

GOING THE WHOLE GRANOLA:  
HOLISTIC MOTHERHOOD AND COMPROMISE AMONG SELF-DEFINED CRUNCHY MOMS

by

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ABSTRACT

Going the Whole Granola:

Holistic Motherhood and Compromise Among Self-Defined Crunchy Moms

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*This study is an exploratory semi-structured intensive interview project in which eight self-defining crunchy mothers in North Texas were asked about their mothering and lifestyle practices, motivations for those practices, and how they navigate compromising those practices. This project largely centers around defining crunchy motherhood and, additionally, looks at themes of risk, intensive motherhood, and gendered environmentalism throughout the analyses. Crunchy mothers appear to have internalized intensive motherhood ideals based on the intensive research process involved in deciding on their child rearing tactics. Through research, crunchy mothers are often able to manage the risk their child is exposed to in a way that is simultaneously environmentally beneficial.*

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In a world with growing environmental concerns as a result of human action, individuals and families are increasingly choosing to navigate evermore complex landscapes involving risk regarding personal and family health (Beck 1995). Among the forefront of environmentally conscious families, a certain figure has emerged that I am particularly interested in: the ‘crunchy mom’. Also known as granola, holistic, or natural, the connotation of ‘crunchy mom’ involves mothers expending their efforts in childrearing towards methods that appear both intensive and environmentally conscious. Blogger Karlyn Bishop (2017) defines crunchy moms as “a mom who practices natural living. She is an advocate of natural birth, non- or selective circumcision, not vaccinating, baby wearing, breastfeeding, co-sleeping, cloth diapering, attachment parenting, homeschooling, organic and green living, etc.” Some of my respondents, too, defined crunchy motherhood with a list of potential practices that a crunchy mother might engage in.<sup>1</sup> Though this list begins to prescribe the ideals for a crunchy mom, many mothers will make compromises by either omitting or altering tactics so they can make motherhood more manageable based on the needs of their family.

While many of these methods have a long history of being used by mothers, the forming of support groups through social media is a tool that can bring more attention to the different ways that people are raising their children. Social scientists have studied mothers who follow many of the same practices as crunchy mothers, such as natural birth (Davis-Floyd 1994; Lake and Epstein 2008), breastfeeding (Faircloth 2010), and electing to opt-out of or delay vaccinations (Reich 2016). Despite these analyses, there is a gap in the literature for studies on

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<sup>1</sup> See ‘Defining Crunchy’ below; see Appendix A for an Index of Crunchy Mothering Tactics

groups of mothers who have a wide-ranging set of practices surrounding natural and attachment parenting techniques. In an attempt to address this gap, I designed my interviews to study this group more broadly rather than focusing on women who engage in one specific mothering practice or another. In doing so, I ask: What does it mean to be a crunchy mom? Which practices do crunchy moms in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area engage in? How do crunchy moms manage risk in their children's lives? What is the relationship between crunchy moms and the environment? How do crunchy moms navigate which crunchy practices to follow? And how do they decide when and how to make compromises?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Gender and the Environment*

Gender differences in environmental concern have been thoroughly studied in the field of sociology (Bell and Braun 2010; Blocker and Eckberg 1989; Bord and O'Connor 1997; Davidson and Freudenburg 1996; Gifford and Nilsson 2014; Zelezny, Chua and Aldrich 2000). In the 1980s, the link between environmental risk and personal/familial health became clear, likely leading to the gender differences in concern about environmental risk (Bord and O'Connor 1997; Davidson and Freudenburg 1996). Davidson and Freudenburg (1996) provide a review of several hypotheses concerning these gendered differences and found evidence to be strongest for the "Safety Concerns Hypothesis." This hypothesis asserts that "health and safety are more salient to women" and that "this salience is reflected in higher levels of concern among women than among men about a given level of environmental risk," thus reflecting

expectations that women behave as nurturers (Davidson and Freudenburg 1996:323). Although not explicitly mentioned, I found this hypothesis to be reflected in other studies as women filling a caretaker role – especially as mothers – was a commonly proposed reason for why women are more inclined to be environmentally conscious (Bell and Braun 2010; Blocker and Eckberg 1989). In fact, many women have been at the forefront of environmental activism in their communities: Bell and Braun (2010) look at a small coal town in which women were propelled by their identity as ‘mother’ to become activists. Their concern for the health and safety of their families and their community propelled them into action in a way that was not present among men. This reasoning begs the question: when comparing women, are mothers more environmentally concerned than non-mothers?

Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich (2000) suspect that gender socialization rather than motherhood status may be at play as they found that among children, girls were more concerned with the environment than boys were. Further studies, perhaps longitudinal, are needed to compare environmental behaviors between age groups to see if gender effects are more pronounced after motherhood/fatherhood is achieved. However, with the increase in cultural acceptance of nurturing fathers perhaps environmental attitudes have begun to gradually lose their gendered divide. I expected that crunchy moms would define their environmental practices around their status as a mother because they recognize themselves as a ‘crunchy mom’ on at least one platform: Facebook.

*Mothers Managing Risk*



Environmental activism may result from a perceived risk, often to the health or safety of the people in the community. The complicated nature of risk leads different groups to find different things risky based on the “perceptions and social agenda” of the group (Kasperson et al. 1988:178). This can be seen when looking at mothering groups which wield different styles: although almost all mothers are concerned with the health and well-being of their children what they believe will lead to healthy, well-off children can vary widely between groups. In Harsha’s (2016) analysis of interactions between commenters on “mommy” blogs, she discusses how discipline is one area ripe for disagreement among mothers who simply want what is best for their children.

Beck (1986) theorizes that our post-industrial society is filled with risks, both known and unknown, thus creating a risk society. Among these risks are many ecological threats that directly and indirectly impact human health (Beck 1995; Giddens 1990; Lupton 1999). In *Risk Society*, Beck (1986) presents the theory of second modernity which states that people have lost faith in rational institutions because, while citizens depend upon these institutions and their experts to explain risk, institutions have often been faulted for creating new risks (Arnoldi 2009; Barbosa 2015; Lupton 1999). This lack of trust that is often targeted at science is often present among moms that advocate for more natural parenting techniques; for example, it can be found among those who are wary of doctors recommending using pain and fever reduction medications for something as simple as a common cold, or among those who do not want to feed their children genetically modified food. Mothers in this group are conducting research of their own and are making decisions that seem to go against the grain. This can be seen in the women who elect natural birth (Davis-Floyd 2013; Lake 2008) and parents who elect against or

elect to delay vaccines (Reich 2016) as they often spend extensive amounts of time researching what is the best choice for themselves and their child or children. By doing this, these individuals assert their own informed risk analysis over these decisions rather than relying on expert advice and cultural norms. When analyzing my data, I explore the work that these women are doing as they conduct their own risk analyses for their children and families, which is reflective of Beck's (1995) assertion that "Dangers, even where they remain impossible to calculate, involve greatly increased labour for housewives and mothers," thus allowing them to internalize intensive motherhood standards despite having a nonnormative mothering style (p. 52).

There is great variety in how risk is perceived. For risk to be assessed, individuals require access to information. Often knowledge is acquired through others with similar values, potentially biasing information to conform to group beliefs (Kahan 2012:255). Once information is given, risk assessment occurs. Kasperson et al. (1988) propose the social amplification of risk to help explain differences in risk assessment by looking at how "risk events interact with psychological, social and cultural processes" along with "secondary social or economic consequences" (p. 178). In particular they discuss, "Interacting with one's cultural and peer groups to interpret and validate" risk as one of the amplifiers, which seems particularly relevant to the study of crunchy moms and their motivations (Kasperson et al. 1988:181). Being in a Facebook group for crunchy moms will theoretically provide a network of people that repeatedly raise and reinforce concerns which are central to the group, whether the dominant culture thinks that these are legitimate risks or not.

### *Intensive and Extensive Strategies*

In addition to crunchy moms reinforcing what risks they think are most important to avoid while child rearing, there is a dynamic in the larger culture that may lead moms who have chosen to join these groups to conform to all or most of the recommendations. Since mothers have begun entering the workforce in larger numbers, a new social ideal for motherhood has emerged (Damaske 2013; Hays 1996). Hays (1996) defines intensive mothering as “a gendered model that advises mothers to spend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children” (p. x-xi). While there are real cultural pressure to spend as much time, energy, and money on your children as feasible, there is debate about how beneficial this is to the children. Milkie, Nomaguchi, and Denny (2015) found that the amount of time mothers spent with their children during childhood did not have an effect on the child’s well-being, though it made some difference in adolescence, with the qualifier that they did not control for the quality of the time spent together.

The tenants of intensive motherhood – time, energy, and money – can conceivably be applied to crunchy moms as most, if not all, of the practices associated with being a crunchy mom appear to involve more time and energy than the alternative. Attachment parenting, for example, emphasizes “long-term mother-infant proximity as a means of optimizing child development” through tactics such as bed-sharing and baby-wearing (Faircloth 2010:358). Utilizing the framework of intensive mothering to interpret the actions of crunchy mothers is useful when trying to understand this group as it can show how modern ideals of motherhood are reflected among this group whose practices are often not normative.

Although the ideals of crunchy motherhood appear to fall under intensive mothering, the lived reality of any mothering style is often compromised. One example of this could be mothers buying family dinners from an organic meal prep company versus mothers preparing from-scratch meals dependent on vegetables organically grown in their home garden and eggs collected from their chickens: both meet the requirements of providing their child with extremely high-quality food but the former requires more money, but much less time and energy than the latter. This kind of compromise is indicative of extensive mothering practices. Christopher (2012) defines extensive mothering as “a way mothers respond to the cultural constructions of the ideal mother and worker and reframe how employment fits into notions of good mothering in their lives.” Although this definition is directly related to working mothers, both working and non-working mothers in my interviews have instances in which it was necessary for them to reframe society and group ideals of being a “good (crunchy) mom.” It will be important to investigate if there are differences between crunchy mom practices that are adhered to by mothers based on their employment status in this and future research.

