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Narratives of motherhood : voices of selected South African Women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The experience of motherhood is an intensely personal experience etched within a much larger social and cultural context. While mothering involves individual women negotiating their identity and roles, it is deeply rooted within ideological meaning and cultural significance. Mothering is embedded in beliefs regarding what is natural, normal and moral (Kruger, 2006), making this a challenging and often stressful transition in the developmental cycle of women.

Social and cultural forces have not only influenced the experience of motherhood, but have also profoundly influenced the theorising of motherhood which in turn has impacted popular understanding of what it means to be a mother. Although significant alterations in this understanding have been recorded historically, the myth of the instinctual mother, who is biologically programmed to intuitively mother and raise children effectively, has predominated for the past century. Although feminism has made some impact on the political and economic position of women and problematised gender differences, the contemporary version of the good mother has changed little over the past few decades despite significant shifts in other realms of women's lives. Intensive mothering ideology dominates modern discourses of motherhood and is underpinned by an acceptance of an inherent, biologically determined motherhood. Furthermore, the child-centred nature of this ideology constructs the mother largely as an object in relation to the child's physical, emotional and intellectual needs. Finally, this prevailing ideology reflects and maintains gendered divisions of labour, both in the home and in the public sphere.

Present literature on mothering and motherhood has expanded from a solitary focus on the effects of mothering on children, to include a theoretical understanding of mothering and a focus on the experiential nature of motherhood (Arendell, 2000b). Thus the limited understanding of the mother as an object in her child's life has expanded to include a more subjective view of the mother. However, limited research of this nature has been conducted in the South African context. This research project aimed to explore some of the theorising around motherhood and then compared how the theory converged or diverged from the empirical data documenting the experience

of mothers. Finally, these findings were compared to the narratives derived from a small group of racially diverse working South African mothers to determine how representative the ideologies and discourses of intensive mothering were in the South African context and to explore the alternative discourses that the participants constructed.

This research was located within a feminist paradigm as its main focus was to give voice to women's lived experience (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Worrel, 1996). Furthermore, the research aimed to challenge the traditional definitions of mothering that have arisen in a patriarchal society and propagated by prominent perspectives in psychology (Worrel, 1996). Bassin, Honey and Kaplan (1994) emphasised that a mother's subjectivity and ability to reflect on and articulate her experiences, would subvert the social myths regarding mothering. Contrary to this, Kruger (2003) found that women addressed their ambivalence to mothering by reproducing dominant motherhood discourses. She attributed this to the fact that women are unable to embrace and voice their own experience in a context where ambivalence is not tolerated within the dominant discourse surrounding motherhood (Kruger, 2003). Thus mothers are not only constructed, but they too construct an ideology of motherhood.

Historically, the position of mother was intertwined with that of female gender, and the roles of adult women and mothers have been virtually universally synonymous (Banditer, 1981). Patriarchal structures have predominated in the definition of the role and identity of women, and although the past few decades have seen some changes in the position of women in society, changes in the expectations placed on mothers have not altered significantly (Hays, 1996; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Within the broader social and historical context, psychology has had an influential position in shaping discourses surrounding the meaning and practices of motherhood. Initially psychology held an instrumental view of mothers as bearing responsibility for creating and raising healthy children (Arendell, 2000b). This focus has shifted to pay more attention to the physical and emotional experiences of women who mother (Kruger, 2006). Psychology has perpetuated mothering ideologies and influenced the way in which mothers are written about and encountered in therapy. Psychological concepts have filtered into popular culture and influenced the way professionals and lay people

evaluate mothers (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991) and how mothers evaluate themselves (Arendell, 1999).

The universal quality of ideologies surrounding mothering has been challenged by authors such as Collins (1991) who highlighted the implications of contextual factors such as race and class on the experience of motherhood. Mothering cannot be considered a homogenous experience, both within and between different groups of mothers. She also critiqued the preponderance of literature describing the experience of White[1], middle-class mothers, to the exclusion of mothers of different racial and social groups (Collins, 1991).

Phoenix and Woollet (1991) pointed out that 'good' or 'normal' constructions of mothering may be implicit or explicit, but that they formed the basis on which mothers and society measured the adequacy of mothering. The stereotype of the ideal mother placed mothers in an impossible role. Firstly, it denied mothers the freedom to express any ambivalence regarding their sacred role and identity as mothers (Hays, 1996). Secondly, the child's needs superseded the mother's needs and where the mother pursued her own interests, such as a career, this choice was frequently constructed as deviant to the ideal picture of motherhood (Arendell, 1999; Hays, 1996). Furthermore, while the mother was constructed as the all powerful determinant of her child's development, who instinctually knew what was best for her child, she was surrounded by experts in child development to guide her through the minefield of all potential pitfalls in the science of child rearing (Hays, 1996).

The rationale for this study emerged from the stark disjuncture between the experience of motherhood and the ideologies and expectations that govern this experience (Miller, 2005). Literature indicates that intensive mothering ideology governs understandings of mothering in Western cultures and it is also prevalent in limited South African studies. Alternative understandings and ideologies of mothering need to be developed that will allow for more diversity in the range of expectations and experiences that mothers embrace.

1. The current study makes use of the terms 'Black', 'White', 'Indian' and 'Coloured' as per the apartheid classification system. While the validity of these terms is firmly refuted, in order to address the relevance of race in motherhood ideology the use of these terms is inevitable.

Research should aim at exposing alternative discourses which better reflect modern women's lives and present a more realistic and less normative portrayal of mothers' lives. The current research aimed to explore the oppressive nature of the ideology of intensive mothering utilising the narratives of the participants. Furthermore, using a critical feminist perspective, this research aimed to oppose the narrow ideology that seems to govern contemporary mothers. This study is limited and does not lend itself to ground-breaking research; however, it contributes another small component to feminist research in South Africa.

As Lorber (cited in Arendell, 1999) points out, while gender has been challenged and some of the practices and arrangements of mothering have been altered, mothering ideology and beliefs governing what it means to be a good mother have been relatively unaltered over the past few decades. Furthermore, an exploration of motherhood experiences and ideology has been limited in the South African context. This research report explored the experience of a group of employed South African mothers who mother in the context of the intensive mother ideology. The way in which mothers constructed and experienced motherhood, practically and ideologically, was explored by analyzing the responses of a group of mothers to an interview. Furthermore, the interplay between ideology and the lived experience of mothers was investigated. While most of the research on motherhood focuses on the early transition period into motherhood, Hattery (2001) suggested that the balancing and weaving of home and family becomes even more challenging as children enter school going age. Hence this research focused on mothers who have children between the ages of seven and ten.

A racially heterogeneous group of mothers was chosen, so that this research did not only give voice to White mothers, however, the mothers could still be classified as privileged in that they were all middle-upper class and had tertiary education. Professional women who may value both career and motherhood equally, may experience greater tension and experience more complex emotional and identity difficulties than women who prioritise one over the other (Buzzanell et al. 2005). It was with this rationale that the participants were selected for this study. Situated in a more affluent economic position than the vast majority of South African women, they would have the financial resources to have a choice regarding their working status,

and hence require active sense-making and negotiation between the traditionally incompatible ideologies of work and motherhood. Finally, their tertiary education exposed these mothers to various institutions and their discourses, which Adams (cited in Kruger, 2006) suggests mediated their experience of motherhood.

Authors differ in the labels that they use in defining mothers who are employed in the public sphere. The general assumption is held that work is of a public nature and remunerated, whereas the tasks and responsibilities performed in the home are not considered to be work (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004). Without wanting to perpetuate the devaluation of relational and practical maternal work, the term 'working mother' has been utilized in this research because this was how the participants labelled and understood their roles.

Based on the rationale above, this research explored the following questions:
Does a group of South African employed mothers from a culturally varied background subscribe to intensive mothering ideology? Furthermore, in what ways do they alter or reject the intensive mothering ideology? Finally: what are the emotional implications of adherence to or rejection of intensive mothering ideology for these mothers?

In overview, the report firstly outlined current literature which focused both on theoretical and experiential studies of motherhood. The construction of modern motherhood was traced from a socio-historical perspective and the position of the working mother was delineated. Competing ideologies of motherhood were examined and the dominant ideology of intensive mothering was discussed and then examined in the context of current research which focused on employed mothers. The rationale for this research emerged from the pre-existing literature and was distilled into specific research questions.

A feminist lens was utilised throughout the research and was incorporated into the methodology. Thematic content analysis was utilised to explore pertinent themes that emerged from interviews conducted with ten South African mothers who were employed outside the home. Finally, these themes were discussed in light of international and local research and literature. The research concluded with

recommendations for further research in this field and implications for therapeutic practice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

This chapter provides an overview of theoretical and empirical literature which documents the context and experience of motherhood. Firstly, the evolution of modern motherhood is discussed from a historical perspective. Some of the ideologies and discourses that have been dominant in Western cultures are discussed and compared to alternative ideologies that have arisen from a non-Western context. The dominant, hegemonic discourse of intensive mothering and how it has shaped the ideas and practices of contemporary mothers is explored in more detail. Current research is discussed which investigates the experiences of employed mothers in the prevailing context of intensive mothering ideology. While most of the literature informing this study originates from a Western context, it is contrasted with literature from a South African perspective.

2.1 Constructing motherhood

Therborn (1980) asserts that ideology defines what exists, what is good, and what is possible and furthermore that ideology operates in the "formation and transformation of human subjectivity" (p.2). Ideologies are expressed and disseminated in discourses. Therborn (1980) postulates that several ideologies may exist within a given culture and that these competing ideologies vie for dominance or hegemonic position, depending on the extent to which they dominate over alternative ideologies and preserve the authority of those in power such as the state. Hegemonic ideologies are more widely disseminated and accessible than alternative ideologies; hence the majority within a culture generally adopt dominant ideologies (Hattery, 2001). While this may explain the adoption of the dominant mothering ideology in the USA, it will be interesting to explore this statement in the South African context where, until recent history, a minority state determined ideological hegemony.

Ideology is an abstract, collective product (Glenn, 1994) which evolves within the historical socio-political structures of cultures; however, it is also powerfully tangible

at an individual level where it influences choices, behaviour, attitudes and emotions (Hattery, 2001). While ideology may influence behaviour, people have the agency to accept or reject ideological constraints (Therborn, 1980). This understanding of ideology will be applied to the concept of motherhood where individual values, beliefs, expectations, behaviours and experiences of motherhood are powerfully influenced by motherhood ideology. The discourse or ideology of motherhood describes the norms, beliefs and values that formulate a societal understanding of what constitutes a 'good mother' (Hattery, 2001; Kruger, 2006; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991) and the ideology motherhood is reflected and maintained in the practices and relationships of motherhood (Hattery, 2001; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Ideologies and practices of motherhood are inextricably intertwined in the lived experience of motherhood and are furthermore shaped by the context in which women mother.

Motherhood is such a familiar institution and experience that it is seldom rigorously defined, even in academic literature (Walker, 1995). The term "mother" utilised in this research refers to the person who is primarily responsible for the "relational and logistical work of child rearing" (Arendell, 2000a, p.1192). "Motherhood" describes the context in which mothering occurs and is experienced (Miller, 2005).

Mothering describes what mothers do, the activities that they engage in, the application of skills and the fostering of intimate relationships (Arendell, 2000b; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Activities such as childbirth, physical care, emotional care and the social and moral development of children are included in mothering (Bassin et al., 1994). Mothering is not a static construct that is confined to tasks, but instead constitutes a socially constructed practice involving the nurturance and care of dependent children in an evolving relationship embedded in dynamic activity (Arendell, 2000a).

Motherhood is popularly viewed as an inherent, instinctual, biologically determined aspect of womanhood and has thus existed in its current form throughout history. However, recent literature produced on the topic of motherhood, supports the idea that notions around motherhood and mothering are socially constructed (Banditer, 1981; Glenn, 1994; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Kruger, 2006; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991),

hence the social and historical context in which mothering occurs are important considerations in the exploration of current narratives of motherhood (Lewin, 2006).

Historically, patriarchy seems to lie at the heart of structures that define and confine women in their roles as mothers (Bassin et al., 1994; O'Barr, Pope & Wyer, 1990). Hartman (cited in Gordon, 1990) defines patriarchy as hierarchical relations among men that has a material base in the control of women's power and sexuality which enables men to dominate women. Patriarchal structures have been evident throughout history. Ancient writings attest to the supreme position of the father as the head of the home and a woman was assigned the legal status of a minor child under Roman and Greek law (Badinter, 1981) with large scale female infanticide being prevalent during this era (Thurer, 1994). The Middle Ages also ushered in a powerful maternal image that has continued to prevail in contemporary Western representations of the ideal mother: the Madonna, mother of Jesus, who epitomized selfless devotion and the pinnacle of femininity (Thurer, 1994). During this period, the nuclear family did not exist and collectivist societies dominated where children had very little inherent value in light of very high infant mortality rates (Thurer, 1994). Work and home were not viewed as separate spheres and family members, including children, were fellow labourers (Thurer, 1994). The reality of women's lives did not attain the romanticized ideals of motherhood reflected by the Madonna but at least she was afforded equality based on her ability to work.

The Renaissance saw an objectification and stereotyping of women and a cementing of gender roles through civil and religious institutions (Thurer, 1994) while the Reformation advocated women as their husband's possession and significantly inferior intellectually and biologically, even in their reproductive role (Banditer, 1981). The good woman was defined by her piety, obedience, chastity and silence, elements of which have endured into modern constructions of the good mother and definitions of deviant mothers (Thurer, 1994).

Dominant and acceptable social practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth century European bourgeois dictated that mothers send their children away to be raised by peasants for the first four years of their life (Banditer, 1981; Thurer, 1994). Respectable mothers never breastfed their children and the wellbeing of their children

was not foremost in their minds. The romanticized view of the mother who was responsible for the happiness of her children only emerged late in the eighteenth century. At this time paternal authority diminished and mothers and children were afforded more legal and social rights. Practices such as arranged marriages declined and the pleasures of motherhood were extolled. Parental responsibility for the wellbeing of children was accepted and confirmed in the nineteenth century (Badinter, 1981). The general social status conferred on women through the ages was extrapolated to their positions as mothers. The historically fluctuating status of women and mothers were subsumed by larger discourses of economic and political power (Badinter, 1981) which is clearly illustrated by the advent of the industrial revolution early in the eighteenth century.

The industrial revolution significantly impacted the social roles of men and women, where sex roles became exaggerated (Hattery, 2001; Thurer, 1996). Prior to the industrial revolution, work and family were integrated and community based agrarian living was the norm (Thurer, 1994). However, following the industrial revolution, a distinction was drawn between unpaid work that was frequently performed in the private sphere, and paid work which was performed in the public sphere. This distinction created a division between men and women's work where men gained control of the public sphere and women were consigned to the private, devalued sphere (Bassin et al., 1994; Reskin & Padavic, cited in Hattery, 2001). This role division had a significant impact on constructions of family, work and gender which has continued into contemporary societies. Nuclear family units, where men were the economic providers for the family and women were responsible for child care and nurturance of the family, emerged during this time and still informs traditional family ideologies (Thurer, 1994).

The 20th century ushered in an era of scientific motherhood where the instinctive virtues of the Madonna were no longer sufficient for raising a happy and healthy child (Thurer, 1994). While the scientific approach professionalized motherhood, it also undermined mothers' confidence and subsumed their role under the male expert (Thurer, 1994). The moral context of mothering intensified and it became a moral imperative for women to be good mothers and act responsibly towards their children,

a change which was closely intertwined with expert-guided motherhood (Miller, 2005).

Following the industrial revolution, women's participation in the public labour sphere was low until the Second World War when there was an influx of women into work previously reserved for men (Hattery, 2001). However, after the war, this trend reversed when men reclaimed their jobs. The cult of domesticity returned (Thurer, 1994) and the psychological profession warned mothers of the long-term psychological damage that employment could pose to their children (Tizard, 1991). At policy level, this pattern was reinforced by offering men higher wages than their female counterparts, making it possible for (White) families to live the traditional nuclear family ideal, with the mother at home with the children and the father being the bread winner (Hays, 1996). This period also consolidated the child-centred view of mothering (Thurer, 1994) and children predominantly occupied schools and homes rather than the workforce (Arendell, 2000a).

The eighties and nineties saw resurgence in the participation of women in the labour force (Hattery, 2001). Social and economic factors such as increased wages for women, a reduction in the buying value of wages and higher expectations regarding the standard of living impacted this changing pattern. Furthermore, significant improvements in availability of child care facilities, the elevation of women's educational attainments and the development of their market related skills contributed to their increased participation in the labour market in past few decades. However, in spite of these explicit improvements, mothers were still implicitly excluded from the workplace by patriarchal structures which dictated that "opportunity and reward structures are gendered" (p.6). Women continue to have fewer opportunities in the labour market and they are remunerated at a lower level with the result that many women still choose to opt out of the labour market, thereby placing them in a position that is economically dependent on men. Furthermore, certain tasks, such as those involving nurturing, themselves have become gendered and constructed in such a way that women are naturally suited to perform them, further tying them to the domestic sphere and excluding them from the workplace. Hattery (2001) thus argues that systems of patriarchy and capitalism create and maintain gender inequality and oppression both in the home and in the labour market.

The modern mother concurrently raises children and participates in paid employment (Arendell, 2000a). While maintaining the Madonna-like virtues of her predecessors, she has the additional obligation to optimize her children's development by providing stimulating extracurricular activities (Arendell, 2000a) and simultaneously engaging in the public labour market that functions according to a contradictory ideology. The practices of contemporary good mothering not only ensure the practical well-being of the child but also embody symbolic meanings and cultural values about the identity and worth of the mother (Garey, 1995). Ensuring good childhoods has become the primary task of the mother, secondarily the task of families, and to a lesser extent the responsibility of social institutions (Arendell, 2000a).

The private-public dichotomy does not hold the same relevance for women from disadvantaged contexts, where the economic provision is an integral, rather than separate component of motherhood (Segura, 1994). The currently documented gendered division of labour in contemporary families is not universal, but rather associated with privileged White, middle-class families; whereas lower-class, Black women have always worked (Collins, 1991). Sharpe (cited in Nicolson, 1999) found that the limited employment opportunities available to girls, especially Black and working-class girls, resulted in a perception of motherhood as fulfilling, satisfying and offering relative freedom. Furthermore, African American women generally experienced less psychological stress and more gratification in combining employment and mothering when compared to their Anglo counterparts (Arendell, 2000b). Similarly, recent immigrants to the USA from traditional and rural parts of Mexico, experienced less ambivalence towards full-time maternal employment as compared to Mexican mothers who had been raised in America and adopted a more Westernised ideology that separated mothers' economic and nurturant roles (Segura, 1994).

