**Maternal Role Attainment Theory**

**Introduction**

The ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ advances the strong maternal identity in the children’s lifetimes. The maternal responsibilities of women in their children’s lives play a critical role in promoting and enhancing the health of their children (Meighan, 2017). The theory fosters the idea of being a mother to the children and which significantly contributes to the health condition and welfare of the children. Dr. Ramona Mercer developed the ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’. Dr. Ramona Mercer was born on 4th October 1929. Dr. Ramona was later in 1971 married to Lewis Mercer who was an engineer by profession. Lewis and Ramona were blessed with one daughter; Camille. Throughout her illustrious career, Ramon contributed to the field of nursing significantly with her ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ in home nursing.

Dr. Ramona received a diploma in nursing in 1951 from St. Margaret School of Nursing in Alabama. With her Nursing Diploma, Dr. Ramona worked as a staff nurse for over 10 years of practice. During this time, Dr. Ramona Mercer worked in the fields of obstetrics, pediatrics, and control of contagious diseases (Meighan, 2017). In 1960, Ramona got back to school, enrolling at the University of New Mexico to attain a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In 1964, she consequently enrolled at the Emory University, attaining a Master's Degree in Maternal and Child Nursing. Dr. Ramona Mercer undertook a lecturer role at Emory University for five (5) years. She, thereafter, left to undertake a doctorate degree in maternity nursing at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Ramona then accepted the position of a professor of maternity nursing in the San Francisco’s University of California. She would later in 1987 retire as a professor of maternity nursing from the same University of California.

Even though Dr. Ramona Mercer retired from the position of a professor at the University, she continually wrote and contributed on family health care nursing. In seminars, training programs, and teaching courses, Dr. Ramona Mercer undertakes teaches about maternal nursing way after her retirement (Meighan, 2017). After undertaking numerous research on maternal nursing, Ramona developed the concept of maternal nursing in 1970.  While working at both the University of Pittsburgh and Emory University Dr. Ramon was presented with the Maternal Child Health Nurse of the Year Award in 1982. While at the University of California, Ramona was handed the Fourth Annual Hellen Nahm Lecturer Award in 1984. With her consistent and significant research works and contributions to the maternal nursing, Dr. Ramona received an award of Western Society for Research in nursing (The 1988 Distinguished Research Lectureship Award). The University of New Mexico gave her the Distinguished Alumni Award in 2004. Dr. Ramona Mercer’s research initiatives in the nursing field involve authorship of numerous book chapters, over six books, journal excerpts, and articles. Many authors have based their books on Ramona’s theory of maternal role attainment theory in nursing.

**Analysis of Basic Concepts of the Theory**

The ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ intended to bring it to the attention of the nurses to provide quality healthcare to the nontraditional mothers so that the mothers can have a strong material identity (Mercer, Kay & Tomlinson, 1986). The mother and child interact and develop a relationship over time and as a development process that occurs between the mother and the baby over a given period. In this case, the material identity of the mothers implies the ability of the mothers to perfectly connect with their babies after giving birth. The principles of this theory could also promote the material identity and role of mothers to children in the case of foster mothers, adoptive mothers and those who become mothers unexpectedly. The nurses promote the interaction between the mother and their young ones. The mothers develop attachment towards the babies as the babies become attached to their mothers as they grow after birth. The mothers, through this interaction, become close and attached to the baby while they acquire the strength to effectively take care of the child. The mothers through this interaction begin to enjoy the process of interacting with the child, easily expressing their joy and pleasure in their role.

According to Mercer, Kay & Tomlinson (1986), as an interactional model and process, the maternal role attainment describes the period the mother interacts with the child to become competent in providing care-taking responsibilities while being able to be competent and with pleasure to providing the tasks (Mercer, Kay & Tomlinson, 1986). Some of the factors that influence the process of this development in the life of the mother are the maternal age at the point of first birth. The maternal age determines the woman’s perception of the experience of birth as it would characterize her first attempt to give birth (Anantha, 2013, p 1). Another factor is the occurrence of early separation from the child as the mother would not have the time to communicate and develop the attachment to the child.

In cases where the mother has low self-esteem, she may have problems trying to develop this attachment to the child as the perceptions of other women and the society at entirety would significantly jeopardize maternal identity (Anantha, 2013, p 2). Maternal role attainment is influenced by the flexibility of the mothers to provide the needs that the baby may require. There are no limitations of what should be done to the baby at what time as long as the role edges towards enhancing child development. In most cases, the mature women are at ease to undertake whatever role to help in improving the health of the baby and thus realizing an effective interaction model with the great maternal role.

The theory involves four stages of the nursing process that the nurses and other nursing practitioners are to follow. The first stage is the anticipatory stage where physiological and social adaptation of maternal role is achieved. The stage comes way before the birth of a child and it requires the preparation of the mothers on maternal roles in the health and medical provision to the babies. To those who become mothers through adoption and unexpected motherhood, the stage requires that they are prepared for such maternal responsibilities way back when becoming women past adolescence. The theory’s second stage is the formal stage. At this stage, the mothers assume the role of taking care of the baby at birth. In most cases, other mothers guide the new mother on what to do to the child to ensure that the child is safe and healthy. The new mothers learn how to take care of the baby through the social connections and groups they have with other women.