### *Competitive Motherhood*

As mothering standards have gotten higher, competition and judgement among mothers seems to be more apparent. Although mothering groups are founded with the intention of bringing women together for support and comradery, unsavory competition and judgement between mothers is often present as well (Faircloth 2010; Harsha 2016). In Faircloth’s (2010) study of a group of breast-feeding mothers called La Leche League, one

respondent found the group to be too exclusionary and did not return to future meetings despite meeting their standards by practicing full-time breast feeding and other attachment parenting techniques.

This kind of piousness present in mothering groups is likely not found in all crunchy mom, or similar, support groups; in fact, many of the groups I came across on Facebook during preliminary searches explicitly stated that they were intended to be groups free of judgement and a place for moms who practiced any level of crunchy mothering to give and receive advice. I suspect these declarations are likely because instances of moms judging other moms have occurred in the forum, or one like it, previously. Harsha (2016) studied 'mommy blogs' and found that judgmental and emotionally charged comments were fairly commonplace; although the nature of Facebook groups deviates greatly from the nature of blogs, it remains that both kinds of groups appear to generally be used by mothers who are seeking to forge a community of support in their (often new) life stage.

The moms that I interviewed were recruited primarily based on connections through private Facebook groups focused on crunchy motherhood and, as such, have certain checks in place that can be used to limit or prevent negative commentary and judgements between the Facebook group members. Each page has one or more administrators who control group membership<sup>2</sup> and have the power to delete comments, posts, and even users from the group page. As many of the groups that I came across in my initial searches had specifically stated

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<sup>2</sup> Controlling membership is a particularly important task among private groups as administrators must approve every Facebook user who would like to join.

intentions for positive sentiments among and between users, I expect that the groups I eventually recruited from were just as strict if not stricter on making their group a judgement free zone due to the fact that the groups were both private and hidden. Due to the parameters of my study, I never saw, recorded, or studied the Facebook groups that I recruited from first hand. Given that these groups were a safe space for many mothers, including those not involved in my study, to share their lives and seek advice I did not feel that my presence was necessary nor appropriate for the purposes of this project. All information regarding the Facebook group dynamics was collected during the interview process.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

This is a semi-structured in-person interview project in which eight crunchy mothers living in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area of North Texas answered questions concerning their practices and compromises surrounding the crunchy motherhood style.

The interviews lasted from about 40 minutes to 2 hours and took place in varying locations of the mothers' choosing. Five mothers chose to invite me to their home while the remaining three chose a public place to meet with me, such as casual restaurants and cafes. After collecting and transcribing my interviews, I used the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti to code for targeted themes surrounding risk, intensive motherhood, environmental impact, and defining crunchy. Due to the exploratory nature of my study, I also coded for other concepts and topics as they became prevalent throughout my data analysis process.

## *Recruitment*

Due to the gendered nature of the literature on parenting as well as the much wider availability of crunchy mom groups in comparison to crunchy dad or crunchy parent groups I found on Facebook during initial searches, I limited my recruitment to mothers. My sampling method was a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, both initiated through a personal contact I have within the Dallas-Ft. Worth crunchy community. In order to recruit crunchy mothers to interview, my gatekeeper assisted me in receiving permission from administrators to post a recruitment message<sup>3</sup> in two large private and hidden Facebook groups on crunchy mothers located in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area. The Facebook posts led to five interviews. I also used snowball sampling to recruit through my gatekeeper and the interviewees, leading to two interviews. The snowball sampling method did lead to one respondent who was not involved in any kind of crunchy Facebook group and thus was unable to answer some of the questions in my guide.<sup>4</sup> The remaining interview was with my gatekeeper. Due to the gatekeeper I had with the crunchy community, I was led to a highly conservative and Christian sample of crunchy mothers.

## *Participants*

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix B

<sup>4</sup> Appendix B

When recruiting, it was a necessity that crunchy moms resided in the DFW to assure ease of accessibility for meeting them to interview.

The mothers in my sample<sup>5</sup> ranged from 23 to 44 years old with children aging from 7 months to 17 years; all mothers in my sample had young children who were not old enough to enter kindergarten with the oldest of the mothers' youngest children being 4 years old. All the mothers in my sample were married except for one; this interviewee was in a long-term live-in relationship, however. The annual household incomes of the families ranged from \$30,000 to \$160,000<sup>6</sup> and the level of education the mothers received ranged from a GED to an ED. S., which is a degree in education between MA and PhD. Six of the mothers were currently involved in paid work with their weekly time spent at work ranging from about eight hours a week to about sixty hours a week per the respondents' estimates. Five of my respondents identified racially and ethnically as White/Caucasian; the remaining three respondents had mixed racial/ethnic identities as White and Cuban, White and Native American and British Aisles, and Black and White. My sample was particularly religious with seven of the eight respondents identifying themselves as Christians of varying denominations; the remaining interviewee stated that she had no religious preference. Self-identified political affiliation within my sample ranges from slightly liberal to conservative and is more highly composed of conservatives.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for Table A: Demographics of Crunchy Mothers

<sup>6</sup> One respondent declined to answer annual household income.



Some of my interviewees requested information about what to expect for the interview so that they could be better prepared to answer my questions, though of course I could only give them a broad scope of what we were covering. Still the mothers would occasionally let me know they had been thinking about how to answer one question or another as it came up in the interview, showing me that they prepared for our interviews anyways. Given that much of what I was asking about was information that they had already researched, it is not surprising that over all they had very well-prepared answers for me. They were recalling, largely, information that they had already dissected and defended to themselves, their family, and perhaps others.

## **RESULTS**

### **DEFINING CRUNCHY**

Crunchy mothers follow a particular motherhood style that is characterized by attachment parenting techniques and environmentally conscious behaviors surrounding child rearing and often extending to other related areas such as household labor or personal hygiene. It is important to note that the terminology 'crunchy' is used by mothers who call themselves crunchy as a means of connecting with other mothers who share their child-rearing values.

While crunchy motherhood is not defined by a specific set of practices, the conceptualization of what a crunchy mom is often seems to center around the practices that they prescribe to as these practices are used to help articulate what it means to be a crunchy mom. Considering this, I would assert that because the definition is explicated so heavily

around the practices followed by these mothers, there are likely some differences in how different crunchy mom groups define crunchy motherhood.

*Crunchy, adjective.*

Crunchy is a term applicable to more than just crunchy motherhood and seems most apt to depict a particular lifestyle regardless of if it is in relation to a mother or not. The interviews evoked recollections of practices described as crunchy that were not directly related (although some may be associated with) motherhood such as when Cathleen, a 29-year-old who is in school to become a midwife while raising her two children, uses rosemary essential oils while studying to help her focus, or when Hailey, a 26-year-old fine arts coordinator at a homeschool co-op who is expecting her second child soon, sets up a system for recycling and composting in her new home. Some mothers even used crunchy to describe other terms. Gwen, a 31-year-old stay-at-home mother to two boys, mentioned that her husband is sometimes referred to as a ‘crunchy pharmacist’ because after integrating holistic healing remedies into their family routine he “does even recommend to his clients sometimes to try natural remedies even though he’s also providing them with prescriptions.”

By using crunchy as an adjective, the mothers are able to generalize the actions that are associated with it rather than imposing strict guidelines on the behaviors that crunchy mothers do. This allows them to be able to select the methods that are best for their family and omit those that don’t work while still leading what would be considered a crunchy lifestyle.

*Synonyms: Granola, Holistic, Natural*

Although there are multiple terms, when conducting initial searches for mothering groups that matched a natural, holistic mindset constrained to the Dallas-Ft. Worth area – a necessary restraint on my study – I found that they were overwhelming ‘crunchy’ groups. Because of this, I have used ‘crunchy’ as an umbrella term throughout the duration of this research. Throughout the interview process, mothers would occasionally make a nod to another term for this mothering style.

In addition to having different names for this idealized mothering style, there are related terms for mothers who are openly acknowledging that they make compromises concerning the crunchy motherhood script. Some of these alternative terms include: chewy, scrunchy, and crispy. Scrunchy moms appear to be the most apt example of this: “A scrunchy mom wants their child to live in a more natural, organic environment, but can’t quite commit to all the activities and practices involved in being a crunchy mom. So they do some, but not all of it” (Bishop 2017). By claiming this title, as opposed to calling oneself a crunchy mom, mothers are acknowledging that they cannot meet the idealized standards of being a crunchy mother. Within my sample, the self-described crunchy moms do make compromises. As I analyzed my data I took note of how these mothers justify those compromises, if they feel guilty or not, and what structural forces are potentially determinant in what compromises are made.

*What the Moms Say: Defining Crunchy Motherhood*

A key component of this project involves describing and defining what exactly a crunchy mother is and, as such, during my interviews I ask the mothers how they would define crunchy motherhood specifically. To the crunchy mothers that I interviewed, being a crunchy mom was about conducting research, not being afraid to go against the grain with your mothering and lifestyle choices, and perhaps participating in some of the key behaviors associated with crunchiness.

Throughout the interviews, the crunchy mothers all discussed the research processes that they have gone through when making various mothering decisions. For many, this was an important component of the crunchy lifestyle. When asked what makes a mom crunchy, the first thing Cathleen stated is “I think it’s somebody who does a little bit more research.” Fiona, a 23-year-old mother to a 7-month-old girl, similarly answers the question “how would you define crunchy mom?” with a discussion about research. To her, a big part of being a crunchy mom is “being well-informed.” Doing research characterized the crunchy mothers who did not include this in their definition of crunchy just as it did those who articulated it being essential to crunchy life.