The relative value assigned to mothers, as opposed to women, differs outside the dominant Western ideology. African women often assume a position of sub-ordination based on their gender, whereas the position of mother is central and honoured both in patrilineal and matrilineal societies (Arnfred, 2003). Oyewumi (2003) labels the cultural construction of Western motherhood as "nuclear

motherhood" (p.2) where the wife occupies a subordinate position within the nuclear family and hence motherhood too becomes gendered and patriarchalized.

Mothering in South Africa is positioned within a unique socio-political history, marked by inequality that has greatly influenced the experience of South African mothers (Walker, 1995) resulting in constructions and conditions of motherhood which differ along racial lines in South Africa (Arnfred, 2003). Collectivist cultures define individuals in relation to others and understand the self as interdependent with others (Mkhize, 2004). Collectivism shapes motherhood in Black communities where mothering is made easier by co-mothering where the responsibility of mothering is shared and the inherent contradictions of mothering are alleviated (Arnfred, 2003). The extended family, rather than the nuclear family, forms the context for childrearing in African societies (Sudarkasa, 2004). Motherhood is perceived as more empowering for Black South African women than their White counterparts (Arnfred, 2003), echoing international findings. White mothers show more Western tendencies towards individualist mothering practices where the individual is regarded as an autonomous entity (Mkhize, 2004) and parenting is located within the mother-child dyad or within the nuclear family (Sudarkasa, 2004). The individualization of motherhood in White South African communities, coupled with unequal social expectations for mothers and fathers, often results in less satisfying experiences of motherhood (Arnfred, 2003).

Depending on the societal sub-group, it is possible that a mother may be responsible for mothering tasks to varying degrees. As Walker (1995) pointed out, in South Africa, it is a frequent phenomenon that the physical care of the child is frequently delegated by middle-class working women to a domestic worker or helper, while working-class women depend on other family members to care for their children. Access to material resources, adequate child care and health care is racially stratified and inequality in the maternity system is evident (Shefer & Ratele, 2006). Urbanisation has been accompanied by a shift from traditional birthing practices towards more Western practices. In a South African study by Fouche, Heyns, Fourie, Schoon and Bam (cited in Chadwick, 2006) it was found that the childbirth experience is changing from a integrated, traditional practice towards a technological and fragmented process for African women. Black South African women are increasingly turning to medical professionals, rather than to traditional sources of

information, for guidance concerning issues related to pregnancy and childbirth (Chalmers, 1987). It is likely that this trend could be extrapolated to other aspects of mothering.

The number of South African women and mothers who have entered the labour market and have become economic providers in their families has followed international trends. Results from the South Africa Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 1998 indicated that 42 percent of South African households were headed by women (Department of Health (DoH), 1998). Overall, 28 percent of South African women over the age of 15 were formally employed, while the percentage increased to 52 percent amongst women with a Grade 12 qualification. 31 percent of employed women had at least one child under the age of six years old, with this figure increasing to 41 percent in urban areas (DoH, 1998). Because this data was collected in light of day care facilities for working mothers, the total number of working mothers would be considerably higher than the figure stated if mothers with children of school going age were also included. The data from the survey further indicated that the higher the education level of the women, the more likely they were to hire help and use day care institutions. Finally, it also showed that the role of husbands or other partners in looking after the children while the mother worked was minimal across all the racial groups, levels of education of the mother and in both rural and urban contexts (DoH, 1998).

While there are clear differences in the current contexts in which Black and White South African women mother, accompanied by different ideas and practices, Walker (1995) points out that there is "sufficient evidence of overlapping understandings, common concerns and even common experiences among women from diverse backgrounds" (p. 19) to invalidate separate constructions of Black and White motherhood. Furthermore, acculturation, the process whereby the culture of a group is being modified as a result of contact with different cultures, is evident in South Africa where Western or White ideas and practices are being assimilated into traditional African ways of life (Mkhize, 2004).

2.2 Motherhood and Feminist Research

A feminist lens was utilised to understand the theoretical field of motherhood and was furthermore applied in the methodology of this research project. Feminism explores how the cultural construction of gender can be utilized as a tool of oppression whereby patriarchal social arrangements allow men personal, physical and institutional power over women (Kiguwa, 2004). Feminism extends further than a theoretical study and endeavours to challenge and change women's subordination to men in all domains. While patriarchy may take many different forms and be experienced differently by women in diverse social, cultural and political contexts, feminist argue that patriarchy is universal (Glenn, 1994; Kiguwa, 2004). Mothering occurs in social contexts where power differentials exist between men and women, between racial groups and economic classes and hence motherhood cannot escape being an arena of political contest and feminist study (Glenn, 1994). Glenn (1994) further argues that "a patriarchal ideology of mothering locks women into biological reproduction, and denies them identities and selfhood outside mothering" (p. 9).

Feminism has sought to contextualize gender research by locating it within the socio-economic, political and ideological context of women's lived experience, moving away from the objective, value-free positivist approach to gender studies (Kiguwa, 2004). The positivist approach to gender research generally reinterpreted women's experiences and meanings from a (predominantly) White, male framework, which allowed little space for subjectivity in women's narratives (Kiguwa, 2004). Feminist research cannot be seen as a homogenous research style as there are many views on feminist research, some of which are conflicting (Olesen, 1998), however, a common emphasis in feminist research is to give voice to women who in the past have been silenced and 'to address women's lives and experiences in their own terms, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women' (DuBois, cited in Kitzinger, 2004, p.126). Feminist research has not only created a platform for women's voices to be heard, but has also altered the ontology and epistemology of social research by problematising taken for granted aspects of women's lives. As feminism has evolved, not only have male-oriented and male-influenced interpretive

frameworks been challenged, but equally so, the Western, White feminist worldview (Olesen, 1998).

Feminist research has been described as being in an embryonic stage of development (Neuman, 1997) and that no unitary feminist epistemology or ontology exists. Some feminist researchers adopt a more critical approach to assertively advocate for social change, while others adopt an interpretive approach (Kiguwa, 2004; Neuman, 1997). There has been a shift from research with a critical focus on theories and ideologies of motherhood to more recent research which has seen an emergence of more empirical data based on the experiences of mothers (Arendell, 2000b; Hattery, 2001). Maternal understandings, experiences and practices have been investigated, thereby expanding the focus of earlier literature on motherhood which emphasized mothering in relation to child outcomes (Arendell, 2000b). A further divergence noted by Arendell (1999, 2000b) is between research which aims to describe the breath of motherhood and capture the universality of motherhood whereas the other, a more particularistic approach, seeks to account for diversity and variation in particular maternal practices and ideas. Both models converge at a point of recognizing that motherhood is ideologically laden in a way that is "powerful, pervasive and persistent" (Arendell, 1999, p.2). In the past decade, feminist constructionism dominated motherhood literature in the United States, where "mothering and motherhood are viewed as dynamic social interactions and relationships, located in a societal context organized by gender and in accord with the prevailing gender belief system." (Arendell, 2000b, p.1194). In this context, motherhood is seen to be variable and dynamic rather than universal, static and reduced to biological determinants.

Oyewumi (2003), writing from an African perspective, accuses Western feminists of reducing motherhood to a gender category by positioning mothers foremost as women. This gendered identity positions women as inferior to men and hence motherhood too is subsumed by patriarchy, whereas Oyewumi (2003) argues that if motherhood is seen as separate to womanhood, it cannot be subjugated to male dominance in the same way. The reproductive processes, unique to a woman, place her in a god-like authoritative position in African culture. However, the powerful maternal position is erased from many Western feminist accounts, resulting in powerlessness and lack of agency of the mother (Oyewumi, 2003). Thus the argument

appears to be that Western feminists themselves have created a construction of motherhood that disempowers women. While the core argument proposed by Oyewumi parallels the romantic feminist stance, where the unique reproductive capacities of women are celebrated, an important difference lies in the inherent status awarded to 'mother' over 'woman'. Kiguwa (2004) further critiques universalist Western forms of feminism for ignoring the triple oppression exemplified by the lives of many Black South African women, based on their gender, race and class.

There are certain methodological limitations to the use of feminist research and difficulties that arise from the very epistemology of this paradigm. Feminism recognises the power of ideology on all aspects of human existence, including the research process. Although, women are viewed as the experts on their own experience, these experiences themselves and reports of them are embedded in a "social web of interpretation and re-interpretation" (Kitzinger, 2004, p.128). Furthermore, the analysis of the data and the meaning attributed to it is influenced by the ideology of the researcher. Kitzinger (2004) specifically points out the difficulty of assimilating data that is contrary to feminist ideology. Researchers faced with this dilemma often resort to omitting these voices from research or choose to reinterpret them. Thus some voices are endorsed as accurate and transparently reflecting real experiences, while others are treated as misrepresentations of women's experiences and are used as rationalisations for patriarchal discourses (Kitzinger, 2004).

2.3 Theorising motherhood

Different social, economic and political contexts have resulted in competing ideologies of motherhood and discourses of what constitutes the contemporary good mother (Arendell, 2000a; Hattery, 2001; Kruger, 2006). The medical discourse and the child development discourse inform an ideology of instrumental motherhood where the mother is viewed as an object responsible for giving birth to and raising physically and psychologically healthy children. In opposition to these two discourses, feminist ideology has focused on the mother as subject (Kruger, 2006; Miller, 2005; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

Instrumental motherhood: mother as object

Prominent discourses in psychology and medicine regard mothering as instrumental in the reproduction and development of healthy children (Kruger, 2006). The female body, specifically the reproductive body, has been highly medicalised (Miller, 2005). Authoritative knowledge around reproduction and childrearing has been located within a hierarchical structure in Western cultures, where medical and psychological epistemology dominates over women's personal experiential knowledge (Miller, 2005). Oakley (1990) described the mother within the medical discourse as a reproductive machine that requires monitoring and intervention. She further argued that the female body and women's self esteem in their mothering has been subordinated to the expertise of obstetricians and gynaecologists. Obscuring the subjective experience of mothering works to the detriment of both mothers and children (Oakley, 1990). Furthermore, the medical discourse pathologises different events in the reproductive cycle of women, necessitating expert managed, highly technological intervention (Ussher, cited in Miller, 2005).

Dykes (2005), writing from a feminist stance, used the metaphor of the production line to describe how mothers experience breast feeding. Using thematic analysis, she highlighted themes of supply-demand, control and providing as expressed in the narratives of mothers, indicating how their experience had been objectified (Dykes, 2005). Earle (2003) isolated breastfeeding as a practice of mothering that was strongly influenced by the medical and psychological discourse of being a good mother, and hence responded to with mixed feelings ranging from guilt to fulfilment by real mothers. Within this instrumental discourse, the maternal body is objectified and mechanized.

Within developmental psychology, the role and character of the mother is scrutinised, but usually only as the "origin and environment in a theory of childhood" (Parker, 1995, p.13). More specifically, the psychoanalytic framework centralised the role of the mother but only in relation to the child. Kleinian theory suggests that early in development the mother is viewed as having no self and she is experienced only in terms of the infant's perceptions, while later, the infant separates its existence from the mother as she is viewed as a hostile threat (Segal, 1988). The differentiation of the

self is in response to the mother being unable to meet the needs of the infant. Bion emphasized the role of the comforting mother who intuitively understands her baby's state of mind and, without being overwhelmed by it, is able to give the distress shape and meaning which renders it more tolerable to the baby (Symington, 1992). Through repeated experience the child will develop an inner structure for dealing with his distress (Symington, 1992). This places an enormous responsibility on the mother to intuitively understand and accurately respond to her infant's emotional needs.

Later work in psychoanalysis by Winnicott and Kohut objectify the mother as the self-object or mirror for the child (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). The baby is satisfied to the extent that the mother responds accurately, timeously and empathically to its needs. Winnicott emphasized the emotional containment that the mother offers the child (Watts, 2002). He emphasized the role of "good enough mothering" in providing an environment with minimal frustration in order for an integrated, good sense of self to develop (Watts, 2002). The critique of object relations theory does not pertain to the interpretation of the infantile experience, but in its lack of response to the mother's experience (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). The mother is reduced at best to a 'mirror' or 'container' and at worst to a 'bad breast'. The discipline of psychoanalysis has been accused of mother-blaming. In a review of 125 journal articles from major clinical journals relating to psychopathology Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (cited in Parker, 1995), found that where causes for pathology were discussed, mothers were invariably identified as the pathogen. Furthermore, clinical practice tends towards forming an allegiance with the child in the client against the mother.

Psychoanalytic theory has been revised in certain contexts. Feminist psychoanalysts such as Parker (1995) and Chodorow (2002), have skilfully applied psychoanalytic theory to the experience of motherhood, from the subjective vantage point of the mother, to understand the profound psychological changes provoked by transition to motherhood.

Instrumental discourses of motherhood which were not sensitive to the context of mothering discriminated against large groups of mothers. Child development norms were generally based on populations of White, middle-class children and their mothers, and deviation from these norms by poor, Black children was interpreted as

being indicative of pathological mothering (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Furthermore, psychological understandings that single out the mother-child dyad and ignore the broader context in which mothering occurs, ignores the reality of women's lives (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991).

Developmental theories have infused the practices and standards of childcare (Arendell, 2000a). The mothering ideology of the late 20th and early 21st century dictates that the mother is not only responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of the child, but also for the educational and enrichment needs of the child. Parents, and predominantly mothers, are responsible for cultivating their children by providing stimulating and enriching activities which secure their children's immediate and future psychological wellbeing. The contemporary good mother carefully and intentionally orchestrates her child's development to guarantee a positive outcome, as opposed to a more passive approach to child development where a child simply "grows up" (Arendell,2000a).

Instrumentality is a hallmark of masculinity, and some feminists argue that research on motherhood from a masculine perspective has focused on the instrumental value of mothering, as opposed to the subjective experience of women (Gerson, Alpert & Richardson, 1990). The instrumental mother, who is constructed as an object in relation to her child, appears to have little inherent worth, besides ensuring a positive outcome for the next generation. Furthermore, she judged as a good or bad mother depending on the outcome of her child.

Feminist motherhood: Mothers as subject

The feminist movement has shifted the focus of psychology onto women as subjects. This has included a re-evaluation of the position of the mother and the meaning and experience of motherhood, where the mother is positioned as a subject in her own right, rather than simply as an object in relation to the child (Bassin et al., 1994; Phoenix & Woollet, 1991). "The greatest impact of feminist scholarship on concepts of mothering has been to divest them of their biological or moral agency, unequivocally expressed, outside of time and history, and to demonstrate the importance of understanding mothering within a dynamic, interactive context of

social, political, historical, and sexual factors, multicultured, multiracial, and multivoiced" (O'Barr, Pope & Wyer, 1990, p.3).

There has been division between feminist discourses relating to motherhood that Kruger (2006) describes as rational feminism and romantic feminism. In the former discourse, equality between men and women is foregrounded and mothering as the primary role of women is rejected (Kruger, 2006). This discourse advocates that women's lives should not be subjugated by childbearing and parenting (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Romantic feminism emphasizes differences between the genders and accentuates women's unique capacity to mother (Kruger, 2006). This discourse aims to elevate the position of women as mothers and mothering is regarded as a rewarding and fulfilling experience that empowers women (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Kruger (2006) highlights how both these positions may be problematic in that they set unrealistic standards for women, which may in turn lead to negative expectations and experiences of motherhood. The subjective position of mothers has been theorized with respect to their identity, emotions and roles as women (Arendell, 2000b; Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Literature tends to reduce the mothering experiences to dichotomies of good and bad, thereby obscuring the complexity and ambivalence of the experience of motherhood (Oberman & Josselson, 1996).

Mothering confers a more powerful identity on women than their marital or career status (Rogers & White, cited in Arendell, 2000b) and it seems that mothering identity is more significant for Black women (Arendell, 2000b). Oberman and Josselson (1996) documented how motherhood expanded a woman's sense of self but at the same time reduced her sense self in the all-consuming care of the child. Similarly, the identity of mother was one which offered inclusivity into a community of mothers, while simultaneously excluding mothers from participating actively in a social life due to the demands of the child. Mothers also had to negotiate the tension between the identity of a sexualized partner and a desexualized mother (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Daniels and Weingarten (cited in McGoldrick, 1988, p.43) point out the positive influence of motherhood in the life cycle of women: "[Parenthood] gives us an opportunity to redefine and express who we are, to learn what we can be, to become someone different."

Surrey (cited in Kruger, 2006) contends that women's identities are not organized around the self, but rather around the self in relation to others. Thus the emphasis is not on reaching autonomy but on relationship, more befitting a collectivist than individualist understanding of the self (Mkhize, 2004). Mothering offers an opportunity to find a sense of worth in a woman's connectedness to another. Unfortunately, even though this perspective emphasises the subjective experience of women, it is subsumed by the discourse that women are naturally endowed with maternal instincts and can be powerful only in relation to their control over their children (Kruger, 2006). Miller (2005) traced the social identity of mothers which were constructed in relation to others and past experiences and which were then incorporated into existing identities of the women. Walker (1995) expanded on this social identity of mothers which "involves women's own construction of an identity as mothers as informed by the discourse of motherhood, mediated by the practice of mothering, but not a simple derivative of either" (p.421). This dimension of maternal identity recognises the interaction between individual and collective dimensions that influence the subjective construction of motherhood. Furthermore, the social identity of mother is but one of multiple social identities that may co-exist for women (Walker, 1995).

Children inspire complex and contradictory emotions in a mother, ranging from nurturing love to vengeful anger (Parker, 1995), omnipotence to inadequacy and guilt (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). These feelings are further intensified by uncertainty regarding the long term outcome of one's mothering efforts (Arendell, 2000b). Mothers' negative feelings are understudied (Arendell, 2000b) or denied (Parker, 1995). Nicolson (1999) states that depression, in the context of motherhood, is related to a loss of power, choice and autonomy. Kruger (cited in Kiguwa, 2004) explains postnatal depression as "an expression of rebellion against the maternal role" (p.20).

The way a mother feels about mothering and the meaning it has for her is deeply influenced by cultural representations of motherhood. Parker (1995) suggests that these representations are becoming more "static and idealised" (p. 2) in spite of the fact that women's lives are becoming more mobile. Furthermore, the unrealistic idealization of motherhood in contemporary culture has undermined real mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

2.4 The ideology of intensive motherhood

Arendell (2000a) argues that intensive mothering ideology, arising from the instrumental discourse, continues to dominate and form a normative, hegemonic discourse. The hegemony of this ideology is demonstrated by its institutionalization in social practices (Arendell, 1999) and its prevalence despite cultural contradictions (Hays, 1996); the diversity of maternal practices to the contrary (Arendell, 1999; Hattery, 2001; Collins, 1991); the unique material and cultural contexts that shape mothering (Collins, 1994) and the consciousness raised by feminism (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Deviancy discourses have targeted mothers who in some way do not conform to this ideology of motherhood which defines mothers as absorbed in the full-time nurturance of their children in the context of marriage. Single mothers, minority mothers, poor mothers, lesbian mothers and employed mothers have all been constructed as deviant (Arendell, 2000).

