same service he could be unsatisfied. For the other, he could be upset but actually it is not because of you, but because he had a bad day, but he wouldn't admit that!"

So for the positions that would appreciate flight attendants’ professional skills in doing emotional labor, such as the ones in the service industry or tourism industry, or even the office positions in the airline company, labor conditions and financial compensation could be much less attractive in comparison. Many flying mothers were quite aware of this situation so many could articulate the cons and pros for me, concluding that remaining their current position was the best choice for them:

I had carefully thought about it for several times. With our age and our background, what could we do if not being a flight attendant? A job in tourism? That’s another tiring job, always going abroad but with much lower pay. See the tour leaders on the plane you could know their lives. The hotel business or the customer service phone center all require taking shifts then that is still the same as now if I quit because of childcare reason. And the pay is so low.

I tried to find a job in those years when I took maternal leave but the interviews I could get were not many. And there were some, like a secretary position…it is steady but the pay is not good. It’s more like a choice thing. It is not impossible and one has to be mentally prepared that there will be still a lot of things to learn.

The ground staff in the airport, they need to take shifts as well! They sometimes need to stay up for night shift, dealing with passengers… and it doesn’t have this much salary. Then what’s the point? I would rather stay.

In general, I sense most flying mothers reached to the point that they were debating and hesitating if they should keep flying after becoming a mother. Some of them did try to see if they could find another job outside the cabin. Some of them succeeded and left the occupation; some of them realized remaining at their current position would be the best for their personal situation. Also many flying mothers had a “wait-and-see” attitude. They wondered if they could find a suitable position that could accommodate their childcare needs; and also wondered if they could work out family
arrangements through negotiation with other family members. “It is like fighting along the way,” a flying mother who had not decided if she would quit her job after her son went to the elementary school had this comment, “you walk and along the way you fight; to see how things go; to see if you may come across another job, a not bad one.”

Concluding from the discussions above, for flying mothers the answer to the key question “Why must you be a flight attendant?” is a dilemma itself. We have witnessed many struggling and challenging scenarios in the previous two chapters, and for my readers who have been feeling sympathy toward flying mothers, you now might feel surprised when you realize flying mothers would choose to keep flying even if they could have another career option. Compared to the past when flight attendants could not at all keep their position after getting married or having children, the choices contemporary flight attendants make involve a more complex decision process and more careful consideration of the different aspects of their lives and their identities.

**The Pregnant Mommy Policy**

Indeed for many flying mothers, to fly or not to fly, that is a question.

China Airlines had moved their enterprise center to their new property in March 2010. This new location, generally known as BOT, is located near Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport within 5 minutes by car. BOT incorporates all departments in China Airlines, including the office staff, the ground staff, the cockpit crew as well as flight attendants. The Novotel Taipei Taoyuan International Airport is a four-star hotel under Novotel Hotels of Accor Group, which is the largest hotel chain in France, is also

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5 The old name Taoyuan Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport was changed into Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport in 2006, due to political reason.
located in the BOT area since it is invested in by China Airlines. It is like a small city
belongs to China Airlines employees.

While the old crew center in Taipei is still in use,\(^6\) BOT in Taoyuan is where crew
members in China Airlines now need to report to work. This latest change impacts on
the lives of all crewmembers and all employees in other departments in China Airlines,
since many have been living quite close to the office in Taipei or the crew center that
was located near the domestic airport. Now they have to spend at least 2 hours a day
commuting to another city every day to work.\(^7\)

The day I went to BOT to visit a pregnant senior crewmember working in the office
was hot and sunny. There was a traffic jam on my way from Taipei to Taoyuan,
particularly when I left at 5 p.m. which was the rush hour on the highway. It took me
almost three hours that day for my visiting and returning trips. I fell asleep on my trip
back to Taipei after my 4-hour-long observational field trip. As my airport bus
approached Taipei Main Station, I woke up reluctantly, could not but help thinking how
my former colleagues would feel about this. Of course as a flight attendant, we have
been quite familiar with such time-consuming trips between the crew center in Taipei
and the airport in Taoyuan. There were countless moments that I would not want to
wake up to work, or too tired to open my eyes after an exhausting long-haul flight. I
actually once fell from the crew bus and hurt my both knees because of tiredness,

\(^6\) The old crew center had been one of my field work sites in 2005-2006 and 2009. I could easily visit it to
recruit potential interviewees because it is within 15 minutes by foot. It was like what I would do before
when I need to visit crew center in my off days. Before I stopped my field work at the end of 2010 it had
been in half-abandoned situation. Now it is mainly used for picking-up and dropping of point for crew
shuttle bus as a commuting lot.

\(^7\) I sensed this could be a new starting point to investigate further (e.g. how such new arrangements
would impact on working mothers, including flying mother’s life) yet due to limited time and energy, I still
had to stop my fieldwork as planned.
resulting in not being able to work for the next three months. I was looking outside the bus window, and felt a slight of relief that I do not have to worry anything else but myself. But how about flying mothers who need to face their family duties right after the flight? Or the pregnant women who may feel quite uncomfortable because of morning sickness? Or the ground staff members who are working mothers that also have family and children to take care of after a long day?

With different identities, the ways women would consider their physical and emotional exhaustion are different. There must be very individual limitations that would differ case by case. For instance, a mother in better physical condition must feel less fatigue compared to the one in poorer health; a mother whose family has a domestic worker to help do the household chores definitely has more time to rest compared to the one who needs to cook, clean, do the laundry, take care of children or any other responsibilities that are considered to be hers. This implies even women who choose the same path would experience quite different struggles and negotiations. What more important is that it would be hard for a mother to assume the possible situation she would be trapped into based on her own beforehand imagination. She would clearly realize the situation when she experiences it, and figure her way out. This also explains why many flying mothers would adopt the wait-and-see attitude regarding changing career paths. Since they could not be sure, the best possible strategy would be “give it a try.”

For the possible transitions in the life course, here is the best advantage and opportunity for a female flight attendant to take: being pregnant. I am not saying this in my own words:
I had been exhausted. The schedule was so packed every month. So I was thinking to take a break from work, but you know it’s hard. They (the office staff) don’t let you ask leave at will of course. My husband and I were trying so… being pregnant is the perfect reason to ask leave and they cannot say no.

Like this quote implied, a married flight attendant might have been trying to get pregnant but her identity as a tired flight attendant who wanted to take a break from work made her feel even more appreciative during her pregnancy. Giving birth to the child is undoubtedly an important change in women’s lives, and women would also take this as an accountable break to adjust herself to her new identity:

My health had been not so good. You know our job. It’s not like I was sick but always felt tired. So I planned to make good use of my pregnancy and the maternal leave to adjust myself to the best situation, I mean physically. So when I was pregnant I really lived a healthy life, go to bed early; sleep well; never stay up late; eat healthy…I also go to the Chinese medicine doctor to take herbal medicine to adjust my body and my health. And when doing my yueh-tze I always followed the custom.

Another flying mother also mentioned the period of her yueh-tze:

I made good use of my maternal leave to adjust my life rhyme. I had been always flying and never stopped and think what I want to do for my future. And I slept well, enjoy the last peaceful days before my son is born (laugh). And during my do-yueh-tze I followed all rules they say. They say don’t wash your hair and I didn’t wash my hair at all. They say stay in the house and I never left my home. I didn’t even get close to the window in case the wind blew to my head… I have to say the Chinese tradition passed down by our previous generations does have its reason. My body was in perfect condition. I don’t even have to put on any foundation make-up base my skin will glow… but after I went back to fly, in just a few months my body had been tortured and was back to the original poor condition.

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8 In Mandarin “do yueh-tze” (做月子) refers to a traditional Chinese custom and popularly practiced. Yueh-tzu means the very first month after childbirth. During the month after the child is born, the mother should follow certain rules to ensure that her body and her health could recover from the labor. For instance, during this time the mother should not wash her hair to prevent headache in the future; the mother should eat food that is cooked with traditional Chinese recipe, such as chicken soup cooked with sesame oil.
Very interestingly I found, flying mothers often associated their pregnancy experiences with their physical health condition in the interviews. In Chinese cultural tradition, pregnancy is considered to be a critical time for women’s health. It is said that as long as a woman had done well during the time of her “yueh-tze” she could become much healthier than her condition before her child birth. Many flight attendants recognized their concerns about their health, which is generally getting worse because of their work. The associations flying mothers make between work and health echo what I said about the transition in life course, because it is an accountable, long-term reason for women to take a break from their work. This really surprised me before I interviewed flying mothers, because from the impressions I had when talking with some flying mothers in my first-stage of research, I assumed when I continued probing I would find information about their reflections on their career. It never occurred to me that such a maternal break, a new start of the new identity as a mother, could also have a meaning of recovery.

The reason why I spent so much time on several trips to visit the BOT was to observe and talk to the pregnant flying mothers’ lives in the office. China Airlines has a policy called “Pregnant Mommy.” This policy gives pregnant flight attendants an option since they could not be on duty in flight. They could choose to hold the position and take pregnant leave, or to temporarily transfer to an office staff position during their pregnancy and still could obtain the fundamental monthly salary, which is approximately the same as the general office staff would get. These pregnant mommies could be

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9 In Mandarin it is called Yun-ma-ma (孕媽媽)

10 As a side note, in both China Airlines and Eva Air, I found the pregnant flight attendants would not be questioned or be considered disqualified if they are an unmarried mother.
assigned to any possible positions in different departments of the airline companies. There could be an opening position at the service desk for cockpit crew or cabin crew; an opening position at the reception desk to greet the outside visitors. There could also be a position available in the Public Relations or Marketing Department which flight attendants are not always acquainted with. When I talked to flight attendants in Eva Air, I found they also have a similar policy for pregnant flight attendants. Pregnant flight attendants may also be assigned to customer service center to respond to the passengers’ phone call or emails.