When defining crunchy, many of the mothers emphasized that crunchy moms do not mother in a typical way, but instead will ‘go against the grain.’ Hailey explains “a crunchy mom probably would be a mom who chooses alternative methods versus mainstream methods.” This falls in line with the immense amount of research that crunchy mothers do as it prompts them to try a mothering technique that isn’t perceived as culturally commonplace – as Fiona puts it, “if you do your research that [holistic living] comes along with it.” Sometimes the research or experience may lead crunchy mothers to decide to go back to mainstream, and that is also

orchestrated as a key component to being crunchy. One example of this is found when Erin, a 32-year-old elementary school assistant principal and mother of three, made her own dishwasher detergent and it “killed [her] dishwasher” thus prompting her to go back to buying her dish detergent premade. She explains:

There are some things that we tried and it didn’t work for us – that to me is crunchy, even that we don’t do that anymore the fact that being willing to try something that sounds different but because I have a reason for it, and even if I revert back to commercially produced dishwasher detergent, it’s because I have a reason for it. It’s more about being intentional and being willing to go against the grain because you have a reason, or going with the grain because you have a reason.

While both research and going against the grain definitively characterize crunchy mothers, these actions certainly are not exclusive to crunchy motherhood. Further research is needed to determine how normative crunchy practices, especially those related to researching parenting techniques given our current technological climate, really are among mothers in America today.

#### *What it Means to be Crunchy: Practices and Mothering Styles<sup>7</sup>*

Both during my initial searches through public Facebook groups, websites, and blogs as well as in my interviews with crunchy mothers I have found that crunchy motherhood is often described with a list of practices that go along with the lifestyle. Many mothers in my sample could provide a set of prescribed actions, however they were unanimous in stating that being crunchy did not *require* any specific action or actions be followed. Hailey explains:

Crunchy moms are known to be the ones that breastfeed longer than a couple of months, or they baby wear instead of using a stroller, or they either delay the schedule of vaccinations or they don’t vaccinate, not using Tylenol for everything, or not just

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix A for an index of crunchy mothering practices.

giving their kids junk food. It's really a large spectrum, but I don't feel like honestly you have to do one thing or another to be considered a crunchy mom.

Their depictions of crunchy motherhood were broad, with the variety of actions being associated with crunchy motherhood allowing for a wider variety of people who engage in some of the activities to consider themselves crunchy rather than limiting the label crunchy to those who follow all of the practices associated with this term. Given the intense focus on research among crunchy mothers, it is logical that this group of women is so accepting of those who have varying interpretations of crunchy because different mothers are going to arrive at different decisions based on what works best for their families. While this does allow crunchy to appeal to a broader range of people, some of the mothers noted how initiating a crunchy journey often led you down an immersive path of crunchiness. Fiona explains that being crunchy is "a massive lifestyle" and being just a little crunchy is improbable because "once you get in there, you're like the whole granola."

While the crunchy mothers that I interviewed rejected any restrictive definition on being crunchy and were clear that there were not any mandatory actions one must undertake in order to describe their motherhood style as crunchy, there are still actions which are considered crunchy. As Abigail, a 33-year-old who is a teacher and crunchy mother to a four-year-old boy, puts it, "[being crunchy] is really more of a mindset than a set of actions, but I think that [there's] a set of actions very intimately related with it." The actions related with being crunchy did additionally come up as the mothers defined crunchy. When asked what actions crunchy moms should follow, Gwen responded:

What I think of when I think of a crunchy mom would be starting from birth – or even during pregnancy – having a doula, midwife, home birth or birth center or even in a

hospital with midwife groups, usually they will try to have a natural birth. Then practices such as breastfeeding, cloth diapering, baby wearing, trying to use natural remedies or homeopathic remedies over antibiotics. Thinking about as the kids get older, I would say that crunchy moms tend to not put their kids into mainstream schooling – so maybe that looks like home schooling or some other form of like Waldorf or Montessori.

Gwen notes that crunchy is on a spectrum and that these activities are not absolutes that one must follow to be considered crunchy.

Among my participants, there were parenting strategies that seemed more essential to being crunchy despite the assertion that no specific action was mandatory. Attachment parenting, a concept many came across while researching, was particularly important to some of the mothers when defining crunchy motherhood. When defining attachment parenting Sears and Sears (2001) state that “Above all, attachment parenting means opening your mind and heart to the individual needs of your baby and letting your knowledge of your child be your guide to making on-the-spot decisions about what works best for both of you” (p. 2). They emphasize that, while there are many practices associated with attachment parenting, there are no absolutes as they encourage readers to engage in the practices that work best for their families and mirroring crunchy mom’s definition of crunchy (Sears and Sears 2001). Gentle discipline, also commonly referred to by crunchy moms as gentle parenting, strategies appear to be very intimately related to crunchy motherhood and were often associated with attachment parenting for many of the mothers in my study. A gentle discipline strategy is dependent on building loving relationships with your kids as you actively listen to them during a discipline moment (Buckley 2005). Gentle discipline, too, has strategies that, while not mandatory, are associated with the term including utilizing natural consequences over punishment or favoring compromising with your children over a punishment and rewards

system (Buckley 2005). The flexibility of these two larger parenting styles that are closely associated both with one another and with crunchy motherhood is mirrored in the definition my participants gave of crunchy motherhood as all of these mothering styles resist strict guidelines in favor of a pragmatic approach that allows mothers to have the room to make compromises.

While explaining that specific actions such as formula feeding or following the CDC's vaccine schedule won't disqualify you from being crunchy, Brooke, a 26-year-old mother of two who is expecting her third child shortly, qualifies that "attachment parenting is the biggest aspect of it [being a crunchy mom], so if you are not interested in connecting with your child in that way then I don't think that that's necessarily a crunchy mom." Two interviewees, including Brooke, utilized attachment parenting when giving their definition of crunchy motherhood, with Gwen stating that the terms were essentially synonymous with one another. Attachment parenting is characterized by practices such as baby wearing and bed sharing, however it encompasses much more than that. The mothers in my study all had unique takes on attachment parenting circling around the idea that they wanted to spend as much time as possible with their child and give them the attention both that they needed and that they wanted, with the 'cry it out' method posited as the opposite of attachment parenting by multiple interviewees. Erin's version of attachment parenting involves bringing her children into her world when other mothers may typically not:

We rarely get a baby sitter because I want them to know how to sit at Texas de Brazil and enjoy good food and that environment. Keeping them with us and having them enjoy that with us is my version of attachment parenting.



Another mother, Gwen, discussed how having her eleven-month-old, who she baby wore throughout the duration of our interview, attached to her “like a little koala bear” characterized attachment parenting for her.

As children get older, attachment parenting strategies shift as the kids move into their own beds and grow too large to be baby worn any longer. Gentle discipline or parenting is a discipline strategy related to attachment parenting. It is largely characterized by what crunchy moms call a love and logic approach which emphasizes discussing choices and making connections with your children over yelling at them or giving directives. Brooke discusses how, in her family, discipline is about:

making a connection and making sure that they [the kids] understand that if they’re doing something wrong then they need to correct their behavior because it’s what’s best for them and it’s what’s best for those around them; not because they’re bad kids, but because they’re capable of doing those things.

Many of the mothers emphasized the importance of not resorting to spanking right away when describing their discipline strategy, though some did discuss how they would spank their child for varying extreme reasons. Natural consequences were sometimes mentioned as the preferred consequences for actions, though for the most part the mother quickly qualified that they would additionally provide consequences if the natural ones were not apparent to the child. Abigail, for example, states:

I prefer natural consequences when they can happen, at this age I know that brain development says they need to happen pretty quick for them to understand the repercussions. And if it can, great. But if it can’t, that’s where I step in and say, okay, I’m going to provide repercussions since the natural ones aren’t necessarily going to happen as quickly as you need to [in order] to understand that this was not the correct choice.

There was some variation in how natural consequences were defined, too. Erin expands this definition further than most when explaining her discipline strategy. She states that she chooses:

the natural consequences that go along with whatever their choices are because as adults we make choices and we have consequences ... I'm not going to shield them from all of the consequences of their choices. There are quite a few times when I ask them what they think the consequence should be because there are always consequences and sometimes we get to choose as adults, you know? Sometimes we can pay the fine or we can do the time – we get to choose.

Here Erin is providing consequences than perhaps other mothers in my sample may not view as natural consequences simply because they are being provided. To her, however, the consequences are natural because she takes care to associate them with the misbehavior rather than having a standard punishment that is unrelated to the actions being corrected.

There were practices outside of attachment and gentle parenting that were also very common among the crunchy mothers I interviewed. However, these practices were typically surrounded with language that suggested the mothers did not consider this to be essential regardless of how widely practiced it was among crunchy moms. Breastfeeding is an excellent example of this: only two mothers in my study had formula experience, one with her foster child<sup>8</sup> who she was not permitted to provide donated breast milk to, and one mother who ceased breastfeeding so she could get back onto a medication that she expressed as important in helping her take better care of herself and her daughter. Breastfeeding was highly regarded

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<sup>8</sup> Respondent was not currently fostering any children at the time of the interview – the foster child referred to here was a child that she and her family took care of for an extended period of time during his infancy.

among mothers as one of the most important things that you can do for your child. However, the mothers did make a point to discuss how, though they felt breastfeeding was an essential component to their crunchy journey, they did not feel as though it was necessary because it was not always a possibility for moms to be able to breastfeed. Cloth diapering was explored by almost all of the mothers in my sample, yet was commonly compromised as children got older and lives got busier. While these practices, along with others, are iconic among crunchy mothers they are not a requirement for being a crunchy mom further supporting the idea that crunchiness is depicting a life- and mothering style these women follow.

### *Conservative Crunch*

Due to the geographical limitations of my study in combination with the snowball sampling method I employed, I had a high number of Christian crunchy mothers in my interviews. Given that Texas is a deep red state in the Bible belt, I am not surprised I had a high number of conservative and Christian crunchy mothers despite the stereotypical view of crunchy as a liberal domain. The geographic limitations on my study allowed me a unique opportunity to study a conservative subgroup of the crunchy community.