While the powerful influence of ideologies on the individual lives of men and women cannot be underestimated, to ignore the personal agency of individuals would be a discredit. Mothers are not passive recipients of the discourses or norms dictated by mothering ideologies (Garey, 1995). Instead, they approach them from various social and internal positions and respond by "adopting, modifying, or reinterpreting them" (Garey, 1995, p.416). Women are "doing motherhood" (p.416): they are active agents in conducting themselves within the dominant ideologies that construct notions of the good mother. Different resources add uniqueness to the strategies used to actualize these constructions of the good mother (Garey, 1995).

Although feminist research on the topic of motherhood has grown extensively and challenged the instrumental ideologies of motherhood, it is apparent that the more traditional ideologies of motherhood still inform what it means to be a good mother in contemporary society: "the ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother" (Bassin et al. 1994, p.2). However, the levels of time and expertise required to meet the criteria of good mothering continue to rise and become more evaluative, despite the increasing number of mothers who are employed (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

This dominant ideology that governs Western ideas and practices regarding motherhood has been termed "intensive mothering" by Hays (1996) and has subsequently been utilized as a construct by several researchers (Arendell, 1999, 2000; Guendouzi, 2006; Hattery, 2001; Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Hays (1996) identifies the ideology of intensive mothering as a model which suggests that mothers invest an inordinate quantity of time, financial resources and personal energy in raising children. Essentially, this model of mothering is emotionally absorbing, where mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and optimal development of the revered child, while sacrificing their own needs to meet the needs of the child (Hays, 1996).

Hattery (2001) offers a comprehensive description of the assumptions of intensive mothering ideology: men and women have essential differences in their childcare capacities; mothers have superior abilities over other childcare providers; women are expected to stay at home to mother; the social arrangements of mothering are good and benefit everyone; gender roles are fixed and based on essential gender differences. These assumptions were derived from a scrutiny of family interactions, expert testimonies (offered in parenting books and magazines) and non-expert testimonies (by political leaders, prominent court cases and media commentaries) in the USA (Hattery, 2001).

Underpinning these ideals of motherhood is the implicit acceptance that mothers are biologically and inherently equipped to mother, thereby distinguishing mothering as a gendered role. Furthermore, mothering is fundamentally child-centred.

Inherent motherhood and gender

Intensive mothering is underpinned by "essentialist assumptions of women's instinctive capacities to be there for others, meeting needs and acting responsibly" (Miller, 2005, p.138). Chodorow (2002) identified how mothering ideology is inextricably linked to gender: femininity is synonymous with nurturance which in turn is seen as an inherent result of being able to carry and give birth to a child. Maternal instinct and natural motherhood is a construct that has permeated contemporary

culture with childcare manuals and parenting magazines promoting mother love as natural and motherhood as the ultimate fulfilment for women (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Marshall, 1991). Nicolson (1999) critiques the evolutionary psychology perspective from which the construct of maternal instinct is derived. The maternal instinct relies on the biological drive towards procreation and nurturance of offspring. Further evidence for innate femininity is derived from the spontaneous emergence of the maternal skills required for childrearing following the birth of a child. Nicolson (1999) queried this biological determinism on the basis of the many women who do not want to have children, have difficulty making the transition to motherhood and seek clinical intervention for depression following the birth of their children. The essential femininity espoused by intensive mothering ideology, where motherhood epitomizes womanhood, makes it difficult to make sense of and articulate the ambivalence which is frequently experienced by mothers (Parker, 1995). By remaining silent about unexpected feelings and difficulties of motherhood which do not match expectations of idealized motherhood, mothers perpetuate and reproduce the myth of instinctual and natural motherhood (Miller, 2005).

Kiguwa (2004) challenged the belief of essentialism which holds that identities, including the maternal identity, are preset and unalterable. She argues instead from a social constructionist perspective that knowledge pertaining to maternal identity and role is produced and reproduced through ideological discourse (Kiguwa, 2004).

Child-centred mothering

Critical feminists generally discuss motherhood in the light of patriarchy. However, Douglas and Michaels (2004) suggest that in intensive mothering ideology, subservience to men has been replaced by subservience of women to children. Hays (1996) identified several ways in which psychological theories have altered the construction of the child and hence lead to the construction of the intensive mother. Firstly, appropriate child rearing shifted in emphasis from rigid training to the nurturance of the sacred child, with families becoming increasingly child-centred as opposed to adult-centred. Secondly, psychological and cognitive child development models promoted the idea that a child's development was not an inevitable process

that resulted in adulthood, but instead needed the careful and thoughtful contribution of parents to ensure an optimal outcome (Hays, 1996).

The role of experts in ensuring this optimal outcome was emphasized, starting with the popularization of expert guidance in childcare manuals which have continued to flourish since inception with Dr Spock's infamous *Baby and Child care* manual (Hays, 1996). Motherhood has become increasingly professionalized, frequently guided by men in the medical profession (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Media has had a profound influence in endorsing, glamorising and the mass propagation of hegemonic discourses which elevate the status of the child (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Johnston & Swanson, 2003).

2.5 Implications of a hegemonic motherhood ideology based on intensive mothering

Conflict within and between mothers

Adams (cited in Kruger, 2003) suggests that the more extensively a woman is exposed to institutions and their discourses, the more mediated her experience of motherhood becomes and the more removed she may feel from the reality of her lived experience. For some mothers, their feelings and behaviour do not match that prescribed by discourses of motherhood and they experience conflict between their own needs and that of their child (Miller, 2005; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Pope, Quinn and Wyer (1990) state that "the ideology of mothering can be so powerful that the failure of lived experience to validate [the ideology] often produces either intensified efforts to achieve it or a destructive cycle of self- and/or mother-blame" (p.442).

Mothers evaluate and defend their own and other's mothering according to dominant ideologies. Arendell (1999a) concluded that the critical nature that mothers reflected towards their own and other mothers was indicative of an internalised ideology of hegemonic motherhood. Notions of the sheer fulfilment experienced by women who are inherently prepared for motherhood, denies the difficult experiences and negative emotions of many mothers (Oberman & Josselson, 1996; Parker, 1995). Mothers

often experience this internal dissonance as alienating, both from themselves and other mothers.

Any role occupied by women besides that of mother has been represented as deviant (Gerson, Alpert & Richardson, 1990) and the ambivalence experienced by many employed mothers may originate from this construction of the idealized mother who is fully occupied at home caring for her family (Segura, 1994). Hegemonic discourses define what is considered deviant and mothers themselves participate rhetorically in propagating deviancy discourses regarding other mothers' practices (Arendell, 1999a). Several authors (Arendell, 2000; Buzzanell et al., 2005; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hays, 1996; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Hattery, 2001) have noted how adherence to or the rejection of assumptions of intensive mothering has created rifts between mothers, specifically between those who choose to remain at home with their children and those who are employed outside of the home. This rift is fuelled by media which creates contradictory expectations and places both groups of mothers in double binds (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). The insidiousness of this discourse is evident when research is considered which indicates that there is no difference in child outcomes as a function of maternal employment (Riggio, 2006; Tizard, 1991), and yet it still forms the cornerstone of the "mommy wars", a term coined by Steiner (2006) which describes the animosity between mothers who stay at home and those who are employed outside the home.

While creating these internal and external divisions, hegemonic motherhood functions to divert attention away from the gendered inequality that marks the lived experience of women, (Arendell, 1999a). The function of this diversion is to relieve the patriarchal state of obligations to assist mothers materially and politically (O'Barr, Pope & Wyer, 1990) and furthermore, locating the distress experienced by many mothers within the pathological individual, rather than at a societal level (Price-Knowles, 1990).

Positive outcomes of intensive mothering

A critical discussion of intensive mothering would be incomplete without regard for the potential positive outcomes of this ideology. Some mothers experience a sense of

accomplishment over their male counterparts at being able to maintain the standards of the intensive mothering ideology while still being influential in the workplace (Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke & Liu, 2005; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Furthermore, it has been suggested that attaining the ideal of intensive motherhood creates a sense of moral superiority for self-sacrificing mothers in the face of a profit driven, self-interested society (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

Without seeking to reify notions of the objectified, instrumental mother, it must be acknowledged that children have benefitted from the intensive mothering model which advocates for involved, emotionally sensitivity mothering which promotes a child's self-esteem (de Marneffe, cited in Johnson & Swanson, 2006). However, the outcomes are not as overwhelmingly positive as one may intuitively think. Weingarten (cited in Johnston & Swanson, 2006) suggests that intensive mothering confuses dependency with intimacy between mother and child and that the child takes little responsibility for the relationship as the mother takes sole responsibility. Furthermore, children may develop a sense of entitlement, lack initiative and struggle to develop relationships based on reciprocity (Weingarten, cited in Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Limiting the diverse experiences of mothering

While mothers are active in managing, directing and shaping their lives within the constraints of an internalized ideology of motherhood, a hegemonic model of motherhood stifles alternative exploration and acceptance of alternative meanings and practices of motherhood (Arendell, 1999). However, the current model of mothering is not static. The exploration of the divergent stances on motherhood based on race, class and marital status, which do not inform the hegemonic view of motherhood, but instead in the past have been constructed as deviant, create cracks in the current model which will allow for the possibility of change (Arendell, 1999). While the power of the intensive mothering model has weakened, judged by the number of employed women, its dominance is still evident in the negative emotions and cognitive dissonance which are prevalent amongst mothers who resist the dominant ideology (Hattery, 2001).

Despite the dominance of intensive mothering ideology, alternative motherhood ideologies have emerged. Some of the assumptions of these alternative ideologies include tenets that mothers are as entitled as fathers to seek employment as a means of personal fulfilment and economic productivity. Furthermore, mothers can form a team with other child care providers, as opposed to being the sole care giver of their children (Hattery, 2001). Collins (1994) identified caring for the child and economic provision as the key concerns of African American mothers. Furthermore, she argued that the dichotomous split between spheres of work and home, and constructions of male and female roles were not as rigid in Black families as compared to their White counterparts. For Black women survival, power and identity are at the heart of mothering practices and children are understood as a broader, collective group, rather than limited to biologically related offspring (Collins, 1994). Furthermore, beliefs that mothers are responsible for children's current and future personal stability do not dominate these alternative discourses of motherhood (Arendell, 2000b).

2.6 Experiencing Motherhood

Although feminist ideologies offer an alternative to the instrumental view of mothers, theoretical feminist ideologies may "remove women from individual experiences instead of illuminating them" (Kruger, 2006, p.193). Kruger (2006) suggested that psychologists should continually seek to explore how women experience motherhood and what mediates this experience, rather than attempt to generate a monolithic ideology that reduces the diverse and unique experiences of mothers.

Recent feminist research has emphasized the lived experience of mothers. Generally, these studies take a more interpretivist approach, compared to the more critical stance of the theoretical discussions engaged with previously. Unfortunately, most of the research, while articulated from a feminist perspective, still predominantly utilised participants from middle-class, White families, in heterosexual marriages. A further critique is that while the research gave voice to women, it did not critically engage with power differentials based on gender. The research reported here focused

predominantly on the experiences of mothers who are employed outside the home as this is the subgroup of mothers that this research report is based on.

Significant amounts of research have been produced which takes an instrumental view of mothering where the effects of maternal employment on child outcomes is considered. Riggio (2006) offered an extensive overview of this research. However, the literature currently under review, will maintain the subjective perspective of the mother.

The term "working mother" juxtaposes concepts that are defined in opposition to one another and hence mothers are left to reconcile a conceptually incompatible dilemma, both internally and in the way that they choose to perform both roles (Garey, 1995; Hays, 1996; Lewis, 1991). The ideal mother does not work outside the home while the labour market is based on traditional male values that tend to preclude extensive involvement in child care (Garey, 1995; Hays; 1996; Lewis, 1991). Hays (1996) argued that working mothers face a cultural contradiction based on the discrepant ideologies that inform these opposed spheres. As a result, working mothers experience the tension between their commitments to their work where expectations are moulded by a competitive capitalist market and their commitment to their children which is shaped by a selfless intensive mothering ideology. Hays (1996) further argued that this contradiction follows gendered lines where men and fathers do not experience the same tension created by this cultural contradiction. Even though a significant proportion of mothers work outside the home, society remains critical of mothers' absence from their children (Arendell, 2000b). Collins (1991) noted a racially and socially stratified contradiction in mothering ideology where poor, Black mothers who did not work, but instead depended on welfare, were constructed as bad mothers while more affluent White mothers chose to work were likewise constructed as bad mothers.

Working mothers are subjected to a deviancy discourse when they violate norms of the intensive mothering ideology by choosing to work, despite their devotion and competency as mothers (Arendell, 1999). Hays (1996) suggested that the only way out of this dilemma was for working mothers to be equally involved and attentive as their stay-at-home counterparts, while adding the role and responsibilities of employment, thereby conforming to the norm of the intensive mother. However, other

studies (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Johnston & Swanson, 2006) recognized the agency of women in reconstructing or reframing the expectations of intensive mothering to suit their employment choices. However, these are fragile internal reconstructions which readily succumbed to external criticism or judgment (Buzzanell et al., 2006). The difficulty in conceptualizing an integration of commitment to work and commitment to family left employed mothers in a position where they were perceived to be inadequate in both spheres (Garey, 1995). Feelings of guilt and ambivalence, as well as societal judgment, had to be endured by mothers who deviated from the ideology of intensive mothering (Arendell, 2000b). Furthermore, critical divisions and conflict occurred between mothers who made different employment choices (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). While there may be some acceptance of the dual role of worker and mother, the good mother prioritised care-giving and nurturance of her children above her employment (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

Mothers who choose to work do so for a variety of reasons. While most literature predicting maternal employment focused on economic determinants and cost-benefit considerations, Hattery (2001) found that mothering ideology had more predictive value than any other variable in predicting maternal employment. Johnston and Swanson (2006) contended that mothers chose employment partly based on their mothering ideology and in part their mothering ideology evolved in relation to their lived experience and employment choices. By modifying their mothering expectations, all the mothers were able to make meaning of their work choices as benefiting their children (Johnston & Swanson, 2006), which corresponded to Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson's (2001) assertion that mothers justified the fulfilment that they derived from work as adding to their children's happiness. Despite the stressors and personal sacrifices such as reduced sleep, curtailed leisure and relaxation, that employed mothers experienced, employment was shown to be conducive to the mother's personal well-being and the gratification she experienced in her parenting (Arendell, 2000b). Miller (2005) described the function of work in establishing and maintaining a woman's identity outside of motherhood.

The employed mother's time and energy at home was allocated in a child-centred and gender-based manner, at the expense of the mother's own "needs, identities and activities" (Arendell, 2000a, p.27). Wimbush (1987) documented a reduction in

personal time, space, autonomy and health in employed mothers due to increased workloads and responsibilities. Scaling back on employment for mothers reinforced gender-based division of labour where mothers' financial contributions were reduced and the fathers' contributions towards the children and home in terms of time and energy declined (Arendell, 2000a). Mills (cited in Arendell, 2000a, p.30) locates maternal scaling-back at an ideological level, and argues that "scaling back represents a private, family-level response to what is too often depicted as a private, family-level trouble, rather than a public issue".

Historically and still prevalent in popular culture, the employment of mothers is strongly opposed based on the belief that it risks psychological injury to children (Tizard, 1991). While earlier psychological work, such as Bowlby's attachment theory, implied that mothering could not be shared and hence was strongly opposed to day care, more recent research has shown no conclusive evidence of psychological damage. Where reasonable childcare is available, the arrangement may be beneficial to both mothers and children. In spite of this, many working mothers still experience guilt and are constructed as selfish and inadequate when they leave their children with alternative childcare providers to pursue employment (Tizard, 1991).

One way in which employed mothers managed to resolve the tension between attaining the expectations of intensive mothering and working, was by engaging in shift work. Garey (1995) analysed interview data collected from nurses who worked the night shift. These mothers purposefully chose this employment option in an attempt to construct themselves as stay-at-home mothers who conformed to the model of intensive mother in that they limited their work visibility; they availed themselves to actively participate in their children's school and extra-curricular activities and they succeeded in positioning themselves in the culturally sanctioned domestic sphere during the day. They frequently deprived themselves of sleep and compromised their marital relationships to keep their work from what they perceived as impinging on their mothering (Garey, 1995). Although the experiences of the mothers and the way in which they constructed themselves was sensitively described and the discourses that they employed was unpacked in this study, gender was only encountered at a descriptive level and not explored further at a discursive level.

In a Swedish study by Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) part-time and full-time employed mothers were interviewed to gain a sense of their ideas and practices regarding motherhood. The Swedish context advocates equality at policy level and ideological level. Through the narratives of these women's lived experience, the researchers focused on the socially constructed understanding of motherhood within a discourse of gender equality. Three dominant discursive positions were identified, all of which conveyed perceptions of femininity and the needs of the child. The first discourse, namely "motherhood is accessibility" framed femininity as giving unconditionally to the child, made possible by the overriding joy of motherhood. This position was succinctly stated as: "the child creates the mother, and the mother exists for the child" (p. 423). The second position involved the mother finding fulfilment in a life beyond the child and then conveying this sense of well being back to the child. Thus while the importance of personal fulfilment of the mother was recognized, it was valued in relation to the affect that maternal happiness would ultimately have on the child. The third discursive position emphasized maintaining separate home and work spheres and focused on the woman outside her role as mother (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001).

An interesting observation made in this study with regard to the emphasis on equality in Swedish society, was that women who chose not to be employed were questioned with regards to their over-traditional femininity. At the same time women who prioritised their work over their children were also sanctioned (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). The irony appears to be that a society that embraces equality and has created structures to advocate gender equality has even further restricted the ways in which women can make choices regarding employment and mothering.

The heterogeneity of the participants chosen by Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) gives breadth to the study as it included mothers from various income brackets, social strata and educational status. Although the research reported to explore the constructions of motherhood from within a context of gender equality, this only featured in the findings related to the last discursive position described which highlighted that gender inequality was prevalent when it came to practical role division between parents. Gender was noticeably absent from the findings in relation to the first two themes.