The pregnant mommy I went to meet was a senior crewmember called Wei-mi. Wei-mi was pregnant with her second daughter. I never asked her age, but I assumed she is in her late thirties. She worked at the service desk for cockpit crew members in a large office, under the department of Cockpit Crew Management Division. Besides Wei-mi, another pregnant mommy Sweet-Q I was also acquainted with was also on duty here. Their duties were trivial but easy. In general Wei-mi and Sweet-Q distributed the updated version of the flight manuals to the cockpit crew, answered their questions, helped them with the company forms they needed to fill out for their requests, just to name a few. Sometimes there would be no one coming in but three of us chatting freely; sometimes there could be a lot of cockpit crew members coming in at the same time, making both Wei-mi and Sweet-Q occupied and overwhelmed with different questions. I even jumped into help them find the application form for the children’s scholarships provided by the company; look for the latest updated version for the 747-400 aircraft

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11 In my field trip, the pregnant mommy working at the reception desk was a beautiful flight attendant who was a model and once appeared in the China Airlines’ commercial.
Manual; and translate the medical term otitis into Mandarin for a Perugian captain for his insurance reimbursement application.

Wei-mi and Sweet-Q told me their observations about the pregnant mommies and their positions in the company. Since they happened to be in the Cockpit Crew Management Division which is male-dominated, they have more freedom because “those men are not interested in supervising us. They think we are professional in service.” Indeed, the ways Wei-mi and Sweet-Q deal with the cockpit crewmembers are as kind, cheerful and considerate as they are interacting with passengers in flight. And it was also because this was not a closely supervised setting, I was not questioned for my identification and my reason to be here when I was doing my field observation. From time to time other pregnant mommies would come into this service office to eat their lunch, to share food, to chat, or just to hang-out. I was also told flying mothers that were assigned to some other departments did not have such freedom. A pregnant mommy mentioned another one who never showed up in this room in any of my visits, “She has been asked to key-in lots of data on computer, and she types very slowly because she is not familiar with the computer.” “Yes I heard,” Sweet-Q said, “when I was delivering some documents to the administration building I came across her. She said her manager is a sharp and an unfriendly woman. That woman does not like her to wander around so she kept giving her new work to be done.”

The experiences as a pregnant mommy working in the office definitely would give pregnant flying mothers a chance to project themselves in the work setting that might be completely different from their familiar cabin. It was indeed a chance to “give-it-a-try” to see if one could still be satisfied with her life when in a general office position. In my
interviews with other flying mothers who had ever taken the advantage of this pregnant
mommy policy talked about their experiences,

Hmm…I appreciate that chance or I would never realize I prefer flying much
more. I have been used to a job that is not…going to work at 9 p.m. and
returning at 5 p.m. Too steady for me.

I think because it was a position for pregnant mommy, so the duties were
easy because pregnant mommy comes and goes. But I observed the formal
employees about their work, I really don’t it would be any easier than the
flight attendant job. I could still be exhausted but in different way.

These two quotes represent two types of attitudes many flying mothers share commonly.
In the first quote, the experience made the flying mothers understood themselves better
and therefore become more certain about their career decision. In the second quote, the
flying mothers could find they might have some unrealistic images about the office
position. In other words, they might underestimate the possible challenges including the
degree of physical tiredness they might have after a long day. Wei-mi also told me she
felt exhausted after arriving at home, “and in comparison my work is much easier than
those real jobs. So how about those working mothers? They must be tired even though
they do not have to travel or stay up all night long as frequently as we do.”

There were also other voices saying that because of their pregnant mommy
experience they see changing to another career could be their possible option,

I actually found it is okay for me to do some office job. I wouldn’t say no if a
chance appears. (I: Have you got any chance?) No. (I: Are you trying to get
a new job?) No…I am a little bit lazy. But I think it is okay.

When getting a new position of course there must be a lot of things to learn.
I am prepared for that. So if there is any insider recruitment in the company
I would like to try.

Flying mothers give positive feedback toward their working experiences as a pregnant
mommy. This policy allows them to perceive themselves in different positions and other
career opportunities by evaluating their experiences, even though not all of them would proceed to find a new job even if they realized they could accept the occupational lives that are quite different from the one they have now. I indicated in the previous section, there are many aspects requiring flying mothers’ careful thoughts. In terms of decisions about their career, the Pregnant Mommy policy gives women a realistic visit to their true feelings upon their identity as a flight attendant.

**The Process of Knowledge Production with Sisters**

My field work in BOT with the pregnant mommies Wei-mi and Sweet-Q in their office also allowed me to identify an important characteristic in flight attendants’ occupational community. As the majority of flight attendants are women, and these women address one another other as sisters (Jie-jie and Mei-mei) when at work, it has been quite common to witness how women get together and share their experiences, and in such process they accumulate their common knowledge all could share.

Addressing one another as Jie-jie and Mei-mei implies that the seniority hierarchy has been the hidden occupational culture in this organization. Such a culture could still be salient in any worked-related setting that is outside the cabin. Yet, pregnancy has made these flight attendants share a common identity as a mother, the distance between the senior and the junior would be shortened immediately if it still exits. I observed that these pregnant mommies might still address one another Jie-jie/ Mei-mei in accordance with the seniority, but it was more like the language habits that could not be easily gotten rid of. As they are all pregnant women, the sharing, the rapport, the mutual understandings on their body and mindset changes, possible concerns and the considerations on family issues make this group turn into a supportive community. Wei-mi said,
Like many others (pregnant mommies) I really enjoy coming to the office everyday. One cannot see the same colleague in every flight, even with your colleague friends it could be quite difficult to see each other because we are all flying. And now we could get together everyday, talk about each other’s lives, exchange information together, sharing food, do on-line shopping as a group to save the delivery charges…this is a precious experience.

Recall flying mother Ching-ching who also commented her days as a pregnant mommy.

It was a lot of fun, definitely much better than staying at home to sleep all day long. Going to work makes all of us become energetic because you could talk to friends, check out and update the latest news or gossips in the company, laugh together….we were like real sisters. I was always in good mood.

In the work setting, flight attendants might not always have time to engage into some in-depth talk since they are on duty. And even if they wanted to, they could not always meet one another every day. Being a pregnant mommy and spending a few months together is undoubtedly a meaningful experience for flight attendants; it is the bonding of sisterhood. The sisterhood they share during this time is not based on their seniority in work relations but is based on their common identity as a mother.

Flying mothers share mutual understandings on their positions, concerns, happiness, worries and various emotional reactions they might have. It is very common to see two flight attendants who might not be familiar with each other in the beginning, build rapport as soon as they found they share the identity as a mother. Flying mothers would enthusiastically engage in discussions on childrearing as well as child care, all known as the “Mama Jin.”¹² For instance, from time to time on Facebook™ I would witness some flying mothers sharing a link regarding a good book on childrearing, or some useful information that could benefit other flying mothers as well. They may lend

¹² “Mama Jin” in mandarin refers to the dialogues and the topics mothers always like to discuss with other mothers, mostly are related to their children.
books to other colleague mothers when they have layover abroad for a few days and could have some quality time to read, without being interrupted by their children. Or a flying mother would talk about her thoughts on her children’s education that would stimulate some ardent conversations and discussions on the topic.

I kept hearing pregnant mommies as well as some flying mothers appreciate the valuable support they acquired from the flying mothers’ community. I suspected that flying mothers would see other flying mothers as one of the most importance sources to acquire their childrearing knowledge. To my surprise, I heard the opposite opinions in my interviews. Many flying mothers said they learned how to be a mother from their female family members, particularly from their mothers and sisters, as well as their female in-laws. I posed this question to flying mother June, “When you have questions about childrearing, or when you are not sure what to do with your children as a mother, who do you usually turn to for help or for opinion?”

J: To my mom. And also I would ask my elder sisters. They give me lots of opinions.

I: Not to your friends or the married colleagues?

J: Hmm…not really. I don’t mean a definitely no. If we have the dialogues we would share the experiences of course. But for questions I would ask my mother and my sisters. Particularly my two sisters. They are working moms; they have kids earlier than me so the questions I have they could answer me with their experiences.

June seemed to differentiate the behaviors of information-sharing and the question-answering/problem-solving, and therefore accordingly chose people she would first turn to: friends or colleagues are for the information-sharing; experienced female family members are for question-solving. When I reviewed the interviews with flying mothers regarding this topic, even though I might not ask the question in the same way as this
one I posed for June, I found experiences was the keyword. More specifically, they refer to different experiences such as,

My mother-in-law is a very nice person. I learned a lot from her, about how to rear my daughter. My mother… I’m from a single-parent family, and I think that, being a mother as a single mom is different. Of course my mother has experienced a lot, making the ends to meet, raising me all by herself… (she was almost in tears, looked as if she has a lump in her throat)… I want to raise my daughter as a good mother in a complete family, and this is what I didn’t have when I was little. And because of my job… I cannot be around all the time, so being a good mother is even more important.

This flying mother linked the good mother with the experiences of raising the children as a mother in a complete family in contrast to raising children as a single mother. She might also imply that a flying mother might fall out of the category of a good mother.

Here is a quote from another flying mother,

I turn to my mom. I guess every daughter turns to her mom for such questions like how to be a mother, right? Mother is always understanding and helpful. She has the experiences. Even though my mom was not a working mom, so there are some gaps she wouldn’t 100% understand…but she would help me out no matter what.

Flying mothers would turn to those who have experience in being a mother for learning about motherhood, which could be more standard motherhood. This may somewhat imply their concerns on whether they are still able to be a good mother as other working women, which I will discuss in next section. On the other hand, flying mothers find support from their sisters at work; those sisters who shared similar childrearing experiences with them. For instance,

The other day I was talking to a Mei-mei who just came back from pregnancy leave. She was debating if she would continue breastfeeding. I shared my experiences with her. It was extremely difficult. Some hotel room doesn’t have refrigerator, or the refrigerator was not big enough, so the first thing when you arrive at hotel is to ask the front desk to refrigerator the breast milk… it was so embarrassing you know you’re still in your uniform, in the lobby, lots of people watching….. I also told her the refrigerator
Breastfeeding experiences were a very specific topic in the information-sharing between flying mothers. While they may consult their other family members about this issue, they need to turn to their sisters at work who have experienced such process and have known all negotiation process and practical details (i.e. the refrigerator in different hotel). There could be emotional support. (i.e. overcoming the embarrassment one might experience). Another flying mother interview, she shared how she would ask other crewmembers to understand her situation because she needed to go to the toilet to squeeze breast milk very often, and it could bring much inconvenience during the busy in-flight service schedule. She told me she therefore for almost half a year did not operate the flights of which flight time is shorter than three hours, or she wouldn’t have enough time to perform “the inevitable mother’s rituals that only those who ever breastfeed would understand.”