Of the seven Christian-identifying mothers in my sample, four discussed how religion influenced their decision to be crunchy thus integrating the two lifestyles. Hailey, who is the mother of a 2-year-old and expecting her next child shortly, states: “The reason why I choose the crunchy lifestyle is because I believe that God created us: He created our bodies, and He created them perfect and whole and we don’t need to add man-made products to what He’s

created.” The specific practices sometimes resonated spiritually for these women. Abigail felt as though the idea that breast is best connected religiously with her, stating, “In my religious view point, God had designed our bodies a certain way, and had designed mother’s hearts a certain way, and had designed our instincts a certain way, that all of that made sense when I thought about it.” The attachment parenting and gentle discipline strategies that Brooke utilized, too, had a religious connection. She explains:

When you read about who Jesus was and the way that God loves us, to me it just makes sense Biblically to parent this way. Jesus was about connecting with people and that’s really what I want to convey to my kids as well: we want to connect with you, we want you to be a good person. But we want to help you get there by helping you realize this is why you’re making this decision, not just because mom and dad said to, but because it’s going help you and be the best thing for you.

This idea that the earth provides what we need was common throughout my interviews regardless of the crunchy-religious connection these mothers recognized in their own lives. The mother in my sample who did not have a religious preference discussed how her views go back to science and nature. She explains:

I truly believe in nature. Of course, that’s crossed over to being a crunchy mom because you can heal with food and all of these things, like essential oils, are all derived from and extracted from things that are here on earth. Whether or not God put them here, I don’t know.

While Fiona is unsure of her spiritual beliefs, she similarly recognizes the relationship between humans and nature when it comes to leading a healthy life with or without the integration of a Creator in that relationship.

While some Christian mothers did integrate their religious beliefs with their crunchy lifestyle, there were those who did not view the crunchy practices they followed as being directly related to their religious. Although Danielle, her husband, and her seven children

ranging from two to sixteen years old regularly attend church services, she discussed how she does not believe religion influenced her decision to raise her children in a way that is crunchy because “we’ve always had the practices we’ve had” – her parents raised her in a similarly ‘crunchy’ way. Further research is needed to determine what prompts mothers to separate or to integrate their religious convictions with their choice to follow crunchy mothering style.

### *Isn't Crunchy Bad?: Negative Stereotypes Surrounding Crunchy*

There is a stereotype of crunchy mothers that was addressed and rejected by some of the women in my sample that evokes imagery that is associated with nonnormative groups and was viewed negatively, sometimes referencing piercings, dreadlocks, or hygiene habits in their depiction. Hailey states:

I guess crunchy mom, granola mom I thought was more of this very hippie, don't shave type of mentality. Then I realized it's not, it doesn't always look that way, there's many different varieties and there's many different degrees to crunchiness as you will.

Despite this stereotype, none of the mothers in my sample fit this prescribed look. Only one of my interviewees had any noticeable piercings and tattoos and even those were not particularly dramatic. There were not any respondents with dreadlocks or brightly colored hair and if any mothers in my sample abstained from shaving it went unnoticed. These crunchy mothers do exist, however. When describing some of the nonnormative crunchy behaviors that become apparently visible at one of the largest crunchy events, a picnic, Cathleen expresses that “it was kind of fun to see nontraditional moms all together in one place because you see a

lot of cloth diapers, you see a lot of amber, you see a lot of dreadlocks and tattoos and it's just a lot of fun."

The crunchy mothers in my sample did not have a negative association with the word crunchy. Of the eight, only Danielle, a crunchy mom to seven and lactation consultant at age 41, explicitly stated that she did not like the term crunchy reasoning that:

for a lot of people, it has a negative connotation, you know, barefoot, hairy. \*laughs\* I think for a lot of people it conjures up more of a backwoods appearance and that's not what the majority of moms that I know who would fall in that category are – they're not. They're often very well educated, they've made this conscious decision to try and do better for their families.

While they did not think crunchy was a bad word, some of the other mothers in my sample did recognize the negative connotation surrounding crunchy. For example, Cathleen discussed how although the term doesn't bother her she was bothered that some of the other labor and delivery nurses that she works with do have a negative perception of crunchy mothers and have used the label in derogatory ways commenting: "oh they're one of *those*, one of those crunchy granola people' when a crunchy client comes in. While the term crunchy is not necessarily disliked by the majority of the mothers in my sample, some would prefer a different title. Hailey explains, "I guess it doesn't bother me if somebody calls me a crunchy mom because I'm a crunchy mom. If I got to pick and choose my label, holistic sounds a whole lot nicer." Danielle, too, preferred the term holistic as it applied to her mothering and lifestyle.

Although the majority of the moms I interviewed did not have strong negative feelings for the term, they largely remained neutral towards the label. In instances where an excitement or pride was associated with the label, it occurred in the past tense. Erin explains:

I feel like [crunchy] has become a little buzzword that's lost some of its meaning. It's also, I feel like it's become the target of some ridicule and making fun of, and so I don't like that. But I do like the overall feeling it gives me of doing what I think is right for my kids and trying to prefer natural alternatives and more holistic alternatives. I like that style of parenting; the word has lost some of its shimmer.

The label instead seemed to be utilized by the mothers as a tool, rather, that could help them find likeminded people from whom they could seek advice from and cultivate friendships with. Fiona is a new mother who has found the word extremely beneficial in her motherhood journey thus far:

There are so many resources out there if you know what that word [crunchy] means. You can go on Facebook and find tons of groups of other moms and other dads and other families that can help - help you find local places that have certain products that you're needing whether it's food or homeopathic medicine or essential oils, there's coupons out there – it's really a lifeline.

### *How Mothers Came to Define Themselves as Crunchy*

The mothers in this group largely only came to know what crunchy was because somebody else identified them that way and typically would invite them to join a Facebook group so that they would have the opportunity to interact with likeminded moms. Prior to learning the term crunchy, many of the mothers were simply following their intuition about what they thought would be best for their families or perhaps going natural when they conceived of it as a more conscious shift. One interviewee tells me she first learned of a crunchy mom group, and simultaneously the term crunchy, through a friend that saw her posting on Facebook about cloth diapers in baby wearing. Brooke explains:

I was trying to ask crunchy questions on my newsfeed and all the old ladies I'm friends with were trying to answer my questions and they were not answering them the way a

crunchy mom would, so I guess [my friend] was like ‘hey this would be a good place for you to seek advice and friendships.’

It did not always take a preexisting friendship for these mothers to be identified as crunchy, however. Erin was spotted by the first crunchy mom she’d meet while baby-wearing and shopping for organic food in a grocery store that, unbeknownst to her, was popular among crunchy moms. The mother approached Erin while shopping to see if she, too was crunchy. Although Erin was unfamiliar with the term and a bit taken aback by the situation, she agreed to join a Facebook group to see what crunchy was all about.

Some of the mothers were introduced to the crunchy lifestyle through those who provided a crunchy service to them, such as a birth photographer or a chiropractor. Fiona regularly took her infant to a pediatric chiropractor after learning about the benefits during her pregnancy. She recalls:

I did not even know what a crunchy mom was until I saw [my daughter’s] chiropractor and she said ‘hey, if you don’t mind, I can add you to this group on Facebook and it’s all of this county and they have some really good insight on there’ – because I had a lot of questions.

There was one mother, Hailey, from my snowball sample that was not a part of any Facebook group. I asked her how she came to call herself crunchy, as her introduction to the word ‘crunchy’ would necessarily differ from the experiences of other moms who largely were introduced to the term along with initiation into a Facebook group for crunchy moms. She explains, “When you’re doing researching it pops up. I’ve heard people describe me as that: crunchy mom, granola mom, holistic mom.” Hailey did not consider herself ‘crunchy’ until about a year and a half into it and never joined a crunchy mom Facebook group, partially due to a perception that she wouldn’t fit into a group because:



there's this legalistic aspect to it that you have to do A, B, and C – and if you're not doing all these things then you're not truly a crunchy mom. And that's not necessarily true because everybody is at a different phase of what they're doing and not everybody has the same ideas.

Although this differed from the experiences described to me by other interviewees, there were nods at the judgmental ways of other crunchy mothers occasionally throughout the interviewing process.

## **THE EFFECTS OF BEING CRUNCHY: INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE MOTHERING, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND MOTHERS MANAGING RISK**

### *Intensive Motherhood and Guilt*

Some of the methods most popular among crunchy mothers simply require a larger amount of time, energy, and/or money than more mainstream child-rearing methods, thus falling in line with the intensive mothering ideology that mothers should invest an intensive amount of time, energy, and money into rearing their children. Cloth diapering, for example, requires a larger time and energy input because of the work involved in cleaning the diapers for reuse when compared to the time it takes to get rid of a disposable diaper. Given the intensive nature of crunchy motherhood, there are plenty of instances in which the mothers recalled needing to make an exception for the practices that they have carefully selected and typically they do not feel guilt for doing so. This relationship between research and compromise indicates that crunchy mothers have internalized intensive motherhood standards but are willing to utilize extensive motherhood strategies, whether they are working or not, to manage the high demands of crunchy motherhood.

The mothers in my sample all researched at least some of the mothering tactics that they employed in varying ways. I would describe the research style of crunchy mothers as intensive due to the amount of time and energy the mothers often put into it. Brooke utilized a multi-pronged research approach for natural birth after having a horrible experience with the interventions involved in her first child's hospital birth:

After she was born I just felt like, that there had to be a better way. So I researched that, I watched a documentary, and then just read more about what it was like to birth with a midwife instead. With my second child, we chose to birth at a birth center with a midwife and I had no medical intervention and it was by far the best experience. That's what we'll do again with this baby.

Some of the mothers discussed the care they took to balance the sources that they utilized when making informed choices about raising their children. Danielle discusses how she has balanced her research surrounding probiotics and fermentation:

Dr. Thomas Hail is very, he's a pharmacologist but he takes a very Western center view as far as medications and more natural products... I try to balance his information with Dr. Frank Nice, another pharmacologist, he takes a lot more holistic approach. Just kind of balance it and see, but it hasn't been for us.