Johnston and Swanson (2006) performed a similar study in the USA to that of Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) and although their study was limited by a more homogenous, predominantly upper-class, White sample, their findings concurred with the three discursive positions previously described. They compared constructions of intensive mothering expectations by mothers according to their work status. Work status was categorised into three groups, namely: at-home mothers, part-time employed mothers and full-time employed mothers. They found that mothers not only altered their work status to live up to intensive mothering expectations, but that they also altered how they constructed intensive mothering expectations to match their working status, indicating a cyclical relationship between ideology and maternal employment. From this research it was evident that mothers were not passive recipients of ideology, but instead were active agents, shaping ideology to suit their context. However, the ideology of intensive mothering, with underlying tenets of child-centredness, still prevailed and defined the parameters of what was constructed as a good mother (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Ethnographic research based in a school analysed the interactions of several teachers who were mothers (Guendouzi, 2006). The research demonstrated that the mothers' narratives supported the discursive positions described by Elvin-Nowak and Thommson (2001). Accessibility was identified as being the key challenge facing this group of working mothers and it was suggested that the unrealistic demands created by the intensive mothering discourse resulted in feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Guendouzi, 2006).

The study by Guendouzi, (2006) highlighted an aspect of the working environment that previous studies had not considered: mothers used the workspace to jointly construct cultural scripts that attempted to resist the hegemonic discourse of intensive mothering. Thus this research departed from other studies where work was view unilaterally as a contradiction to mothering, and instead explained how the working environment offered a space where restrictive discourses were challenged. Furthermore, co-complaining between the mothers was constructed as a means of coping with the practicalities and guilt arising within the confines of the intensive mothering discourse (Guendouzi, 2006).

The research evidence discussed thus far explored the experiences of employed mothers within the ideology of intensive mothering where the focus was very much on the child-centredness of this model. Although gender inequality, a further hallmark of the ideology being investigated was mentioned, it was not explicitly explored. Research by Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) and Arendell (1999, 2000a) included a gender lens in the investigation of working mothers and the intensive mothering ideology.

Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) used qualitative analysis of interviews with parental couples to explore how gender equality in everyday interactions was related to their construction of motherhood. Motherhood was located within interpersonal relationships, rather than as an internal process existing solely in the mother. The results of this study indicated that the participants constructed mothering using two predominant models: mothering as a gendered talent and mothering as a conscious collaboration between both parents. In the first model, gender inequality was maintained by the belief that mothers shared an inherent connection with their children and thus organized their time around their children and took continual responsibility for their children, thereby allowing fathers to step back from directly taking responsibility for childcare tasks and building relationships with their children. This model suggested that the idealization of motherhood perpetuated gender inequality in parenting. In the second model, parents assumed shared responsibility for their children and compensation was made for biological differences between the parents. Fathers actively took on tasks and were open to learning, while mothers stepped back and allowed fathers to engage directly with the children (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005).

From this research it was evident that the construction of fatherhood was intricately related to the meanings and practices assigned to motherhood (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005). To understand parenting as collaboration, rather than as a gendered practice, would require a better understanding of how mothers and fathers create each other by including interpersonal dimensions of mothering. The authors contended that, if mothering as a gendered talent remains a dominant discourse, gender

inequality will continue to be perpetuated, even if fathers were involved in parenting (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005).

This research was one of the few studies to include fathers as participants and locate motherhood within an interpersonal relationship beyond the mother-child dyad. However, the participants were limited to heterosexual parental couples who were raising children together, thereby using a very traditional understanding of nuclear families which excluded a large sector of mothers. Furthermore, by limiting the study to the interpersonal aspects of mothering, the broader social context was not probed to illicit how this nuanced mothering. In the context of the current research, the employment status of the mothers was not treated as a variable and the authors did not specifically distinguish how mothers positioned themselves in relation to work, mothering and gender equality.

Arendell (2000a) investigated how modern mothers, who concurrently raised children and participated in paid employment, strategized their time and energy to maximize their presence and their children's involvement in extracurricular and enrichment activities. These mothers coped by scaling back on housework and employment, thereby reducing the time and energy that they committed to these pursuits in favour of their children. Furthermore, they scaled back on their personal expectations and fulfilment in terms of career advancement, housekeeping norms, marital time and personal time. They made sense of these temporal personal losses by focusing on the limited opportunity that they had to add value to their children's lives (Arendell, 2000a).

Buzzanell et al. (2005) investigated how a group of managerial women constructed personalized versions of the "good working mother". They found that these mothers reframed the good mother ideals into the good working mother ideal which was more compatible with their lifestyles. Good working mothers were able to arrange high quality day care for their children, they took on a higher proportion of childcare in relation to their partners and finally these mothers took pleasure in their role as working mother. However, the authors found that these constructions were fragile as the image of good working mother could easily be shattered if, for example, the child care was inadequate or it was pointed out that they failed to fulfil a child's need. Their

reframing was ultimately child-centred, rather than based on their personal fulfilment and reified traditional notions of the intensive mother (Buzzanell et al., 2005).

The irony of the gendered cues that the mothers responded to was highlighted: they focused on cues such as the mother as primary caregiver, responsible home organizer and their contribution to the family to validate their decision to work (Buzzanell et al., 2005). However, the participants ignored the absence of fathers in the discussion of parenting or they portrayed fathers as irresponsible or childlike. In this way, the mothers ironically preserved the domestic realm as their own and replicated traditional gender roles, in spite of what their managerial positions would suggest. Thus they avoided implications that they did not fulfil their own and societal expectations regarding motherhood, despite the fact that they are engaged in employment away from home and their children. The second irony noted was that this group of mothers distinguished themselves from stay-at-home mothers by focusing on ways that constructed them as different and even superior to stay-at-home mothers. The distancing between these two groups reifies narrow discourses of motherhood (Buzzanell et al., 2005).

What this work highlighted in contrast to other literature is the pride the women took in being able to manage the challenges of being working mothers (Buzzanell et al., 2005). They enjoyed the "diversity of experiences and identities associated with both realms of their lives", and they justified paid work by constructing themselves as happier mothers and material providers, in both accounts contributing to their children's wellbeing (Buzzanell et al., 2005).

Hattery (2001) contended that the beliefs around motherhood influenced the range of solutions that women explored in relation to negotiating work and family tensions and the strategies that they implemented to manage this tension. Her study examined how motherhood ideology influenced maternal employment and concluded that the predictive power of motherhood ideology on maternal employment was central for a large proportion of the participants. Other factors that contributed to mothers' choices regarding their work status included structural factors (occupational opportunity; child care costs and availability; number of children and partner's schedule) human capital

factors (the mother's educational attainment and work experience) and economic need (Hattery, 2001).

The two primary goals of the mothers were identified as being a good mother who lived up to intensive mothering expectations and to secure a comfortable standard of living for the family (Hattery, 2001). Depending on the extent to which her participants embraced or rejected these conflicting goals and strategized towards attaining them, she classified the participants into four groups:
The *conformists* accepted the intensive mothering ideology and prioritized it over a comfortable standard of living. All the mothers in this group chose to leave their work to be at home with their children. The *nonconformists* rejected the dominant motherhood ideology and actively pursued securing a middle-class standard of living for their families. These mothers defined their roles as including nurturing and providing. All these mothers were employed full-time. The *pragmatists* accepted both the dominant motherhood ideology and the pursuit of a comfortable middle-class standard of living. These mothers used a cost-benefit analysis of multiple factors, rather than adhering to an ideology, to find pragmatic strategies to balance and weave work and home. The final group, the *innovators*, also accepted both the dominant motherhood ideology and the goal of providing a middle-class standard of living. However, these mothers found new ways of balancing and weaving home and work, by participating in employment without relying on paid childcare.

Although Hattery's study (2001) was almost entirely based on interviews with White mothers, her research indicated that even within a fairly hegemonic sample, there were challenges to dominant motherhood ideologies.

There is a paucity of research on the experiences of mothers in South Africa (Kruger, 2006). Most of the research that has been done has focused on mothers and children that are regarded as being at risk and within instrumental discourses of motherhood which isolate 'problem mothers'. Furthermore, the impact of race and culture on contemporary motherhood in the South African context has not been adequately researched (Kruger, 2006). As Walker (1995) points out, for White, middle-class South African mothers, the discourse of 'Good Mother' dictates that the physical and emotional care of children is central, whereas, the discourse amongst Black working-

class mothers is one that emphasises financial support above day-to-day care and emotional care (Walker, 1995).

Long (2005) sensitively explored the contradictions present in the experiences of HIV positive mothers. Two studies that utilized South African mothers' narratives (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Kruger, 2003) identified how these women reproduced dominant motherhood ideologies. Magazwa (2003) examined the perceptions and experiences of a group of Black and White South African mothers.

Motherhood in South Africa is firmly embedded in discourses that "emerge from, reflect and reproduce a discourse of inequality" (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004, p. 17). This research, although exploring racial and economic inequality at a theoretical level, only addressed gender inequality, as the participants, bar one, were all White professionals. Although intensive mothering ideology was not identified as a construct in this particular research, the themes that were identified correlated with this construct and seemed prevalent in the participants' narratives. The authors noted that the discourse of motherhood as empowering was poorly represented in their data but that there was space for constructing non-conflicting working motherhood, where a mother's private and public work could carry equal significance (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004).

Although Kruger's research (2003) was based only on two participants from a larger study, it was evident that dominant mothering ideology was prevalent in shaping the narratives of these mothers in the South African context. Kruger (2003, p.198) concluded that 'the most individual stories are also shaped by political realities and that women will not be able to embrace the ambivalence in their stories in a context where such ambivalence is not yet tolerated within the dominant ideologies'.

Magazwa (2003) included race in her analysis of mothering in South Africa. She found that Black mothers experienced more familial support from their female relatives and that mothering was considered a communal, rather than individual practice. However, she pointed out that this was changing for Black women in multiracial suburbs and mothering was bearing more semblances to White families where child rearing was a private affair. Generally, parenting was viewed as the sole responsibility of the mother in both groups. The mothers valued their work and

mothering and expressed the satisfaction that they derived from both these roles. The expression of maternal ambivalence was fiercely sanctioned by some mothers (Magazwa, 2003).

From these findings, it appears that while some elements of intensive mothering ideology are present in the narratives of South African mothers, there is space for competing ideologies. However, it is evident that mothering ideologies, regardless of their form, are influential in the lives of mothers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The feminist academic, Suleiman, succinctly states: "Mothers don't write, they are written" (cited in Parker, 1995, p.8). A feminist perspective stresses the need for the raw data of maternal voices when embarking on a study of motherhood. A cohort of working South African mothers was interviewed to gain access to this raw data and the transcripts of these interviews were then analysed to derive themes pertinent to the research questions. Within the feminist paradigm of research, the researcher's own voice in the research was acknowledged.

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research was undertaken to explore the lived experience, feelings and meaning making of the participants. Qualitative research emphasizes the value-laden, subjective nature of research and seeks to understand how social experiences are created and attributed meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Rich, in-depth accounts of participants' experiences can be accessed by utilising a qualitative approach, although this approach does not purport to offer scientific facts or unchangeable evidence (Parker, 1995).

The subjective nature of qualitative research methods have been widely critiqued by positivist researchers as biased, resulting in contamination of data, however, feminist researchers have maintained that researcher neutrality is impossible (Rapley, 2004). Instead researcher and participant collaborate and research is viewed as a conjoint project as opposed to a discovery of essentialist truth (Denzin, cited in Rapley, 2004).

This research draws on a phenomenological approach to gain understanding into the lived experience, subjective perspectives and attribution of meaning in the lives of mothers. The intention behind this qualitative approach is to stress the subjective position of mothers as autonomous, evolving subjects, rather than as objects of their children's development and wellbeing (Parker, 1995). Qualitative research allowed for this exploration into the lives and contexts of the participants (Neuman, 1986).

3.2 Procedure

Subsequent to obtaining ethical clearance for the research project from the University of the Witwatersrand, purposive sampling was utilized to select participants. When initial attempts to recruit participants from nursery schools and primary schools in Johannesburg failed, participants were recruited from employees at an institution of higher learning and a secondary school.

Ten mothers who met the criteria for the study were approached individually to explain the study and to request their participation in an interview. A one hour meeting for the interview was arranged at the convenience of the mother. A semi-structured interview was designed by the researcher in consultation with the supervisor based on previous studies documented in the literature. The interviews were conducted at the participant's residence or office and lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Nine interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. One interview was transcribed from memory on the same day as the interview after recording failed. Thematic content analysis was utilised to analyse the transcribed interviews. The results and findings of the research would be documented within the research report submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand.

3.3 Participants

Inclusion criteria for the study required that the mother had at least one child between the ages of seven and ten and that she was professionally employed for at least 25 hours a week. A total of ten mothers between the ages of 35 and 41 years were included in the study. They each had one or two children whose ages ranged from three to twelve years. All the mothers were positioned in heterosexual marriages and living with their children and partners at the time of the study. The participants all had tertiary education, with the majority having a postgraduate level of education. Their occupations included social workers, educators, counsellors and psychologists. The sample was constituted of forty percent Black women, thirty percent Indian women, twenty percent White women and ten percent Coloured women.

3.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were utilised in order to access the raw data of mothers' voices and focus on their subjective position. Semi-structured interviews are useful for generating data which focuses on an understanding of individual life experiences because they allow for rich data to emerge and do not constrain the discussion, nor become intrusive or suggestive (Schurink, 1998). Furthermore, interviewing enabled the gathering of complementary and contrasting data on the same themes (Rapley, 2004).

An initial list of questions was generated after engaging with the academic literature on motherhood and surveying several studies on motherhood that utilised interviewing in the methodology (Hays, 1996; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Magwaza, 2003). The questions were revised and the interview technique was adapted following the pilot interviews and in consultation with the supervisor in order to illicit conversation and data that paralleled the research questions (See Appendix I).The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the questions to guide the interview, but they did not limit the content parameters of the interview.

3.5 Data analysis

The data was analysed using thematic content analysis, as this approach is useful for identifying, analyzing and interpreting themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis offers the flexibility of being used across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches while providing a rich and complex account of data. Thematic content analysis can be used to reflect reality or, as in the case of this research, to question and untangle the complexity of 'reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research project, thematic analysis was used within a feminist paradigm which emphasises women's subjective positions and offers a critical approach to understanding women's experiences (Kitzinger, 2004; Neuman, 1997). The meanings, experiences and feelings expressed by mothers were analysed to draw

out prominent themes relating to the ideology of intensive mothering and the ambivalence generated by the mothering experience.

A systematic process of coding was applied to the data. The aim of coding is to simultaneously reduce the data and categorise it (Neuman, 1997). This research utilised the three stage coding process of raw data described by Strauss (cited in Neuman, 1997).

The data was reviewed on three different occasions. Firstly, during open coding (Neuman, 1997), each transcript was read through twice in its entirety and broad themes were identified. This initial phase was influenced by the research questions posed and the literature on motherhood, utilising a deductive or 'top down' approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings of both international (Hays, 1996; Oberman & Josselson, 1996) and local research (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Magwaza, 2003) influenced the codes used to identify themes in the data. Initial codes were utilised to condense the data into categories that were noted. Some of these initial codes included the emotions expressed by mothers, the roles of fathers and the ideal mother. Themes were not limited by the codes derived from prior research. A bottom-up, inductive approach was also utilized to identify those themes that were not delineated by existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unexpected themes emerged from the data, such as the agency of mothers in their independent decision making regarding pregnancy and the differentiation between role of mother and other aspects of womanhood amongst participants from certain racial groups.

The second pass through the data, referred to as axial coding (Neuman, 1997), focused on the initial coded themes rather than the raw data. Additional codes were noted, codes were organised and the axis of key concepts was identified. Furthermore, codes were clustered or subdivided as required under themes. For example, the role of father was organised under a broader theme of gendered parenting and accessibility was divided between maternal and paternal accessibility. During this procedure, deeper analysis occurred and the questions regarding the causes, consequences, interactions, strategies and processes indicated by the data were asked. For example, notions of inherent motherhood were closely related to race and which in turn impacted on the gendered nature of parenting. A further example involved the

reciprocal nature of constructions of childhood and motherhood. During the final phase of analysis, selective coding (Neuman, 1997) involved scanning the data for cases that illustrated the theme and could be useful for comparison or contrast. The research questions prompted a careful analysis of the data for examples which both supported and contradicted intensive mothering ideology. This phase of coding involved further reorganising, clustering and refinement of themes that remained close to the data.

3.6 Reflexivity

The research questions that led to this study were not only birthed out of literature and the stories of many mothers, but also out of the researcher's own experience of motherhood which was complicated and enlightened by her work in the fields of medicine, education and psychology. The disjuncture between personal experience, social constructions and the theory of motherhood motivated this research project at a very personal level. The deep personal investment in this project required reflexivity from the researcher, to ensure that her own voice did not dominate those of the participants.

Reflexivity is described as the process whereby one critiques or actively becomes aware of oneself as a person, a psychologist, or a researcher (Gibson & Swartz, 2004) in an effort to accurately represent findings despite personal investments in research. Reflexive journaling and field notes were made to accompany the transcripts in an attempt to enhance confirmablity (Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998). The field notes allowed for a systematic record of observations of non-verbal information (Silverman, 2000) and the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between the content and process of the interview. When the field notes were reviewed, the emotional investment and earnestness of the mothers became evident. While the taped and transcribed data did not always convey the emotional intensity of the mothers, it was conveyed in the occasional tears, abundant smiles, rolling of the eyes and hand gestures that occurred during the interviews. This additional information was incorporated in the analysis of the data, to enhance the understanding of the data and

to attribute a more accurate meaning to the data. Finally, it also aided in keeping the individual voices of the mothers alive in the transcribed data.

As a woman and mother, the researcher had the advantage of being able to empathise with some of the experiences of the mothers. However, this position was a potential obstacle to the credibility of the research in that it could foreclose the discovery of experiences and ideas that were foreign and unique to the participants. Boyatzis (1998) pointed out that qualitative research is especially vulnerable to the projection of the researcher's own values, emotions and attitudes onto the information presented by the participants. The researcher was particularly sensitive and reflexive in gathering data from mothers who subscribed to alternative ideas and understandings of motherhood. Personal reflexivity during and after the interviewing allowed the researcher to explore the emotions that arose in response to the interview. The emotions ranged from empathy, humility and surprise to irritation and even anger at some of the participant's narratives. Where the researcher empathised strongly with a certain viewpoint, it was important that this data was not overrepresented, at the expense of data which created more uncomfortable feelings and dissonance for the researcher. The self reflexivity and perspective of the supervisor in the analysis of the data were active attempts towards ensuring that the researcher did not use her life experience "as an informal reference point" (Gordon, 1990).