From what I heard when talking with flying mothers, mothering behaviors are mainly learned through family members and its knowledge is passed down from generation to generation in the vertical direction. Information-sharing via personal experiences, on the other hand, is a horizontal knowledge-production process. Flying mothers share information they have with one another, such as loaning books or exchange thoughts on their children’s education as mentioned earlier. Also because of their occupational characteristics, there are things only other flying mothers would know, or would know better than the supporting resources from their female family members. So flying mothers would exchange tips and techniques that are more particularly useful to this community but might not be applicable to general working mothers. (Why would a
general working mother need to know about the refrigerator information in different foreign hotels?) When mothers get together it could be expected that they would have an enthusiastic discussion of child-rearing as they are sharing their Mama Jin with others. When flying mothers get together, the dialogues they have should be called “Mama Jin for Flying Mothers Only” since the information they would exchange is highly related to their occupational characteristics. It could range from the material resources they would like to provide for their children and family (e.g. where to buy certain brand of baby food for cheaper price or more varieties; the toy I bought for my son last time from Costco was fun and educational, you might also want to get one for yours; the omiyage\(^{13}\) bought in the duty-free sop at the airport could be perfect gift to give the in-laws) to the specific strategies in dealing with family arrangements. Here is an example from my field notes,

Since it was a flying mother, Lin’s birthday today, Sweet-Q planned a surprised party for her. Many flying mothers came in around 3:30 p.m. I was planning to leave BOT after 3 p.m. to avoid the possible traffic jam on the high way, and I wasn’t sure if it is okay to be in the party since I didn’t know Lin at all. But finally I decided to stay since Wei-mi and Sweet-Q sincerely invited me. Some other flying mothers invited their colleague friends who were in BOT as well. We turned off the light, closed the office door, and began singing a birthday song as soon as Lin stepped into the room. Lin was so happy for this surprise party and kept saying thank you. The atmosphere was so warm and touching. Through the dim candle light, I looked at all these faces and thought, we were indeed sisters, isn’t it?

As we were eating cakes, I heard the on-going dialogues among flying mothers. I immediately noticed that not all of them knew one another even though they were all pregnant mommies; or some of them knew each other as they once worked in the same flight before, but didn’t find out the other had also become pregnant. In any sense they could engage into chatting immediately by asking about the other’s pregnancy, due date, the gender of the baby, etc. I heard the group of pregnant mommies at the other end of

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\(^{13}\) This term is from Japanese, meaning the local specialty snack or food that tourists would like to buy, taking home with as gifts for their family and friends.
the table was discussing some nutrition supplemental drinks for mothers that they wanted to buy together to get a group discount, as what they were doing the same in buying some facial masks. I heard myself asking, “is the facial mask good?” while in the other side of the room a flying mother who stopped by for cake asked “Is the drink good? When do you take it?” And both of us received satisfying answers from other crew members’ feedback.

A flying mother I didn’t know asked Wei-mi about her current pregnancy. Wei-mi told her she is having her second daughter. So the dialogues at this side of the table have turned to the best timing to have the second kid. Wei-mi said she purposely planned to have her second daughter this year considering the age differences between two children. Someone talked about the interval between the childbirth is decided by the degree of tiredness she felt toward work. Another married flight attendant shared what she had heard from other flying mothers about the best timing. She thought that makes sense to her so she was planning to have her first one and asked maternal leave for 2 years, and at the end of the maternal leave she would have her second child to extend her leave as pregnant leave. So she could take care of the first one while she is pregnant with the second one. And when the second child is born, she could ask another 2-year maternal leave.

In this part of my field notes, we could see when a group of pregnant mommies and flying mothers get together, the possible atmosphere among them and the interactions they might have. Their discussions could vary from the topics on beauty products (as a female flight attendant who hopes to look good) to the topics on motherhood (as a pregnant woman; as a mother; or as a woman who is planning on her motherhood). What I would like to point out is: we actually see women’s different identities could be shifting and speaking at the same time. And in such a sharing process, together women produce their common knowledge that is peculiar and practical from their position; make sense of the ways to cope with the world they face.

Learning to be a Flying Mother

Besides the general topics all mothers regardless of their occupation are likely to discuss with their peers, another major theme in flying mothers’ conversation was the emotional support as well as the respective strategies because of their occupational
characteristics. There is a hidden common sense that such dialogues are less likely to happen between a female flight attendant and her male colleagues (i.e. pilots and male flight attendants.) Of course, there might be some practical information exchange (e.g. shopping information and tips) yet when it comes to other issues, particularly the emotional part, “it just doesn’t feel quite right to discuss with them,” as a flying mother said, “male flight attendants, I don’t know, they cannot understand everything we face even they might have been married and might have kids. The situations we face are different. For example, we have ‘Mama ban’ but have you ever heard ‘PaPa ban?’ Or maybe there could be same things or same feelings, but you just never hear them talk about it. The dialogues just wouldn’t happen.” In flying mothers’ opinions, male crewmembers do not face the same degree of pressure in taking care of the children after work or arranging their working schedules to fulfill their family responsibilities, and they could yield part of his responsibilities to his wife, so the dialogues between a flying mother and a “flying father” are seldom initiated.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we see different practical family arrangements and emotional strategies flying mothers adopt to cope with multiple requirements and responsibilities from their roles in public and private spheres. Through the sense-making process, flying mothers accumulate and share their common knowledge on motherhood from their standpoints and emotionally support others who are situated in the same position.

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14 In Mandarin this term means Daddy’s flight.

15 As a side note, in my field work I noticed male crewmembers, including both male flight attendants and male pilots, would face other pressure, such as lacking of time to accompany their children. Particularly for male pilots whose working schedules are more easily to be changed. But considering my limited time and energy, I focus more on flying mothers’ part at this point and leave my questions toward male flight attendants and pilots for my future research plan.
Women would learn from their female models such as their mothers or sisters about standard motherhood the society appreciates, and the cultural expectations about the mothering behaviors a good mother should have. Flying mothers therefore are likely to be trapped into the dilemma, doubting if they are still, or if they could be a good mother with the limitations their occupation imposed. The majority of the flying mothers I had interviewed ranged from 26 years old to early 40s in their age; they could be regarded as the sample representing the major group among contemporary Taiwanese working mothers, whose mothers and mothers-in-law are approximately in their 60s to 70s. For their female seniors’ generation, when they were in their daughter/daughter-in-law’s age, women did not always work outside home. And even if they did, they were more likely to engage in a traditional pink collar jobs. This implies that they might not be in an important position that had highly-demanding workload or frequent needs for traveling. For instance, in Chapter 4 we had discussed that Moon’s mother-in-law was a working mother when she was young. She thought that Moon should have no problem in taking care of her children as a working woman, without fully acknowledging that Taiwanese women today are in much different circumstances at work and could face more challenges in striking a balance between work and family, not mentioning that Moon was in an occupation that could make the situation even more challenging. This illustrates that conflicts between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law may result from these gaps, and there could been quite different interpretations of motherhood. The flying mothers could be even more untenable for their mothering behaviors if they are expected to live up with the same standards that could not always be accomplished due to their occupational characteristics.
I had a chance to interview a former female flight attendant Madam Wu who was in her 60s and had become a mother-in-law. She shared a lot of her experiences working in the flight attendants’ glamorous golden days in Taiwanese airline history. When she was young, it was very difficult to go abroad for Taiwanese people; becoming a stewardess\(^{16}\) meant this girl could have a privilege to travel, and it was almost a guarantee that she could be quite “competitive among mate-selection.” Madam Wu married a doctor. She said many of her colleagues “married well”; by “married well” she meant their husbands were doctors (like hers), rich business men who might lived abroad, a CEO of some international enterprises, just to name a few. At that time, married flight attendants had to transfer to a ground staff position if she did not want to resign from work. Madam Wu said if one is married well she would not need to work after getting married, or she would be asked not to work outside home to devote to the household full-heartedly. “Married-well is important. But not everyone married well. I was lucky.” As for herself, in the beginning she chose to transfer to a ground staff position so that she wouldn’t “feel bored at home.” Her work duty was to answer phone calls in the customers’ service center. After her first child was born, she quitted her job to take care of her family and to help in her husband’s newly-opened clinic. From her viewpoint, she was once a working woman outside home. After her two children were born, she became a full-time mother—even though she was helping in her husband’s clinic. In her opinion, “it is impossible to keep flying after having children. Mothers should be at home for children but flying could not allow mothers to do that.” I told her

\(^{16}\) She used stewardess instead of flight attendant to refer to this occupation in our interviews. I see this would also reflect the image of this occupation in the society was more glamorous; and it stressed even more on women’s sexuality.
today many flight attendants who are married and have children kept flying. She responded immediately, “but it must be hard for them right? I know for your, younger generation, many women have to work for financial reasons, or for other reasons.... Time and the society are different now. But maybe a ground position in the office is much better for their (flight attendants’) children’s sake.”

Madam Wu had some experiences in the airline industry and had been working outside her home. She could acknowledge the social class mobility due to marriage as well as its influence on women’s lives. She could also indicate the social changes that might impact on the generation of contemporary Taiwanese working mothers (“Time is different.”) But even with such background knowledge, it was still hard for her to completely agree with flying mothers’ choices. She tried to tell me in a very gentle way that she held some certain ideal expectations of motherhood that said mothers should give their children priority; therefore, she had doubts about flying mothers’ ability and willingness to accomplish the criteria for a good mother.