The third stage is the informal stage where the mother adopts her own and new ways of providing the motherhood roles and do not rely on any social ties with other mothers. At this stage, the mother coins her strategies and ways to model her child in ways special to her. After developing her own ways of taking care of the baby and blending them with what she learned from the social ties with other mothers, the mother then experiences peace, competence, and conviction in all she undertakes to accomplish her maternal role in the life of the baby. These feelings of accomplishment, joy, and harmony in playing the maternal role in the life of the child describe the fourth and final stage of the ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory.’ In specific and outlying circumstances, the mother may be looking forward to having another child as she is contented and comfortable playing the maternal role in the present baby or other children she bears.

**Personal Relevance**

The extensive research and scholarly activities that Dr. Ramona undertook during the past five or more decades, plainly describe the roots of the theory. Ramona has strong clinical and nursing health backgrounds going by the numerous awards, contributions, and recognition she has received in the nursing field. With the five books on nursing, maternal and childcare nursing, Dr. Ramona also contributed to several scholarly initiatives, research articles, journals, and offered education and training in the nursing field (Meighan, 2017). She has continually written on family and home nursing expanding the knowledge and enlightening many mothers and families on how to enhance their health conditions and those of their children. Being a holder of a Bachelor’s degree in Science in Nursing, master’s degree in Maternal and Child Nursing, and a doctorate degree in maternity nursing, Dr. Ramona had vast knowledge, experience, potential and attitude to explore and invent the ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ in the family and home nursing practice.

**Relevance to Healthcare and the Client Discussed**

The ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ discloses the roles mothers, who are the caregivers to the children play to ensure the children acquire good health. The theory contributes to the maternal-child nursing through the practices and preparations that the mothers must undertake to ensure that the children are healthy and appropriately develops. The theory identifies the nurses’ roles in modelling the mothers to attaining maternal roles and responsibilities. The nursing activities and processes initiates crucial interactions with the mothers who then simulate the lessons on caregiving. The mothers have the role of promoting family health through assuming and learning appropriate and healthy methods of handling the children. The theory, through the considered maternal roles, provides the interventions through which the nontraditional mothers can play to ensure healthy child-upbringing processes. The nurses guide the mothers during their pregnancy periods and during birth to ensure that the children’s health are safeguarded.

With the vast experience as a nursing lecturer and with a nurse’s educational background, Dr. Ramona has acquired skills and knowledge on nursing theories. The diverse awards and honors that Ramona has received over her lifetime explain her potential to develop the theory and contribute significantly to the field of nursing. Dr. Ramona has worked as a nurse all her lifetime providing her with vast experiences on how family health can be improved through maternal role attainment concept. The theorist’s education and clinical experience in maternal health nursing effectively positioned her to contribute to the field of family and child health.

**Application of the Theory to Research**

The ‘Maternal Role Attainment Theory’ provides researchers with varied opportunities to research more on the applicability and implacability of the concepts entailed in the theory. Different researchers have examined the implication of the theory on nursing and the application of the the theory to nursing situations as well. For example, Masoumeh Kordi and others investigated *The effect of maternal role training program on role attainment and maternal role satisfaction in nulliparous women with unplanned pregnancy* (Kordi, et al., 2017). In this study, the researchers explored the process of attaining maternal roles from pregnancy and how such women become satisfied with their roles. Dr. Ramona’s theoretical concept revealed the different research approaches one can investigate through research to ensure that her theory was factual and contributing to family and child health.

**Limitations of the Theory**

The theory was generally unclear on how to test the theoretical concepts Ramona Mercer developed. In its entirety, the theory failed to prove that the theoretical model applies to all sociocultural backgrounds. The theory remains untested to many cultures around the world making it limited to only European backgrounds. Women from diverse cultures would have different experiences and roles to play in family set ups.

**References**

Anantha, M. R. (2013).  Maternal Role Attainment Theory. https://www.ejmanager.com/mnstemps/157/157-1456482412.pdf. Accessed on 6th July, 2018.

Husmillo, M. (2013). Maternal Role Attainment Theory. *International Journal of Childbirth Education*, *28*(2).

Meighan, M. (2017). Maternal role attainment - Becoming a mother. Chapter 27. https://nursekey.com/maternal-role-attainment-becoming-a-mother/. Accessed on 5th July, 2018.

Mercer, R. T., Kay, M., & Tomlinson, P. S. (1986). Predictors of maternal role attainment at one year post birth. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *8*(1), 9-32.

Kordi, M., Fasanghari, M., Asgharipour, N., & Esmaily, H. (2017). The effect of maternal role training program on role attainment and maternal role satisfaction in nulliparous women with unplanned pregnancy. *Journal of education and health promotion*, *6*, 61-61. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5562012/.