The conversational style of the interviews, the empathy conveyed by the researcher and the use of self disclosure, aimed to create a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the participants and encouraged a deeper level of disclosure. As Denzin (cited in Rapley, 2004, p.22) stated: 'in the collaborative or active format, interviewer and respondent tell a story together…the two collaborate in telling a conjoint story'. However, despite these efforts at an egalitarian collaboration between researcher and participant, the nature of the research and the position of researcher inevitably created a power differential. This was obvious where, despite efforts to reassure the participants that their mothering was not being evaluated, it was noted how the discourses subtly shifted to include more negative aspects of mothering once the tape recorder was switched off and two mothers were informally engaging with one another, as opposed to relating as a participant and a researcher. While efforts

were made to limit the impact of inherent power differentials in every aspect of the research process, the words of Shefer (cited in Macleod, 2004), rung true:

> The very moment I ask the question or the very moment I write the discourses on paper, without each of the participants present, constitutes a moment of representation, a moment of hiatus between 'me' and 'them'. This moment ultimately reflects one of unequal power between researcher and participants (p. 534).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were made at two levels: the pragmatic measures that ensured confidentiality and autonomy of participants and more philosophical considerations that paid attention to the use of power in the interactions with participants and in the use of the knowledge generated by the research project.

Participants were given an information sheet (See appendix II) that invited them to participate in the study and which indicated that participation was entirely voluntary. The purpose and requirements of the study were explained in the information sheet. The participants were given the assurance that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research or to refuse to answer any questions without any repercussions. They were also assured that the information gathered during the interview would be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality and sanitisation of the data was particularly important as the women worked in the same organisation. To prevent the identification of participants in the report, all identifying data was disguised and pseudonyms were used to refer to participants in the report. Small portions of the transcripts, rather than entire transcripts, were used in the report. Informed consent for interviewing, recording, transcription and reporting of the collected data was obtained in writing before starting the interview (see Appendix III). The tapes and transcripts were securely locked away and access was limited. The tapes and transcriptions would be destroyed post-qualification.

The research only proceeded after Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand. Although it was deemed unlikely that the research would pose a potential risk to participants, counselling or debriefing was made available to participants at Family Life Centre located in Johannesburg in the event that the interview resulted in emotional distress for the participant.

Chapter 4 : Findings

Four main themes emerged from the interview data, namely:

- Inherent Motherhood
- Motherhood is child centred
- Mothering is gendered
- Ambivalence to motherhood

Each theme was explored further using several subthemes and attempted to highlight the interplay between ideas and practices of motherhood in the context of what has been identified by literature as the prevailing ideology of intensive mothering. Child centredness, gender inequality and inherent motherhood are key elements of intensive mothering, whereas maternal ambivalence may be closely associated with the prevailing ideology. Strong emotions were evoked by the topic of motherhood and the findings are presented in such a way to convey these emotions and to remain close to the voiced experiences of the participants.

4.1 Inherent Motherhood

An overarching theme that influenced all other themes was the idea that mothers are innately and biologically predisposed to having and raising children. For many mothers, motherhood was the essence of femininity and womanhood was directly equated with motherhood. Some mothers were easily able to move between the idea of being inherently maternal and the practices involved in this role, whereas others experienced dissonance between the idea and practice of inherent motherhood.

While many of the mothers reflected on the external influences on their maternal identities, such as the role of socialization of women and the influence of female relatives in their understanding of motherhood, numerous of the participants located their identity as mother as originating from within.

Ayanda, a social worker who had largely raised her children independently, referred to the innate and instinctual nature of motherhood. However, she also acknowledged the environment as shaping how a woman practiced motherhood:

It (motherhood) comes from within. You won't get it anywhere, you won't read it anywhere, it depends on your circumstances and situation, then you come up with a strategy to make sure you are a good mom… keep that instinct, the inner you always alive…it will never make you go wrong.

Ayanda illustrated the instinctual nature of mothering with an example of how she was able to use her maternal instinct and careful observation to determine if her children would be sick the next day. It was interesting that, although she prided herself in her ability to be instinctually attuned to the needs of her children, Ayanda also discussed how she had done "research" into how to best care for her children at a physical and emotional level. From this observation, it would appear there is an inherent contradiction: although a mother was innately equipped to raise a child, she still relied on the input from experts to ensure that she was a good mother.

Lindiwe, a psychologist and mother to a seven year old, was more ambivalent to the idea that women are innately attuned to the needs of their children and questioned whether mothers are simply more mindful and rehearsed in their ability to respond to their child's needs. In this excerpt, she explained, with a tone of frustration, why she responded to her child's need to have a birthday cake at school while her husband did not:

So I don't know if because I'm there it's woman intuition or we think of these things it's...

The idea that being a woman is synonymous with being a mother was strongly conveyed by the Black mothers. Jacoba made this distinction between White and Black women:

It's not like, if you can compare the Whites, whether they have children or not, life does move on. But in terms of us Blacks, it's like, people will see you as a kind of a not being a real person…

Jacoba conveyed the idea that having a child was the very purpose and identity of a Black woman. Her personhood was marked by her status as a mother, or stated differently, a child defines a woman as a person.

Similarly, Portia powerfully suggested there was no alternative identity for a Black woman besides that of "mother" and that a woman only came into being when she had a child:

> *What are you before a mother, by the way? You are a what?*

The uniqueness of women in relation to reproduction was the most evident in the participants' narratives around their decision to have children. While some mothers negotiated their decision to fall pregnant with their husbands, they viewed this experience as inevitable due to their status as married women. Other mothers viewed their unilateral decision to fall pregnant as evidence of their agency as women and an aspect of their lives that they felt empowered by. The latter view was more strongly held by the Black mothers, and was conveyed by the words of Jacoba:

> *Then I just realised, that I didn't want somebody to say "Jacoba, ok we can have children now". Uh uh, I have to make my own decision.*

While Portia articulated a similar independence from her husband in her decision to have a child, the maternal instinct discourse was prominent and interacted with her agency as a woman and the nurturant role ascribed to women:

> *I don't think you decide to be a mother, uh, I, I think when your maternal instincts becomes a little bit powerful (laughs). You feel you have to be a mother, you feel you want to mother… he wanted a child for reasons better known to him but I wanted a child you know, I wanted to nurture somebody.*

Jacoba commented on the social identity that being a mother affords a woman and the positive emotions that she associated with this:

> *(laughs) Well it's like,… just being called a mother. Someone saying "mummy" to you. Ja it's like…especially looking at people like going on the malls, seeing people with a little one, then you just feel happiness.*

Alison, a high school teacher and mother to two daughters, described how the notion of inherent motherhood made it very difficult to make sense of her experience as a new mother as it was contrary to the expectations raised by this discourse. Furthermore, it prevented her from articulating her ambivalence to motherhood and seeking help as she felt so isolated and abnormal in her experience.

I think there's a general expectation on moms and that's why I think I struggled in the beginning because you're all supposed to tune into motherhood and love it, and mothering should be a natural thing to you and umm…I didn't love it in the beginning. And it was hard being honest about where I was because there were very few people I could say to "Gee whiz, I'm just hating this"… I thought there was something wrong with me. So you … I tended to keep quiet and thought it's something I've got to cope…pull yourself together, this is supposed to be amazing…

4.2 Motherhood is child-centred

The core understanding and experience of the participants in terms of motherhood was one in which they occupied the role of primary caregiver. As such they were responsible for their children's holistic well being which in turn required them to be available and accessible to their children.

Children's well-being is the governing principle in mothering

The interview data suggested that mothers took continual responsibility for all aspects of their children's well being and development. While some mothers saw themselves as solely responsible for this and hence prioritised all aspects of child's well being, others viewed it as a shared responsibility with their husbands. Some mothers viewed their children as needing to take partial responsibility for themselves and thus reframed their role as mother by constructing an alternative understanding of the child. The mothers also maintained a dual focus between ensuring the immediate well-being of their children and the long term outcome of their children. They focused on all aspects of their children's development, ranging from their physical needs to their emotional and cognitive or academic needs.

The two prominent physical needs that featured in the mothers' narratives were their children's need to be well fed and healthy. Although these may seem to be obvious needs that good mothers would automatically fulfil, when they were constructed as

competing needs in the presence of limited resources, conflict was created between the child's needs and the mother's needs. The most frequent means of dealing with this tension was to prioritise the child's needs.

Portia described how she sacrificed her own needs to meet her child's physical needs. What also became clear was that the father did not alleviate her load, but instead added to it, to a point where she felt unable to cope:

> *You have to sacrifice your needs and wants as a mother to make sure that the rent is paid, to make sure that water and electricity is there, the child eats, there's uniform. All these things are on top of your shoulders. And he (husband) also has demands that he puts on you. So it's just too much.*

Lydia described how, since becoming a mother, she had to adjust her eating habits. The phrases "had to" and "one can't do that" suggests that there exists a prerequisite standard for adequately meeting the nutritional needs of a child for which a good mother is responsible:

> *I've had to make food which I, you know…before I was quite happy with having popcorn for supper but one can't do that anymore. And also that whole: "have to have breakfast" whereas I would have run off to school without having breakfast.*

Cynthia described how she still physically spoon fed her seven-year-old daughter to ensure that her nutritional requirements were met and so that her daughter knew that her mother had fed her. Cynthia stressed her role by emphasizing "I've" in this excerpt, demonstrating the symbolical importance of the mother in providing nourishment:

> *My daughter is a very poor eater. I want her to know that **I've** given her food. Once she eats anything thereafter, I don't stress as long as I know I've given her something substantive initially.*

An important requirement for a good working mother was the ability to evaluate how sick a child is and then to make an accurate appraisal of whether to prioritize work or child. Most of the mothers commented that they found their working environment supportive in times of crisis and it seemed that the process of prioritizing was an

internal, rather than external process for the mothers. In their narratives, some mothers approached the scenario of a sick child pragmatically; focusing on the practical arrangements required by a sick child and utilizing family responsibility leave where necessary. However, for other mothers the emotional implications of being a working mother and having a sick child were more prominent.

Irene explained her response when her child was sick with strong emotion:

> *Oh, I run. I run, I drop everything, I run.*

The urgency in her response was clarified by a previous experience:

> *There was one time where they phoned me and I was on lunch and that was the one day when I didn't go immediately. And after half an hour I got another call and within five minutes I got two more calls and my husband had already been on his way. And this is a time when it was serious. So I think it's also my fear with that, that because I didn't respond quickly, at that time, that I think it's important that you drop everything quickly and go. That's the priority.*

Irene expressed how she was driven by fear that her child may need her and that she would not be present. This excerpt also proposed that in the scenario of a sick child, the father was an inadequate substitute for the mother who is the primary caregiver.

Portia repeatedly gave examples of how she evaluated her mothering on the basis of the physical well-being of her child. Any deviation from optimal health in her child was attributed to a personal failure which resulted in self blame and disappointment in her mothering ability. Furthermore, she experienced her child's weaning herself from the breast as a rejection of herself as mother. Breastfeeding demonstrates the overlap between themes of maternal responsibility and inherent motherhood as breast feeding symbolizes the epitome of nurturance in the inherent mother discourse.

> *My child was only breastfed for six months. From there she weaned herself off my breast and it took me to another level. I was…I had to go for psychological assessment. I could not understand why my child does not want my breast. I felt rejected.*

Alison felt unprepared and unable to initially meet the demands of the physical care of her child. Like Portia, Alison also required professional help at the time to help her cope with her sense of inadequacy, however, her current narrative utilised humour to amplify her situation to the absurd, possibly to deflect from a very real sense of her personal inadequacy as a mother:

> *It* (becoming a mother) *was a hang of a shock. …I was 22 hours in labour and I was absolutely exhausted… and about 3 hours later in the dead of sleep and they brought this child to be fed and that for me was like "WHAT have I done?" and, so that shock for me thinking "can't they just take her down to MacDonalds, I am exhausted". That for me was the shocking thing, this is now it, I'm on duty twenty four-seven, and there's no escaping it.*

Alison also conveyed a sense of being trapped by the physical demands of being a mother. Although she claimed that these demands became less as her children grew up, she still described herself as *"being at my children's beck and call all the time"*.

The participants expressed a deep investment into the emotional well being of their children. Since all the mothers had been exposed to theoretical understandings of psychological development due to their careers, it was assumed that this would have an impact on how they constructed the maternal role in this area. They took responsibility for ensuring their children's emotional well-being and the behavioural outcomes of their children's emotional state. Again they emphasized both the current and future implications of mothering their children at an emotional level.

Shakira, an educational psychologist and mother to two children, made a particularly interesting observation regarding the nature of her work and her ability to be a good mother:

> *You know they say: "Psychologists make inconsistent mothers"… you know what you should be doing but reality is different …you're just human. So you're always feeling guilty about not living up to what you know you should be doing.*

The assumption would be that psychologists would be in an ideal position to provide optimal mothering based on extensive knowledge on the emotional needs of a child.

However, Shakira explained how having this knowledge compromised her ability to provide consistent mothering to her children. The knowledge of children's emotional needs and the expectations for good enough mothers prescribed by the discipline of psychology meant that she constantly felt inadequate, guilty and unable to meet the unrealistic ideals set before mothers. Her response to her guilt was to overcompensate with behaviour that she felt was not in her child's best interests, for example, not being able to enforce healthy boundaries and limits for her child's behaviour.

Shakira described her child as clingy and needy in his behaviour and blamed herself for inducing this response:

> *When I came home from work I needed him to need me, so I think I made him clingy.*

In a similar vein, Irene interpreted some of her son's emotional dependency as resulting from her premature return to work. She shared the responsibility for not preparing adequately for their child financially with her husband; however, she ultimately accepted the blame for not spending enough time with her son. The word 'should' suggests that there is a preset amount of time that a mother should spend with her children that would safeguard them against emotionally neediness. She juxtaposed her failure to give her child enough time with the need to provide for him financially.

> *… it wasn't a choice [to go back to work], it was a thing of, "You have to." I felt we didn't plan well financially. Uhm…because I think I would have liked to stay home longer with him because I think that's where his clinginess and neediness comes from. I didn't really bond and spend as much time as I should have.*

Lydia emphasized that by taking excessive responsibility for decision making and choices that confronted her daughters, she would be stunting their emotional development. By constructing her children as independent individuals who were able to take responsibility for their behaviour and actions, she no longer took singular responsibility for them. She recognized her own agency as well as that of her children. She also deviated from the discourse that elevates the child's needs, and instead narrated from a position of her own need.

It's almost as though we don't allow the children to become responsible for their actions and I need my children to be responsible …I would like that sense of responsibility in my children whereas I don't know if a lot of my peers allow their children to be responsible. They take the responsibility away from the children by forcing them into certain schedules.

All the participants had children of school going age and the role of the mother was emphasised at this developmental stage. Mothers were deeply invested in their children's education and were very involved in helping their children with homework. The mothers frequently evaluated their mothering based on their ability to choose the right school, provide adequate educational resources and the quality of their children's performance at school. They also frequently explained that their role in establishing a sound educational foundation was important to their children's future success.

After being quite critical of herself as a working mother, Cynthia, a teacher, viewed herself as being somewhat superior to other mothers because she was able to offer her children expert guidance in their education.

I feel you have a slight edge when you are working with the children. And the reason I feel that: I've compared them with their cousins and things where the moms and dads are working out of the education field and somehow they don't have the same perspective.

Good mothers are accessible

All the mothers interviewed in this research referred in some way to the need for mothers to be accessible to their children. Time was allocated in a child-centred manner. A distinction was made between themes that related to the ideas regarding the accessibility of mothers and the practices engaged with by mothers in negotiating this concept.

By working, the participants had limited time to spend with their children. These mothers found alternative ways of compensating for the time that was spent away from their children and strategized to increase the amount of time that they had

available to spend with their children. The understanding of accessibility was extended beyond physical presence to include the emotional and mental connectedness that the mothers felt with their children despite being engaged in other activities such as work. However, it was evident that managing the tension between the ideology of the constantly available and accessible mother with the practicalities of being a working mother, resulted in a range of emotions for the participants.

For many of the mothers involved in the research, spending sufficient time with one's child was the most important criterion of what it meant to be a good mother. There was an emphasis on the quantity of time that was spent with the children as well as the quality of the interactions with the children. Mothers also frequently referred to internal and external judgments of their inadequacy in accomplishing the ideal standards of accessibility.

The amount of time spent with a child formed an important yard stick by which mothers judged themselves and by which others judged the adequacy of their mothering. Jacoba reflected on the importance of time and the nature of the activities engaged in during this time. Her narrative continued to describe her guilt in relation to her apparent inadequacy:

> *As a mother, I think…giv[ing] time to your children is the [most] important [thing]…ja, time for children. …many of us [are] not doing much of that. And that is actually what our children need. We kind of occupy ourselves with our own life or our own daily routine. So, ja, I think giving your children time is the most important [thing] which they need…I wasn't doing it good enough… that's the thing that I felt guilty about it but I was kind of trying to make it up to them whenever I've got a chance.*

By referring to children and mothers in the collective second person, it seems that she was drawing on a universal ideology that governed all mothers as well as judging mothers collectively for not adequately meeting their children's essential need for maternal availability. By utilizing the second person it perhaps also allowed her not to engage with more personalized feelings regarding her own perceived inadequacy which her community reflected when she took her children to day care during the weekends so that she could study.

Cynthia, a teacher who described her struggle to balance the demands of schoolwork, (which required taking large volumes of work home) with her children's needs, identified the limited time that she had with her children as the central conflict that she experienced in her role as a mother. Again there was an element of personal judgment for her failure to make sufficient time to meet this core criterion of the good mother:

> *I think the time thing. If I had that right, I think it would be perfect. My time management is very poor.*

Accessibility was not only framed in the context of time, but also in terms of the ease with which the child could approach the mother with any concerns or problems. Mothers differed in their opinions as to how open this access should be with some mothers feeling that accessibility should be within certain boundaries.

Lydia, a self proclaimed feminist and mother to two daughters, emphasised the emotional and relational aspects of accessibility. However, just as Lydia did not see the need for unlimited availability to her children in terms of time, she also referred to boundaries in terms of the emotional accessibility that she gave her daughters. In this sense Lydia did not conform to the stereotypical image of the good mother, which she herself acknowledged during the interview.