So we could assume that flying mothers are in the middle position between the traditional and the modern. What they learn about motherhood is about traditional mothering behaviors; what they have been expected to do is also based on the traditional standards; the role models or examples they might witness in their lives could be other general working mothers, however what they could fulfill could be quite different from all these expectations, traditions, or mothering behaviors that modern working mothers would practice. Flying mother Spring is one of my colleague friends. She has a son and her husband is a pilot in our company. The interview we did was one of the initial interviews I had after reentering the field in 2009. In our interview, Spring
said she had been considering quitting her job in the near future when her son goes to the elementary school. This was some news to me since I never heard her talking about this, so I asked her why, without thinking much about my question. Surprisingly, it took her quite a while to think before she could answer me, with some hesitation in her voice,

Hmm...why...... (long pause) because, I guess...everyone does so...after he goes to the elementary school, mama...I should keep an eye on his homework, pay attention to his test scores...about why....I don't know the reasons myself. I just feel this is the way it should be.

Maybe it was because this is my mother did when I was little so I feel this is the way. My mother wasn't working. I think many mothers help with their children's homework as they go to the elementary school whether they work or not. Education is important.

I asked if she would find another job if she decided to quit her job and about her husband's opinions upon this topic. She told me since her husband's salary could support the family, he said it depends on her decision. As for her, the problem was she had no idea of what job she could do,

I am seeking the chance in the company, if they release any inner opportunity to transfer to the office position I'd like to try. It's still in airline industry. I don't know about the work outside...my husband's salary could support the family but if possible I'd like to work too. It's not like I don't enjoy this job. So I haven't decided yet if I'd keep being a flight attendant or not. I'm still waiting to see if how things go after he (my son) goes to the elementary school.

Spring's reactions were quite similar to other flying mothers when they considered their career as I had discussed earlier in this chapter, but at that time I had no idea. On my way home that day, I kept thinking about Spring's hesitation and her being unable to clearly articulate her reasons behind her feelings. She was confused about her own position and her abilities in negotiating in-between. Since I was at the initial stage of my research, I thought it might be because I was naïve and unfamiliar with the (flying) mother's world, so it was hard for her to answer my ignorant question. In my following
interviews, I gradually realized that Spring was one of the examples that flying mothers are struggling with what should be done as a good mother (i.e. check homework as every mother does, including her own mother), what could be done with the fact that she was a flying mother, and her own thoughts on this occupation as career—the position of the self between these dimensions.

Spring linked her children’s education with her decision about continuing her flying career or not. There were some other flying mothers making similar connections, as children’s education is considered to be one of the good mother’s responsibilities. Flying mother Lan-yuan had her parents-in-law and a foreign domestic worker helping her taking care of her two children and the housework. She made distinctions between the work that could be done by others and the work that is her responsibilities that she could not and should not avoid:

I appreciate they cover for me...But there are still things that cannot be...done by others. For instance, I couldn’t ask my parents-in-law to check my son’s homework. They don’t understand the content. They could supervise him aside; ask him to go to finish his homework first...while his little sister plays her toys or watches TV...he may want to watch so badly that he just gets the homework done as soon as possible without double-check. My parents-in-law may check if he finishes the homework, sometimes they ask him to rewrite if his Chinese characters look bad. But they have no idea if he has made a lot of mistakes in the math questions.

Lan-yuan’s foreign domestic worker is from Indonesia. Lan-yuan had her take care of the housework, such as doing the laundry, cooking or cleaning. Lan-yuan shared what she had heard about role of the foreign domestic workers in some other flying mothers’ family:

In my family, because my husband is working abroad. I have to take care of my children all by myself. My Indonesia domestic worker helps with the housework. When I’m away, I’ll have her (the domestic worker) take my children to their grandparents’ home and sleep there. So at least some relative is around, they(her children) are not alone (with the domestic
I heard about a flight attendants’ couple, they sometimes have to leave their children to their domestic workers for a few days when they both have to be away. (I: A few days!) Yes! That’s risky isn’t it? There could be problem you know? Their children eat with her (the domestic worker), play with her, sleep with her…it’s like her children. That’s not a relative but a foreign worker who cannot speak Chinese. What if anything happens? I don’t know what they are thinking…

I felt shocked when hearing about such arrangements. Even though I had a chance to talk with some flying mothers whose husband were a pilot, I could not successfully recruit any flight attendant couples for interviewing their family arrangements. I came across a flight attendant couple and their two children in a former colleague’s wedding. In our casual chatting, the wife, a senior crew member, told me she and her husband always carefully compared their assigned monthly schedule when they got it, and then swap flights respectively to ensure that at least one of them could be in Taipei with their kids.

My impression was, even though some flying mothers depend on their relatives (particularly the grandparents) as well as their foreign domestic workers to share their responsibilities at home, they differentiate the part that could be outsourced, and the part they would try their best to get done by themselves. This is considered one of the important mothering indicators they set for themselves. Like Lan-yuan, flying mother Ching-lin also indicated similar ideas of differences.

I happened to discuss this with other crewmembers in my previous flight. Our children are having mid-term lately. This is the first mid-term week in the elementary school. A Jie-jie said she exchanges flights this month to guarantee that she'll have off days in Taiwan before her son's mid-term. Another Jie-jie said she only slept 4 hours the night before this flight. She needed to help her son review and prepare for his mid-term till 11:00 p.m. And the reporting time of this flight was 5 a.m. She got up at 3 o’clock.

Ching-lin said, “For taking care of children, you could ask helpers. But for educating them, like reviewing their school work, you could not ask someone else.” The
discussions she had on the flight with other Jie-jies were also coherent with this idea.

Many flying mothers see supervising their children’s school work is their unavoidable
duty. Below are some quotes from different flying mothers. In my interviews, sometimes
flying mothers would lecture me about how to be a good mother and here we could
observe some examples:

It is important to pay attention to their school work since they are little.
When you have children you’ll understand what I mean. The school work in
the elementary school is easy, so make best of this time to develop their
ability, good learning habits…if the test scores are bad they’ll be easy to
lose interests in school work.

Jie-jie when you get married and have children…when your child is about to
go to kindergarten you could come back to ask me. I have done a lot of
research on good kindergartens and made a list I could share with you….A
good kindergarten should have certain characteristics……teaching them to
read but not to make them write , Mandarin and English--bilingual
education…..

From their lectures, I quickly got a sense of what they cared about children’s education.

And this seems not to be unique among working mothers,

The elementary school work today is not easy. It’s unlike when we were
little. They have a lot of school work and home work, and that’s
obviously…the kids cannot do by themselves without parents’ help. They
require parents’ involvement. The other day I make joke of it with my
husband as we were both helping to finish the art homework for our sons:
it’s not kid’s homework; it’s our parents’ homework.

I wonder how other working mothers do about this? My sense is my
daughter’s classmates’ mothers are also doing what I am doing. Most
mothers, as long as they care about their kid’s performance, they teach,
supervise, and monitor their children’s work. My daughter once said,
“Inging’s mother accompany her to do her math questions everyday, why
can’t you accompany me?” Inging is my daughter’s best friend. I talked to
her mom before and she is a busy working mother. Sometimes she won’t
be able to arrive home after 8 p.m.

Flying mothers with children in the elementary school usually have concerns about
whether their children could achieve well in school, at least they would expect that
children would not fall behind their class. This is one of “the mother’s responsibilities,” in their own words. Since flying mothers find that other working mothers are mothering their children in certain way, and that mothering falls into the part flying mothers consider to be their responsibility that should not be outsourced, they made efforts to achieve the same standard.

But there must be some criteria flying mothers could not meet, or they felt that they are not doing what other working mothers do because of their limited time and energy, and this makes them feel a sense of guilt, doubting if they are providing their best to their children.

The other day I heard a Jiejie said she would try to cook for her husband and children as long as she could arrive home at before the meal time no matter how tired she is. I said I always buy take-out bento to feed them. Jiejie said homemade meals represent love and should not be replaced by take out all the time. I guess I am not a diligent wife and mother as much as Jiejie.

I am thinking…my sister-in-law who is a flight attendant but she is also working, she sometimes cannot arrive at home till 7 p.m. but she cooks everyday, supervises her sons to do their homework, does housework and everything. I am not doing the same things. I am the lazy mother type. I couldn’t reprimand myself too hard because if I do everything I'll be exhausted. But sill I feel guilty sometimes.

I feel I’m not a good mother even though I know I could have more time for my child when I have off days in Taipei, even though my child could have more materials….but sometimes I still feel I am not as good as the traditional mothers., like my mothers-in-law who could cook healthy meals for him, I feel she provides better care for my son than me.

Flying mothers could identify the dilemmas they are trapped into and question themselves if they could be a good mother. However, their feelings of perplexity could be relieved when realizing they are not alone. Flying mothers share their mothering experiences with one another, like the pregnancy mommies I had encountered in BOT. They would encourage one another. For example,
When my maternal leave ended and just returned to work, in the first month I always missed my baby very much no matter it was a short or a long-haul flight. It I talked about it in the galley, or if someone asked and I said, senior Jie-jie would share their experiences with me. They said as long as you are away, don’t think about it. Because you cannot manage it, so forget it. Enjoy the time of yourself. Indeed this was useful.

I always tell new mothers: they’ll grow up anyway whether you’re beside them or not. Why bother to think about it too much?

In Chapter 5 I discussed how flying mothers would try to transfer negative emotions into positive ones. They also use such a strategy to consider their dilemmas:

I think I am a good mother. Even though I could not be there for my daughter all the time like other mothers do, when I have the full day off I could have even more time to accompany her to play. That is what other working mothers could not give for their children.

I don’t know if I could be considered as a good mother or not. I guess I am but…our job is different. I only think since I believe it is the best way I could do, and I am loving my son, not less than any other mother.

The time I could accompany him is different from other mothers but this is because I have to work. It’s not like I could not accompany him so I am not as good as other mothers. If I’m not in good mood, or if I’m tired, I couldn’t provide the best quality time with him. So quality is even more important than being at his side every day.