The mothers vetted their research, too: some avoided literature that utilized any form of scare tactic, others would use multiple research strategies before coming to a decision about what practices would work best in their family dynamic. Abigail had an intensive research strategy when creating an alternate vaccine schedule for her child in which she "ranked the vaccinations by efficacy versus instant report on VAERS<sup>9</sup> versus is this something that's going to kill him?" herself, effectively analyzing source data for her family's individual purposes.

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<sup>9</sup> Vaccine adverse event reporting system. See [vaers.hha.gov](http://vaers.hha.gov)

When going crunchy, some of the mothers in my sample took classes, earned certifications, or participated in paid work which taught them strategies compatible with crunchy mothering suggesting a higher level of time and energy even compared to the other research strategies utilized by crunchy moms. One of the most common methods in formal training among my respondents were birthing classes aiming to prepare moms for a natural birth. Danielle, for example, took a birthing class with her mother, who had taught Lamaze for many years. Brooke and her husband fostered children and, in order to be certified, they had to take classes for parenting and car seat safety. The parenting classes helped Brooke learn gentle parenting discipline techniques that she uses on both their biological and their foster children to help develop a sense of communication and understanding when correcting behavior.

Some of the mothers earned certifications for crunchy skills that were not needed for their paid work. Cathleen is a certified clinical aromatherapist and, as such, essential oils are “one of [her] first go-tos for any treatment if anybody starts showing symptoms of being sick.” Having this certification allows her to use one of the more controversial<sup>10</sup> crunchy methods effectively, although she did discuss how she disagrees with how many crunchy moms use essential oils like clove unsafely. Similarly, Erin had a certification in herbalism and utilized these skills when making balms for her family and to trade with her crunchy friends. Crunchiness seeps into the work of these women, too. Among my sample half worked in a field that could be described as crunchy: a lactation consultant, a midwife in training, and two

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<sup>10</sup> According to the mothers in my sample there is debate in the crunchy community about the safety of essential oils due to their high concentration. Clove and thieves are two of the ‘hot’ oils that were most commonly referenced as potentially problematic, especially for children.

women working at homeschool co-ops. While more research is needed to understand the directionality of this relationship, the expertise mothers build up at their work lives can additionally be seen as a portion of the research that they have done for their families if she is utilizing the crunchy skills from her job with her children. Hailey, a fine arts instructor at her daughter's homeschool co-op, does this when she creates activities for her two-year-old to do on non-school days. By completing this high level of research, crunchy mothers are putting in a greater amount of time and energy, though not necessarily money, into their child rearing strategy thus internalizing intensive motherhood ideals despite having a nonnormative mothering style.

Having a crunchy mothering style takes a large amount of energy because of the intensive amount of research involved as well as because these mothers have to continuously make conscious choices that they feel go against the grain. Sometimes, this includes making your own products rather than buying a commercialized one. Danielle uses essential oils to make blends for supporting her family's health and wellness, explaining, "I have a blend that I've made up for my youngest for ear pain and teething pain, I have a blend that I've made up similar for both my older son and my husband for chronic pain or pain related to gymnastics." Although Danielle did not specify the amount of time, energy, or money spent on creating these products it is reasonable to assume that it takes more time and energy than picking up Advil when you're shopping, especially when considering the work put into the initial research required to understand how to make support blends.

By putting energy into research it appears that as a result crunchy mothers sometimes have to continuously put more energy into their child rearing strategy. Making their own cleaning products is a perfect example of this. Hailey explains:

If you're going to commit to this lifestyle, it's not easy. It is so much cheaper to buy a bottle of Gain and so much easier just to go to any pediatrician and to follow whatever the doctor says. That is so much easier, and part of me wishes that I could do that. But because I've spent the time and the energy to research I personally have convictions for it and I chose this for the benefits for my family and for my children's health in the long term.

While buying the store brand or most popular laundry detergent is easier than making your own and cheaper than buying the organic or honest brand, for Hailey the amount of energy and time she put into researching built her convictions up so that she felt she could not go back to leading an un-crunchy life.

### *Compromising Crunchy with Less Intensive and More Extensive Strategies*

The crunchy mothers I interviewed openly recognized that compromise is needed as they navigate crunchy motherhood. Crunchy mothers employ extensive mothering strategies as they allow themselves to deviate from the ideals of crunchy motherhood when time, energetic, or monetary restraints occur in their lives without beating themselves up about it. One of the more prevalent time constraints that prompted mothers to make compromises had to do with compromising the healthy and controlled home cooked meal with a convenience food – whether that meant providing a less nutritionally balanced home cooked meal, fast food, or something packaged to meet their children's day-to-day caloric needs. Erin's family is up by

about 6 am every weekday and as such, compromises are made when it comes to these weekday morning meals:

For breakfasts unfortunately, and I wish it was different, during the week since we do get up so early and we have to get out of the house so early it's a lot more of the grab and go type items like the granola bars.

Other mothers discuss that some weeks get away from them and cooking every night isn't probable – so sacrifices are made. Hailey's families schedule gets very busy on Wednesdays and Saturdays since those are the days that they attend church services and, as such, they typically will pick dinner up on those nights. Although I did not ask how many hours per week the women (or their husbands – some expressed that they were not the household cook) spent cooking, some of the mothers in my sample discussed cooking 6 or 7 dinners each week in addition to preparing almost as many breakfasts and/or lunches.

One mother mentioned another strategy for cutting back the intensive amount of time involved in preparing healthy foods without having to compromise with fast-food. Gwen expressed the time saving advantage her instant pot gives her in preparing whole meals:

It's just easy. It makes it more convenient to cook so it makes it easier for me to cook healthy food without having to stand over a stove or get things in and out of an oven. I don't have to baby sit it, so I can set it and then go and play with my kids or take care of the baby or do whatever I need to do.

This extensive strategy utilizes a kitchen product to minimize the amount of work Gwen has to do when preparing meals for her family. While I did not specifically ask, it is likely that more mothers in my sample have strategies to reduce the time demands associated with preparing fresh, healthy meals despite it being one of the more commonly mentioned compromises throughout my interviews.

Baby wearing is an attachment parenting technique popular among crunchy moms that on the surface appears as though it is more intensive than the normative child rearing method. Baby wearers expend energy as they wear their children around the house, grocery store, wherever they can go, enabling them to devote essentially all of their time to their child. Among my participants, mothers found baby wearing to be helpful and a convenience rather than burdensome. Often baby wearing facilitates mothers being able to hold their child without hands so that they can move around their home and multitask thus saving time because they can cook or clean without having to stop to go check on a child in another room. While expressing her affinity for baby wearing, Gwen explains “it’s really comfortable for me and easy for me anyways because I’m not limited by staying here, I can go outside and go for a walk with my 4-year-old.”

Crunchy mothers do appear to put an intensive amount of energy into child rearing, although many of their most practiced crunchy mothering tactics have the benefit of saving them energy. One example of this would be co-sleeping and/or bedsharing<sup>11</sup>. Many of the mothers noted that for breastfeeding mothers, co-sleeping was a convenience that they were happy to continue throughout their breastfeeding journey. Erin, for example, did not intend to co-sleep but found herself falling asleep with her babies after breastfeeding them at night. She explains: “it wasn’t intending to co-sleep. It was more the convenience of breastfeeding and then we’d both fall back asleep.” Co-sleeping was not always a probable option, however.

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<sup>11</sup> I combine these strategies because the mothers in my sample used them somewhat interchangeably. See Appendix A for details.

Hailey expressed how she wanted to co-sleep with her first child and it did not work out – the baby slept much better in her own space and would stay awake if she was with mom and dad. When discussing plans for her next child, due in May, she stated, “if this one chooses to co-sleep, I am all for it because it’s a lot less stressful for me because you’re right there.”

It should be noted that not all mothers felt as though co-sleeping or bed sharing was an easier method than having their child sleep in another room, however. One mother in my study, Brooke, expressed that she found co-sleeping to be hard while her second child was nursing because she would “stay latched literally all night long, and it about drove me insane.” She noted that “now that it’s over and I’m on the other side of it, I see the benefits of it [co-sleeping] and I know that I was doing it because I felt like it was the best thing for her.”

Throughout my sample, mothers consistently agreed that when money was a barrier for them to complete a mothering ideal, it was not something worth worrying about. Money most commonly came up when mothers were discussing that they would get organic if they could afford it, just they typically could not. For example, Brooke states:

We don’t do a lot of organic stuff, just because of the cost and we’re a one income family<sup>12</sup>. Like I said you choose your priorities and that is not one of them for us right now. But yeah, just basically trying to find things that are not processed is more important to me than finding organic stuff. Now I will buy organic when we can afford it, but if I can’t then I don’t beat myself up over it.

Overall the mothers in my sample rejected the idea that they should feel guilt when they make compromises concerning their crunchy motherhood style. There was a common

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<sup>12</sup> Brooke reported participating in 16 hours of paid work a week, stating that the pay primarily covered the costs of the co-op tuition for her eldest child.



sentiment that compromises were just something that happened and you couldn't let yourself get hung up on what you couldn't do. Gwen articulated this sentiment when discussing crunchy shortcomings: "I don't feel like there's any one point where I just felt really crushed that I didn't do something. It's just a part of life, you just have to be flexible and roll with it. I give myself grace to do what I need to do." These decisions to give themselves leniency when compromises need to be made were often due to very pragmatic reasons. As Cathleen recalls deciding that her cloth diaper journey needed to shift to part-time disposable when running errands around the town she states, "I've had enough days that I had a cloth diaper blow out at a grocery store that was very, very difficult. So that's why I don't put him in cloth diapers when we go out places; it's just not worth the trouble."

While I would not assert that crunchy mothers are guilt-free, overall the women in my sample were willing to compromise without letting said compromises weigh too heavily on their conscious despite the very high demands of crunchy motherhood. When instances of guilt did occur, it was often in terms of regret at not doing enough research. These instances of guilt interestingly forge a relationship between that guilt and the most intensive behavior that is characteristic of crunchy mothers. For example, Abigail deemed herself a "regret mom" when explaining, "I had my son circumcised before I knew better." In the future if she ever had another boy, she states that she would never approve that procedure again because, since she has done her research, she now considers it "an elective cosmetic procedure."