> *So for me the ideal mom is someone the child can go and talk to and feel absolutely comfortable with them and trust completely. But know where the limits are, know where the boundaries are and respect. There needs to be a sense of respect.*

One reason behind the strong adherence to the idea of accessibility, frequently reported by the mothers, was the understanding that accessibility is a prerequisite for the optimal development of the child. Cynthia explained:

> *If we have more time we end up not just being understanding [of our children], but also [encourage their development]…in the sense that you're giving them that space to express, that space to grow, that space to experiment.*

Several of the mothers also expressed that their desire to be accessible to their children was a reaction to the inaccessibility of their own mothers. Irene, a counsellor and mother of two boys, captured this idea when she described the absence of her own mother in her upbringing. Irene also referred to accessibility as having immediate implications as well as long term consequences:

> *So for me it was always a thing of, "I don't want to be an absent mother. I don't want to be a mother from a distance." And I found that…I found it very difficult because my…because they never knew, they never understood me. My mom never knew who I was. I grew up away from her.*

Being available to one's child operated within a circumscribed timeframe. Cynthia was preparing for the individuation of her children and anticipated that in the future her children would no longer be accessible:

> *Kids grow up so quickly now where they don't want their parents. I always tell my husband we need to enjoy the time we have while they want us to be with them.*

While all the mothers acknowledged ideas regarding the centrality of accessibility, they were equally vocal regarding the limitations that work placed on the accessibility that they were able to offer their children. They had to confront the dilemma posed by the ideology that good mothers were unconditionally available, yet as working mothers, their accessibility was contingent on work demands. If the ideology behind the proposed good mother is not questioned, the logical conclusion to this dilemma would be that working mothers are inadequate mothers. While some mothers expressed feelings of inadequacy, most mothers found ways to justify their work.

Portia, a social worker and the sole income earner in her family, reflected on the difficulty she experienced when she had to leave her child at home to attend a workshop related to her work.

> *Ai, it made me feel like an incomplete mother, you know. Whereas the reason you are away from home is because you want to make money for her. But the child does not understand that part of life. She feels you have to be there every time.*

Portia's feelings of inadequacy at meeting her child's need for her to be constantly available extended to her very identity of being a mother. She perceived herself to be incomplete as a mother although she understood her work in the context of her child's material needs. However, this rationalization was ineffective in preserving her identity as a good mother because it did not compensate for the child's voiced need for availability.

Portia continued to explain that work not only deprived her and her child of time together, but it also limited her ability to fully immerse herself into her role and identity as a mother. This presented a shift from her own mother's generation where the role of worker did not compete and diminish the experience of motherhood. The dichotomous nature of work in the public sphere and motherhood was clearly expressed in this excerpt:

> *But in those times… mothers mostly were not working so they would have all the time to be mothers and they would explore motherhood to the extreme. But we don't because we have to divide our attention between working and mothering.*

The conflict that Portia experienced between working and being with her child was not confined to an internal experience or in her relationship with her daughter. Instead it played out against the backdrop of societal expectations of mothers being present and available to their children.

> *But somebody might feel that I'm sacrificing my child, whatever, against work, you know. Somebody might feel sometimes I'm being selfish. People judge you everyday. And I think we have to…one has to live in such a way you satisfy yourself and your family, you know, before the judgments that could happen in society. So I will live with judgments everyday.*

Portia conveyed the strength of societal judgment by using the word "sacrifice", where mothers are placed in an all or nothing bind. It suggested that being a working mother placed a child's very life at risk and construed the working mother as "selfish". However, in spite of the very hostile perception that Portia had of the social context in which she mothers, she demonstrated her agency in negotiating her multiple roles and duties, even where this went contrary to ideological expectations.

Irene identified how her decision to work was contrary to her child's preference. To make sense of being a good working mother while at the same being unavailable to her child, she distinguished between her child's needs and wants, and implied that if she was able to meet his needs, as opposed to his wants, she could still be a good mother and work. Furthermore, she identified how her unavailability challenged her son to discover his own resourcefulness and hence proved to be beneficial.

> *I think he [her son] would have loved me to be a stay-home mom or to have a kind of job where things could be flexible around his needs. And wants. Most of the time there are wants. ..maybe he needed to revise his own resourcefulness …I think it has helped him…*

Several mothers described how they attempted to keep work and home time separate. Thus although they were not available all day, certain time was allocated where work could not encroach on their time with their children.

Lydia distinguished between her time at work and her "mommy-time". However, even though she made this categorical distinction, inevitably the one sphere impacted and encroached on the other. There was a unique blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries in Lydia's situation because she taught at the same school where her children attended.

> *… I don't find it easy because first and foremost I'm the mom so if I had to leave my…if Ellen came in crying I would leave my matrics and go and sort her out which, I suppose, my boss wouldn't be happy about but I'm the mom first. Ja, I think I do give up so much for the school and I give up so much of my "mommy time" for school reasons… you know…so I'm the mom first*

Lydia relieved some of the tension created by having a shared space where she was both mother and employee by prioritizing her child's needs for her availability over that of her work. She also prioritised her role as mother over that of worker. She repeated this with conviction and prefixed her reiteration with "you know" suggesting that she was drawing on a discourse that the listener was obviously aware of and that she needed to reinforce that her role as mother took precedence over her role as worker.

The data suggested that teachers found it the most difficult to maintain the time distinction between the work time and mothering time. Time with their children was impinged upon by the volumes of work that had to be taken home, whereas the mothers in different occupations were more able to maintain time boundaries.

Although the availability of working mothers was clearly expressed in terms of time, the accessibility of working mothers to their children was compromised in more subtle ways. Many mothers complained that the exhaustion, frustration and other emotions that they experienced at work, spilled over into their time with their children, thus making them less attentive and accessible to their children. Particular to this sample of participants was their perception that the nature of their work impacted on their emotional accessibility.

Lydia illustrated this tension between expending too much emotional energy at work so that her emotional reserves for her own children became depleted. She also acknowledged that while she may have been physically available to her children, she was possibly emotionally unavailable due to the nature of her work where her mothering role extended to other children in her care.

> *I think the nature of my job means that I give the best of me to other people's children and that's the part I don't like. I have to be very careful of that, to try and make sure that uhm…I'm also a mum to my own children…sometimes… I'm so wrapped up in another child's issues that I'm grumpy with my own girls and I don't mean to be.*

Mothers also noted that although they were physically apart from their children, they remained present to their children at an emotional and mental level. It seemed that constant mindfulness of one's child was an aspect of accessibility that working mothers could attain, even though this construction of accessibility was fragile.

Portia described how a good mother was constantly thinking of her child and her safety, however, she acknowledged that this mental presence was not an adequate substitute for her physical presence and that her child could still come to harm and reflect on her adequacy as a mother:

I think the best mum would be a person who would always have the child's…you know, in their mind and make sure the child is safe at all times and understand that sometimes when things happen it's not because of your ill-making as a mother, you know.

The interview data made it clear that although all the mothers had to limit their time at home due to work obligations, their time at home in the afternoons and/or evenings and over weekends were predominantly arranged around the practical needs of the children. Several mothers expressed their disappointment that these practicalities took precedence over "just being" with their children.

The activities that seemed to predominate were homework, transport and preparing meals. Mothers frequently reported these practicalities in the form of lists or an itinerary, accompanied by a sense of hurriedness.

Lindiwe, a psychologist, emotively described how she struggled to fit all the practicalities of her child's schedule into the few hours after work. This became particularly problematic when an additional demand was made by having to buy a birthday cake after working hours.

Yesterday I rushed out here to get the cake and still had to rush, fetch him from karate, do homework…

Priscilla, a counsellor and mother to two daughters, also listed some of the practicalities that she had to accommodate. As opposed to Lindiwe, she did not feel overwhelmed by all these duties and instead seemed to welcome them. However, her careful choice of words appeared to convey ambivalence towards her time and how she felt about meeting the practical requirements of her children, but this ambivalence was carefully communicated:

I won't say my time is not mine but a lot of my time revolves around being a mother: picking up my child from school, doing homework, and my main focus now is spending time with her. I don't think it's more a duty, I think it's more because I want to.

Irene not only struggled to fit in all the activities in her sons' lives, but she also struggled with the fact that that the practicalities of mothering impinged on the time that she had to relate on an emotional level with her children. With a mixture of passion and sadness she described her situation:

> *There's just twenty-four hours in a day and sometimes you just feel that, "Sjoe!." And it's soccer and it's homework and it's lunch and it's this, you know... I find that I don't have time to just sit with them and just hear how their day has been.*

Jacoba expressed similar sentiments to Irene:

> *So you have to do the washing (of nappies) every time when you come from work; there is a child you have to give love to …no time to do that.*

Besides scheduling their time to accommodate their children's needs, the participants attempted to compensate for time spent away from their children by reducing or eliminating time that they spent on themselves. Mothers recurrently stated that 'me time' was lost. While they often referred to a reduction in leisure activities, the limitation on time for the mothers affected them at a deeper core level, where they began to feel that a part of themselves, not just their time, was sacrificed.

Ayanda, was shocked by the reality that motherhood was so all consuming in terms of her time and eventually sought therapy to assist her in implementing ways of regaining some time for herself:

> *… motherhood for me was like "ok this is real and it's fulltime" and you hardly have time of your own. Things don't work the way they would be before or the way you thought they would be like "I'll have enough time to rest".*

Irene shared similar sentiments to Ayanda, but went further to equate not having time for herself to actually losing parts of her identity. Later, in the interview she commented on how she needed to "find herself" again by spending time alone.

> *…it was very stressful because I felt there was no 'me'. There was no more time for me.*

Jacoba experienced this limitation on her time as alienating her from her very self , suggesting that time limitations affect her at a core, visceral level:

> *You essentially don't have time to listen to yourself, to listen to your heartbeat.*

Most of the mothers' accounts suggested that they had little agency when it came to how they spent their time at home. It appeared that they did not consciously relinquish their time to mothering duties, but that it was an automatic process over which they exerted very little control and which was expected of them. Lindiwe explained:

> *The "me time" is kind of minimal, if it's there. Um… in the sense that I come home, I have to think homework, I have to think bath, I have to think reading time…*

Lydia differed in her experience of time constraints and mothering, consistent with an earlier narrative where her own needs were not subsumed by her children's needs:

> *Uhm……maybe I've been selfish more, in that way. I haven't allowed it[being a mother] to change my life. Uhm…if I want to study I want to study, I'll fit it in. If I want to have peace and quiet I'll make time to have peace and quiet. I'll try and give time to the girls as much as I can but I still think that I need time for myself so…and to do things that I want to do.*

Although Lydia was able to maintain boundaries in terms of spending time on her own pursuits outside of motherhood, she was initially hesitant in expressing this and questioned whether her behaviour was selfish. This suggested that her decision to consciously place limits on how much time she is willing to spend with her children, was contrary to the dominant discourse on motherhood.

Four of the mothers interviewed chose to limit their careers to increase their accessibility to their children, while the majority of the remaining mothers expressed a desire to reduce their working hours. The reduced working hours were perceived to alleviate some of the tension created by time restrictions at home. However, all the mothers insinuated that the increased available time would be spent with their children, as opposed to reclaiming some of their 'me time'.

Most of the mothers expressed that they were obliged to work the hours that they did, reflecting that they felt that they had little agency in this aspect. Those mothers who were able to reduce their working hours experienced this as personal agency. However, choosing to reduce her work commitments created a sense of being unfulfilled and depressed for Cynthia and she felt that she needed to justify her decision to her colleagues. In some ways she had compromised an area of her life where she had felt competent and fulfilled to accommodate the needs of her children; however, she currently felt that she was not performing adequately in either sphere. In this excerpt she explained how she tried to justify her decision to withdraw from extramural activities at the school where she was employed:

> *In three years time when my children don't need me, go on their own to their extra curricular and I am totally available, I will whole do it heartedly [get involved after school hours . The only problem is I now feel unfulfilled…I'm in the same school but I don't think I'm making a contribution and it's actually very depressing*

None of the mothers expressed a desire to leave public employment entirely. They cited several reasons for wanting some form of employment outside of the home. Their reasons displayed some ambivalence between working for their own fulfilment and stimulation and working to provide material resources for their children. The former reason tended to be communicated with more hesitation and less readily than the latter.

> *I think I would've really liked being at home but I think there is still a part of me that would like to do what I am doing because it is something I enjoy. So working half-day I think is a balance … I enjoy what I do, ok, so I'm getting that satisfaction and also being there for my kids. (Priscilla)*

Lydia acknowledged that her experience was different to that of most other mothers and her narrative elevated the status of the employed mother. She used stay-at-home mothers as her reference point in quite a critical way, suggesting that by staying at home, a woman's intellectual capacities were not utilized. Furthermore, she constructed the fully available mother as a "slave", conveying that she did not believe that being fully available to meet a child's demands was equated with being a good mother. The diminutive adjective of "little" suggests a disregard for these mothers.

I must be an exception to the rule because I couldn't wait to go back… to work. I needed to have some other information going into my head, not just nappies and colic and stuff like that. I was keen to get back… You don't have to be a full time mom. I think that they [her children] would also like me to be a full time mom. But then I'm wondering if it's a full time mom or just a little slave to run around bringing sport kit because we've left that at home. ..

Seven of the mothers employed a nanny or helper to look after their children when they were not available and to assist with household duties. The remaining children were looked after by family members while the mothers worked. Few mothers had confidence in the caregivers that they employed, but instead felt that they had little choice in the matter. This made it especially difficult for them to return to work and they reported frequently phoning home to check up on their children. Despite the perceived adequacy of the caregiver, a common theme was that the mothers felt that no-one was able to look after their children in the way that they were able to.

Jacoba reported on her experience of leaving her children with a nanny and how she had to lower her expectations of the quality of care that her children would receive. This in turn resulted in feelings of depression:

So it wasn't good enough. It was difficult, honestly ja. But anyway I just accept, I just realize that's how…as long as the baby's not sick then I mustn't be worried. I must just let it go. But it was difficult. I mean it's like under pressure most of the time…I was depressed.

Priscilla also struggled emotionally to leave her child, however, because she felt that the care that her child would receive was individualized and understanding, approximating her own level of care, offered her some relief:

It was very difficult. It was extremely difficult. I…the first month I cried everyday…what helped with leaving her was my mum in-law so I knew that, you know, she is with someone that would understand her and there was no other children so it helped.

Several mothers expressed their sadness and regret that their children's caregivers were present to experience their children's first milestones while they were occupied at work.

Even though Irene expressed elsewhere that she found her work to be personally fulfilling and that she would choose to work, in relation to missing out on her child's developmental milestones, she seemed more ambivalent towards her decision to work. She perceived her loss as one that was enforced on her, rather than as a trade off for being a working mother.

> *I'd love to be a stay-home mom because I just think that…or even just work part-time because I think that you lose out so much. I'd love to…I would have loved to be a stay-at-home mom because of the milestones. It wasn't me who saw the first step, it was the domestic, you know, that kind of thing. And I felt I was robbed of that.*

Portia described her loss in a similar way:

> *And the other thing is that you don't enjoy the milestones, they don't happen in front of your eyes. You are told that your child is walking, you are told that your child is crawling. Somebody else enjoys that, while, if I was not a working mother I would see her crawling, I would see her walking, I would see all the milestones. But then as a mother you…as a working mother it's different.*

In summary, the second theme indicated that mothers negotiated their role as good mother who needed to be accessible and ever present, with the reality of being a working mother. They tried to maximize their time with their children by carefully managing their time at home around their children and sacrificing their own time; or they tried to compensate for their limited availability by enhancing the emotional quality of the time that they spent with their children.

4.3 Parenting is gendered

The gendered nature of parenting that predominated participant's narratives presented a theme that functioned reciprocally with previous themes of inherent motherhood and maternal responsibility. The mothers' narratives which incorporated a strong adherence to the discourse of innate motherhood reflected more gendered role divisions between mothers and fathers. Some mothers accepted the roles of father and mother as essentially different, ascribing a provider role to the husband while retaining a nurturer role as mother. Other mothers attempted to educate their husbands in their nurturant role as father, seemingly attempting to take what was innate to them as mothers and make it explicit to their husbands. A final pattern that emerged was one where a discourse of parenting, as opposed to mothering, emerged where both partners were viewed as being equally able to meet their children's needs. The latter position was not frequently narrated by the participants.

Men are not naturally predisposed to be primary caregivers

Portia reported how she had to give a detailed account to her husband in order to take and fetch their child from school when she was away from home. She stated that he was infantile in his ability to think and plan in relation to the physical needs of their child. She suggested that a mother was not only responsible for mothering a child, but also for mothering the father:

> *Sometimes fathers become babies. (laughs) They want to hear…they want you to say, you know what, do this. I had to phone him to say, "Take the child to school: there's a car, there's petrol…take the child to school, then go fetch the child from school. You have to give instructions.*

Ayanda focused more on the emotional needs of their children when she educated her husband regarding his paternal role. She also acknowledged her limitations as a mother and referred to the unique aspects of fatherhood. In this excerpt she recognized the essential gender difference in parenting, where only a father could

meet some of the needs of a son. However she also recognised the commonality between what it meant to be a mother or father:

> *I sometimes have to do a little of encouragement and say "take them to soccer, take them to matches". Try to explain to him, you know, the baby boy needs you in terms of father to son relationship. There are things I may not know as a mother or I may not be able to easily discuss.*

Priscilla and Lindiwe both used the notion of bonding in relation to certain activities performed by fathers in relation to their children. While bonding is generally viewed as a relational connection between mothers and their children, these mothers demonstrated how fathers were equally able to engage in bonding and that it was not an inherent quality of mothering.

Fathers are not responsible for meeting all children's needs

Fathers were not required to take equal responsibility in raising children. Most of the mothers agreed that the father's role as a parent was secondary to that of the mother's and some reduced it to that of a financial provider. For some of the mothers the unequal, gendered role division created conflict, while others accepted it. The extent of the gender inequality in terms of parenting, as experienced by the mothers, varied greatly within the sample but tended to be greatest amongst more traditional Black, Coloured and Indian parents and less amongst White parents.

Portia, a Black mother, described an altercation with her husband when he returned home late and he relegated parental responsibility by intimating that if the mother takes responsibility, the father is absolved of responsibility.

> *…the kids were worried you came home late and he'll say, "Ha…the child is with her mother mos. Why should I worry?"*

She continued explaining how a father has the freedom to choose when he will be available and when not, as opposed to the mother who is bound by the "rules" of always being available and responsible:

> *Sometimes you have to play both roles so that of a father and that of a mother, you know. When he wants to go he just goes. When he wants to go to sleep he*

just goes to sleep. He doesn't care whether somebody's tucked in nicely, whether the kids have their pyjamas on, he doesn't care. Whether the child had supper, he doesn't care. If he wants to sleep, he just sleeps and you are left with all those rules, you have to do everything, all by yourself.

Jacoba commented on the differences between White and Black culture in terms of parenting. The private sphere of home was conceptualized as the mother's domain while the public domain of employment was viewed as the father's domain. However, this exclusive division did not account for the mother's equal involvement as an employee outside of the home and did not require any compensatory involvement of the father in the home. Jacoba recognized the inadequacy of this model and her powerlessness to change.