I could not ignore the efforts on accountability flying mothers make when they talk about their family lives and their mothering. These efforts are subtly expressed in different forms: in the way they talked about the material resources they could provide because of their occupation; in the way they talked about the expensive tuitions for the bilingual primary school their children could go because they could afford; or in the ways they hide or control their feelings to make their behaviors accountable. And the accountability make flying mothers think they could still be categorized into the good mother group. They see their choices were the best choice as being a mother in the intersecting position between work, family, gender role, cultural expectations and self. This is how
the powers shape flying mothers’ identities and how women resist the powers in the structures. We could not identify these efforts toward accountability without in-depth probing on emotion.

I don’t know… I guess I never say, or I never think about this until I am talking to you at this moment. I am trying to prove myself to the others I am doing it right… (I was about to say something to her) No I don’t mean you… or maybe you or anyone else. I have to think I’m doing my best or what else I could do?

I am satisfied with my current life, it’s not I am suffering or anything. I love flying; I have a good husband and two sweet children; my parents-in-law are understanding and supportive. Our family lives might be different, you know, comparing to the normal ones. But is it that because I’m not always at home my children will be bad? NO of course NOT. But sometimes you have to prove it to the others who ask you about this.

I gradually realized the ways flying mothers talk about their lives in the way of justifying themselves; their behaviors and decisions. This justification was not for me, but actually for the others, for their family members and for themselves.

**A Room for Myself**

Flying mother Yuan who negotiated with her husband so that she would not have to resign from her flight attendant job for financial reasons. In fact, she was thinking something else:

I love this job! Why do I quit because others tell me to do so? But if I say that directly I would sound selfish. In any way I’m not going to quit! It is the only space I have for myself!

Yuan was not the only one who had such feelings,

I don’t want to leave my job because even though there are a lot of sufferings I needs to go through, at least I have some space for myself when I am away. When I am abroad I don’t have to face everything in the house all the time.

While hearing story after story about how flying mothers would sacrifice themselves to fulfill their responsibilities, I somewhat felt relieved (with genuine pleasure) to hear such
secret voices from the bottom of flying mothers’ heart: being a mother is not everything to them all the time. Flying mothers think sometimes they would also want to prioritize their self in front of other things, and one of the benefits they could acquire from the identity as a flight attendant is: this occupation allows them to fulfill this secret wish from time to time.

When I was talking with a flying mother about swapping for Mama ban, she suddenly confessed to me that she occasionally would say to her husband and her mother-in-law (who took care of her daughter during the day) that she could not find anyone to swap her flights, so she could fly to the destination she really likes.

This month there is a 5-day flight to Frankfurt on my assigned schedule. I haven’t been to Europe for a long time and kind of miss it. So when I swapped flights I purposely kept this one on my schedule and told my husband I couldn’t find anyone for this flight, so sorry in those 5 days I’ll have to depend on you to take care of our daughter. I pretended to be very sorry but in my mind I was singing: yeah I’m going to Frankfurt!

We both laughed after her confession, and she continued,

Well but I have to say, even though I’ve been so excited about this flight, on the day I left, when I saw my daughter’s cute face and my husband… I did have a sense of guilty in mind, thinking well maybe it was not a good idea after all because I left them alone, a father with his daughter, too poor little things depending on each other… that kind of image came up in mind. But on the other hand I was telling myself, no you have to go to fly this flight. You deserve it. You are hardworking so you should give yourself a little treat sometimes.

Anyway I enjoyed my stay in Frankfurt, we crewmembers went out for a tour together and it was a lot of fun. I haven’t had such trip for a long long time. But I missed them (her husband and her daughter) as well. So it ended up when I went shopping I didn’t buy anything for myself but all stuff I got was for them.

From this flying mother’s secret confession we could see she chose to let her “self” speak out for what she wants, so she took the initiative to give herself a reward by making use of her occupational characteristics to take a break from her family
responsibilities. She recognized that getting away contributes to her emotional well-being positively even if her roles as a wife and a mother somewhat occupied her mind. Since it is hard the outsiders to fully understand the occupation, it becomes a possible path when flying mothers sometimes do not want to “put my family in front of me” and hope to pursue “what I really want.” Another senior flying mother said,

I don’t want to social with some of my husbands’ side of relatives. They are annoying to me. I don’t want to cook for them, for the family reunion meal on Chinese New Year’s Eve. Yes I’m the daughter-in-law and I should do this. But I just DON’T want to. So every year I purposely swap an outbound flight on New Year’s Eve. Every flying mother wants to swap a flight to stay in Taiwan and I’m doing the opposite way. My husband knows about it. He said, at least not every year, okay?

In this case this flying mother, used her occupational characteristics to avoid one of the responsibilities ascribed by her role as a daughter-in-law in the big family, and her motivation was also prioritizing herself.

Sometimes, flying mothers are not acting for a rebellious resistance like this Chinese New Year’s Eve scenario. They only need to have a small break, a little bit of freedom and some space that no one would interrupt them. When they have a layover abroad, their hotel room becomes a room of their own.

I think one of the best things I enjoy this job so much after becoming a mother is when I am abroad, I could leave everything behind and enjoy the time for myself. I don’t have to attend to anyone but only myself.

I swap flights… I like the flights to South-East Asia especially to Bangkok most. (I: Why?) Because like Bangkok, everything is cheap, you could go to massage, eat delicious food, do my nails, go shopping, and go to massage again. It a total relaxation trip as if I’m still a single lady, I don’t have any husband and kid to “serve” at home.

When my daughter was little, she was not the type easy to rear. She always had little issues, crying all night for no reason; easily to get cold…I was exhausted; everyday I didn’t have enough sleep. And when I had a layover that is the only time, valuable time I could sleep as much as I wanted to without a baby crying. Even to Bali I didn’t go to SPA but went to bed
directly as soon as I checked in at 4 p.m. and slept till the next day noontime for picking up.

Flying mothers talked about how the time abroad allows them to enjoy time as a single woman without a family burden, do what they want to do as they do not have to “serve” anyone but themselves. After prioritizing their “self”, they see they could be ready for their fights in the real life:

To fly a 2-day short flight is like a recharging trip whether I would have chance to do some shopping or to eat something nice. Even I might do nothing much but stay in the hotel room to sleep, I’ll feel refreshed again and I’ll be in good mood when going home.

I’ll feel recharged and refreshed after having a layover abroad. And I’ll be ready to face my family and my children. I think this is good for them as well because I’m no longer an exhausted mother.

Since flight attendants need to travel frequently, they could be more likely to have occasional opportunities to get a break from their routine work for family, to enjoy time and space for themselves and to feel refreshed again. To the general working mothers, such opportunities could be their luxurious dream. So when flying mothers have a chance to “give it a try” for other career chances, they might realize by quitting their job they would also lose such frequent time and space when they would like to prioritize themselves. And this becomes one of the major factors that urge them to stay in their flying career. Flying mother Ching-lin said,

I sometimes feel I’m flying everywhere, my work, my family, my children, everything…I’m like small fragmental pieces scattered everywhere. And doing what I want to do in the hotel room makes me become a complete person again.

**Sexuality of Mothers**

Ching-lin continued telling me about things she likes to do when she was in a hotel room abroad that makes her feel she is a complete person, or more specifically to say,
a complete woman: to practice her beauty ritual that she would not have time to do at home from head to toe. The process would take her at least 2 hours including hair treatment, facial, body scrub, hot water bath with aroma essential oil and self-massage. I immediately responded to her with surprise, “Hey! Jiejie! These are also what I always liked to do in a hotel room when I was flying!” Ching-lin said, “Did you? We are women and being a woman it is important to maintain our beauty, no matter how old we are, no matter if we are married or if we have children or not.”

Indeed both of us knew we were in an occupation that highly stressed women’s sexuality at work. The uniform, the make-up, the grooming rules, the high-heeled shoes as well as the gendered emotional labor kept reminding us of our identity as a woman. After talking to Ching-lin, I reflected on my impressions of flying mothers when I was at work. I seldom perceived the differences between me as a single flight attendant with them as a married working mother. We were all dressed up with our make-up. I treated them as my colleagues: pretty, smart. We worked together and interacted with people in this setting with certain manners we anticipated the others would respond in certain way. Some of my married colleagues were slim and beautiful; their stunning beauty and young look often made me assume they were as being young and single as I was. I often forgot that my glamorous colleagues might also have other identities as wives and mothers.

So Ching-lin’s words reminded me to rethink how sexuality is highly emphasized at work. Responding to that, flying mothers also keep in mind that they should be a beautiful woman at work. They might have interacted with the passengers with the characteristics coming from their identity as a mother, as discussed in the gendered
emotion labor section in the previous chapter. They might be able to project a mature woman’s image that a young, single flight attendant could not project, but this could not fully override the requirements about beauty that come along with the occupation.

Several of flying mothers mentioned the relations they see between work and their femininity.

When I put on my uniform I am a female flight attendant, because I dress up. I look quite different from the mother image. And it’s good for me in many ways. It reminds me I could still look beautiful even I’ve become someone’s mother.

And obviously, my son prefers his mother’s face with makeup. This is very interesting he is still so little. He once commented, “Mama you look more beautiful when you are in the uniform, could you pick me up from school in the uniform?”

Some flight attendants talked about their identity shifts and the influences on femininity accordingly,

When hanging out with other flying mothers our topics are always about children. But of course there are also topics on beauty. All crewmembers are interested into that whatever our age may be.

I’m so glad I come back to this work, or I don’t know how “big” I would become. Since the uniform reminds you of your body, and you are witnessing other crewmembers are so slim, you’d remind yourself to lose some weight to look good. Because of the uniform I could keep figure.

I always don’t quite like putting on make-up and my make-up for work is not like perfect, you know what mean. I’m always like this. But once a purser told me, you might want to put on more make-up because you’re a mother now. I said why? Because I’m older so I need more make-up to hide my age? She said the main reason is if you are more serious with your make-up now, people wouldn’t think you’re losing your beauty because you’ve become a sloppy mother.

From the quotes above, we see different interpretations of femininity after a woman has acquired her new identity as a mother. The demonstrations of femininity as a mother could exist in the mother-like interactions with passengers; through one’s viewpoints of
their self when their identities shift from family to work or from work to family; in the ways one is disciplined by the peer pressure as well as the prevailing body images. The demonstrations of femininity is fluid, in multiple formats that could all exist at the same time.

So I should not feel surprised or perplexed if I witness a flying mother demonstrating her sexuality in the ways that are different from the general impressions of mothers. One flying mother I interviewed was well-known among crewmembers because of her beautiful face, her outgoing characteristics and her interests in clubbing. She was one of the dancing team members that had performances when the company has important events. I got in touch with her through a video of the dancing team’s performance on the 50th anniversary celebration ceremony of China Airlines which was posted on the Facebook™. She dressed like a star in the musical Chicago, danced in quite a feminine and sexy way. That was a very impressive performance. I went to her home to interview her. While I sat in her living room, watched this well-known former colleague folding clothes (including some sexy lingerie and panties) when talking to me, I could not associate her clean face with the hot dancer in the video. Without make-up, she looks like a little girl much younger than me. I did feel confused because before I left home for this interview, I was checking her Facebook™ page and found she posted latest hot photos taken in a club with her girlfriends from the party on the previous night. Some of her girlfriends are flying mothers as well. If our conversations were not related to her daughter at all, I could forget I was interviewing a flying mother and assume I was talking to a hot, single, beautiful flight attendant.
In reflection on my own thoughts about her, I realized how easily one could be fooled by the gender stereotypes of mothers: being a mother does not take away one’s pursuit of femininity, and the demonstrations of femininity are not eliminated after acquiring the identity of mother. Couldn’t a flying mother who is situated in this specific position and experiencing multiple powers from different dimensions demonstrate her sexuality in the ways that would not be associated with motherhood? How would Taiwanese mothers consider their femininity demonstrations? These preliminary explorations of flying mothers’ views on sexuality could be a starting point for further investigation.

**Summing up**

In this chapter we saw how women shared and constructed flying motherhood together through their experiences. From all the examples and quotes presented in this chapter, I would like to point out three important final remarks. First, flying mothers are constructing their motherhood together through the knowledge production process. They recognized the dilemmas they face, and might be struggling between the expectations of their family roles and the limitations from their work roles. They could not always acquire appreciation for their mothering efforts they deserved to have, but they could be empowered mutually within the community of flying mothers who share the same experiences with them. Second, when talking about motherhood we should take mothers’ feelings and their emotional self into account. Because motherhood is composed of a series of complicated shaping process involving powers from different dimensions. To resist the powers coming into the shaping process, women would also be adjusting their feelings for what they could and could not do, particularly when they need to persuade and to convince others and their self that they are doing the best for
the children when their identity as a good mother is being challenged. Third, how flying mothers prioritize their self by making full use of the occupational characteristics illustrates women’s agency is playing an important role in their resistance to the powers and oppressions, even though not all working mothers could have same privilege as flying mothers have. When we examine the demonstration of women’s self, we need to carefully acknowledge the different aspects and formats in the exhibitions. I sense even though not all Taiwanese women have owned a room of their own, they are heading in this direction.
CHAPTER 7
LOVE STRUGGLE AND FLY

I carry your heart with me. (I carry it in my heart.) I am never without it
(anywhere I go you go, my dear; and whatever is done by only me is your
doing, my darling)

— e.e. cummings, I carry your heart with me

My best colleague friend Yi-Fang was getting married in the summer I went back
to the United States preparing for the final stage of my study; therefore I could neither
be her bridesmaid nor be at her wedding ceremony as we once planned. In Taiwanese
wedding culture, the newly-wed couples often prepare a video about their love story to
show their guests in the ceremony. Since I could not be there, Yi-Fang shared the video
of their love stories with me before her wedding. We have been such close friends like
sisters for so many years yet I did not know an important fact until I viewed the video: in
order to maintain a long distance relationship with her boyfriend when they were dating,
Yi-Fang swapped 48 flights to Los Angeles in two years. This means on average she
had two flights to the United States each month. I was in awe because I knew how
much hidden effort she had made to make this happen. On the phone I asked her about
this and told her my admiration for her determination for their love. Yi-Fang said, “Well,
only we flight attendants really understand how difficult it is to swap flights. He (her
husband) could never really see the hard parts. But that’s fine. He is returning to Taiwan
because of me so my love was not a waste.” We then talked about how we
crewmembers are often willing to sacrifice a lot for people we love, and we would make
all efforts to be with them, to make them smile, and to give them the best we could offer.
Because of our job, we need to strive much more to make many things happen. Isn’t it
also true considering what we have heard about flying mothers’ experiences?
After reviewing countless positive and negative scenarios that illustrate flying mothers’ happy and frustrating emotional moments in their daily lives, in this concluding chapter, I will discuss the sense-making progress of the sacrifice and efforts flying mothers make, followed by the structural powers that situate contemporary Taiwanese women. With the close examinations of both the public and the private spheres of women’s lives we see lots of evidences of how these two spheres intersect and intertwine. My argument is that the dichotomy in the existing theories which usually separate work and family into two realms could not fully address the reality in women’s lives. Our traditional theoretical models of work-family conflicts and spillovers should be informed by intersectional perspectives to approach the core of the oppression, and how women exhibit and interpret their subjectivity and agency. Specifically, themes that will be discussed in this chapter begin with reviewing the inadequate approaches to work and family in current literature. Acknowledging such gap leads us to further consider what used to be thought in the personal, private sphere (i.e. emotional efforts; family issues) should actually be brought to the spotlight. I conclude by suggestion how a theory of intersectionality could contribute to further dialogues.

The Inadequate Current Approach to Work and Family

As mentioned earlier an important keyword I kept coming across in my field was Time. In the donut shop I once overheard a mother telling her son who was about 4 years old, “I have to work today so you have to behave yourself.” I had no idea to how much degree the little boy really understood the meaning of work. On the other hand, I would like to question if we as adults ever engage in a deeper thinking about the meaning of work to us? And what is its relationship with Time? Because of occupational characteristics, for flying mothers Time could carry multiple meanings all at once when
we see how multiple demands, responsibilities and needs from work, family, as well as one’s self always compete together in their lives. This fact is not flight attendants’ exclusively, but because of their occupation it is possible to identify such facts that could also apply to other working mothers (or fathers) more easily. Examination of flying mothers’ experiences reveal that the current approaches in sociology of work could neglect the importance of Time if we simplify the model into the work-family conflicts or spillover. For instance, the airline and the flying mothers have different interpretations of the meaning of Time during layovers. Also, while we may witness how frequent travels have brought difficulties and tensions in flying mothers’ families, women’s subjectivity still comes into play when we hear how flying mothers aim to keep some space for their complete self. From these flying mothers’ experiences, we could see their decision-making process in terms of their career options (i.e. keep working as a flight attendant or resign to find a comparatively stable position) involves quite complicated factors. They would hesitate and ponder along the way, no matter what their final decision would be.

On the other hand, the difficulties flying mothers face in juggling demands of different domains reflect the rigid, out-of-date images and expectations placed on married women’s family lives. Today, many Taiwanese middle-class families composed of young parents in their late 20s to 30s have adjusted to the rapid social and economic changes in order to accommodate both their family responsibilities and financial needs accordingly. Women may choose to continue their work after having children and outsource their child-caring duties to the elder generations in the family or the professional care-givers such as the nanny, the childcare center or the foreign domestic
helpers. At the first sight, it seems that Taiwanese modern women are pursuing their career and self-accomplishment, which could be seen as an evidence of gender equality in employment. Yet, upon examining flying mothers’ lived experiences, we could actually witness many examples illustrating the other side of independence. The adjustments modern Taiwanese middle-class families adopt still tend to follow the traditional expectations of women’s family roles, as we could see the expected duties flying mothers are expected to perform as a good mother and a good daughter-in-law in the family. We think that women in Taiwan are now equal to men because gender discrimination has been largely diminished in the past decades with the Taiwanese feminists and activist pioneers’ efforts. Legally speaking, women are even more protected in the labor rights in their pregnancy and during the demanding child caring years. I have to argue that these positive facts are only partially correct because we could clearly identify how flying mothers negotiate in different scenarios when they could not perform their responsibilities as other general working mothers do. The general working mothers might also struggle as much as flying mothers do, and they might lose control emotionally due to fatigue or pressure, but at least they could still perform the routine mothering work by practicing the more traditional mothering behaviors. Flying mothers often fail to practice in the same way, so they have to depend on other family members’ support and understanding to their untraditional mothering behaviors. There is a gap between the assumed mothering and the real mothering practice.

After identifying such a gap, we could proceed to the next step by seeking possible solutions. Flying mothers’ experiences demonstrate that our images of
mothering could not address the diversity in real practice; therefore it would even be harder for the cases which fall out of the category to obtain the support they need. And it could be a win-win situation for both the employers and the employees if the gap could be diminished. For instance, from the stance of the crew management and the airline company, keeping the senior female flight attendants could benefit the in-flight service quality because they are more experienced employees after years of training in this occupation. While senior female flight attendants are also more likely to have other family obligations as a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. In my research we see these women still depend on themselves as well as other personal resources and support because the company management so far has failed to take these into account since family issues are considered to be personal matters. Flying mothers may appreciate the company following the related labor regulations and laws to provide the pregnant ones “Pregnant Mommy” position, but undoubtedly there could be much more room to give flying mothers more flexibility in terms of their family roles One of the examples is the monthly roster that makes all flight attendants suffer, particularly the flying mothers as I had discussed in Chapter 4. A flying mother in China Airlines pointed out:

Everyone has different requirements and needs according to their family situations and arrangements. Say, I like to have off days in the weekend; another’s husband may be on roster as we do so she does not really need to have weekend off; or the other wants to have shorter Mama Ban and doesn’t care about the off days…everyone has different requests, then they (the company)…why not give us all we want? It’s the age of computer and I believe it could be done by some program or something. It is not that hard. It’s that they don’t want to do; they don’t want to give us convenience. They would say doing so will cost more money. I don’t think so. Even if it costs some money, comparing to other money they spent on fuel or on the aircraft….this is nothing okay? And we are talking about 2000 flight
attendants and their families here. Not to mention the female pilots. They have families too right?

I agree with her for I also think more humane, reasonable and considerate monthly rosters for flight attendants (as well as pilots) are possible, because that already exists in some international airline companies. In Eva Air, flight attendants could list their flight preference for the next month¹ (i.e. a guaranteed day off on a certain date; a long-haul flight) so we do understand loading the advanced requests into the roster programming system is possible with certain existing roster programs. In Cathay Pacific, flight attendants could swap flights as many times as they wanted to without the punishment rules like forbidding swapping in two months after asking sick leave. In Emirates Airlines, married flight attendant couples could request to have the same long-haul flights with their spouse.²

I would like to suggest that if the airline company really treasures the value of their employees, then carefully taking the issues that occur in the private sphere (e.g. family lives; emotion) into account is more crucial than it is usually assumed to be. As said this would benefit both the employers and the employees, because “A happy flight attendant brings a happy passenger. But when my mind is occupied with other bitterness in my own life, how could the company expect me to be a happy flight attendant as always?”

Reconsidering the Realm of the Private Sphere

While abundant literature on work-family conflicts has been established in current sociology scholarship, it would fail to depict the whole story if we set a clear-cut

¹ Even though it must be noted that such requests might not be fulfilled because of the adjustment of the monthly schedule by the company after the roster is given.

² This information was obtained from the data collection in the field and in certain forum on the Internet. However I did not have chance to interview an Emirate’s flight attendant for further questions regarding its details in practice. I was also interested in its benefits for flight attendants’ families as well.
distinction between these two ends without recognizing the ambiguous reality. Therefore I argue what used to be considered private issues must be formally brought to center on the table. Particularly when issues in the private spheres often directly impact on women’s lives, as we could observe from flying mothers’ experiences.

I urge we should address the emotional aspects in a much more formal format. My first point is, even though the service industry is highly related to the emotional labor, the efforts to control one’s emotion are usually not highly valued, because these efforts could not always be seen superficially; could not be evaluated and measured to calculate the value. As the result they are thought to be dealt with by oneself through personal mental mechanisms. In fact, from what flight attendants need to do about their emotion (i.e. the emotional work after work) we have to insist that the emotional labor should be much more appreciated. My second point is, emotion should not be considered as separable as always. Personal emotion is usually required to be confined to the private realm as an indicator of the service givers’ professional attitude. The emotional work after work flight attendants do make us see how flight attendants are instilled with such ideas about being a professional one by hiding their true feelings on the spot and then releasing their emotional tension later on. Also, we witness how flying mothers made efforts to separate their personal emotion due to family issues from their occupational lives. This demonstrates that emotion could be resulted from both the public and the private life at the same time. Our understandings of the occupational positions that relate to performing the emotional labor should be updated by acknowledging its highly gendered nature and how the emotional efforts in the personal
lives may also come into play, especially when the service-providers are most likely to be women.

In the field many flying mothers could clearly articulate how the company regarded their family issues as personal matters, and that their personal emotions are what they should deal with by themselves. A flying mother said:

They don’t care about your personal things, family things…they think it’s your personal issues. They don’t care about it. If you cannot do it, then quit—they would say so. A Mei-mei had some family issue so she went to "communicate with the office" to see if she could ask leave for a month, and she could still hold position but without salary. Because of her family issue did not qualify the requirement for asking that kind of leave, the office manager said, "Have you considered quitting the job? I think maybe this is not an appropriate job for you anymore."

The office manager, gently and firmly, conveyed the message: you are not qualified for this job as a flight attendant. As I have discussed before airline companies define an important qualification of a flight attendant to be a controllable woman who follows the company rules. Flying mothers, like other all flight attendants, also need to abide by the rules. Therefore they would find they are facing such situation: if you cannot be a "normal" flight attendant; if your family could not be normal enough to make you operate your duties as other normal flight attendants; if you could not leave the personal affairs in your personal lives behind, then the company is less likely to be supportive because the existing structure does not have the flexibility to accommodate your personal issues from the private sphere. That poor flying mother who wanted to negotiate for some understanding and flexibility was told by the manager, "I do sympathize with your situation. But you have to understand that the company has our position. If every flight attendant comes to us begging for mercy and exception, what are we going to do? Isn’t it unfair to others who don’t have personal issues? .....We are not charity."
This serves as an example that under the guideline of capitalism, enterprises such as the airline companies aim to make the largest benefits. Therefore in such institutions, personal and emotional encounters in the private sphere would fail to be taken into account because these are usually considered to affect the enterprises’ goal of making benefits. Personal issues are considered hard to be fully controlled and monitored, for they are too individualized to be managed under specific rules. Therefore, an airline company could practice a family-friendly policy such as the Pregnant Mommy program we had discussed, while on the other hand, we identified countless scenarios in flying mothers’ everyday lives which illustrating that women’s sufferings and sacrifices in accommodating their family needs have not been fairly attended to. Pregnant Mommy policy refers to a specific period in women’s live that could be managed by certain standardized procedures, such as assigning them to certain office work in certain positions. But women’s daily encounters would differ case by case and be hard to manage (“If every flight attendant comes to us……what are we going to do?”). From flying mothers’ experiences we could clearly see these daily encounters are the major source s of women’s physical tiredness and emotional pressure; yet because they are in the private realm and not thought to be carried to the public sphere for more attention.

Because of their occupational characteristics, flying mothers would need much more flexibility to accommodate their family needs. Since family needs on the daily basis could not be fully attended to and supported, women engaging in this occupation would turn to their personal, family network to acquire support. This usually meant that other family members—especially the elder generations—would have to share the childcare responsibilities. A nanny or a good 24-hour childcare center could also be an
option if the flying mothers’ families could locate an appropriate one. In addition, it is quite common to find the employment of foreign women domestic workers among flight attendants’ families. They rely on these domestic workers for the housework and for the child-caring chores.

Even though it seems that flying mothers depend on the elder generations majorly because of the flexibility consideration, the child-care arrangements did not sound different compared to the general working mothers’ cases in Taiwan. Flying mothers as one group among the contemporary Taiwanese women face the same issues as other Taiwanese working mothers face: the supporting system of child-rearing and child-caring is not yet complete in the social welfare. As discussed in Chapter 2, we began to see certain improvement in social policies such as the subsidies for childcare leaves. Taiwanese society still has a long way to address and accommodate the needs of contemporary Taiwanese families.

**Renew the Definition of being Good**

I had argued that when at work, female flight attendants are women made to fly. Women’s bodies, emotions and behaviors were always monitored and supervised in order to project the impression the airline company promotes for the enterprise’ benefits. On the other hand, in a traditional Taiwanese family, what a woman is expected to do is also monitored, supervised and disciplined by power from different dimensions. Similar to the idea that women are made to fly, the lived experiences of flying mothers demonstrate that Taiwanese women could also be made to become a mother through a certain good mother framework. We might not be able to clearly articulate such a framework until we examine a non-typical woman’s occupation as a flight attendant. In addition, flying mothers’ family could be regarded as a miniature of the middle-class
double-salary families in Taiwan. Because of the improvement in women’s rights in education and employment over the past decade, Taiwanese women in contemporary society are more independent in pursuing their own career paths. We may therefore misunderstand that because women could also contribute to the family financially, women’s gender roles would also change in the double-salary family, which is the major trend in Taiwanese society. Through the examination of the micro-level interactions flying mothers have with their family members, we could identify it is a myth if we think in this way.

Flying mothers’ experiences also inform the current gender and family scholarship by suggesting cultural perspectives on the role of daughter-in-law. When work-family conflicts discussions are informed by Chinese/ Taiwanese cultures, we see the cultural expectations of gender roles impose heavy pressure on working mothers. Particularly, as shown in the case articulated in Chapter 4, for flying mothers whose work does not allow them to take care of their children “in the right time,” the tension accumulated between the traditional (as the mothers-in-law represent) and the modern women who do not work as other ordinary working mothers (as flying mothers represent.) The hidden cultural expectations of women’s roles create the ideal/good working mothers’ behaviors which women in occupations with non-traditional working hours can hardly fulfill. The ideal working mothers’ behaviors are mainly based on the jobs that would allow mothers to still attend to childcare in a specific way. Female flight attendants, for example, cannot always be at home for their children in the evening and on the weekend (“the right time”) as the ideal working mother model anticipates. Since double-salary families are often seen, flying mothers are not competing with the stay-at-home
moms but with the general working mothers. And such competition with the good working mother model would exhaust them.

In the middle between tradition and modern, flying mothers demonstrate how Taiwanese women would apply different techniques in negotiating with the elder generations’ expectations of them. In Chapter 4, I had discussed the flying mother Moon’s strategy. By making her mother-in-law realize the long working hours that outsiders may not be aware of, she sophisticatedly revealed her sufferings to acquire her mother-in-law’s consideration of her tiredness. I came across other flying mothers who would also adopt a similar strategy in different scenarios. I see by doing so, flying mothers actually hope to acquire more than help and understanding when they could not fulfill the traditional expectations imposed upon them. They would reveal their sufferings or standpoints to their family members when they might be questioned if they can be qualified as a good wife, a good mother or a good daughter-in-law. This is an example how modern working mothers are suffering from the struggles between the gaps of their roles. With their limited time, energy, and emotional tolerance, these women need to figure out a strategy to deal with the possible challenges to their stances.

In addition to the negotiations with expectations from outside, flying mothers also demonstrate the negotiations they have within themselves. They realize because of their occupational characteristics they could not always perform their duties as other good (working) mothers, they would try to adopt different definitions to reflect their own efforts in being a good mother and to justify their behaviors when they could not fulfill certain mothering responsibilities as they hope to do. In Chapter 5 we see how flying
mothers make emotional efforts to qualify themselves to be a good mother. The definition of the good mother here is not always coherent with the general expectations on mothering behaviors. They define good mothering work according to the reality they could do as a flight attendant. When I asked flying mothers how they would persuade themselves to keep flying because there must be certain moments they feel confused or homesick, what they said was quite similar:

When you are away, think only about yourself. Don’t think those things you cannot reach and you cannot deal with. Try to enjoy your time.

Jiejie told me that to think in this way: your children still grow when you’re away. They will be fine.

Flying mothers try to make efforts to release their own concerns and worries, and also by supporting one another, by sharing similar experiences with others, they gradually learned the definition of motherhood could be changed and could be renewed. So they could justify that their absence would not affect the growth of the children. Or they might consider their absence would benefit their children even more, as we discussed how flying mothers see the financial and the materials resources they could provide for their children; or how flying mothers consider regaining personal balance emotionally gives them more patience toward their families after returning home.

One of my interviewees told me she at first felt guilty when she decided to keep flying because she really likes her job. And later she realized that as long as she did not compare herself with other “ordinary mothers” she would feel much happier. It was because, “We might not learn how to be a mother from our colleagues, but we would learn how to be a flying mother from one another.” She could identify the distinctions between flying mothers and ordinary mothers due to occupational characteristics, and if she forced herself to fulfill the standards as other mothers, she would feel frustrated.
when she could not do things in the same way. Therefore, she tried to adopt similar strategies and practices other flying mothers would do, and in this way, they tend to make the motherhood tailored to their occupation.

From flying mothers’ example, we could see evidence that the definition of motherhood does have flexibilities and mobility. Today more and more Taiwanese women dedicate themselves into their career, and it is important to recognize the fact that the traditional standards and expectations of women’s roles in the family should also be updated. In this way, we will be more likely to approach the powers existing in the institutions that manipulate woman’s lives.

**The Intersectional Position**

Understanding flying mothers’ lives through the micro-level examination reveals the multiple and intersecting powers that situate contemporary Taiwanese women. Revealing these institutionalized powers I see that the gap in current literature could be informed by the theory of intersectionality. Responding to the inadequate approach to understand family and work, I argue the dichotomy in separating work and family would be too narrow. Working mothers might not find these two ends are always competing, nor the case that the positive spillover will be brought from one end to the other. The public sphere and the private sphere are two realms that interact and intertwine closely with the other. In some cases we may even find multiple meanings could coexist at the same time.

Previous approaches tend to separate themes into different dimensions for easier understanding as we separate the public sphere from the private sphere. I see the better way would be viewing people’s lives as a continual and a complicated system and consider every possible variable that could affect how this system interacts and
intersects with one another. For instance, airline companies would ask their female flight attendants to separate their personal lives and personal emotion at work, which is impossible as I have discussed in my previous chapters; the meaning of the time during the layover abroad could have different and coexisting meanings based on one’s identities. The way we used to separate the public sphere and the private sphere is actually trying to disconnect one from one’s identity (-ies) but it is unreasonable to disconnect women’s identity in the family from women’s identity at work. Because we tend to evaluate the issues in this fragmental format, we could not really sketch the complete picture of people’s lives.

Another illustration is, in Chapter 6 we witnessed how flying mothers still try to seek a space for their self when they are positioned between their occupation and family. Their efforts in making themselves complete demonstrate women’s subjectivity and agency. Different from the general imagination that women always prioritize their family responsibilities, or the women in the professional position might dedicate to work wholeheartedly, flying mothers show another version of the story, which is they would try to negotiate in-between, with the acknowledgment of the importance of accomplishing oneself. If we used the work-family conflict/spillover framework to examine flying mothers, we could not grasp the gray area flying mothers could have between their different identities. However, by bringing in the theory of intersectionality, meaning that we acknowledge how powers in different dimensions would impact and intersect, then we could approach the position that flying mothers are situated in. More importantly, we then could also recognize the efforts flying mothers would make to complete themselves—not for work and not for family as we might assume—in this
particular position. In all, I see intersectionality could effectively inform the inadequacy in the theoretical framework in understanding gender, work, family and culture. It allows us to develop a more integrated perspective to evaluate women’s standpoints between multiple institutional powers and the possible exhibition of women’s agency in their specific position.

**Limitation of My Vision**

Writing a dissertation itself is a lonely journey. However, the more I wrote, the more I realized an important fact: the airline industry is a lonely industry. Because it often involves complicated regulations, professional knowledge and unrecognized suffering and struggles people in this business would have. Flight attendants, for example, voices were not heard. It was not because no one else studied flight attendants, but because of the difficulties in understanding the occupational reality, it would be hard for outsiders to approach this group of people, and to fairly present their lives. People who engage in other positions in the airline industry face similar situations.

So I was even more thankful for my identity when writing about the occupation in an industry full of loneliness. I know my presentation of flying mothers would be very different if I did not share partial identity with them. I am also thankful for my outsider identity, for this had given me a chance to reflect on the occupation I was quite familiar with. I see what I had presented in this dissertation has achieved the best I could do. While saying so, I would like to recognize the limitations I am aware of in this dissertation. There are several aspects I hope to address, but could not find possible access, or I gave up on because of my limited time and energy. Since I consider my research on flight attendants will be my life-time project, I will seek the opportunity to pick them up in the future.
First, I did not have many opportunities to interview with flight attendants’ family members. Only two husbands were willing to talk to me. I see by collecting the voices of flight attendants’ family members, including the husband, the parents and the parents-in-law, or even with the children, the story of flying mothers’ families will be more complete. I did not actively try to approach other family members when in the field because I considered my main focus on women themselves. Also I did not feel quite confident to interview the elders and particularly the children\(^3\). I sensed that as a sociologist-in-training, I might need to mentally prepare myself more before I talked to these people. I also needed another interview guide, for possible questions, which I did not prepare either.

Second, I think it would reveal other stories when investigating other flying mothers’ lives. For instance, the flying mothers who have elder children in their teenage years; or who is a single-parent. In a way, I see the respondents I interviewed were more “normal” flying mothers, as those two pregnant colleagues would as I quoted in the beginning of Chapter 2. Moreover, I hope to recruit more flying mothers working in Eva Airways and more former flight attendants who decided to resign their jobs because of family consideration.

I once heard a story from a flying mother about a pilot’s wife who was also a flight attendant. In fact, she was an in-flight purser, meaning her job responsibilities are even more demanding. The flying mother said she witnessed the purser crying when describing what happened to other crewmembers when they were having breakfast together, “My 10-year-old son told me before I went to work yesterday…he said, ‘Mama,

\(^3\) I also had concern if interviewing children could involves ethinical issues.
I’m so lonely. I want to commit suicide.’ My husband and I are always not at home. But what should we do? We need the money.” I felt quite bad when listening to such a sad story as if the little boy was crying in front of me. Yet, when interviewing flying mothers, I seldom have the chance to “grasp” similar dramatic scenarios that I could probe further. As I had discussed in Chapter 5, interviewing about people’s emotion is much more difficult than it seems to be, sometimes it depends on good luck to have the respondents be open enough to reveal their true, emotional stories. I have to acknowledge that even though I used different strategies to confirm and to understand my respondents’ feelings and emotion, there must be some hidden sides that were not discussed.

Last, so far my research lacks the voices of male flight attendants, or males engaging in other positions such as pilots. Also, even though I had tried to build up contacts, I failed to investigate the airline company’s viewpoints on flying mothers or the Pregnant Mommy policy in the management level. While I need to spend more time and careful thoughts on my next focus of this research, I acknowledge that not being able to present their standpoints is one of the limitations of this dissertation.

**Final Remarks**

This dissertation aims to focus on Taiwanese female flight attendants as a way to deconstruct the power imposed on Taiwanese women today. Because of the work characteristics that have put highly-educated women into a highly gendered occupation for doing highly-gendered work known as (gendered) emotional labor, this job is not like the past pink collar positions. Instead, it shares similar characteristics with career women or women that have highly-demanding jobs or are in the important positions that require them to be away from home frequently. By looking into women engaging in this
gendered occupation, we will be able to approach and identify power relations that manipulating women’s lives, as well as the possibilities women’s agency could contribute to the further dialogues in the future.

I had completely indulged myself in the writing process of this dissertation. I described this as my “Boyfriend D”: D refers to the word dissertation. It was because I always felt my heart was with it all the time, as if I was in love. No matter where I went I thought of it. At any time, if anything came to my mind that could contribute to my interview questions; anything about my worries, my concerns, or my doubts, or any trivial or crucial things I hoped to put it into my dissertation or somewhere in my research, I would try to turn on my laptop to write about it as soon as I could access it. Sometimes I could not wait that long so instead I would immediately jot down my scattered ideas or certain keywords. Indeed it was like I was so much in love. I could not help notice so many parallel love relations in we women’s lives when talking to other women in my writing days. Once I commented on my Facebook™ status about this special relationship with my significant other “Boyfriend D”, a flying mother left me her thoughts: it is like I am in love too, because wherever I go my son, my little lover is in my mind. My friend Yi-Fang was willing to sacrifice so much time and energy to fly to Los Angeles to meet her boyfriend and the reason was undoubtedly because of love. My dissertation was based on my long-term ethnographic project on Taiwanese female flight attendants who I consider to be my sisters with love. Writing about them always reminded me of the days I was engaging in the occupation I loved and enjoyed it so much –and I still admire those days even though I would not go back to flying. I did my best in doing this research with the acknowledgment of my visions and my limitations.
Hopefully this dissertation has fairly presented and revealed part of these Taiwanese women’s lived experiences: flying mothers’ struggles, negotiations, concerns, considerations, happiness, depressions, and all those heartfelt moments they have for people they love, people they care about, people they always feel being with them wherever they go, and people who they always carry with their hearts.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Working as a flight attendant for China Airlines for seven years before coming to the University of Florida, Ching-Yu Louisa Chang never forgets the starting point that motivated her to pursue a new career path in sociology. She is interested in understanding people's lives. She loves to listen to other people's stories and sharing her stories with others.

She received her B.A. in foreign languages and literatures from the National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Florida. Her specializations are gender, work, family, and feminist research methods.

Upon receiving her degree, she plans to go back to Taiwan and aims to begin her academic career in her country. She sees herself as a feminist sociologist. Her life goal is to keep telling and writing down the stories about people working in the airline industry.