I would expect that further studies and/or a larger sample size would reveal crunchy mothers who have internalized a larger amount of guilt due to some of the 'bad' crunchy behaviors that were alluded to by some of my respondents. Cathleen noted that "a lot of

crunchy moms are very much ‘it should be done this way’ – they’re purists, I guess – and they judge moms for not making the decisions that they would have made for themselves,” qualifying that, “there’s also a large group of [crunchy] moms that are a lot more supportive of various parenting decisions and just providing education and guidance when it’s requested.” None of the mothers that I interviewed expressed having a purist mentality. Rather, they discussed their acceptance of a variety of mothering styles among crunchy moms regardless of how strictly those parenting decisions aligned with crunchy ideology. To exemplify this sentiment, I present a quote from Hailey:

In my circle of crunchy moms, we are not judgmental people. There are crunchy moms out there who are, but the majority of the people who I have met are not. I’ve never met a crunchy mom that puts another mom down for vaccinating their child or running to the drug store to get Robitussin or things like that... most [crunchy] moms are very supportive of each other and understand that we all make our own decisions because it’s the best for our child.

### *The Crunchy Mom and Mother Earth*

The crunchy actions integrated into these families’ lifestyles have many real environmental benefits from a pragmatic point of view. As a group, crunchy moms avoid processed foods, produce less waste through activities such as cloth diapering, purchase environmentally friendly products (e.g., chemical free, organic), and participate in other environmentally friendly activities. While the individual carbon footprint of each family was not probable to calculate within the limitations of my project, I would suspect that the families of the women in my sample all have a much less negative environmental impact when compared

to the rest of the American population. Sometimes this was intentional, however it was also often perceived as a side benefit.

For some mothers, environmental benefits were a fundamental part of their crunchy journey. Abigail notes:

We also use a lot of household products that are environmentally friendly as opposed to full of chemicals. My household cleaners and my plastics – we use BPA free, try to use petroleum free when possible. Glass. We reuse, we use reusable grocery bags. That's a big part of it for us too.

Being environmentally friendly is fundamental to this mom's crunchy journey. Hailey discussed how one of her next crunchy ventures included setting up a system for recycling and composting at her new home now that her family would have the space to do it and the importance of that: "this home God has given into my husband and I's [sic] dominion and I need to steward that to the best of my ability. Part of that is recycling, composting, using natural products to keep it clean, things like that."

For some mothers, the environmental impact was more of a side benefit than a motivator for their crunchy lifestyle. Cloth diapers, for example, were often conceived of by the mothers in my study as an economically savvy child rearing decision. Erin states that, for her family, "cloth diapering wasn't about saving the landfills. It was about saving money, it was more economical. It was a logical choice for us, and it had the side benefit of not generating as much trash or waste." While all of the mothers in my study expressed some level of concern for the environment, it was not always a top concern or motivator for their decisions. This finding contrasts with the expectation of environmentally friendly behavior as mandatory among those who call themselves crunchy or granola.

The mothers in my sample discussed varying degrees of environmental involvement prior to becoming mothers – some didn't do anything they would consider environmentally beneficial while some recalled always having an inclination towards leading a more natural lifestyle. Some of the crunchy moms discussed structural barriers that prevented them from leading an environmentally conscious lifestyle prior to becoming a mom and even during early motherhood. Gwen recalls:

I had the desire to [do environmentally conscious things], but not necessarily the ability to because I didn't have the land – living in a dorm room or apartment you don't have the ability so much. But I think I recycled and always had the desire to do gardening and stuff.

Now that she has a home with a backyard Gwen is able to compost and garden regularly. Fiona is currently living in an apartment and discussed her desires to compost and garden once she and her boyfriend are able to move into a house.

Many of the mothers had the perception that their concern for the environment and that the actions that they took to have a less negative impact on it increased after they became a mom even when they made a conscious effort to be environmentally friendly prior to being a mom, such as Abigail:

I was always a big recycler, I was always big on using glass instead of plastic. Mostly in household goods I used a lot chemical and petroleum free stuff before I was a mom. And, you know, didn't litter, didn't do anything like that. I've always been pretty environmentally conscious but, being a mom, more so.

For some, having children was what caused an environmentally conscious perspective to be integrated into their lifestyle. Erin discusses how prior to having children, her world went from high school to college to married and felt much smaller as her focus remained on academia.

When she became a mom, she felt as though her world widened and her awareness of the environment increased.

Further research should be done to more closely dissect the impact that motherhood has on behaving in an environmentally positive way as this study could not closely address this issue due to the wide scope of the project.

### *Management of Risk Through Intensive Research and Other Crunchy Strategies*

In line with Beck's (1989) theories of risk society and second modernity, crunchy mothers have begun questioning the institutions and social norms surrounding child rearing as exhibited by the intensive research practices followed by crunchy mothers. Abigail expresses her distrust with the relatively recent changes in mothering practices such as a perceived social preference for formula milk:

How have we been parenting for the past 10,000 years? Why'd we change that all of a sudden? So that really started [with] my grandmother – she really got me thinking about why are we changing this? Of all the things that Western civilization, Western medicine has changed, why does this one have to?

This crunchy mother is aware that social norms surrounding motherhood have shifted and does not trust that they have shifted for the benefit of baby and of family and that has propelled her journey into crunchiness to a certain extent as she searches for a better way to mother.

In addition to questioning social norms, crunchy mothers are aware of the environmental factors creating health risks that are lurking around us and are taking action to

manage that risk for their children through a variety of holistic health care practices<sup>13</sup>. Cathleen states:

My main thing is trying to protect my kids from what I can while I can. For instance, cancer is one of the leading causes of death in our country right now, and there are a lot of causes for cancer that we cannot do anything about. Genetics is a big part of that, and some of the big environmental exposures we can't really do a whole lot about – air quality, things like that. But while those factors kind of put us on the projection towards getting cancer at one age or another, there are other factors, other lifestyle choices that can kind of bump that chance up. My goal is to control what I can in order to keep all those stars from lining up just right in order for cancer to start, if I can. I can't control all of their decisions when they go off to school and when they're adults, but I can do some of that now while they're young and while their bodies are growing quickly and they're more susceptible to that kind of damage and hope that I can encourage different lifestyle choices for them than the ones that were encouraged for me when I was growing up.

Cathleen recognizes the importance of normalizing healthy behaviors early on for her children so to reduce their risk of cancer while their bodies are most prone while simultaneously socializing them to engage in healthy and responsible behavior with hopes that it will have life-long health benefits for them.

Holistic health care and limiting their children's western medicine intake, particularly with over the counter medicines, along with healthy diet for a healthy body was at the forefront of the minds of the crunchy mothers that I interviewed. There were many different ways that this was interpreted, however it remained that mothers consistently had their own alternate views on how health care should be managed when compared to the American cultural script. Concerning vaccines, only one mother in my sample had all of her children follow the CDC vaccine schedule and she would prefer a delayed schedule but deferred to her

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A: Index

husband's judgement due to his profession as a pharmacist. All the mothers in my sample discussed how they would manage common sicknesses such as colds at home with varying natural remedies; many referred to common over the counter medicines negatively, such as Tylenol, citing the long-term effects that they have on our bodies.

In addition to the technical research completed by these mothers, many moms also referenced their "mommy gut" as key in their research process. Erin expressed her belief that trusting this gut while making decisions for your family is an essential component to being a crunchy mother when explaining her intent for a delayed vaccination schedule:

Erin: We will likely get them caught up on their vaccination slowly once they hit puberty, but just not why their bodies are so tiny.

Interviewer: Did you do a lot of research on that?

Erin: Some and a lot of it, and this is also kind of a factor of my definition of crunchy, is kind of going with your mom gut and trusting your mom gut. I can't say that I did a lot of technical research, but it was kind of that logic research of their body is small and my body is big and so then it just doesn't make sense logically speaking. It was more that than individually researching. Now when we get to the point where it's time to get them caught up on their vaccines then, yes, I plan to do a lot of research on timing and which ones and, you know, kind of develop my own alternate schedule based on what's appropriate for them.

Doing what felt right and most natural was a driving motivator for some of the crunchy actions these mothers followed and an important component of the risk analyses completed when crunchy moms decide on child rearing techniques.

It is noteworthy that no matter what exact methods were employed by crunchy mothers, the research and thought behind the methods chosen reflect a risk management strategy in any case. While none of the mothers executed crunchiness in the exact same way,

they each took into account the research that they were exposed to and the individual need of their child and their family to make decisions that were very often nonnormative.

## **DISCUSSION**

Intensive motherhood standards do appear to be internalized by the crunchy mothers in my study per the large amount of time and energy they put into researching their child-rearing strategies. While some of the practices that crunchy mothers engage in require more time, money, and/or energy when compared to the normative practices, it is important to note that this is not always the case and many crunchy mothers employ strategies because they are saving them time, money, and/or energy. When employing extensive mothering strategies through actions such as having a weekly fast food night to give themselves a break from cooking or using disposable diapers when running errands, crunchy mothers allowed themselves to redefine what it means to be a good crunchy mother within the context of their busy lives. While the literature has shown patterns of guilt among mothers (Faircloth 2010; Harsha 2016), among the crunchy mothers in my sample there was an absence of guilt they feel when compromises are made suggesting an acceptance of the extensive strategies they necessarily employed. The mothers I interviewed discussed that life happens and you cannot be too hard on yourself when you are unable to make something work – Brooke openly stated that she doesn't think any crunchy mom could take on all of the designated crunchy practices, suggesting a very realistic assessment of the high standards crunchy moms aspire to. Often the guilt and regret that they did express surrounded them not doing enough research – such as



when Fiona felt she should have sought out a second opinion when she was prompted to have labor induced early due to preeclampsia – as opposed to surrounding compromises that the mothers made.