I have been looking at White culture; men are so helpful in the house. Ours don't see …they see a house as a mummy house, not as a man's house…"Jacoba, as long as I'm paying the fees for my children, I don't have to worry". I say, "You know what, my children doesn't understand the value of money, or the value of your payment. What they need, they need to run around with you".

Irene acknowledged the financial provision that her husband made for the family but then proceeded to describe the struggle with wanting more from her husband in his role as parent. Her narrative conveyed that this struggle was both internal and external and operated at an individual level, within the parental couple and at a societal and cultural level. She also described the gap between the idea of equal parenting at an ideological level and the inequality which she experienced at a practical level.

His contribution is very much monetary which is fantastic because he earns a big salary and we can live in the house that he built for us…but it sort of starts and ends there…I think I've been so socialised that a mother is one that keeps the home fires burning, does the motherly things, cook, clean, wash, see to the kids… My husband is always telling me he's a feminist but when it comes to actual doing his behaviour shows very differently.

A smaller group of mothers experienced parenting as a shared responsibility. These mothers did not adhere to the inherent mother discourse as strongly as the other

mothers. Lydia explained how it was not enough to view her husband as supportive, which would seem to convey that he was choosing to assist her in what would still essentially be the mother's role. Instead, she constructed him as an equal parent who had an equal obligation and equal ability to take responsibility for their children's well-being. She moved away from mothering to centre parenting. The outcome of this was that although some practicalities of parenting had to be negotiated, the majority evolved.

> *He does homework with the girls and it's really easy to have a supportive husband. Especially a supportive…no that's not it…parents. That you're sharing the parenting responsibility with somebody because it would be very difficult otherwise. I think I've always expected it to be a 50/50 partnership… we need to do this together.*

Accessibility is optional for fathers

While accessibility seemed to be central to the participants' constructions of a good mother, it did not appear to be equally true of the fathers. Accessibility was obligatory for the mother who needed to "make time" to meet the demands of the children, while the father was only expected to be available if possible.

After describing the work pressures that her husband was under, Irene conceded that he did spend time actively engaged with the children when he had time, however, she made it clear that this was not expected of him, but rather that his time with the children was viewed as a gift that was bestowed on them which should be appreciated. She hereby highlighted the double standards implied by the gendered expectations that are placed on parents.

> *However I must add that if he does come home early then he immediately gets into those roles. He will assist with the kids' homework, he will…but that happens once in a blue moon. So it's almost like a gift when it comes, it's not a responsibility.*

Cynthia described her husband's interactions with their children in a very positive way. While she was critical of the limited quantity of time she spent with her children, ironically because she worked, she did not apply an equivalent standard for her

husband but instead admired him for the quality of his interactions with the children. She also compared his calm, relaxed way with the children with her frantic attempts to manage both attending to the children and her own workload:

> *He spends limited time with them because of his work hours, but when he does spend time with them it's real quality time as far as I care. And he's got a good way with the kids in the sense that he's very calm, quiet and relates well with them… if he came early he would be playing soccer with my son and have no care in the world about work. Now we don't have that.*

Expectations and practices around accessibility and parental responsibility differed vastly for most mothers and fathers, despite the fact that the mothers were also earning an income. The reality of being the primary care-giver and worker often engendered feelings that were dissonant with romanticized notions of idealised motherhood. These ambivalent feelings towards motherhood were explored in the next theme.

4.4 Ambivalence towards motherhood

While many mothers described their expectations of motherhood using idealized images, when they reflected on their own experiences, much more ambivalence towards motherhood emerged. While retaining some of the idealizing narratives regarding the identity of being a mother, these were often punctuated with the demanding nature of mothering. The uniqueness of mothers featured prominently in these narratives and functioned reciprocally with the previous theme that highlighted gendered parenting. There appeared to be distinction between feelings associated with being a mother and the feelings associated with the practices of motherhood, resulting in ambivalence towards the overall experience of being a mother.

> *Being a mother is something adorable, something pleasur[able], something which many of us are not regretting, because those children are bringing us happiness. Although somewhere along the line you are shouting…but we are not shouting from the hatred, we are shouting from the love. (Jacoba)*

I think I'm…(giggles)…I don't know. I'm enjoying every moment of it. You know, sometimes it's challenging and difficult. But I think I've…I've…I don't regret being a mother. I don't regret being a mother and I think, given the chance I can be a mother again. … I think motherhood is not a bad thing. (Portia)

Both Portia and Jacoba explained that becoming a mother was something that they did not regret, which may imply, that if the evidence of their experience was evaluated, the contrary may be true. As previously discussed, for both these women, motherhood was the essence of who they were as people, and thus it was idealized, irrespective of how demanding this role may be.

Many of the mothers described how being a mother, despite the challenges and demands of mothering, resulted in personal growth.

Challenging, beautiful, a journey, a soul journey…(Irene)

I love it (gentle voice). I love it. I think I've grown a lot since I've been a mother. I've discovered my resilience, my strength, my…a whole lot of things. And I feel it's a miracle to bring another human being to earth and see him grow. (Lindiwe)

Lindiwe integrated the discourse of inherent motherhood in her idealization of her mothering experience.

Lydia deviated somewhat from her general stance on independent mothers and children when she described the meaning that the experience of motherhood had for her. She laughed, somewhat cynically, at the irony of her words in the context of her broader narrative:

I just love the sense of being needed. It's being needed, being wanted (laughs). Sometimes it's frustrating…they don't want anyone else but mom. But it's so amazing to think that people need you so much... It's so fantastic to feel so needed.

Alison commented on the mixed emotions she experienced as a mother and she highlighted the anxiety she experienced not knowing whether her mothering was adequate when taking a long term, outcome perspective. The image of a roller coaster suggested a sense of dyscontrol in her daughters' lives and furthermore, that her success as a mother would be evaluated by how her children turn out, despite her limited control:

> *You know, it's the most exhilarating experience but it's the most terrifying experience. But I think one of the hardest things about motherhood is that there are no guarantees that what you're investing in your children is going to bear fruit in later years, and ummm…so ja, to me it's like a roller coaster ride…such tops, such amazing exhilarating times and then the times when your heart does ache.*

Irene described her mothering as "bittersweet" which seemed apt in capturing the ambivalence that mothers experienced towards the identity and practices of motherhood which operated within a discourse that simultaneously elevated mothers because of their innate ability to produce and nurture life and then devalued them as subservient to men and children.

4.5 Reflexivity in analysis of findings

Although every attempt was made to reassure the participants that the research was not an evaluation of their mothering, some participants responded in a guarded manner to the interview. These transcripts conveyed the sense that some participants attempted to demonstrate their competency as a mother. This stance was consistent with the general finding that mothers experienced their position as one that was constantly evaluated and judged against the normative standard of the 'good mother'.

The questions that guided the interview were grounded in a feminist paradigm which conveyed a construction of motherhood which emphasised the disempowerment and inequality theoretically associated with motherhood in feminist literature. However, these feminist assumptions may have been foreign to some of the participants' worldview, necessitating a justification of their experiences of motherhood.

The idealised notion of motherhood was presented in stark contrast to the practical difficulties and gender inequality apparent in the participants' narratives of motherhood. This disparity created a tension between reinterpreting the idealisation of motherhood as an example of how maternal subjectivity had been transformed by ideology and simply accepting it as a reflection of how participants experienced motherhood. By reflecting on the tenderness and sincerity with which participants conveyed their narratives, it seemed that to reinterpret their expressed experience would be to deny them subjectivity and be a disservice to the aims of feminist research.

4.6 Conclusion

The theme of inherent motherhood was well represented in the findings and underpinned further understandings of the gendered nature of parenting and the role of mother as the primary caregiver. Furthermore, motherhood was constructed as child-centred, where mothers were responsible for the physical, emotional and cognitive development of their children. The participants differed in the extent that they supported inherent mother discourses, their level of responsibility towards the child and their expectations of paternal involvement. The goal of mothering was to ensure the current and future well-being of the child. Accessibility to the child was a key feature of discourses pertaining to the ideal mother and most of the participants struggled to find ways of optimizing their accessibility in the light of their working status. Most of participants articulated idealised notions of motherhood in spite of the very demanding nature of their mothering experience and the frequent feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

These themes were integrated and discussed in the light of existing literature and the unique South African context in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The ideology of the good mother has evolved historically and has been argued to be socially constructed. Current literature and research into motherhood has identified several competing discourses which construct the contemporary ideology of the good mother. The discourse which seems to dominate in contemporary Western societies has been termed intensive mothering.

The research question posed by this study is whether a group of working South African mothers subscribed to intensive mothering ideology. Furthermore, it questioned how these mothers altered their construction of the good mother to reconcile it with their status as working mothers and their social context. The main themes that emerged from the interview data indicated that the participants generally viewed mothering as a gender specific and inherent ability. Mothering was predominantly child-centred and required rigorous planning and commitment to ensure optimal child outcomes. The demanding and dichotomous ideology prescribed by intensive mothering, frequently resulted in feelings of guilt, inadequacy and ambivalence towards the experience of motherhood for mothers who attempted to adhere to the expectations of this model.

The data suggested that while the mothers subscribed to intensive mothering and aligned their mothering practices to this ideology to varying degrees, they were able to reconstruct aspects of what it meant to be a good mother to suit their context. Furthermore, it was evident that mothering ideology was influenced by culture. However, regardless of social and cultural contexts, mothers struggled at both practical and ideological levels to make meaning of their experience and to live up to ideals of the good mother.

Dominant Western ideologies of motherhood, such as the intensive mothering ideology, are based on a philosophical tradition that espouses binary opposites (Glenn, 1994). Mothering has been defined by dichotomies such as male versus female, worker versus mother, public versus private sphere, love versus hate for the child and intrinsic versus socially constructed motherhood. These dichotomies have been used to construct what it means to a good mother, or its binary opposite, a bad

mother. While each half of the dichotomy is interdependent on the other, they function hierarchically in ideologies where one is accorded dominance (Glenn, 1994). The discussion will highlight how these dichotomies are present in the intensive mother ideology and where alternative ideologies disrupt these dichotomies.

5.1 Dichotomies of Gender

As Jeannes and Shefer (2004) argue, the dichotomous social construction of gender means that one gender is superior, and in the South African context, men still occupy the positions of power. The themes that emerged from the data reflect, maintain and perpetuate a discourse of inequality (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004). While it may be argued that the inherent motherhood theme speaks to the unique attributes of women, thereby elevating their status, the value attributed to nurturing qualities of women are undervalued compared to the inherent abilities of men, specifically their economic productivity. Furthermore, the discourse of inherent motherhood also excluded men from parenting duties as they are inherently limited in performing these duties, providing a rationale for the gendered picture of parenting that was evident in the data. In light of the above description, the mothering context is difficult and at times oppressive to women, however, the dominant ideology makes it difficult for mothers to express emotions that are discrepant from idealized versions of maternal fulfilment.

The dichotomy between the essential, inherent and biological nature of motherhood versus the contextual and socially constructed nature of mothering has been disputed by literature, with the ideology of motherhood resting on the former set of assumptions. Most of the participants' narratives included discourses of inherent motherhood, where mothering was understood as being instinctually linked to biological abilities to conceive, give birth and raise a child. While this understanding has been reproduced by previous work (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; Hattery, 2001; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004), what stood out in the current study was that this inherent ability was understood by the participants themselves to be mediated by contextual factors. Mothers frequently described how their personal experiences of being mothered, familial expectations as well as community and social influences were integrated with their innate abilities to mother, congruent with what Collins

(1991) described as a particularistic experience of motherhood. Furthermore, these unique contexts nuanced the practices and strategies that they adopted in their mothering (Collins, 1991).

While previous work indicated that African families shared the responsibility of mothering (Arnfred, 2003), this study found that due to urbanization, the majority of Black participants were removed from familial support structures and in a process of acculturation (Mkhize, 2004) adopted a more individualized, Western approach to mothering where they depended on helpers and nannies to support them in their maternal duties. All these participants indicated the inadequacy of this new arrangement, but felt that there were no alternative solutions. The role of the extended family featured prominently in the Indian families who were represented in the study where a three-generational pattern emerged either as a temporary or permanent arrangement.

The inherent motherhood discourse invariably contributed to gendered parenting. Fathers were not expected to share equally in childcare responsibilities where mothers and families strongly upheld this belief. Some mothers contradicted this belief by reframing "bonding" – a term used by Bowlby to advocate for exclusive maternal care of the infant (Senior, 2002) - to assert that fathers were able to bond with their children if they spent enough time with them, even if they were not inherently endowed in the same ways as mothers. Some mothers in the study attempted to educate their partners regarding their nurturing roles as fathers; however, where inherent motherhood discourses dominated, this was generally met with resistance or dismissal. Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) concurred that where parenting was viewed as a conscious collaboration, fathers were able to compensate for biological differences and build meaningful relationships with their children, which allowed them to respond equally well to their children's needs. This alternative discourse of parenting blurs the essentialist dichotomy of male and female and disrupts the gendered division of childcare.

The instinctual nature of mothering was further disputed by some mothers who felt that their ability to mother was born out of practice, careful observation and conscious thinking and planning to meet their child's needs. Ruddick (1994) argued for maternal

thinking as opposed to maternal instinct in guiding maternal practices, while Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) emphasized that the mother-child (as opposed to the father-child) relationship was fostered by repeated interactions and which in turn maintained mothering as a gendered talent. Thus the interpersonal relationship, rather than an inherent ability, resulted in maternal dominance in childcare. While narratives amongst the Black mothers in the study drew strongly on discourses of inherent motherhood, their narratives also indicated how the gendered nature of mothering amongst this sub-group of mothers was maintained by relational dynamics which were embedded in broader patriarchal societal expectations. Male migration amongst Black population groups in South Africa is significant (Shefer & Ratele, 2006) which may have resulted in loosening of emotional ties between fathers and children, shifting the relational responsibility of childcare exclusively onto mothers.

5.2 Public-private sphere dichotomies

The private-public dichotomy developed in tandem with gendered role division within the home (Hattery, 2001; Thurer, 1994). Where motherhood was viewed as the fulfilment of womanhood, alternative pursuits that impinged on this role could not be accommodated. In this model, the father's role is that of economic provider while the mother is constructed as the nurturer. Where mothers stepped outside their role of nurturer, they had to adopt an alternative ideology that could encompass both roles of worker and mother, and concurrently disrupt traditional gender discourses. Alternatively, they could attempt to manage both roles in such a way as to keep the domestic and work spheres separate enough to maintain traditional dichotomous ideologies, where inevitably there was some construction of themselves as deviant when they were unable to manage both spheres separately. The latter option seemed feasible in countries that supported gender equality (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001) and for mothers who were employed part-time (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). However, in the South African context where gender inequality prevails and the flexibility of employment is limited, the public-private spheres inevitably impinge on one another (Jeannes & Shefer, 2004). The education of women, specifically Black women, has lagged that of men in South Africa (Shefer & Ratele, 2006) making men more employable and furthermore, the migration of Black men to urban areas to earn

wages enforced the role of men as economic provider and women as the nurturers. While the participants in this study were not directly affected by migrant labour and were academically highly qualified, these factors impacted on cultural ideologies of appropriate parenting.

Mothers explained their decisions to work in a variety of ways which were in part informed by their ideology of motherhood (Hattery, 2001). In terms of Hattery's (2001) classification of types of working mothers, the participants in this study would predominantly be categorized as pragmatics and non-conformists, however, these descriptive dimensions did not adequately account for the dynamic complexity of their ongoing reasoning regarding their employment status. Many of the mothers described their fulfilment and satisfaction in their role and identity of worker, suggesting that motherhood did not offer the ultimate fulfilment for women as postulated by intensive mothering discourses. However, this rejection of dominant ideology was moderated by the way the participants emphasised that the role of mother was always prioritized over that of worker, which echoed findings by Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001). The narratives of these mothers revealed that, in reality, the constraints of their work situation dictated that they frequently had to prioritise their work over their child's needs, illustrating how ideology powerfully shaped perceived reality and the construction of narratives.

After prioritizing motherhood over employment, the participants justified their work in several ways. Firstly, most of the mothers conveyed that they had no choice but to work for the economic well-being of the family. Besides for one mother who was the sole bread winner, the social class of the participants in this study suggested that they had a choice regarding their employment status, thus placing them in the category of mothers where work outside the home was sanctioned by the dominant ideology (Collins, 1991). Work was generally constructed as a necessity by the participants, however, it was in terms of maintaining a middle-class lifestyle, as opposed to economic survival. This finding concurred with Hattery's (2001) work. It appeared that by constructing themselves as having no agency in terms of work, these mothers were more comfortable in justifying their employment in relation to the expectations of intensive mothering. More indirect benefits of their work included the example of gender equality that they set for their children and their own happiness and fulfilment

which resulted in them being better mothers to their children. This corresponded with the "happy mother-happy child" discourse (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Johnston & Swanson, 2006) which affirms the child-centredness of the intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996; Douglas & Michaels, 2004).

The need to "justify" decisions regarding a mother's employment status assumes a dichotomous understanding of working mothers – as is exemplified by the intensive mothering ideology where public and private spheres are constructed as oppositional and mothers have to carefully negotiate their involvement in both so that one does not impinge on the other. However, alternative models of mothering, where economic provision is seen as an integral aspect of mothering, do not create the same dilemmas for mothers, negating the need to justify work. Sengura (1994) documented this in her study of Mexican mothers, where more traditional mothers who embraced the economic provider role experienced less guilt and ambivalence towards their work than Mexican working mothers who had adopted dominant American cultural norms which required them to stay at home with their children. The ambivalence and guilt experienced predominantly by the White and Indian mothers in the current study, in relation to competing roles of mother and worker, could be understood within this framework. By adopting, and even resisting, an ideology that divided the economic provision and nurturant roles of mother, these mothers went to great lengths to justify their decisions to work. In contrast, the more traditional Black mothers seemed to experience less ambivalence and guilt where their public employment was subsumed under mothering work.

While many of the discourses discussed thus far reflect a disempowered portrayal of working mothers, there were important exceptions. Buzzanell et al. (2005) indicated that women were proud of their abilities to simultaneously adopt the role of worker and mother and to work through the complexities that these dual roles presented. A similar sense was conveyed by the participants in this study, where the women constructed themselves as indispensable to the family, thereby elevating their status above that of their partners and men in general.

While most of the dilemmas constructed around the discrepant work and mothering ideologies had to be solved at an individual and family level, an important exception

stood out in numerous mothers' narratives. At a policy level, some of the maternal guilt at not being able to adequately care for a sick child was relieved by the availability of family responsibility leave for employed mothers. While the mothers still had to weigh up the needs of their child in relation to their responsibility to work, the availability of leave and the recognition that this leave gave to their dual position of worker and mother, made the decision making process easier. This demonstrated a fairly unique space in mothering discourse where the state has transformed policy in order to relocate a problem from the private sphere to a societal level (Price-Knowles, 1990).

In spite of the concession discussed above, mothers still carry the primary responsibility to "preserve, love, nurture, care and provide for their children, seeking to meet the prevailing notions of good parenting, and to do so despite the many contradictory time and other pressures they face." (Arendell, 2000a, p.4). From previous studies and the data produced in this study, it appears that the adequacy of nurturing that a mother can provide is seen to be directly proportional to the amount of time that she has available to spend with her child. Time is an invaluable commodity in developed countries in the 21st century (Arendell, 2000a) and several studies have identified maternal accessibility and availability as central themes in maternal discourses of the good mother (Arendell, 2000a; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001; Guendouzi, 2006; Johnston & Swanson, 2006) and a prerequisite for intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). Many of the mothers in the current study equated the ideal mother with one who had unreserved quantities of time to spend with her children, despite their own inaccessibility during working hours. While some mothers modified or rejected the ideology of intensive mothering in this regard, others perceived their position as deviant in relation to the accepted model.

In the realm of mothering, time investments in the lives of children carry a "potent symbolic meaning: they serve as an indicator of the caring relationship, perceived as such by both the care recipient and the care provider" (Tarlow, cited in Arendell, 2000a, p.4) and by how society measures the adequacy of the mothering. The mothers in the study adopted various strategies to reconcile the dominant motherhood ideology with the reality of employment. All the mothers reported reduced or no "self-time", which in turn resulted in a sense of identity loss and alienation from themselves

(Oberman & Josselson, 1996). Some mothers scaled back on their employment which was helpful to some but unfulfilling for others. All the mothers utilized the services of a nanny or domestic helper to assist them with childcare and domestic duties. These are common strategies utilized by modern mothers (Arendell, 2000a). Although this arrangement alleviated some of the pragmatic difficulties of being a working mother, it created feelings of guilt for those mothers who perceived the care of others as an inadequate substitute for their own care. This understanding corresponded with the intensive mothering belief that a childcare provider is an inadequate substitute for the mother (Hattery, 2001).

The nurturant role of the mother not only required significant time investments, but she was also responsible for ensuring the physical and emotional well being of her children. The adequate nourishment of the child, while an apparent maternal duty, is also symbolically laden (Garey, 1995), reflecting a fundamental aspect of the nurturing role of a mother (Earle, 2003). Where the mother's nourishment of the child was rejected, especially where this was very personally embodied in the act of breastfeeding, it created emotional turmoil for the mother who perceived it as a rejection of her very self (Earle, 2003). The quality of food that a child consumed needed to be of a particular nutritional value and seemed to be representative of the quality of mothering. For the participants, the well nourished child served as a yardstick by which a woman's mothering could be evaluated.

Apart from the physical well-being of children, mothers also took primary responsibility for the emotional well-being of the child. For some mothers, their children's emotional well-being was treated as a research project, requiring careful research and observation; while others attributed the emotional neediness in their children to their personal maternal inadequacy. This reiterated notions of the intensive mothering model where mothers are responsible for the emotional well-being of the child whereas alternative mothering ideologies suggest that Black mothers are more concerned with the economic and physical care of their children, rather than their emotional well-being (Collins, 1994). Some of the Black mothers in this study reflected that emotional care was not an aspect of their mothering that they had learnt from their mothers and that they had introduced this aspect of mothering by reading books and attending parenting classes. This generational shift in mothering practices

represents a move away from the collectivist understanding of the self to a more Western, individualist, autonomous self which is defined by internal attributes such as emotions (Mkhize, 2004).

An important area of mothering school-going children related to schoolwork (Arendell, 1999). Again the symbolic nature of maternal time invested in the child's academic development was evident. The child's academic performance served as an indicator of the adequacy of mothering. While some fathers shared in this responsibility, it was still predominantly the mother's duty to ensure that homework was done, to monitor the child's school performance and to liaise with teachers. The commitment to a child's academic performance also encompassed the mothers' dual focus on both the present and future well-being of the child, as academic progress and education serve as important predictors of future economic success. Commitment to extramural activities, which served as enrichment for child development, was evident in the mothers' narratives and added to the harried and exhausted nature of modern mothering (Arendell, 2000a). The emotional investment that the mothers depicted in relation to their children's extracurricular activities could be understood in relation to the symbolic meanings and cultural values about the identity and worth of the mother who actively participates in her child's life (Garey, 1995). Within the frame of the intensive mother, her accessibility and presence at extracurricular activities represented her devotion to her child.

The child-centred nature of modern motherhood seems to have elevated the status of the child above that of the mother and a mother's worth is measured in relation to her child (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hattery, 2001; Hays, 1996). The interview data strongly upheld the child-centred nature of intensive mothering ideology. Generally where there was conflict over limited resources such as money and time, the child's needs were prioritized over the mother's. Some mothers diverged from the dominant discourse regarding the child-centredness of mothering. They felt that children needed to take some responsibility for their own lives to develop maturity and independence. The "ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother" (Bassin et al., 1994, p.2) was rejected and instead equated to slavery. These participants distinguished between children's needs and wants, a reframing which allowed the mother's needs to take precedence over the child's wants. Where the child was reconstructed as having some

agency, the child was encouraged to discover his/her own resourcefulness, rather than depending on, or depleting, the mother's resources.

One of the contradictions held in the intensive mothering ideology is that although women are biologically endowed to mother and nurture their children, they need expert guidance to adequately fulfil this role (Hay, 1996). Mothers frequently reported that although they mothered instinctually, they needed to consult magazines, parenting manuals and attend classes to ensure that they were able to mother their children optimally. This apparent discrepancy was not consciously identified by the participants, but instead the expert guidance, albeit it contradictory at times, was needed to ensure that their mothering was not misinformed or misguided. This dependence on expert sources of knowledge represents a Westernised value system where local knowledge, the common sense wisdom that arises within a specific socio-historical and cultural context (van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004) is replaced by scientifically controlled, objective, expert knowledge systems (Miller, 2005). This aspect of acculturation was evident in some Black mothers' narratives where dual dependence on home remedies and local knowledge was expressed in conjunction with professional advice and literature.

While the participants in this study were also economic providers, this did not diminish their role as mother, while it adequately justified the fathers' absence in childcare. This is one of the cultural contradictions that Hays (1996) emphasized: while the working mother's role has expanded, the role of father's has remained largely unaltered. The participants indicated that fathers were not expected to be equally accessible as mothers. It was acceptable and even applauded when fathers spent some time with their children while mothers were critical of their own unavailability, in spite of very real constraints. It appeared that what fathers contributed in money, mothers were obliged to contribute in time to their children. Husbands very infrequently scaled back on leisure time and their careers were not altered to accommodate childcare responsibilities. A less represented discourse focused on parenting as opposed to mothering, where both parents carried equal responsibility. Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) identified that conscious collaboration between parents decentred the mother as primary caregiver. While several mothers explained how they espoused this belief and practiced shared

parenting with their husbands within the privacy of the home, it was not exercised outside the home because in broader social settings, their husbands reverted to more traditional gendered patterns of parenting. This highlights some of the disjunction between ideology and practice in the lived experience of men and women.

5.3 Dichotomous identities

The identity of mother and what it personally meant to the participants to be a mother was explored in this research. Feminist literature on motherhood is divided between predominantly Western theories which centralize the identity of woman and view the maternal identity as a secondary aspect of womanhood; as compared to feminists from an African worldview who argue that the maternal identity is separate and superior to the identity of woman. The maternal identity was central to most of the participants; however, this discourse was more strongly affirmed by the Black mothers in the study, concurring with previous research (Arendell, 2000b; Collins, 1994). Being a mother affirmed their identity as a woman, and even beyond this, qualified a woman as a person. The participants conveyed the understanding that essentially women were born to mother. Some feminists attributed this understanding of motherhood as an outcome of oppression of women under patriarchal structures (O'Barr, Pope & Wyer, 1990). However, as Oyewumi (2003) argued, the Western construction of motherhood is disempowering and fails to recognize the supremacy of motherhood over other aspects of womanhood. For these participants the identity of mother was not secondary to being a woman or a wife, which was more significant in the discourses of White and Indian mothers. This was particularly evident in the narratives regarding the participants' decisions to become mothers, where White and Indian women negotiated this decision with their husbands, while the Black mothers predominantly felt that it was their independent decision. For these mothers, it appeared that their identity as mother was firmly consolidated by their ability to conceive and bear a child whereas the other mothers felt that they had to prove their motherliness in ongoing practices of mothering. It would appear that, for the Black participants, the identity of mother was perceived as empowering and separate from other aspects of womanhood. It is not surprising in the South African context, where Black women have borne the triple oppression of race, gender and class (Collins, 1994; Kiguwa,

2004), that the uniqueness afforded women in their ability to conceive, give birth and nurse a child is used to elevate their status, even though the practices and responsibilities involved in mothering could be viewed as oppressive to these women.

5.4 Dichotomous feelings

The disjuncture between the expectations of motherhood and the reality of mothering in a context that undervalues maternal work and which is riddled with contradictions regarding the role of mothers, contributed to a wide range of emotions experienced by mothers. In psychoanalytic terminology, maternal ambivalence is used to describe the conflicting love and hate that the mother experiences towards the child (Parker, 1995). These dichotomous emotions are, in turn, aligned with being a good or bad mother. The definition of maternal ambivalence is expanded in this research project to describe the range of emotions that a mother may experience towards her child and towards her role and identity as mother. Oberman and Josselson (1996) proposed that the experience of motherhood is fluid and complex, involving the "balance of conflicting emotions, attitudes, experiences, or states of mind" (p.356). While the ideology of intensive mothering suggests that motherhood presents ultimate fulfilment and joy (Hays, 1996), in reality, mothers experience a much broader and complex range of emotions (Oberman & Josselson,1996) which may be complicated by combining their role of mother with that of worker (Arendell, 2000a; Buzzanell et al., 2005; Guendouzi, 2006). The participants in this study narrated a spectrum of emotions in relation to their mothering and they were constantly judging and being judged against a normative standard or ideal with regards to their mothering. Miller (2005) related the constant self-monitoring observed in mothers to the powerful moral underpinnings of the good mother ideology which determined which feelings and thoughts were appropriate in relation to dependent children.

Oberman and Josselson (1996) described a central dynamic of motherhood as the experience of a loss of self occurring simultaneously with a sense of expansion of the self. Feelings of increased self-esteem, ability and resilience were echoed in the words of the participants in this study who seemed to embrace motherhood as an expansion of their identity and well-being. However, these positive feelings were accompanied

by a sense of losing essential parts of themselves when their own needs for time and space were subsumed by the needs of the child. The participants in this study managed to partially integrate the personal strengths and weaknesses that motherhood evoked, however, guilt at their perceived inadequacy clouded much of their experience. It seems that the intensive mothering model allows little space for mothers to express the negative aspects of their experience, thereby limiting a more integrated self.

Mothers struggled to adjust to mothering where the expectation to be inherently able to mother was not met in reality. Some mothers in this situation, as described by Arendell (1999), constructed themselves as deviant where the ideology proved to be more authoritative than their own experience, demonstrating the power of ideology in transforming personal subjectivity (Hattery, 2001; Kruger, 2003; Pope, Quinn and Wyer, 1990). Miller (2005) explained the profound difficulty that mothers experienced in narrating unexpected responses to motherhood in relation to the moral demands placed on mothers to be good mothers. These personal constructions of deviance in light of moral imperatives to be good mothers isolated some mothers and prevented them from seeking assistance. In turn, their silence continued to perpetuate the myth of the inherent mother.

The mothers in this study were able to articulate, albeit guardedly, some of the negative feelings associated with the deprivation of self that they encountered in their experience of motherhood. However, ambivalence was expressed more readily in relation to the multiple duties and responsibilities that participants had to perform in their role as mother. While able to express some of the frustration with the expectations placed on them as mothers, all the participants reserved an idealized portrayal of their identity as a mother. While the "doing" of motherhood was demanding, unequal and at times exasperating, the "being" of mother was described as miraculous, inspiring and precious. Rational feminism would argue that these idealized notions of motherhood are the outcome of patriarchal structures and discourses that have convinced women that mothering epitomizes their femininity and that it is not a true reflection of their experience (Kruger, 2006). Romantic feminism, while acknowledging the uniquely feminine experience of motherhood, may nullify the very real negative experiences and feelings that mothers have described (Kruger,

2006). Neither of these theoretical understandings adequately explained this phenomenon and yet both capture an aspect of the reality of these women's experience as mothers. While the idealization of motherhood has serious implications in terms of obscuring the lived experience of mothers and isolating those whose experience does not conform to ideology, the idealization of motherhood may be empowering as it perhaps gives meaning to the difficult aspects of mothering and it cannot be contested or completely supplanted by men. The latter conclusion is supported by the tendency of participants who lived in contexts marked by greater inequality and oppression to portray a more idealized understanding of motherhood.

While the themes presented in this study confluence around discourses of inequality, dyscontrol and lack of agency, like many other studies replicated by this work, it would be negligent to ignore the alternative discourses that the participants expressed. In spite of the difficult and undervalued nature of mothering, in its current configuration in South Africa, the positive reward of loving and being loved by a child profoundly influenced and enriched the lives of the participants. As Walker (1995) noted in her South African study: "under particular conditions and in particular combinations with other identities…[motherhood] provided particular sections of women with a strong enough sense of self-worth from which to challenge various forms of oppression and, in the process, develop new strengths and capacities." (p.19). While the ideology of intensive mothering featured prominently in the narratives presented by the participants, much more nuanced narratives of equality, empowerment and agency emerged when the details of the individual discourses were examined, suggesting that alternative ideologies which were less dichotomous and more fluid, were able to emerge.

5.5 Implications for future research

The limited nature of this study favoured a single methodology in the exploration of motherhood. As Arendell (2000b) suggested and Hattery (2001) demonstrated in her research, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data can add valuable insights and understanding to the field of motherhood. Furthermore, the limitations of the interview as research instrument could be reduced by including observational data and

ethnographic research tools. Longitudinal studies that record the changing experiences of motherhood and the factors that influence these changes could make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on motherhood.

The experiences of more diverse groups of South African mothers need to be studied so that different discourses and constructions of motherhood can be given voice in academic literature. Mothering in the context of poverty, same sex parenting, single parenting and other contexts that are generally ignored by literature needs to be explored.

Mothering is influenced by constructions of gender at multiple levels, ranging from the individual mother to the family, community and society. Very limited research into the meaning and practices of fatherhood in South Africa has been conducted, even though this field of research would shed light on the reciprocal construction of motherhood and fatherhood.

At a theoretical level, ongoing research into motherhood is needed. While feminism has opened new avenues for research, it will have to guard against replacing conservative ideals of motherhood with their own prescriptions. Kruger (2006) stressed that "feminist psychologists should continuously explore and understand how women are experiencing motherhood and why" (p.193). The emphasis should be on documenting the diversity of women's experiences rather than attempting to generate universal truths.

5.6 Implications for practice

Psychoanalytic theories are frequently complicit in mother-blaming. While the value of these theories are not being questioned, the emphasis that it places on the mother as object and source of psychopathology needs to be revisited and cognizance needs to be taken of the changing context of mothering in psychoanalytic formulations. Practitioners themselves need to be aware of the specific ideology of mothering that they hold and how this may in and of itself pathologise and blame mothers. Practitioners working with mothers need to be aware of the power that ideologies hold

over mothers when addressing the conflicting emotions and behaviour with which mothers may present and to keep the subjective experience of the mother central, as opposed to her instrumental role.

Practitioners working with children are at risk of participating in deviancy discourses of motherhood where mothers are held responsible for their child's behaviour, emotional and physical health while the multiple determinants of child outcomes are ignored. Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) suggest that practitioners should help conscientise parental couples to their pre-existing ideologies and challenge assumed gender based inequalities and power differentials, thereby helping couples to make conscious decisions around childcare responsibilities.

At a higher level, this research concurs with previous work (Garey, 1995) which suggested that to improve the situation of working mothers at policy level, it was not enough to assume that the role of mothers could be subsumed by alternative child care. While accessible, quality childcare is crucial, it is important to create avenues by which mothers are able to perform certain components of mothering that are personally meaningful to them, requiring work environments that are flexible enough to accommodate those activities that represent good mothering to them.

5.7 Limitations of Study

The number of participants was limited to facilitate the use and analysis of in-depth interviews. A fairly homogenous group of mothers was chosen in terms of their social class and level of education. Furthermore, participants were all from very traditional nuclear families and engaged in heterosexual marriages. These constraints limited the generalisability of the findings.

The data was also limited by the self report nature of interviews where participants do not always voice their actual experience. It was acknowledged that the participants were unable to extract themselves from the ideologies within which they mother and that their narratives were influenced by what they perceived would be the right responses to questions on their mothering, especially in the light of the rigidity of the

evaluative component of motherhood ideology. However, interviews were still deemed to be the most useful tool to access their beliefs and practices regarding mothering.

The cross sectional nature of the study also limited the quality of the data which was produced. Narratives change with time and perceptions of motherhood are likely to change with time as the mothers' experiences change and the needs of their developing children change. Some of the narratives produced by the participants were retrospective which could have been modified in the light of experience and a changing identity of mother.

5.8 Conclusion

This research report documented how the socially constructed ideology of the good mother has evolved historically. Feminist research in the field of motherhood has identified the hegemony of intensive mothering ideology amongst several competing contemporary ideologies of the good mother in Western cultures.

This research report questioned whether a group of working South African mothers identified with the intensive mothering discourse and how these mothers altered their construction of the good mother to reconcile it with their employment status and their social context. The findings produced themes of inherent motherhood, child-centred motherhood and gendered parenting which suggested that while the mothers identified with the discourse of intensive mothering and aligned their mothering practices to this ideology to varying degrees, they were able to reconstruct aspects of what it meant to be a good mother to suit their context. However, it was clear that mothering was not an effortless practice, but instead mothers struggled with ambivalence at both practical and ideological levels of living up to ideals of the good mother. Even though the participants rejected or reframed aspects of the intensive mothering ideology, the internalised stronghold of this ideology was evident in the evaluative stance that women occupied in relation to their mothering and the frequent expressions of guilt at perceived aspects of their maternal inadequacy.

This research project highlighted the need to explore and document alternative motherhood ideologies, specifically those that do not emerge from Western, White, middle-class groups; ideologies that do not reduce the experiences of motherhood into exclusive dichotomies, but instead allow for a dynamic continuum of motherhood experiences. As more ways of being a mother are acknowledged and accepted, mothers will be at greater liberty to adopt a role and identity that suits their context and experience, relieving the need to construct themselves and other mothers as deviant.

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