My initial perception of crunchy motherhood was heavily focused on all of the environmental benefits that came along with it as I hypothesized that environmental concern would be one of the primary motivators for crunchy mothers when selecting this mothering style. While environmental benefits were not always at the forefront of the crunchy mothers in my study's minds, they did have very clear concerns for the health of their families – and particularly their children – in conjunction with the concerns about the environment. This finding further supports the consensus in the literature that women have high levels of environmental concerns because they are concerned with the health and safety of their family (Blocker and Eckberg 1989; Bord and O'Connor 1997; Davidson and Freudenburg 1996). Utilizing chemical-free cleaning products was a strategy used by the crunchy mothers in my study to reduce chemical exposure to their children, for example. Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich's (2000) assertion that environmental concern is higher among women due to gender socialization rather than motherhood did not resonate in my data set. While some of the crunchy mothers in my study recalled always having a desire to behave in an environmentally friendly way, many discussed how having children either initiated or intensified their concern for the environment. Fiona, the newest mother in my study, discussed in great detail how as she began planning to have a child, she initiated a massive lifestyle change for her and her boyfriend that was aimed at improving the health of their family. The understanding of the

relationship between crunchy mothers and environmentally behaviors, then, is dependent on an understanding of the social nature of risk.

The crunchy mothers in my study took care to manage the health risks their children are exposed to through varying research strategies and the implementation of nonnormative practices when deemed to be risk averse compared to the presumed mainstream practices. Crunchy mothers expressed distrust towards the medical institution, supporting Beck's (1989) theory of second modernity. The mothers in my study were particularly skeptical of the vaccination and pharmaceutical medication agendas and opted to do their own research to determine the level of risk they would be exposing their child to by following a medical norm. This research resulted in varying holistic health care strategies which contrast with the cultural norms of medicating at the first sign of vaccinating on schedule. As such, the mothers in my study took care to find a pediatrician for their child that agreed with their holistic approach.

There was some evidence supporting Kasperson's (et al. 1988) social amplification of risk among crunchy mothers, though this was not a particularly strong theme in my interviews. When discussing varying crunchy choices that they made, participants would sometimes bring up another crunchy mom – or her Facebook post – prompting them to reconsider the normative behavior in comparison to a crunchy behavior. While this would sometimes instigate introspection, the crunchy mothers in my study would research the subject themselves and conduct their own risk analysis with some commenting that the crunchy behaviors that they engaged in often varied from the behaviors of their crunchy friends. Future research would benefit from a study noting the interactions between crunchy moms to better address these concerns.

### *Limitations*

The nature of the interviews was exploratory and the data begins to set the stage for the world of crunchy. As such, future research both on crunchy mothers and those who follow a crunchy lifestyle in general could better explore their social dynamics. Now that I understand crunchy is used as an adjective to describe a lifestyle and mothering style that these mothers are following, it could be important to study groups outside of mothers, if there are other groups relating crunchy to practices outside of motherhood, to better understand why non-mothers choose to be crunchy.

I have a fairly homogenous group of participants; as such, future research would benefit from studying a larger variety of crunchy mothers to get a better idea of what the full spectrum of crunchy really is. While the participants in my sample gave me the unique opportunity to study a seemingly rarer subset of conservative, Christian, crunchy mothers, the stereotypical crunchy mother looks very different from any of the mothers in my sample. It would be interesting in future research to see if this caricature of what a crunchy mom is does exist more closely to its depiction outside of my sample as well as to have crunchy mothers who are able to speak to some of the practices mentioned, but not engaged in, by my sample such as using yoga spiritually. Future research should be conducted to collect a more comprehensive list of the practices that are engaged in by crunchy mothers as mine is by no means exhaustive – I have heard of other trends crunchies follow since collecting data, such as using family cloth

and/or a bidet instead of toilet paper, and expect that the trends associated with be crunchy shift over time and place.

The geographic limitations on my study have led me to necessarily base my definition of crunchy motherhood on my participant's experiences and perceptions. I expect that if I were to repeat this study in another region of the United States, different practices would be conceived of as more or less essential to determining who is crunchy and who is not. Future research would benefit from targeting a wider variety of crunchy groups to further evaluate the mom judgements that are potentially present in crunchy, or similar, circles.

## **CONCLUSION**

Crunchy mothers in North Texas follow what they describe as a nonnormative mothering style that involves an intensive research process for selecting one's child rearing strategy. The practices typically associated with crunchy motherhood center around attachment parenting techniques as well as techniques that are often environmentally friendly. Although the motherhood practices that they choose are sometimes intensive, this is not always the case and there were many instances in which the intensive research process led to the decision to follow a time, energy, or money saving practice when compared to a parallel normative practice. Both working and non-working mothers in my sample used extensive strategies pragmatically without guilt – when guilt was felt it was typically in relation to the research process and framed as regret for not pursuing more knowledge prior to making a decision.

By conducting an intensive amount of research, crunchy moms are able to assess and then manage their child's risk exposure. This practice is reflective of Beck's (1989) theory of second modernity in which citizens have begun to lose faith in institutions as crunchy mothers do not simply depend on professionals but conduct their own research as well, allowing them to make the decision that is best for their family. While there is a very real assessment by the mothers of environmental risks and toxins, it is a concern for their family's wellbeing, physically and financially, more often than it is a concern for the state of the environment that prompts them to take on crunchy behaviors. Crunchy mothers are a group that is ripe for further research as they are exhibiting behavior with a real, positive impact within the context of the home.

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## Appendix A

### **Index of Crunchy Mothering Tactics**

*Amber* – All but one mother in my sample utilized amber necklaces to assist with teething pain (and some utilized them to assist with overall reduction of pain). In addition to amber necklaces, some mothers bought necklaces with other stones to manage health concerns they had for their children.

*Alternate Schooling* – This especially should be looked at further in the future as I did not specifically ask the mothers in my study about their schooling strategies. Many crunchy mothers chose home school or other alternate schooling programs over mainstream public education.

*Baby-led Weaning* – Once a child is able to be introduced to solid foods, many crunchy mothers will allow them to eat small portions of whatever the family is having for that meal instead of feeding them pureed baby food. The idea behind this strategy is to assure that the child learns to chew before swallowing.

*Bed Sharing* – A co-sleeping strategy in which a child sleeps in the same bed as their parents or specifically their mother. This is often utilized as strategy during breast feeding to allow children nursing accessibility throughout the night.

*Breastfeeding* – The mothers in my sample emphasized the importance of extended breastfeeding with most mothers either weaning their child at a time that seemed natural for their family or allowing their child to self-wean.

*Circumcision* – Crunchy moms in my sample almost unanimously disagreed with male circumcision citing that it was a cosmetic procedure with no medical purpose. Those who did

not disagree with circumcision still took care to research the issue and did not view it as a mandatory procedure.

*Cloth Diapering* – Many crunchy mothers utilize reusable cloth diapers rather than disposables for their children. While this was primarily framed as an economic decision that was often compromised for convenience sake, it additionally has great environmental benefits and can be used as a strategy for avoiding the chemicals in many of the affordable disposable diapers available today.

*Co-sleeping* – When a child sleeps in the same room as their parents or specifically their mother. This is often utilized as a strategy during breast feeding to allow for a quick response time when their child needs them. Note that while all bed sharing is co-sleeping, not all co-sleeping is bed sharing. As such, some mothers referred to bed sharing behavior – and especially hybrids of more general co-sleeping tactics and bed sharing – as co-sleeping.

*Eco-Friendly Behavior* – This encompasses many tasks that crunchy mothers may or may not do such as: composting; recycling; gardening; using chemical-free household cleaners; making their own hygiene and beauty products or buying natural/eco-friendly products; purchasing cows by the whole or splitting them with friends or family; avoiding plastic or selecting more environmentally friendly plastics; having bat boxes; etc. For some the environment was a driving factor in going crunchy while for others it was more of a side benefit to their lifestyle.

*Essential Oils* – Drops of highly concentrated plant matter used by some crunchy mothers for things such as body wellness support or cleaning supplies. The use of essential oils is debated because they can be unsafe for children and/or pets depending on the amount you use, the

quality of the oil, and the variety of oils. The mothers in my study had varying levels of caution when describing their experiences with essential oils.

*Extended-Rear Facing Car Seat* – Many of the mothers expressed the importance of leaving their child rear facing as long as possible rather than following the minimum requirements. Most often the mothers would utilize a combination of height, weight, maturity, and age to determine when they could turn them front facing.

*Holistic Health Care* – This is perhaps the most complex crunchy behavior to describe as it encompasses so much and looks so different from family to family. Some of the tactics that holistic health care encompasses for crunchy mothers includes: eating healthy foods and avoiding foods that are processed, un-organic, or have gluten, for example, focusing on dietary needs are most pressing to their family's health; having a delayed or alternate vaccine schedule; generally electing against medical intervention and prescriptions<sup>14</sup>; avoiding hand sanitizer so that you come into contact with germs that help build immunities; utilizing skills in herbalism and/or essential oils to create low- or no-risk remedies for your child/family's minor ailments such as a head ache or a rash; ingesting probiotics, by drinking kombucha for example, in order to regulate gut health; buying homeopathic medicine or other premade remedies that are considered more natural than pharmaceutical drugs; spending time outside to expose oneself and ones' children to natural vitamins, allergens, probiotics, etc.; using chiropractic care as a whole body wellness check; and so forth.

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<sup>14</sup> Every mother in my study had an instance both where she has given her child prescribed or over-the-counter medicine and where she can foresee providing that for her child in the future.

*Natural Birth* – the mothers in my sample strove to have births without any medical intervention. As a strategy for accomplishing this goal, many elected to have doula or midwife groups over OBGYNs for their deliveries. Every birth story looked different with some mothers electing water birth and others ultimately having a C-section. What characterizes their birth choice is the desire to birth naturally.

*Time-In* – A gentle discipline strategy<sup>15</sup> that typically involves the child sitting with the mother or other disciplinarian to discuss their misbehavior one-on-one. It is posited against a time-in which depends on the child contemplating on their misbehavior without guidance.

*Other Crunchy Tactics* – These tactics came up throughout the duration of my interview as potentially crunchy practices, whether they were engaged in by mothers or not: free-bleeding and other alternate menstrual care practices; free range parenting; not piercing the ears of a child without informed consent; minimalist living; nonbinary gender identification of child; etc.

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<sup>15</sup> As attachment parenting and gentle discipline/parenting are described under ‘Defining Crunchy’ I do not include these broad parenting strategies in this index.

**Table A. Demographics of Crunchy Mothers**

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>	<b>Children Ages and Sex</b>	<b>Annual Household Income</b>
<b>Abigail</b>	33	White, Native American, and British Aisles	Married	Masters	Teacher	Baptist	Somewhat Conservative	4-year-old male	\$140,000
<b>Brooke</b>	26	White	Married	Some College	Co-Op Teacher	Christian	Somewhat Conservative	5-year-old female 2-year-old female Pregnant with 3 <sup>rd</sup> child	\$60,000
<b>Cathleen</b>	29	White	Married	Bachelors	Registered Nurse	Non-denominational Christian	Somewhat Liberal	3-year-old female 1-year-old male	-
<b>Danielle</b>	41	White	Married	Bachelors	Lactation Consultant	Methodist	Moderate	16-year-old female 14-year-old male 9-year-old female 7-year-old female 5-year-old female twins 2-year-old male	\$85,000
<b>Erin</b>	32	White and Cuban	Married	Ed. S.	Assistant Principal	Baptist	Conservative	6-year-old female 4-year-old male 1-year-old female	\$160,000
<b>Fiona</b>	23	White	Live-in Relationship	Some College	Stay-at-home Mom	No Preference	Moderate	7-month-old female	\$30,000

<b>Gwen</b>	31	White	Married	Bachelors	Stay-at-home Mom	Christian	Conservative	4-year-old male 11-month-old male	\$120,000
<b>Hailey</b>	26	Black and White	Married	GED	Fine Arts Instructor	Christian	Somewhat Conservative	2-year-old female Pregnant with 2 <sup>nd</sup> child	\$75,000

**Table B. Mothers and Crunchy Practices**

	<b>Abigail</b>	<b>Brooke</b>	<b>Cathleen</b>	<b>Danielle</b>	<b>Erin</b>	<b>Fiona</b>	<b>Gwen</b>	<b>Hailey</b>
Alternate birth plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Alternate vaccine schedule	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Amber necklaces	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Baby wearing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chiropractic care		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cloth diapers		X	X	X	X		X	
Co-sleeping and/or bed sharing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Eco-friendly behavior	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Electing against male circumcision		X*	X	X	X	X	X	
Essential oil use	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Extended rear facing car seat	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	



Gentle discipline	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Healthy diet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

This chart represents tactics that were mentioned during the interviews by crunchy mothers and is not exhaustive of all the practices that they talked about. To receive an 'X' a crunchy mom must have tried one of these tactics on at least one of her children and includes tactics that were tried and did not work for their family.

\*Stated the child she was pregnant with would not be circumcised.

## Appendix B

### A. Recruitment Script

This message is being posted on behalf of a sociology research student. "Hello, my name is Meagan Sanders and I am graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington currently conducting research on crunchy mothers. I am looking for crunchy moms of at least one child in the DFW area who are willing to be interviewed about the crunchy practices that they follow and the reasons they have for choosing this parenting style. Please contact [meaganlsanders@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:meaganlsanders@mavs.uta.edu) if you have interest in participating."

### B. Informed Consent Document

Informed Consent (to be read by interviewee or myself, upon request, to confirm verbal consent prior to interview)

You are being asked to participate in a research study about crunchy moms, the practices they follow, and the reasons that they chose the crunchy parenting style. If you do not define yourself as a crunchy mom, please let me know now. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time if you decide you would no longer like to participate. Please ask questions if there is anything that you do not understand.

The purpose of this research is to further understand who crunchy mothers are and what motivations they have for choosing this parenting style. Participation in this study generally lasts between one and three hours. Occasionally interviews may go on longer than this; if this is the case a follow up meeting may be arranged at the end of the initial interview period at your convenience. Audio recordings will be used throughout the duration of this interview. After the interview, the recordings will be transcribed, or typed word-for-word, by the researcher. After the transcriptions have been checked thoroughly for accuracy, the recordings will be destroyed. Please note that all personal, identifiable information, such as names of people or organizations, will be changed to further protect your privacy. By participating in this study, you will be able to share your reasons for and experiences about being a crunchy mom in a way that will contribute to the knowledge of society. You might experience some discomfort while discussing trials that you have faced while raising a child throughout the interview. It is not my

intention as a researcher to dwell on the negatives throughout the course of the research nor to discuss a subject that is making you uncomfortable. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time without consequence.

There will not be any compensation for this study and there are no alternative procedures for this study. Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent at any point during your participation without consequence. Every attempt will be made to see that your interviews are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected, including transcriptions, from this study will be stored in the Dr. Kelly Bergstrand's Office at the University of Texas at Arlington for at least three years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Additional research studies could potentially evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous.

Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to the current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Questions about this research study may be directed to Kelly Bergstrand at [kelly.bergstrand@uta.edu](mailto:kelly.bergstrand@uta.edu). Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or [regulatoryservice@uta.edu](mailto:regulatoryservice@uta.edu).

Do you consent to participate in this study and be interviewed and recorded?

C. Interview Guide

Tell me about your family. (Are you married? How many kids do you have? What are their ages? Does anyone else live with you? Spend large amounts of time in your home on a regular basis?)

Describe a typical day in your home.

What is your job? How many hours do you work a week?

How would you define “crunchy mom”? (What kind of actions do crunchy moms need to follow to still be considered crunchy? /What are the essential behaviors to being a crunchy mom? /

What makes the crunchy parenting style different from other parenting approaches?)

Does your spouse/partner (if applicable) practice crunchy parenting too? (Is it important to them? How are they involved? On what basis are they involved?)

Can you tell me how you became a crunchy mom?

What crunchy practices are most important to you? What others are integrated into your routine?

I’m going to ask you a series of questions about some of the common practices that I have heard crunchy mothers do and what your opinions of them and experiences with them are:

Can you tell me about your birth(s) (and birth plan, if applicable)?

Did/do you breastfeed 100% of the time? How long did you breastfeed/do you plan to? How did you supplement (if no to 100%)?

How do you feel about vaccines? Did you/do you plan to vaccinate your children? What research have you done on this subject matter?

What kind of medical care do you use regarding typical health checkups for your children?

What do you do when they have a common sickness, such as a cold? What about when they are sick with something more severe?

Do you and/or your children use chiropractic care as a homeopathic health check?

Do you use essential oils? What do you use them for primarily? Do you ever substitute western medicine with essential oil remedies? In what instances?

What kind of diapers did/do you use? Why?

Can you tell me about the food your children eat? (What kind of meals do you typically eat as a family? What kind of food do you usually feed your children? How often do you cook? Can you describe a typically meal that you would make for your child/ren? Do you have any health standards you try and uphold (such as purchasing and consuming only organic food, or grass-fed beef, something like that)?)

How do you feel about attachment parenting? To you, what all does this entail? What do you think other crunchy moms think is most important concerning following attachment parenting techniques?

What are gentle parenting techniques? Do you use gentle parenting techniques?

How do you discipline your children? How does this vary based on the misbehavior that you are correcting? Does your spouse discipline your children in a similar way? What about other care takers?

What is your opinion of circumcision?

What do/did you do concerning car seat practices for your child? Did you conduct research of your own to make these decisions?

Are there any crunchy practices that I haven't asked you about that are important to you or other crunchy moms that you know? Can you describe them and their importance?

Is there anything a crunchy mom should never do? What would that be? Why would it be bad for a crunchy mom to engage in those practices?

Are there any crunchy practices you disagree with? Why?

Have you ever been convinced to try a crunchy parenting technique that you were wary of? Can you describe what happened?

Can you tell me about a time that you failed to live up to a crunchy standard that you care about? (How do you feel when you didn't adhere to this crunchy practice?)

How did you find out about the first crunchy mom Facebook group that you joined? What made you decide to join it?

What do you use the crunchy Facebook groups that you are a part of for?

Outside of what we have talked about, do you have any other reasons that you feel were important regarding your decision to become a crunchy mother? Would you explain how those inform your parenting decisions?

What do you do when you need to compromise crunchy mom childrearing tactics? What do you think or know your friends who are crunchy do? Why do you think compromises most often happen?

How concerned are you with the state of the environment? Do you consider yourself an environmentalist? If so, when did you begin to consider yourself this and why?

Do you intentionally teach (or plan to) your children to behave in a way that is environmentally friendly? If so, how?

Did you have any environmentally conscious behaviors that you regularly practiced prior to becoming a mom?

Do moms organize events through your Facebook group? Do you attend – if so, how regularly? If so, what are they like? Can you describe a memorable one that you have attended?

Has there been a time where you have come across something in a crunchy Facebook group that helped you be a better parent?

Is religion a prominent component of your family's routine? Does religion influence your decision to be a crunchy parent?

Do you like the term 'crunchy' mom? Which term(s) do you prefer?

Do you have anything else that you think I as a researcher should know about crunchy moms?

Do you have any questions for me?

D. Face Sheet

Interviewee #\_\_

Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

DOB: \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Race and Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status (circle one): Single Live-in Relationship Married Separated Divorced Widowed Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Education (circle one): Some high school GED High school degree Some College Associates Bachelors  
Masters PhD

Are you currently employed for paid work? Y/N

Occupation (if none, what was your most recent job/career?):

Annual Household Income:

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Political Affiliation: Very Liberal Liberal Somewhat Liberal Moderate Somewhat Conservative Conservative Very  
Conservative

DOB and sex for all children:

Facebook groups you are in for crunchy moms: