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The experiences and identities of working mothers: An explorative psychoanalytic feminist study

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

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Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology – PSYC 7036A Research Report

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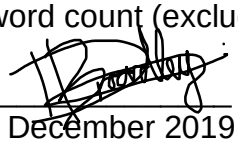
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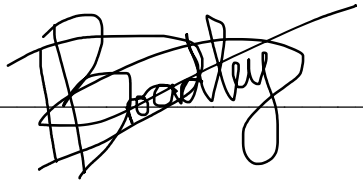
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ABSTRACT

The worldwide increase in working motherhood has seen a substantial number of South African women joining the workforce. While a number of South African studies have explored various aspects of motherhood, fewer bodies of work have focused on working motherhood specifically. This qualitative study explored the experiences of working mothers in South Africa from their own perspectives, as well as how mothering and career identities are negotiated in light of dominant mothering and gender ideologies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six working mothers and Interpretive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings indicated that working mothers experience difficult transitions to motherhood as well as a variety of demands and pressures related to their dual role. Working motherhood was found to be characterised by a shattering of expectations, subsumed needs, a loss of self, changes in the family dynamic or marital dyad, as well as strains on mental health. Upon returning to work, participants additionally experienced much ambivalence and tension in negotiating conflicting identities. During this time, they have to compromise in a number of ways, by letting go of pre-motherhood functioning and learning to accept support. Their journey therefore includes substantial losses that necessitate a process of mourning. This results in working mothers' engaging in a number of defences to avoid feelings of loss, sadness, resentment and anger related to their dual roles. Moreover, dominant mothering and gender ideologies were evident in the results, albeit to varying extents between individuals. Lastly, participants derive meaning from their working motherhood identity through being impactful in the world and by being able to provide for their families. They also experience meaning in their mothering role in highly individual ways. Implications for clinical practice are provided.

Keywords

Working mothers, working motherhood, experiences of working mothers, working motherhood identity, motherhood, motherhood and loss, maternal ambivalence, transition to motherhood, mothering ideologies, gender roles

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Title

The experiences and identities of working mothers: An explorative psychoanalytic feminist study.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite a worldwide increase in working motherhood, traditional gender roles wherein males are seen as providers and women as caregivers remain largely unchanged (Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Selin, 2014). With dominant ideologies such as intensive mothering advocating that motherhood should be an all-consuming task (Hays, 1996), women in heterosexual relationships still tend to have more household and childcare responsibilities than their male partners, regardless of whether both partners are employed full-time (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Therefore, being a good mother means wholly devoting oneself and all of one's time to family life, rather than focussing on a career (Hays, 1996). Additionally, psychological literature has also tended towards 'mother-blaming', by assigning responsibility to mothers when children show unfavourable developmental outcomes (Thurer, 1995). These ideas have led to working mothers experiencing a great deal of guilt and inadequacy for being unable to live up to societal expectations of mothering (Macdonald, 2013). Moreover, with the majority of existing literature being child-centered, knowledge of the contemporary mothering experience has largely been neglected (Kruger, 2006).

It is therefore proposed that greater insight into the experiences and identities of working mothers may help to create a more realistic idea of parenting in modern society, as well as the supports that are needed to cope with it. Furthermore, taking a feminist approach to these insights will allow for the emergence of a multifaceted approach to gender (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007) as well as give way to an understanding of the lived experiences and subjectivity (Freeman, 2019) of working mothers. Feminist research additionally brings about the possibility of transformation in terms of gender inequality and thereby allows for dominant ideologies to be

challenged (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019). Moreover, adopting a psychoanalytic feminist stance, specifically, allows for data exploration from a psychological viewpoint, with a focus on the construction of individual knowledge within the greater context of gender socialisation (Tisdell, 2008).

1.3 Research Aims

The aim of this research project was to explore the experiences of working mothers in South Africa from their own perspectives, as well as how mothering and career identities are negotiated in light of dominant mothering ideologies, gender ideals and mothers' cultural backgrounds. Moreover, working mothers' perceptions of cultural influences and early childhood experiences on their mothering identities and experiences were also explored. The research questions that emerged from these aims specifically pertained to the study's specified sample of South African women working in corporate organisations. These questions are as follows:

- What do working mothers experience in their dual roles as parents and employees?
- How are motherhood and career identities negotiated?
- What is the perceived influence of working mothers' cultural backgrounds and upbringing on their experiences?
- How do findings from the above questions relate to dominant mothering and gender ideologies?

1.4 Rationale

Between the rise in female employment (Christopher, 2012), contested gender norms for childcare and household duties (Green, 2015; Rich, 1995), and competing mothering ideologies (Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Medina & Magnuson, 2009), it is not surprising that much controversy has surrounded employed motherhood (Wilson, 2006). This has given way to a number of studies over the last few decades, some of which have addressed the impact of working motherhood on child development (Bernal, 2008; Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2010; Hill, Waldfogel, Brooks-Gunn,

Han, 2005; Huerta et al., 2011; Huston & Rosenkrantz Aronson, 2005; Nomaguchi, 2006), attitudes towards working motherhood (Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002; Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1979), stereotypes of working mothers (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Odenweller & Rittenour, 2017; Okimoto & Heilman, 2012; Yu & Lee, 2013), as well as the effects of working motherhood on maternal happiness or well-being (Adhikari, 2012; E.M Berger, 2013; L. Berger, 2018; Buehler & O'Brien, 2011; Chatterjie, Markowitz, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013; Hamplova, 2018; Warr & Parry, 1982). While a number of studies have also addressed the experiences of working mothers (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle, & Liu, 2007; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Nae-Young et al., 2007; Peterson et al., 2018; Williams, Suls, Alliger, Learner, & Wan, 1991; Yahraes, 2017), the majority of these did not take place within the last decade, and only a few address populations other than White females in Western countries (for exceptions, see Hagelskamp, Hughes, Yoshikawa, & Chaudry, 2011; Hennessy, 2009; Waterhouse, Hill, & Hinde, 2017).

The worldwide increase in working motherhood has seen a substantial number of South African women joining the workforce (Patel, Govender, Paruk, & Ramgoon, 2006). Google Scholar and PsycINFO searches around 'motherhood South Africa' and 'working mothers South Africa' reveal that a number of South African studies have explored various aspects of motherhood (for examples see Bhana, Morrell, Shefer, & Ngabaza, 2010; Chohan, & Langa, 2011; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Gustafsson & Worku, 2007; Iwelunmor, Zungu, & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Jordan, Patel, & Hochfeld, 2014; Kruger, 2006; Magwaza, 2003; Macleod, 2001; Walker, 1995), but fewer bodies of work have focused on working motherhood specifically (for examples see Diraz, Ortlepp, & Greyling, 2003; Govender, Ramgoon, Patel, & Paruk, 2006; Patel et al., 2006; Visser, Coetzee, & Herbst, 2007; Wallis & Price, 2003), or produced qualitative accounts of the experience of working motherhood from mothers themselves (for examples see Moore, 2013; Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014; Wallis & Price, 2003).

The literature has also been criticised for being largely child-centered rather than focussing on the experience of motherhood from mothers' perspectives, and for neglecting the influence of cultural factors on parenting (Kruger, 2006). There is thus a concern that the multiple meanings mothering may have for individual women (as

well as the circumstances that their parenting takes place in) has remained hidden behind research that either ignores the experience of mothering, or tends to generalise and idealise it in unrealistic ways (Kruger, 2006).

This could be a significant oversight as the mothering role impacts most areas of a woman's life, including her identity, the way she interacts with the world, her daily tasks, and what she deems as most important in her life (Vejar, Madison-Colmore, & Ter Maat, 2006). Additionally, work contributes much complexity to the enjoyment of parenting and maternal well-being (Arendell, 2000). With employment having an undeniable impact on the mothering experience (Peterson et al., 2018) it stands to reason that knowledge of working mothers' experiences could assist in understanding this impact, and the support mothers need to cope with it.

Lastly, the experiences and identities of working mothers have not yet been explored through a psychoanalytic feminist framework. This theory could provide significant insights into the influence of gender role socialisation and ideologies on women's experiences (Tisdell, 2008). A critical psychoanalytic feminist approach could also integrate insights into how women's own early life experiences influence what they regard as appropriate for their gender (Wolff, 2007) and, therefore, how they choose to mother.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review serves to explain the main concepts in this research report, as well as to provide an overview of previous studies relevant to the topic at hand. To explain the background to the study, the influence of motherhood ideologies and gender roles will be explored first. Thereafter, literature pertaining to identity and motherhood identities will be reviewed. Lastly, the literature review will address what has been discovered about the experiences of working mothers to date.

2.2 Motherhood Ideologies

For the purposes of this study, the definition of ideology that will be referred to is that of "dominant modes of thought" (Gerring, 1997, p. 957) or, in other words, the dominantly held beliefs, values and ideas of society (Freeden, 2003). Rather than being reflections of an unbiased truth, ideologies support certain socially constructed ideals (Johnston & Swanson, 2006) or what has been referred to as "shared mental models" (Denzau & North, 2000, p. 24). These mental models have an impact on how individuals interact with and make sense of their social world (Denzau & North, 2000). Similarly, ideologies inform the context in which motherhood experiences take place (Kruger, 2006), and are thus important to explore in relation to this study. What follows, therefore, is a discussion of gender roles and dominant mothering ideologies, the influence of culture on these ideologies, as well as an outline of psychoanalytic feminist views on gender roles and mothering ideologies.

2.2.1 Gender roles and mothering ideologies.

Gender roles and ideologies refer to convictions about the roles, contributions and responsibilities deemed suitable for males and females (Kroska, 2007). Traditional ideologies generally place greater emphasis on the merits of specific roles and responsibilities for each sex. In the context of family life and parenting, this would take place through a man working to provide an income for his family, while a woman's role would typically include home responsibilities as well as child-rearing

and raising activities (Kroska, 2007). On the other hand, egalitarian ideologies emphasise the importance of equality in relationships, with men and women deemed as equally responsible for raising children as well as earning income to support the family unit (Kroska, 2007). Research points to the persistence of gender roles in the division of family and household tasks in dual earner households, with working women taking greater responsibility for childcare and household duties than their male counterparts (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Poduval & Poduval, 2009).

Thus, it becomes evident that gender roles and ideologies are inextricably linked to both mothering and working motherhood. Definitions of mothering ideology frequently refer to the dominant parenting ideology of intensive mothering (Johnston & Swanson, 2006), put forward by Hays (1996). In keeping with traditional ideologies of gender, according to this ideology, maternal duties should consume a substantial amount of resources, time and energy on both a physical and emotional level (Hays, 1996). Intensive mothering advocates that mothers bear the most responsibility for taking care of their children and, consequently, that mothers are also responsible for their children's development. The intensive mothering ideology further supports the notion of self-sacrifice, with mothers' needs never claiming priority over the needs of their family (Hays, 1996).

Therefore, the societal portrayal and perception of a good mother entails one who is devoted to her children's needs above all else, and who attends to these needs on a full-time basis (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Russo, 1976) – a belief that is further evident in psychoanalytic thinking (Chodorow, 1978). Similarly, the ideology of essential motherhood (DiQuinzio, 1999) is based on the belief that motherhood and womanhood are closely intertwined, with motherhood being a natural inevitability and serving as the ultimate purpose for women. This ideology further claims that a woman's happiness is dependent on whether her natural need to mother has been fulfilled (DiQuinzio, 1999). These expectations of how mothers are supposed to act and the notion that they should be happy in their parenting role have profound and wide-reaching impacts on how motherhood is perceived by women (Kruger, 2006). With mothering ideals providing an assumed accepted standard against which to be

measured and appraised (Kruger, 2006), mothers are likely to internalise and even perpetuate beliefs from society regarding their mothering role (Green, 2015).

Discourses around what is considered to be natural and acceptable mothering are further perpetuated by those deemed as experts in parenting (Moore & Abetz, 2016). Popularised psychological theories have also been accused of 'mother blaming' (Thurer, 1995). Developmental psychologists, for instance, have been criticised for eliciting guilt in mothers by asserting that pathological outcomes are certain if mothers pursue careers and children are handed to others for caregiving (Macdonald, 2013). That said, it appears that women who are mothers have to navigate criticism however they choose to parent. For instance, if a mother provides a great deal of involvement in her children's lives, she is considered to be overly intrusive, too protective and domineering. On the other hand, if a mother is not considered to be adequately involved with her children, she is perceived as self-centred, aloof and rejecting of her children (Thurer, 1995).

Mothers are also implicated in children's psychopathological outcomes, creating a societal narrative that mothers are to be looked at when deciding where to direct blame for extreme anti-social behaviour (Thurer, 1995). Moreover, while some of the ideals around a mother's absolute responsibility for ensuring optimal child development have been challenged, they have not reduced in popularity (Green, 2015; Kruger, 2006). While the influence of mothering on child development is not to be denied, it is argued that a number of contextual as well as child factors should additionally be taken into account before assuming that mothers are to blame for psychopathology (Thurer, 1995).

Additionally, it has been argued that many mothers across the globe are set up for failure by sheer virtue of the fact that their circumstances do not allow them to conform to the intensive mothering ideal (DiLapi, 1989). For instance, working mothers face tremendous pressure to meet dominant parenting expectations (Macdonald, 2013; Medina & Magnuson, 2009), have little time to attend to their own needs or interests outside of the parent-child relationship, and experience increased feelings of guilt as well as anxiety (Macdonald, 2013). Due to the fact that these and other parts of the mothering experience are influenced by cultural ideals (Kruger,

2006), the next section will discuss the influence of culture on gender roles and mothering ideologies.

2.2.2 Influence of culture on gender roles and mothering ideologies.

It is believed to be important to highlight culture in this study, as the way in which motherhood is perceived and interpreted is influenced by cultural ideas surrounding motherhood (Bell, 2004). A concept that has been approached in a variety of different ways by a number of authors, 'culture' has seen numerous definitions over the course of the last century (Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, & Lindsley, 2006). For the purposes of this research, culture broadly refers to the "ideals, values and assumptions about life that guide specific behaviours and are widely shared by people" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, as cited in Brislin, 2006, p. 83) and as representing a "coalescence of discrete behavioural norms and cognitions shared by individuals within some definable population that are distinct from those shared within other populations" (Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004, p. 690).

Furthermore, culture is a non-static phenomenon with great complexity and propensity to change – individual thinking and behaviour has an impact on the cultural practices that are adopted, as well as how these practices may develop and change over time (Lehman et al., 2004). Culture is therefore not wholly predictive of behaviour (or gender role expectations, for example) but, rather, is presumed to provide individuals with a variety of behaviours to choose from (Brislin, 2006). In a similar vein, it has been found that mothering patterns are transmitted intergenerationally in some ways, but that individuals preserve some culturally learned aspects of mothering while choosing to part with those that are not considered useful to their role (Glassman & Eisikovits, 2006). However, it has been argued that persons with similar cultures are likely to subscribe to similar ideologies and ways of thinking, while those from different backgrounds are likely to interpret their environment in different ways (Denzau & North, 2000).

Moreover, the undertakings related to motherhood involves the enactment of one's gender, class and race (Byrne, 2006). This means that mothers are believed to adhere to certain norms afforded to them by their raced, classed and gendered

selves; and that these norms are evident in everything from their daily mothering activities to the environment that is created for their children's development (Byrne, 2006). Somewhat in contrast to this, Walker (1995) argues that there is substantial overlap between how motherhood is constructed between women of different races in South Africa. However, the author simultaneously cautions against simplifying motherhood experiences and proposes the greater allowance of complexity in conceptualising motherhood identities. Furthermore, it has been found that the intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996) bears influence across different social classes – providing a standard of mothering even where structural barriers make doing so difficult (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015).

Thus, in the context of this study, it follows that motherhood and the way in which it is executed varies across cultures and between different periods in time (Moore, 1996). This is evident in worldwide research on cultural differences in parenting practices, which have pointed to varying degrees of conformity to gender roles, but nonetheless show that the majority of mothers across the globe bear the most responsibility in terms of childrearing (Selin, 2014). More traditional cultures appear to favour traditional gender roles, which impacts on the parenting expectations women within that culture may experience as well as attitudes towards working motherhood (Budig, Misra & Boeckmann, 2012). Interestingly, even in cultures where greater egalitarian parenting practices are taking place due to the increased number of dual earner households, some parents still hold on to more traditional ideals of gender roles (Selin, 2014).

As a theoretical stance that provides some insight into where the aforementioned gender roles originate from and how they influence mothering (Tisdell, 2008; Wolff, 2007), psychoanalytic views of gender and mothering ideologies will be discussed in the section that follows.

2.2.3 Psychoanalytic feminist views of gender and mothering ideologies.

Psychoanalytic feminism makes use of psychoanalytic ideas to investigate variations between men and women, and how the construction of gender roles on individual, family and societal levels impacts on early childhood development (Wolff, 2007).

Traditional psychoanalysis was criticised by feminists for ignoring the female developmental process as distinguishable from that of the male developmental process, as well as for perpetuating male dominance through the assumption that mothers are to serve as the main caretakers of children (Rakow, 2015). With a strong focus on mothers as objects in relation to their infants, traditional psychoanalytic theory was also criticised for ignoring the experiences of mothers, and for neglecting to focus on the idea of a mother as a human being in her own right (Benjamin, 1988; Hollway, 2001).

Proponents of psychoanalytic feminism asserted that investigations into mothering will unearth some of the ways in which patriarchy is created and maintained (Benjamin, 1988; Chodorow, 1978). In other words, psychoanalytic feminists believe that a greater understanding of personality development early in life will assist in understanding how identity is formed, as well as how expectations around appropriate gender norms for women and men arise (Wolff, 2007). Contrary to early psychoanalytic theories such as those of Freud (Rakow, 2015), psychoanalytic feminists proclaim that women's inherent qualities are more likely to be attributed to socially constructed gender norms than predetermined biological factors (Sarikakis, Rush, Grubb-Swetnam, & Lane, 2009). These gender norms are communicated and created during a woman's early childhood years, leading to the internalisation of oppressive gender beliefs (Sarikakis et al., 2009).

Chodorow (1978) argued that a man's early childhood experience and socialisation bring about greater independence partly due to the difference they experience in relating to their mothers. A woman's early childhood experience, on the other hand, brings feelings of similarity and relatedness to the fore in relation to their mothers. As a result of these differing early experiences, it is believed that men have a greater propensity to take part in the working world where independence and separateness is valued, and women have a longstanding internal desire to be mothers themselves. Chodorow (1978) therefore highlights that the social norms wherein mothers are primary caregivers and fathers are primarily responsible for providing income, create a continuous cycle wherein women are more likely to become mothers and men are more likely to become workers.

According to the idea of gender performativity (Butler, 1990), gender is not an inherent trait whereby women are considered feminine and men are considered masculine through early development. Rather, there is the idea that we construct our gender through particular acts that are informed and directed by a wider heteronormative matrix. This normative framework intimately informs what we perform and what constructs of gender are reproduced. Gender is thereby argued to be a social construction, guided by cultural norms. Normative ideas around culture become embedded in our daily actions and interactions (our performativities) where normative ideas of gender are reconstructed in a number of complex ways.

Importantly, Butler (1990) also considers both women and men to be actively involved in their gender performativities, thereby allowing for contextual variability of gender roles and identity (as well as conformity to these roles) to be considered - while acknowledging that these performances are guided and pressurised by stringent ideals and social norms. We therefore embody gendered ideas embedded in the wider heterosexual matrix that we are embedded in. These ideas are internalised and enacted, and therefore produce and reproduce gender. Over time, socially constructed roles become assumed to be natural and are accepted as such by society as a whole.

The above ideas make it apparent that identity formation intersects with gender and mothering roles. Therefore, some prominent ideas around mothering and identity will be highlighted next.

2.3 Motherhood and Identity

Identity encompasses how individuals define themselves and who individuals perceive themselves to be (Meca et al., 2017). This could relate to internalised aspects of the self, such as different ambitions, viewpoints or value systems (Waterman, 1999). In a similar vein, it could also refer to how individuals situate themselves in connection to different cultural entities (Schwartz, Montgomery & Briones, 2006). Bilgrami (2006) further distinguishes between subjective identities and objective identities. The author goes on to explain that subjective identity refers to the above-mentioned idea of how individuals see themselves and who they

believe they are. Objective identity, on the other hand, is how a person may be seen by others, and is influenced by “biological or social facts” (Bilgrami, 2006, p. 5) associated with such an individual.

In relation to this study, while subjective identities would entail who working mothers conceive themselves to be, the latter idea of objective identity brings our attention to how mothering ideologies may influence how mothers are seen by others. Becoming a mother is often cited as a time when women undergo substantial changes in their subjective or personal identity, by both gaining new aspects of self and having to mourn other aspects that can no longer exist (Stone, 2014). They may also have to negotiate changes in the ways in which they are viewed by others. These and other ideas will be illuminated in the discussion to follow.

2.3.1 Identity and the transition to motherhood.

While motherhood may be central to how women perceive themselves, a women’s motherhood identity is one of many identities she may have at any given point in time (Hollway et al., 2008). Identity is also continuously in a process of change, with aspects such as cultural influences playing a role in individuals’ attitudes towards (and perceptions of) the world around them (Frosh, 2010). Women experience a number of identity changes in the transition to motherhood, a time which is considered particularly tumultuous (Stone, 2014). Becoming a mother is associated with an initial period wherein a loss of personal identity is experienced, after which children are integrated into women’s concept of self and a new identity is allowed to emerge (Laney, Hall, Anderson, & Willingham, 2015).

Women also experience a sense of shock or personal crisis upon becoming mothers (Kitzinger, 1978). The transition to motherhood therefore has substantial psychological impacts on mothers (Hollway et al., 2008; Hollway, 2016), with some initially attributing a loss of meaning, autonomy and sense of control to this period (Stone, 2014). Having to navigate the demands of caring for a child and putting another’s needs above their own leads to conflicts with what mothers previously deemed as important, as well as conflicts in how they perceive themselves (Hollway et al., 2008). Friction arises as mothers are caught between the desire to care for

their children, and their own sense of independence or personal wishes they may want to fulfil (Hollway et al., 2008). Thus, maternal ambivalence is commonly associated with this time (Parker, 1997) and makes for a painful experience that is accompanied by conflict and shame (Raphael-Leff, 2010). In addition to experiencing conflicting feelings towards their infants, women experience a sense of fading into the background while becoming subordinate to their infants - who are also prioritised in the minds of others (Stone, 2014).

With societal ideals placing an emphasis on self-sacrifice and all-consuming motherhood (Hays, 1996), maternal subjectivity or maintaining a sense of autonomy as a mother is set up in opposition to good motherhood (Stone, 2014). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that mothers who work (and thus pursue an identity outside of motherhood) are perceived to be neglecting their role as mothers (Thurer, 1995). It therefore appears as though working motherhood has the potential to elicit complex identity negotiation within individuals (Hollway, 2016; Stone, 2014), yet its influence on the transition to motherhood remains largely unexplored in the existing literature. A number of studies exist on motherhood and identity in general (for examples, see Bailey, 1999; Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Frizelle & Hayes, 1999; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Hollway et al., 2008; Hollway, 2015; Laney et al., 2015; Smith, 1999; Zabielske, 1994). However, there are fewer explore working motherhood and identity specifically (see Buzzanell et al., 2007; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Laney, Carruthers, Hall, & Anderson, 2014). It is proposed that further research, specifically, psychoanalytically informed research, may help to understand the motherhood experience in more depth, providing insight into how working mothers experience and manage the tension between multiple meanings and identities.

2.3.2 The convergence of professional and mothering identities.

Laney et al. (2014) found that motherhood leads to an expansion of the self and alters the way in which work is experienced as well as approached, thus highlighting profound personal growth that takes place through navigating working motherhood. On the other hand, literature on working motherhood and identity has pointed to the tensions that arise through mothers' attempts to identify with or merge competing

ideologies (Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013), as well as how mothers engage in meaning-making to navigate the complexities of working motherhood (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007).

Studies on working motherhood and identity have uncovered the difficulty of living up to conflicting discourses around motherhood – namely the successful woman and intensive mothering ideologies (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). In negotiating these competing ideologies, mothers feel a strong need to have enough time for their children as well as enjoy the benefits of full-time employment (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013). However, this gives way to parenting and career goals which, at times, are conflicting. While some women subscribe to the ideals of being caregivers and see motherhood as an essential part of being a woman, they simultaneously view employment as vital to their emotional health, identify with being able to provide for their families and want to maintain their financial independence (Kahu & Morgan, 2007).

Furthermore, mothers' work statuses are partly influenced by their internalised mothering ideologies, but "their mothering ideology emerges in part to fit their lived experience with a particular employment decision" (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Thus, working mothers engage in a cognitive process of rationalising or reconciling their internalised mothering ideals with their having to work (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Identities are recreated through a process of meaning-making that allows mothers to pursue rewarding careers, enjoy family life and defend against criticisms levelled at working mothers (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Gorman & Fritzche, 2002).

Consequently, in their efforts to make meaning of their roles against the backdrop of the traditional good mothering ideologies, it was found that some working women reconstruct traditional ideals into that of the "good working mother" (Buzzanell et al., 2005, p. 276). According to these women, a good mother is someone who ensures that her children have good caregiving available in their mother's absence and delegates some duties to their partners. Additionally, some working mothers have found ways to reconstruct their identities not only as mothers, but as "independent

mothers" (Kahu & Morgan, 2007, p. 70) who believe taking time for themselves is essential to their ability to be good parents.

At the same time, the way in which these working mother identities are constructed was also found to be delicate and prone to change (Buzzanell et al., 2005). Working mothers feel the need to defend their work as being to the benefit of their families rather than for themselves, and appear to believe they are better parents than stay-at-home mothers because of the value that their work provides. This meaning-making has been argued to be in place to manage negative feelings around failing to meet societal ideals of mothering, and the struggle to meet the demands of mothering while working (Buzzanell et al., 2005). On the other hand, this meaning-making may also be interpreted as an active grappling with and contesting of dominant ideologies and a reconstruction of what it means to mother - rather than a passive acceptance thereof (Frizelle & Kell, 2010). Similarly, a study conducted on a sample of South African working mothers found that most of those interviewed did not believe staying home would improve their mothering (Patel et al., 2006). This is believed to signify a greater resistance to more traditional ideologies and the idea that mothering identities are not wholly defined in relation to these (Patel et al., 2006). Moreover, Walker (1995) argues that women give multiple meanings to motherhood and that there is evidence for their agency in challenging dominant gender norms.

2.4 Experiences of Working Mothers

To date, research has shown that working motherhood is a highly demanding role that requires remarkable adaptation on both a personal and social level (Berger, 2018; Poduval & Poduval, 2009). The discussion that follows aims to highlight some of the challenges and rewards associated with working mothers' experiences, both at home and at the workplace.

2.4.1 Challenges and rewards of working motherhood.

While some authors have claimed that working mothers have greater levels of happiness over those who mother full-time (Berger, 2013; Macdonald, 2013), other

studies have emphasised that working motherhood entails greater propensity to stress, a lower likelihood of having a balanced lifestyle and lower levels of happiness as opposed to those mothers who are not employed (Treas, Van Der Lippe, & Tai, 2011; Stier, Lewin-Epstein & Braun, 2012).

In a similar vein, there are a variety of rewards as well as challenges related to working motherhood. Some of the challenges include the difficulty of managing a dual role (as both provider and caregiver) and the consequent emotional strain of having to balance work and family life (Berger, 2018; Guendouzi, 2006; Peterson et al., 2018; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Waterhouse et al., 2017). Adding to their strain is the dominant perception that mothers in heterosexual relationships are regarded to be the primary caregivers for their children, and this appears to result in childcare duties affecting their roles as employees to a greater extent than their partners (Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Frizelle & Kell, 2010). In addition to taking responsibility for most childcare duties, the persistence of gender roles sees mothers in heterosexual relationships bearing the most responsibility in terms of household tasks, leading to elevated levels of stress at home as compared to their partners (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Working mothers also experience greater vulnerability to anxiety and depression (Adhikari, 2012; Chatterjie et al., 2013). Risk factors for such mental health strains include perfectionistic tendencies (Gelabert et al., 2012), unprocessed grief associated with the losses of motherhood (Nicolson, 2011), as well as inwardly directed anger (Clay, Anderson, & Dixon, 1993).

Finding themselves unable to live up to the expectations and ideals of intensive mothering, maternal guilt and feelings of failure have also been found to come to the fore for working mothers (Guendouzi, 2006; Medina & Magnuson, 2009). Employed mothers experience a great deal of pressure in their desire to provide their child with good parenting and worry about whether they are adequately addressing their children's needs (Peterson et al., 2018). Some working mothers have commented on the difficulty of not being able to spend as much time with their children as they would want to, expressed their sadness at missing their children's developmental milestones, and admitted a sense of resentment towards caregivers' having closer relationships with their children (Christopher, 2012).

On the other hand, it has been argued that the sheer number of women who work outside their homes demonstrates that there are both financial and psychological gains to be made through maternal employment (Wilson, 2006). Some of the benefits highlighted by research include personal expansion (Laney et al., 2014) alongside maintaining a sense of identity (Guendouzi, 2006), self-esteem (Christopher, 2012) and achievement (Laney et al., 2014) through their careers. Additionally, mothers benefit from mental stimulation (Poduval & Poduval, 2009) and enjoyment related to performing work duties (Christopher, 2012), financial independence (Christopher, 2012), the ability to provide for their families (Wilson, 2006), as well as a means to more equal decision-making in the family (Kumar & Maral, 2015). The working environment also provides mothers with an additional supportive social context in which they can share their experiences with others who face similar challenges in meeting societal ideals of good mothering (Guendouzi, 2006; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015). At the same time, the working environment may also bring forth its own challenges – some of which will be explored in the discussion to follow.

2.4.2 Experiences of working mothers within organisations.

The influence of gender roles on mothers' experiences appears to extend beyond home life into their experiences at work. Some authors have highlighted the existence of concepts such as the 'motherhood penalty', wherein mothers were found to be paid less than women who are not mothers in most countries studied (Budig et al., 2012). This discrimination was further found to be related to cultural attitudes, with more egalitarian cultures showing greater tolerance for and support of working mothers. On the other hand, less support is shown in more traditional cultures that prefer specific roles to be filled by each gender (Budig et al., 2012).

In addition to cultural norms, one of the explanations for the motherhood penalty relates to how working mothers are perceived and discriminated against professionally (Benard & Correll, 2010). While individuals tend to react more favourably to men in the workplace after they become fathers, women who become mothers tend to be stereotyped in comparably negative ways. Once a working woman becomes a mother, she is likely to be recognised as having more personal

warmth than before, but previously held assumptions about her being a competent employee are likely to disappear (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). Conversely, working fathers are also perceived to have greater personal warmth than before becoming fathers, but previously held assumptions regarding their competence as employees are likely to remain the same (Cuddy et al., 2004).

It is believed that gendered views on employee behaviour is far-reaching, with constructions of leadership and power greatly favouring masculinity (Olsson & Walker, 2003). Mothers are frequently viewed as being less competent in as well as less committed to their work (Benard & Correll, 2010). Additionally, it is believed that this devaluation as an employee is in place before women become mothers. To this end, Millward (2006) points out that women are often perceived as potential mothers rather than productive employees that are able to contribute to an organisation. The author goes on to say that this has the effect of women feeling excluded and led to believe they are less able to make use of long-term prospects within an organisation during their pregnancies. This has the inadvertent effect of mothers having to question whether they can both be effective employees as well as mothers (Millward, 2006). These beliefs are further perpetuated by dominant stereotypes of women's qualities and what they are able to contribute to an organisation at an executive level. For instance, Olsson and Walker (2003) found that those who perceived women as able to make significant contributions to the workforce believed women would do so through their relatively greater displays of intuition and emotion as compared to men. However, this same study found that women who came across as more 'masculine' were viewed as being aggressive and controlling (Olsson & Walker, 2003). This highlights that traditional views of the qualities attributable to men and women are likely to perpetuate gender ideology and therefore bear an influence on how women's abilities are viewed in the workplace.

Furthermore, when it comes to recruitment, career advancement and employee training, working mothers are favoured less than working fathers or other professionals that do not have any children (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). Therefore, not only do working mothers have to come to terms with a newfound maternal identity, but they start to experience devaluation as an employee that they may not have experienced before. This creates a predicament for working mothers,

who want to prove their ability to maintain competence at work, while navigating the numerous challenges that motherhood brings forth (Millward, 2006).

From the above discussion, it becomes apparent that the experience of working motherhood is multi-faceted with significant advantages as well as challenges. Mothers who are in a position to enjoy the benefits of employment yet simultaneously have to manage difficult feelings around being unable to live up to mothering ideals (Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Peterson et al., 2018). At the same time, they face significant disadvantages upon returning to work that their male counterparts do not have to endure (Cuddy et al., 2004). Thus, the subjective experience of working motherhood may involve greater complexity than most previous research may have been able to highlight or explain. While there are common themes across the experience of working motherhood, some authors have pointed to a need for more qualitative studies to be undertaken, as these are able to explore individual experiences and capture their complexity more adequately (Buzzanell et al., 2007).

2.5 Conclusion

This review of literature highlighted the substantial influence of dominant mothering ideologies and gender roles on the working motherhood experience (Kruger, 2006; Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Some of the challenges that working mothers experience as they navigate conflicting personal and parenting goals were also explored (Berger, 2018; Guendouzi, 2006; Peterson et al., 2018; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Waterhouse et al., 2017). Furthermore, the review pointed to the potential for complex identity changes to come to the fore during working motherhood (Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Ladge & Greenberg, 2015; Laney et al., 2014).

In South Africa, while a number of studies have explored topics related to motherhood (for examples see Bhana, Morrell, Shefer, & Ngabaza, 2010; Chohan, & Langa, 2011; Frizelle & Hayes, 1999; Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Gustafsson & Worku, 2007; Iwelunmor, Zungu, & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004; Jordan, Patel, & Hochfeld, 2014; Kruger, 2006; Magwaza, 2003; Macleod, 2001; Walker, 1995), fewer have focused on working motherhood (for examples see Diraz, Ortlepp,

& Greyling, 2003; Govender, Ramgoon, Patel, & Paruk, 2006; Patel et al., 2006; Visser, Coetzee, & Herbst, 2007; Wallis & Price, 2003) or the experiences of working motherhood from the perspectives of mothers themselves (for examples see Moore, 2013; Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014; Wallis & Price, 2003). This study aims to address this gap in the literature through a qualitative method that will allow the researcher to capture greater complexity in participants' accounts (Cresswell, 2007). It is further believed that the substantial influence of dominant mothering ideologies and gender roles on the working motherhood experience makes a compelling argument for adopting a psychoanalytic feminist theoretical approach – an aspect that will be explored further in the upcoming methods section.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section outlines the research methods that were used within the study alongside the reasons for choosing these. It will begin with an explanation of psychoanalytic feminism as the chosen theoretical framework, after which the research questions will be highlighted. Thereafter, the rationale for choosing a qualitative design will be explored alongside the methods that were used for data collection and analysis. Finally, credibility, trustworthiness and reflexivity will be considered in relation to the study.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was concerned with obtaining in-depth descriptions of the working motherhood experience as well as mothers' identity negotiation. It therefore had an explorative aim and was located in an interpretivist paradigm, wherein participants' individual experiences and their consequent meaning-making around these experiences were considered significant (Cresswell, 2009; Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010). A psychoanalytic feminist approach was the chosen theoretical framework for the study. Whereas feminist psychoanalysis may refer to the application of feminist principles to psychoanalytic psychotherapy (Prozan, 1992), psychoanalytic feminism views "women's oppression as rooted within psychic structures and reinforced by the continual repetition or reiteration of relational dynamics formed in infancy and childhood" (Graff, 2012, p. 1).

Thus, psychoanalytic feminism aims to explore the development of the human psyche to gain greater insight into how the societal oppression of women is created and maintained (Wolff, 2007). Psychoanalytic feminism focuses on the experiences of individual women and draws attention to how being socialised into a female gender role (which places importance on the value of relationships and is characterised by nurturing), influences the way in which knowledge is constructed by women (Tisdell, 2008). It therefore employs a psychological focus on women's early life experiences and the impact these have on their beliefs regarding appropriate

behaviour for their gender (Wolff, 2007). This theoretical approach was suited to the study as it is an approach with a fundamental interest in mothering as one of a woman's roles. Furthermore, the approach comments on gender roles as well as how identity is formed, and seeks to understand how familial and societal forces influence women's experiences (Wolff, 2007).

3.3 Research Questions

As previously mentioned, the aim of this research project was to explore the experiences of working mothers in South Africa from their own perspectives, as well as how mothering and career identities are negotiated in light of dominant mothering ideologies, gender ideals and mothers' cultural backgrounds. The study also aimed to explore working mothers' perceptions of cultural influences and early childhood experiences on their mothering identities and experiences. The research questions that emerged from these aims specifically pertained to the study's specified sample of middle-class, partnered, South African women working in corporate organisations. They were as follows:

- What do working mothers experience in their dual roles as parents and employees?
- How are motherhood and career identities negotiated?
- What is the perceived influence of working mothers' cultural backgrounds and upbringing on their experiences?
- How do findings from the above questions relate to dominant mothering and gender ideologies?

3.4 Research Design

In keeping with its explorative aim, the study made use of a qualitative design (Anderson, Ones, Sinangil, & Viswesvaran, 2001), as this allowed for the collection of in-depth accounts of working mothers' experiences. This research design also allowed for the assumption of multiple realities (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Cresswell,

2007) and allowed for the collection of first-hand accounts of different experiences and perceptions from mothers themselves (Cresswell, 2007).

As an inductive approach, qualitative research design maintains enough flexibility for new ideas and information to emerge from the data without being limited to pre-established categories (Cresswell, 2007). Additionally, in keeping with qualitative design, the study favoured depth and a smaller sample. This allowed for the production of rich, detailed accounts of personal experiences to be described by participants in the study (Cresswell, 2007) – something which would not have been as viable with quantitative studies which tend to make use of larger samples (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

3.5 Participants and Sampling

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Laher & Botha, 2012) was used. Thus, a few individuals employed in corporate organisations full-time (who were known to the researcher) were approached by the researcher via email as well as telephonically, and asked to approach working mothers within their corporate organisations to gauge interest in possible voluntary participation in the study. Inclusion criteria were outlined in this email and verbal communication so as to ensure suitable participants were approached. A sample of six individuals were interviewed. This small sample size was deemed appropriate for this as a qualitative study, wherein depth of interviews carries greater priority than the number of individuals interviewed (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Laher & Botha, 2012). Corporate mothers were chosen to ensure greater homogeneity within the sample and because it is believed that corporate environments tend to entail long working hours and less flexible working arrangements (Akhtar, Kashif, Arif, & Khan, 2012) – thus allowing for the possibility of highlighting tensions in working motherhood to a greater extent.

A number of inclusion criteria were considered in the recruitment of participants. Participants between the ages of 25 and 50 years were sought for the study. Participants were included on the basis of being mothers who are also employed full-time. Participants were women who define themselves as having a career as well as

a career trajectory, who perceive their work as part of their identity and who believe they would want to work even if they did not have to work out of economic necessity.

Participants were also women who feel that they had a career or professional identity before having their first child. They were required to have at least one child between the ages of two and 11 years of age. This was to ensure that their motherhood identities were slightly more homogenous; it was assumed that mothering older adolescent children may involve different developmental challenges. Middle-class economic status was preferred as it was believed greater identity conflicts (which is of central importance to this study) occur in working mothers from these populations as they have greater access to a sense of independence, but that this becomes undermined during the transition to motherhood (Stone, 2014). Tertiary education was also specified as a prerequisite, as it implies considerable financial investment has already been made into the working mother's future, and it is believed that this may influence a woman's level of commitment to having her own career. Having a live-in partner or marital spouse was another inclusion criterion, as this may reveal dynamics with regards to the division of household and childcare tasks between working mothers and their partners, and how this support or lack thereof influences working mothers' parenting experience. While culture was unspecified in the inclusion criteria, it is believed to have an influence on parenting and gender roles (Moore, 1996; Selin, 2014) and, therefore, participants were asked about its perceived influence on their mothering role in the interviews.

In addition to meeting the prerequisite criteria outlined above, the recruited sample ended up including two Black females, two Coloured females and two White females. Those interviewed were between the ages of 32 and 39 years of age. They had children between the ages of nine months and eight years of age, with at least one child above the age of two years. The pseudonyms used for these mothers were Koketso, Sophia, Ayesha, Naomi, Gemma and Lindelwa. Koketso is a 32-year old Black female with one child who is married. She was pregnant at the time of the interview and works in the mobile communications industry. Sophia was 36-years old at the time of the interview and is a White female. She works in the banking industry, is married and has two children. Ayesha also works in the banking industry and is a Coloured female. She was 39 years at the time of being interviewed, is married and

has two children. Naomi is a White female who works for a financial services and health company. She has one child and is married. She was 36-years old at the time of being interviewed. Gemma works in the banking industry, was 39-years old at the time of being interviewed, is married and has two children. She is a Coloured female. Lastly, Lindelwa works for a media company and was 37 years of age at the time of being interviewed. She is a Black female, has two children and is married.

While the above criteria were outlined to prevent interviewing an excessively heterogenous sample, it is acknowledged that a focus on middle class, tertiary educated women in relationships may have added a limitation to the study by producing what could be considered a normative account of working motherhood. Moreover, while this was not specifically chosen or aimed for, all of the mothers interviewed were heterosexual. It should be noted that, while this sample falls into a heteronormative category, it is acknowledged that there is greater diversity in terms of motherhood voices than this study allowed for.

3.6 Data Collection

In line with the characteristics of qualitative research, first-hand accounts of mothers' viewpoints and perceptions were gathered through individual interviews (Fossey et al., 2002; Giorgi, 2005). This allowed for the topic at hand to be explored in a highly focused manner (Fossey et al., 2002) and created the possibility of gathering data through a real-time conversation between a researcher and a participant (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In order to gain in-depth, comprehensive descriptions of the working motherhood experience, the study made use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008; Fylan, 2005).

In keeping with this method, an interview schedule with prompts to elicit in-depth answers therefore acted as a guide during data collection (see Appendix D: Interview Schedule), and active listening skills were engaged to build rapport with participants (Ayres, 2008). These characteristics of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in terms of clarifying what participants were trying to convey through their dialogue, thus allowing the researcher to gain insight into the participants' experiences in great detail (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews permitted the exploration of complex research questions and gave way to the emergence of more nuanced or contradictory ideas in the participants' accounts of the phenomena under study (Fylan, 2005). The interviews were each experienced as unique and highlighted the complexity of each mother's experience in navigating her motherhood role. Being able to conduct one-on-one interviews also meant that my presence as a researcher impacted how answers were navigated, possibly as it removed a sense of anonymity and opened participants up to judgement regarding their adequacy as mothers. As such, the interview approach allowed for the observation of points where participants were more defended or guarded in their answers, indicating some discomfort in sharing some of their more exposing or vulnerable experiences of motherhood. This also points to the idea that mothers expected judgement from some of their responses, possibly as this may have been their experience in the past. However, most mothers became more comfortable with the interview process as it unfolded and were able to share some of their greatest vulnerabilities and most difficult experiences as working mothers. It should also be noted that some mothers were easier to access than others, and often had strict work schedules around which interviews had to be scheduled. This points to the difficulties they may face in navigating additional childcare and household responsibilities outside of their work demands.

Before the interviews commenced, participants were given information sheets and interview consent forms regarding the study (see Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet and Appendix B: Interview Consent Form). Permission was obtained to audio-record the interviews (see Appendix C: Audio Recording Consent Form) and pseudonyms were used in the reporting of the data, assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality. As previously mentioned, the use of pseudonyms means the following names will be used in reporting the findings: Koketso, Sophia, Ayesha, Naomi, Gemma and Lindelwa.

3.7 Data Analysis

Offering a means to locate patterns within data alongside theoretical flexibility, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse interview transcripts.

In keeping with the study's explorative aim and interpretivist stance, interview transcripts were analysed for themes related to working mothers' experiences and identities, and their perceptions related to these. To enable the production of a rich analysis that captures some of the complexity of the working motherhood experience, an interpretive perspective was favoured (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, using a psychoanalytic feminist approach during analysis entailed taking a psychological focus on early life experiences and how these may shape beliefs regarding gender roles (Wolff, 2007). It also entailed an exploration of how the societal oppression of women is created (Wolff, 2007), how dominant ideologies can be transformed and challenged (Kaur & Nagaich, 2019), and the idea that gender is multifaceted (Beetham & Demtriades, 2007).

Due to the fact that psychoanalytic feminist theory was drawn upon during analysis, the way in which themes arising from the transcripts were coded, interpreted and written up were in line with this theoretical framework. In other words, themes attempted to capture the voices of the participants and their understandings of their experiences in light of dominant mothering ideologies and socialised gender roles (Tisdell, 2008; Wolff, 2007). Thus, Interpretive Thematic Analysis (ITA) was implemented, favouring analysis at a latent level wherein "underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13) were explored.

In accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, there were six steps involved in the analysis of data. Firstly, the researcher read each interview transcript a few times and made notes about initial understandings or ideas regarding the interview content. Secondly, interview transcripts were read again, with the researcher coding the data for any noteworthy aspects within each interview response. For the purposes of ensuring consistency in coding, transcripts were read once more, and adjustments were made to preliminary coding as necessary. Thirdly, coding was organised and grouped into initial themes relating to the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thereafter, the fourth step involved reworking these initial themes, by consolidating ones that were similar, and discarding those which were weaker or not adequately

aligned with the aims of the study. The remaining themes were refined and defined more clearly in the fifth step, by naming the themes, specifying which aspect of the data each theme is to capture, and commencing with the writing of each theme's accompanying analysis. In the sixth and final phase, the final written report of the analysis was produced. This included an outline of themes and extracts from participant interviews, alongside a rich analysis and description of these themes and how they relate to the study's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is related to whether the results emerging from the study can be trusted to represent 'truth', the likelihood of the study's transferability to other settings or contexts, as well as the degree of reliability and verifiability of findings (Fossey et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a similar vein, credibility in the context of qualitative studies concerns the likelihood of research results reflecting authenticity (Ahmad, 2017).

While this qualitative study attempted to gather and report on depictions of research participants' experiences of working motherhood, the way in which results were analysed were influenced by the researcher's own preconceived ideas and experiences (Fossey et al., 2002; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In addition, using a psychoanalytic feminist stance in interpretation of the interview data implies that data was understood (and therefore conceptualised) according to a specific theory. This not only limits interpretation of the data to a particular lens, but could further be problematic in the sense that there may be a difference between the way in which participants perceive their life experiences, and the way in which the researcher interpreted the participants' life experiences (Josselson, 2011).

As a result of this inevitable influence, to ensure credibility, measures need to be taken to ensure that themes emerging from analysis reflect accurate representations of what was meant by participants in the interviews. To this end, the researcher's supervisor crosschecked themes to confirm that there is agreement in how the results are being interpreted in the study and that findings are an authentic reflection of what the mothers shared. Furthermore, verbatim extracts from the interviews are

included in reporting the results of the study so as to maintain authenticity and allow the reader to determine the applicability of interpretations of the data (Fossey et al., 2002).

3.9 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative studies is understood as a researcher's continuous acknowledgement of their own position with regards to their study, as well as the active recognition that this position has an influence on their research (Berger, 2015; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). Thus, through the process of reflexivity, a researcher continuously engages with and reflects on how their presence, previous life experiences, and frame of reference may impact every stage of their research project (Dowling, 2008; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). It is important to acknowledge this in relation to this study, as reflexive efforts impact the quality of research produced (Berger, 2015).

Reflexivity in psychoanalytically informed studies allows for the consideration of unconscious material, as well as transference and countertransference in the researcher-participant relationship (Brown, 2006). Therefore, it provides the opportunity to explore the researcher's reaction to participants, the researcher's experience of participant interviews (including non-verbal behaviour), as well as the intersubjective space between the researcher and the participants (Elliott, Ryan, & Hollway, 2012). It additionally allows the researcher to reflect on why certain findings seem significant, and how their own reactions to the research process may impact which findings they deem important. In a similar vein, psychoanalytically informed researchers endeavour to be mindful of differences and similarities between themselves and the participants, as well as how these may influence results or the interpretation thereof (see Elliott et al., 2012).

While I am not a mother myself, it is anticipated that the way I was parented as well as the way I plan to parent may have had an influence in my interpretation of the data. As a White, Afrikaans female from a privileged middle-class upbringing, I was financially fortunate enough to receive full-time caregiving from my mother during the first three years of my life. After this, my mother started working again and our

household became a dual-earner household – much like the ones that were explored in this study. This may have led me to have a bias in favour of working motherhood in some ways, and a bias against it in others.

Furthermore, my lack of experience with parenting imparted a sense of naivety in collecting and analysing the data, as I do not have a first-hand experience of what it means to mother. Therefore, during collection and analysis of the data, there were points at which I experienced judgment towards mothers and how they chose to mother. This was especially prevalent in instances where working mothers appeared less invested in their children and more drawn towards their careers. This made me realise how entrenched societal expectations of mothers are and how, despite having knowledge of socially constructed motherhood ideologies, I was unable to escape the framework of these ideologies in my own psyche. During interviews, participants at points also expected judgement, and appeared to select their responses carefully to avoid scrutiny from the researcher. These instances all pointed to the pervasiveness of societal expectations and how working mothers continually are and feel evaluated around the ambivalence of their experience.

In the collection of data, different responses were elicited in me from each participant, yet there was an overall sense that much pain was being defended against (both by the researcher and the participants). It was only upon writing up the results and discussion sections that I realised I had subscribed to more idealised notions of motherhood prior to conducting this study. Similar to the shock participants experienced upon becoming mothers, gaining insight into their experiences was overwhelming and shocking in some ways for myself as the researcher. As such, the countertransference I experienced during and after interviews was frequently a feeling of loss and sadness, alongside a sense of tension and resentment. Much like the participants, while I could intellectually prepare for the fact that working motherhood would be an extremely demanding role, it was more difficult to anticipate the extent of the emotional exhaustion and loss it entails. It was only as I was writing up the findings that a persistent feeling of not fully capturing participant experiences allowed me to engage with the underlying loss that was there, but initially defended against.

In reflecting upon the interviews, I realised participants with older children (above the age of three years) seemed more accepting of their circumstances and more settled into their role; while those who had some older children as well as infants at the time of being interviewed appeared more anxious and exhausted. Therefore, with some interviews, there was a feeling of frailness underlying more defended narratives of motherhood, alongside a feeling that a probe for deeper exploration would leave the participant in an uncontained state. This affected how I felt interviews could be conducted and the depth to which content was explored. In addition, this left me with a sense of sadness and helplessness for the experiences of these mothers and a wish that I could reassure them in some way. At the same time, having experienced interviews with mothers who presented a more manageable view of working motherhood left me feeling resentful of the mothers who were more anxious, as their experiences left me in disbelief and questioning my own desire to mother in future. As such, while the research was enlightening in some ways, hearing participants' stories of loss related to their relationships, their careers and their lives in general, had a marked impact on me as the researcher. This may additionally have influenced how findings are presented as being more inclusive of the challenges of working motherhood.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Human and Community Development (see Appendix E: Ethics Clearance). Working mothers were invited to participate in the study without forcing or pressurising them to do so. Participants were given information sheets outlining the purpose of the study and detailing what their participation in interviews would include (see Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet). Participants also received forms outlining their consent to participate as well as consent to be audio-recorded (see Appendix B: Interview Consent Form and Appendix C: Audio Recording Consent Form). Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld by using pseudonyms in the reporting of data, and full identities were only known to the researcher and her supervisor. To ensure that anonymity is maintained permanently, none of the verbatim quotes or information used in the reporting of the study contain identifying details that may allow them to be traced back to individual

participants. Transcripts have been kept on a password-protected computer and, with the participants' permission, will be archived in anonymised form in the personal databases of the researcher and her supervisor at the end of the project for possible future research use. Anonymised data may also be used in future studies that include other researchers. Permission was also obtained to audio-record the interviews. These audio recordings were kept on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after publication of the research.

It was made clear to participants that there are no benefits or risks to taking part in the study. It was also emphasised that participants did not have to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable with, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time without any explanation. Participants were asked to let the researcher know in the event that any part of the research interview process causes distress for them, so that they may be referred for counselling (should they wish to make use of such services). The details for free counselling services were also made available on the participant information sheets, however, none of the participants requested or enquired about counselling.

Lastly, it is acknowledged that locating the study within a psychoanalytic framework raised ethical complications. Participants were not able to foresee or consciously control what subconscious material may be revealed and interpreted from the interviews when interpretation of multiple layers is favoured in the analysis of the data (Josselson, 2011). The question is therefore raised as to whether participants can truly provide consent if they could not be fully aware of what they may be consenting to. Therefore, any highly sensitive material or interpretations were managed thoughtfully and where necessary, excluded, if these were deemed to be potentially harmful for a participant to read.

3.11 Conclusion

This section outlined the research methods that were used in the study. The psychoanalytic feminist theoretical orientation was explained alongside data collection processes, steps for data analysis and the research questions that this

research aimed to answer. Lastly, considerations around credibility, trustworthiness and reflexivity were explored in relation to the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS
JOURNEY OF WORKING MOTHERHOOD

4.1 Introduction

The themes that emerged from the interviews spanned five main categories which chronicle the journey of working motherhood through a variety of experiences and shifts in identity. It is important to note that while these broad categories emerged as a useful way to document the experiences of these women, their experiences were not as clearly delineated as categorised in this section, more often intersecting and overlapping. Various subthemes will be discussed under these five main themes, namely: the transition to motherhood, integration of identities, pressure of working motherhood, history and contextual influences on working motherhood, as well as meaning derived from working motherhood identity.

4.2. Transition to Motherhood

Overall, the transition to motherhood appeared to be marked by loss and some participants seemed emotionally overwhelmed when reflecting on this period – evoking a sense of sadness and anxiety in the countertransference. Within this theme, four subthemes were found. The first was the discovery of a great discrepancy between what motherhood was expected to be, and what the reality of motherhood entailed. The second was that mothers experienced a sense of subsumed personal needs and a sense of loss of self. The third theme refers to changes to the family dynamic or marital dyad upon the transition to motherhood, while the fourth theme refers to various mental health concerns that emerged during this time.

4.2.1 Shattering of expectations.

Throughout the interviews, there was a strong indication that the transition to motherhood is a highly personal experience with difficulties that vary in a number of ways between mothers. When asked what it was like to become a mother, participants described the experience using phrases such as “Scary” (Koketso),

“Overwhelming” (Sophia), “Quite daunting” (Ayesha), “Really hectic” (Naomi), “Exciting” (Gemma) and “...you are shocked” (Lindelwa). Some similarities across their experiences included five of the mothers referring to becoming a mother as an experience that cannot be prepared for or that cannot fully be known until one is a mother. Furthermore, Sophia described feeling overwhelmed during the transition and a sense of not having known what the experience would entail on an emotional level. She also explained having been unable to predict or prepare for the type of changes that took place in her body:

> It was overwhelming...Ja I think it was overwhelming. It was not what I expected. I think even though you plan for it you can’t - and intellectually understand what’s going to happen - emotionally you can’t prepare for it. And then I think physiologically all these changes happen to you and those physiological changes with your hormones and everything also kind of, you can’t prepare for that. So ja I would say it was quite an overwhelming experience (Sophia).

Koketso spoke of how her idealised idea of motherhood started changing from the moment she gave birth – and served as a sobering introduction to the journey ahead. There was a narrative of wanting things to be a certain way, but having to relinquish control during the process of becoming a mother. She pointed to the unpredictability of the transition as well as making meaning of this sense of precariousness by trying to accept her reality for what it is:

> My experience, rather let me say how I was introduced in becoming a mom and having my baby, what I had in mind initially and how it turned out was two completely things right from the very beginning, from birth...So, earlier on I learned that it’s not always what you want it to be, or it’s not always what you dream of it to be. So, it’s just a matter of saying I’m here, I’m now, this is the situation that I find myself in, and how do I make the best of it? Because I feel like sometimes we want to plan and pre-empt so many things, and sometimes life just does not work out that way (Koketso).

4.2.2 Subsumed needs and loss of self.

Another theme that emerged strongly is that of losing one’s sense of self as well as a sense of reality, as once known, during the transition to motherhood. Mothers’ daily lives become subsumed and subordinate to that of their baby’s needs.

> It is a lot of adjusting. And just finding time for yourself. All of a sudden you don't have time for yourself. Even brushing your teeth is a mission. You know? So it's, I guess nothing can prepare you for being a mother, like being a mom (Lindelwa).

Motherhood was also described as being an all-consuming, anxiety provoking task where it becomes challenging to resume everyday activities and life as it was known before. Half of the mothers described a complete change in lifestyle and in how their free time is spent. The majority of mothers additionally referred to the difficulty of lack of sleep and the consequences thereof, which included negative effects on their mood and everyday functioning.

> ...I had little sleep. So that was a big adjustment. So lack of sleep...it was quite tough on my marriage at the time...I would say for the first couple of months it was really hard, I really didn't know what time it was, what day it was. It was really hectic, very demanding. So I kind of went from it just being my husband and myself to it being the three of us and the focus is very much on the baby...so there was not very much sleep as well, grumpiness. I was quite anxious when I became a mum for the first time because you sort of worry about can I keep this human alive?...So becoming a mom like initially when my son was born, it was a bit of a stressful experience (Naomi).

Notably, despite describing motherhood as an anxiety-provoking experience, Naomi defended against the intensity of the experience in the quote above and played it down by saying "a bit of a stressful experience" rather than "a stressful experience", and referring to anxiety about keeping her child alive as "you sort of worry…". There additionally appeared to be a sense of mourning life prior to motherhood that both the participants and the researcher defended against - with participants feeling too ashamed to talk about it, and that the researcher avoiding further probing on this topic during interviews.

4.2.3 Shifts in family dynamic and marital dyad.

A few of the women referred to shifts that were required in their marital relationships. Naomi alluded to the effect of the transition on her marriage (the transition precipitated divorce) and the resulting family dynamic, which was similarly echoed and described by Sophia.

> So ja…I mean I did have the support of my husband at the time when I went back but like our marriage fell apart soon after that. So that was very difficult because then I was a single mom and then having to work when my son was 6 months old, so that was very hard (Naomi).

> ...it's also then like what role are you to your husband and that's like dynamic as well. So I think that the difficulty is he, you know, loves you and appreciates you and your identity that he loves is focused around this former person that you defined yourself as and now you have to integrate this new role of being a mother in, and then he has to learn to love that as well. And he has to kind of let go of his expectations around what your identity was and reshape kind of who you are to him too... (Sophia).

Therefore, the adjustments related to motherhood were also cited to have an impact on the family dynamic and marriages of some of the mothers interviewed. For Sophia and Naomi, the transition to motherhood thus not only signalled the expansion of their family, but the loss of the previous dynamic that existed in their marriage before their babies were born. Sophia became teary upon talking about this changing dynamic, indicating an overwhelming feeling of sadness. A sense of loss (both for their sense of self and for life as it was before) thus co-existed with the new arrival, giving rise to conflicting feelings and emerging identities that were difficult to process.

4.2.4 Strains on mental health.

A number of participants additionally alluded to strains on their mental health as well as the difficulty in maintaining a form of life and work balance upon becoming mothers. Their difficulties manifested in the form of emotional exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, depression and symptoms of panic attacks. Sophia vividly described the difficulty of following a regimented, routinised existence and the joy this removed from her life experience; contrasting it to a more spontaneous existence before having children. There was a great deal of resentment at this point in the interview, which meant Sophie's words came across as a display of anger towards what working motherhood requires:

> And I think that unfortunately the efficient use of time and whilst you feel very efficient and accomplished because you're doing so much with your limited time, it also kind of strips you of your spontaneity and kind of the joy of life, right. Because when you're kind of, when life becomes repetitive you don't really remember the moments

> that spark joy you just kind of go through this routine and this motion. And so, this over-regimented existence conversely, you know, it makes like, it lessens your anxiety, it also kind of strips you of this joy and that kind of makes you feel a bit numb (Sophie).

Moreover, Lindelwa experienced a great deal of anxiety upon unexpectedly becoming a mother for the second time and had to be hospitalised. She attributed this to trying to do things perfectly as she believed she was able to do before motherhood, and came to a realisation that her self-expectations have to shift dramatically in order for her psychological survival to be possible as a mother:

> ...and boom I was pregnant, and I was not planning it. So that was a huge blow for me. You know instantly when I found out I was hospitalised. I was hospitalised for two weeks because I just felt sick. You know, and that's another thing we women, we're so scared to even say that because we feel like you're going to judge me that I didn't love my daughter...And even after my baby was born, I think when she was eight months, I was hospitalised again for two weeks and they said I had post-maternity anxiety. I was burnt out. I had pushed myself so much because you create standards for yourself which are so unrealistic as a mom. Which is crazy (Lindelwa).

Notably, during the interview, Lindelwa paused and appeared to immediately regret telling the researcher about her hospitalisation and what may be interpreted from this fact. It is possible that finding out she was pregnant for the second time evoked overwhelming anxiety for her as she remembered the difficulties related to her first child. Perhaps feeling unable to convey ambivalence and hateful feelings towards her child without guilt or fear of scrutiny, she pre-empted the researcher's judgement in a way that signalled she may be judging herself for experiencing anxiety rather than excitement at the prospect of a second child.

4.3. Integration of Identities

As can be seen from the findings related to the transition to motherhood, a great deal of change took place during this time for participants. Further changes could be observed in the various ways in which participants' identities expanded. One of the themes that emerged around this idea included a degree of compromise that initially takes place related to the return to work – participants not only have to bear the ambivalence of returning to work and the loss of their full-time motherhood role, but

have to let go of pre-motherhood functioning and learn to accept support from others. At the same time, participants described an integration of their roles, whereby parts of motherhood influenced their professional identities. Lastly, participants also experienced vast personal growth and a change in some of their personal qualities through the experience of working motherhood.

4.3.1. Compromise.

After mothering more intensely for the initial few months after giving birth and thereafter returning to work, it was found that participants experience ambivalence regarding their return to work and the loss of their newfound motherhood role. They described having to learn to let go of pre-motherhood functioning when back at work and learn to become more accepting of help from others.

4.3.1.1 Ambivalence of returning to work and loss of motherhood role.

Participants were asked about their experience of returning to work. During interviews, there was a sense of longing when participants spoke of this period, and most of the mothers portrayed it as being marked by various losses and adjustments. Returning to work outside the home after a period of maternity leave (or, in one of the cases, working from home) brought about a great deal of anxiety and ambivalence. For five of the mothers, some of their anxiety was attributed to child caretaking arrangements and the difficulty of leaving their baby with someone else.

> ...there's a lot of concerns that come with it. Who's the nanny? Who's looking after the kid? What is she learning? Is she stimulated? What happens when the nanny leaves or the nanny gets sick?...And I think that it comes with complexity bringing other people into your lives, having to be dependent on them. And I think after two years I just, I couldn't anymore and I put her in a school from nine to five. But it broke my heart. So it comes with a lot of emotional trauma, because now you're worried about someone else (Ayesha).

Half of the mothers also spoke of feelings of separation anxiety on having to part with their babies for most of the day after the initial period of more intensive caregiving duties at home. The feelings of distress brought about by the situation

were difficult to bear and, in one of the cases, resulted in a self-regulatory approach of trying to take the transition one day at a time to ameliorate stress levels.

> So when I came back to work, it was um, ja you don't want to leave that little human at home because you haven't left them since they've been born. So it's like, it's like separation anxiety from both of you in a way...Once I got into it a little bit more and I realised it's okay, you know you take these sort of small steps. And then you say okay, today was fine. Let's just deal with tomorrow, tomorrow…It was hard at first but it did get a little bit easier (Naomi).

Participants reported having to tolerate feeling as though they are missing parts of their child's life and development. In addition to their missing out, they have to come to accept that someone else bears witness to and enjoys their child's milestones in their absence. This fact elicited feelings of guilt, where mothers felt torn between their different priorities and experienced a sense of inadequacy in parts of their dual role. Being unable to resolve these feeling states further elicits rationalisation around areas where mothers perceive themselves to fall short. This could be seen in the rationale for working (for instance, providing material goods and a home) making an appearance alongside the narrative around guilt and working. Some participants thus appeared to soothe their guilt by reminding themselves of the benefits of their working for their children.

> ...So, I think initially, particularly in the first few months there's a little bit of guilt that comes with that, that is associated with am I missing out?...I mean we had a lovely, lovely nanny, she would have like done her hair in like these different ribbons and she would look beautiful...but I'm like oh I should have done that, you know...But over time you get to ask yourself what's really important. Is you being here and providing for your child, your child feeling your love when you are with them the most important thing, or would you rather sit here all day and just be physically present but not necessarily, you know, giving your full self to them? (Koketso).

> And look it comes with, there's a lot of guilt. There's a lot of guilt that comes with working and having kids and making sure that they get the best of everything. You want to give them the best materially. And you want to give them best from an education perspective. You want to give them a garden but you've got to work for it. And that takes you away from them. And then on the flip side, I mean what you're missing out on, what I've now seen, is school excursions. Extramural just sitting at the side watching them. The appreciation on their faces when they see you there...I can just see what it means to her and her confidence (Ayesha).

Much ambivalence was attached to this period – the mothers felt torn having to leave their children, but simultaneously found value in being able to return to their roles at work. In what Koketso relayed above, there was a sense of missing out regardless of whether she was at home or at work. Her comment implied that even if she was to stay at home to be a full-time mother, she would not be fully satisfied. She imagined that she would be "physically present…but not necessarily giving her full self to them". This suggested an underlying idea that she might be missing out on something by being home. She made meaning of her dual role by trying to focus on the time that she does get to spend with her daughter, rather than thinking about the time they spend apart.

In a similar vein, half of the mothers in the sample experienced excitement at the prospect of returning to work. Notably, for Lindelwa, this excitement was entangled with unbearable ambivalence and separation anxiety – further exacerbating her sense of guilt at not only working, but at perceiving herself as deriving benefit from working. Notably, her mention of being excited to return to work during the interview came with an explanation - as though a reaction of judgement was expected when relaying this fact to someone else (in this case, the interviewer).

> But it's hard going back to the office. I think with my first baby it was exciting, you know. And sometimes you don't want to say this as mothers, that it's exciting for me to go back to work because you feel guilty for leaving my little one at home. You're stuck in these emotions. You want to go back to work because you want to interact with others and you're tired at home with the little ones. But at the same time you are stuck with, I don't want to leave my baby at home with a stranger, someone I don't know. So the guilt, ah the guilt is so much. I wish somebody had told us about the guilt. You know? So you're stuck in between. I literally remember the day before I had to go back to work, I literally sobbed. I sobbed. Because I didn't know how I was going to leave my baby and function at work for eight hours without seeing her (Lindelwa).

4.3.1.2. Letting go of pre-motherhood functioning.

Five of the participants spoke of compromising on their pre-motherhood tasks and abilities. They found themselves having to let go of previous levels of functioning and accept having far less time available to complete tasks. In so doing, four found it difficult to hand over responsibilities that they no longer had time for or trusting

someone else with something they were accustomed to doing themselves. Similarly, two of the mothers also mentioned coming to terms with a more 'unkempt' or messy way of living. These difficulties gave way to meaning making around accepting themselves as imperfect, or not being able to do things to a certain standard that they previously held for themselves.

> What changed for me is acknowledging that you know what, some of the things that I could normally do before being a mom, they tend to be a struggle. Like obviously we have certain rules and regulations as a team and we've got certain schedules that we need to follow, but I couldn't...I tried and that killed me inside because I was just pushing myself so hard, to the point of burning out. You know, it's just cutting yourself some slack and saying you know what, I can do this much for today. Even at home, it's okay to leave the dishes in the sink. It's fine (Lindelwa).

Moreover, re-joining the workforce resulted for some in an initial period of perceived lost productivity. Some mothers experienced a loss in their thinking capacity or agility at work, alongside a loss of confidence. This impacted heavily on their sense of competence in the workplace and required identity renegotiation around being a productive employee.

> So, the first time round I felt like my brain capacity, I wasn't myself when it came to how I now function in the world. I didn't feel confident, I mean I'd be in meetings and there'd be a very simple question asked around maybe my team or what I thought about something...and I remember like I could black out, my mind would literally black out because I wasn't used to thinking on my feet anymore. So, there was definitely a period of adjustment…And that, I wasn't like that, that's not who I was but I had to acknowledge, like hold on something quite drastic just happened in your life, you have been away from work for six months now... (Koketso).

> I mean I haven't slept through you know for nine months now...And you know like not sleeping has an impact kind of on your cognitive functioning. And so you always kind of feel like, am I being stupid? Am I like not, am I not getting it, you know. Do my colleagues kind of see that I'm not as like, that I've lost my edge that I'm not as sharp as I was? You know, that I'm not as like quick on the uptake…That I can't deliver as much, I'm not as energetic, you know that I look tired...like I've lost that identity that I can like deliver no matter what and I can exceed expectations because I just don't have the capability anymore… (Sophia).

Five of the mothers compromised and adapted to the dual role by restructuring the way they work by, for instance, working from home on some days or readjusting their schedule. One of the mothers also mentioned implementing strict boundaries at work

in order to leave at a certain time and attend to her family. Two of the mothers also mentioned reworking the meaning of productivity, by ensuring that they get as much as possible done while at work to prevent taking work home. Overall, it additionally appeared that these strategies were used defensively to reduce the sense of mourning they experienced in relation to their pre-motherhood functioning and the loss of a sense of pride.

4.3.1.3 Accepting support.

Alongside the realisation that pre-motherhood functioning has changed, these mothers spoke of having had to come to terms with not being able to attend to all their responsibilities given their greater time constraints. Adjustments were required to make the transition to working motherhood easier. This entailed them having to ask for and accept support in various ways, albeit difficult to do so. Half of the mothers additionally mentioned making use of time-saving or convenience strategies to alleviate their burden (for example, ordering groceries online).

Moreover, all of the mothers who were interviewed outsourced additional household and childcare help. This outsourcing has financial implications which were also stressful for some participants but, at the same time, most participants saw it as worthwhile and important to enable their careers. For Sophia, however, there was a sense of resentment at having to undergo this outsourcing. She spoke of it in a very defended, transactional way, pointing to potentially difficult underlying emotions regarding relying on support and the loss of control that this entails:

> ...I have to buy all my childcare. Which is fine, I mean, I think that's what people do alright. I think that if you're fortunate if your parents are available to help you with children. It's just very expensive to buy all your childcare. And then it's very expensive to, kind of, you know, buy house care and childcare and then what happens in the evenings if your job run late, runs late… (Sophia).

It was observed that some mothers engaged in implementing strict controls and rules for responsibilities that are outsourced – thus in some way being present in the home through the structure they have implemented even when they are at work; or being present in the task even when they are unable to complete it themselves. Having to

rely on support also evoked stress as these mothers at times felt unable to trust that their support systems will complete tasks in the way they would like them to be completed.

> ...like you know, husband as engaged as he is, kind of doesn't understand like the role as fully I think and you know for him it's like, I just get up in the morning and I make my breakfast and I chop off half a piece of toast, of my toast for the two-year-old and you know she feeds herself and then I go and shower and get dressed. Whereas like, for me, it's like never mind the half piece that you chopped off…is she eating the half piece that you chopped off and then you have to feed the little one…And then, then you know by the time I've finished my coffee...you know I need to make tea for the older kid, then I need to make milk for the younger kid…You know then there's a nappy that's dirty or whatever… (Sophia).

Thus, it became apparent throughout the interviews that having to ask for support from others (paid support or otherwise) or relinquish control in certain ways brought about tension in some of these working mothers. They seemed to doubt that others would hold their children's needs in mind in the same way that they as mothers do. This was especially evident in those who perceived or positioned themselves as capable and achievement-oriented. The sudden sense that one is no longer able to control all outcomes or perform in certain ways appeared to give rise to a conflict in identity as these mothers felt that they were falling short of their previous levels of functioning. Many had to learn to evaluate themselves differently to how they did before having children.

> ...like I've always been like this over-achiever and, and I came to a point where like okay, I can't do this on my own, like I really need support, I need a stay in nanny, I need you, my husband, to step in. Like this is one thing I cannot do on my own, like everything else in my life leading up to that point was like, don't worry I've got this, don't worry I've got this. And this aspect was one that led me to say I don't, I don't got this...It really opened up my eyes how important it is to be okay with asking for help. And until that point in my life I hadn't, I hadn't been a person who would function that way... (Koketso).

It appeared that it is not only the admission that support is needed that is challenging and even humiliating for some, but also accepting help (and continuing to accept help). The use of support structures evoked anxiety for many of the mothers. Some mothers dealt with this anxiety by engaging in self-talk around not having to be perfect and accepting themselves as more human. While it is acknowledged that the

strong desire to maintain involvement in household and childcare tasks is multi-layered and complex, there were indications in the narratives that these desires may partly stem from an internalised societal idea that being capable as a mother means being able to “do it all”. Discovering the impossibility of “doing it all”, two of the mothers who were interviewed tried to foster a greater sense of self-empathy and self-acceptance to counteract feelings of inadequacy. For instance, Lindelwa had the following to say:

> You know, one thing about motherhood, you cannot do it alone. And we lie to ourselves as mothers because we want to be super moms. And one thing that I realised is that support is always there. But the question is, are you willing to receive it as a mother? Because you get a friend who says you know what, sometimes you can just bring the babies to me and you can have a nap. But you never take that offer. Because you feel so guilty. You feel like when I’m taking a nap and my kids are going somewhere else it means I don’t love my kids very much or I’m not a good mother (Lindelwa).

4.3.2 Integration of roles and reconstruction of professional identity.

Throughout the transition to motherhood, some participants noted having experienced remarkable shifts in how they construct their identities. These shifts were characterised by both a sense of loss and a sense of self-expansion. Rather than keeping a professional identity to step into and out of as daily work proceeds and comes to an end, most participants experienced some integration of their motherhood self and professional self. Thus, it appeared that their career or professional identity was seen as a part of their selves rather than as defining themselves – and a similar stance was taken towards motherhood. As mothers who also work, and professionals who also mother, the women interviewed seemed to have gained an appreciation for themselves as complex beings with multiple needs and desires in their lives.

> ...I’ve learnt with being a mom as well that I can’t define myself according to my career because I’m many things. You know, a career is part of who I am, I am a mother, I am a web producer, I’m a friend, I’m a sister, I’m a wife. I’m so many things. So why do I define myself with only this one thing?...So if I have challenges in my career and things don’t go as planned then ultimately depression comes because that’s all I am…So I’ve learnt to understand that career is a part of who I am, it is not who I am (Lindelwa).

With these varied needs resulting in multiple roles that are at times conflicting, the integration of their various identities was not without tension. During these parts of the interviews, there was also an underlying frustration and helplessness that could be felt from participants. For some working mothers, their idea of who they are professionally started to incorporate elements of their 'mother' selves and was indelibly changed (this is explored further in the next section). For others, having to navigate multiple roles or identities meant that working motherhood was accompanied by a sense of loss and a disappearing of the self amidst competing demands:

> ...I think you lose your identity as a person. Because you've got two really big roles. Three big roles. You-you're a wife, you're a mother and you're this working person. You've got responsibilities on all ends. I mean I was managing a team of ten. That came with its own stress. And there's very little time for self-care. There's very little time to think about yourself...I just don't know what I enjoy doing anymore. I don't know what my passions are. I don't know, and I mean this is what I'm working on. I just don't know who I am. So you just get lost (Ayesha).

Sophie touched on a similar notion, although her loss was additionally tied to the meaning she had previously attached to having a career. She also expanded on the difficulty of integrating different roles. Thus, what emerged from the narratives was a state of identity in flux upon returning to work, alongside the difficulty of having to navigate two spheres (being a professional and being a mother to a baby) that have only existed separately up until the point where mothers return to work. Returning to work then forces an integration of two seemingly different roles and makes for a demanding period of adjustment.

> I think that part of [what] was overwhelming is kind of like the defining this new role...And what's difficult is who your identity was before, at least for me...my identity was defined by my, the quality of my deliverables at work. And because being a mother is so time consuming, intellectually again you understand that you have to kind of learn to balance it. But it's very difficult to integrate all these different roles (Sophie).

Many of the women appeared to rely on intellectual defences, understanding that compromise and integration were required, but alluding to a more difficult emotional

process underlying this…one in which they felt overwhelmed, and perhaps a little disconnected from themselves and others - feeling “lost”.

4.3.3 Personal growth and expansion of self.

Five of the participants pointed to having a different way of being at work since becoming parents. For these participants, change was especially evident in how they applied their mothering role professionally, or how they tended to apply some learnings from motherhood to their work. Overall, their newfound motherhood identity and the personal expansion that came along with it seemed to give way to greater emotional vulnerability and capacity for nurturance – something those interviewed spoke about with pride and saw as being advantageous to their work.

> And I think just the whole, the natural manner in [which] you nurture and look after, you know, a life, you can’t help but be influenced in that way. So, it definitely impacts other pockets of your life. And for me it has really helped me unlock what I call creating conducive workspaces for my team and the people that I interact with, and show up as a better person (Koketso).

> The thing is what I think motherhood encouraged me is to have a lot more patience at work. To be a lot more empathetic. To be open to listening and uhm, I felt like almost sometimes I was like the mother in the thing, in the team. To keep the team together to create the structure. To create conversation. To mold (Ayesha).

> ...if I look back to the person I was then to the person that I am now, completely different. Like completely, completely different...I was super impatient and now I have to be patient...and whether that’s with my son or some members of my team or someone that I’m not getting along with at work like a difference of opinion, um so there’s definitely things that um that I’ve learnt in being a mother that have benefitted me in my work (Naomi).

Additionally, all of the participants explained that they had greater empathy or compassion for others since becoming mothers. Having a child seemed to allow the fostering of more empathy professionally and enabled some mothers to recognise the humanity in their colleagues. Due to this, they tended to approach their colleagues in a more patient as well as understanding manner. Two of the participants added that they became more invested in the growth of their team members in their capacity as managers and found themselves being better listeners.

Their narratives suggested that something about having to care for and be sensitive towards the needs of their infants had heightened this capacity in relation to others.

> ...I was always very like task orientated. I can always have very difficult conversations because I maybe lacked heart, you know...But I think like becoming a mother like reignited that like human connection in me and that desire to really understand other people's difficulties...like I could see people's pain a lot more easily. And so, like...it's a benefit in terms of my work, and it also like it helps me see where there is a weakness or vulnerability or pain in others so that I can like tap into it to facilitate outcomes that are better for people (Sophia).

> So, it's really about, it has made me realise and recognise that it's about being human first - before one is an employee or before one is like a boss of thirty people - it's about being human first. And because you are looking after this person that is completely reliant on you, you can't help but have the same level of empathy with the people around you...So, it has really helped me have a more empathetic look at the world around me to say, the human condition needs to be healthy and well first before an employee condition can function well (Koketso).

Regarding personal growth, Lindelwa also spoke of having increased resilience and persistence, which she partly attributed to having to bear a difficult pregnancy and labour. She also spoke of becoming more optimistic and trusting of others (especially other mothers) since becoming a mother and, that for her, this newfound trust transcended racial or cultural boundaries. However, this comment appeared to be directed at the researcher and was perhaps over-compensatory for her discomfort at having opened up her home to a stranger of a different race (the interviewer) as well as at having to open up about her personal experiences during the research interview.

Additionally, Gemma believed that she is softer since becoming a mother, exercises greater self-control and tends to think more before she speaks at work than she would have before becoming a mother. Lastly, Sophia spoke of having to multi-task and manage complexity as a working mother, which she felt had given her greater agility and dexterity at work. Therefore, while there were a number of commonalities in the way mothers experienced personal growth, there were also a number of unique experiences of growth between them.

4.4. Pressure of Working Motherhood

Findings indicated that working motherhood entails a great deal of pressure. This related to having to juggle multiple roles, expectations to meet a 'supermom' ideal, and consequent feelings of failure in being unable to do so. Moreover, these working mothers reported experiencing judgement and scrutiny in their dual roles – both for being an employee who mothers, and for being a mother who works.

4.4.1 Juggling roles.

Five of the mothers who were interviewed spoke of competing demands for their attention and an immense sense of pressure around having to juggle multiple roles. At the end of their working day, participants additionally have to attend to childcare and household tasks and feel pressure to be emotionally available to their spouses – something that was relayed with a great deal of irritation. Thus, there is little time for self-care, relaxation or restoration at home. Four of the participants also spoke of parenting as a second job with varying responsibilities, while half of them alluded to a desire for greater support in managing these roles from their spouse. Naomi described the pressures of a typical day as follows:

> So I work all day and when I'm there it's very, very intense so, it's very much like a delivery job environment...So I'm quite tired by the time I get home in the afternoon. And then when you get home it's like a second job...I've got to look after my boy, he's got to have a bath. I've got to make sure that dinner is sorted out and have to make sure everything is ready for school tomorrow. We have to do his homework and then have dinner, get him into bed and by the time he's in bed then I only get a chance to kind of relax...So then it's also like when I'm finished there, then like my husband wants my time...It's very, very challenging to kind of juggle all of those things (Naomi).

Furthermore, multiple competing demands meant that some of these working mothers struggled to feel fully present in any one of their roles – while working at the office they tended to worry about their children or household; and at home while tending to their childcare or household duties they tended to worry about work. Thus, as working mothers, they had to contend with having a split focus and frequently

thinking of more than one thing at a time. Half of the mothers also mentioned finding it difficult to “switch off” between work and home life.

> But that’s, it’s stressful because you’ve got to come home. You’ve got to get in the kitchen. You’ve got to cook and you’ve got to think at work about this part. At work I’ve got to take time out of my day to remember to say okay, what needs to be taken out of the freezer? What am I cooking? Because it’s got to be prepared...When I get home it’s got to be done...it’s something that I need to do every day but there are times when I would forget...So I am never fully hundred percent focussed on one thing at a time (Ayesha).

Thus, as mentioned by half of the participants, having to straddle various roles comes at an emotional cost. Feelings of exhaustion after work were dominant and left little resources for attending to childcare and household duties.

> You’re always bring your...your work home with you. Whether it is you’re sitting in front of a laptop or it’s latent, it’s just always on your mind, you know. So, I don’t think you ever switch off. And what I found is, is that your quality time with your kids, I don’t think you’ve got as much patience when you get home (Ayesha).

Moreover, some of the mothers felt exasperated trying to satisfy their family and work demands simultaneously, feeling helpless and as though meeting all demands is impossible.

> So your work will demand of you, your husband will demand of you, your children will demand of you, your family, as they age, your parents will demand more of you. And there’s just like less and less time to keep giving to everybody and so you’re always going to make someone unhappy (Sophia).

Lindelwa also mentioned the difficulty of juggling multiple roles and how having high standards or perfectionistic ideals for her various roles led to health problems in the form of burnout. She, along with two other participants, further revealed a desire to be more open about the sheer difficulty of juggling working and mothering, indicating a sense of pressure that is felt around being expected to cope with multiple demands. As evident in the below quote, some mothers found it difficult to engage with negative emotional states around juggling roles and appeared to eventually find ways to cope through mourning and letting go of previous capacities and expectations and accepting new limitations of their time and energy:

> ...I didn't sleep last night and I'm supposed to function here in the office. You know? So juggling was a, that was another thing for me, it was very difficult. And I think it differs with individuality, because I think I always had this thing of trying to be a perfectionist...I want to strive the same way as I did before I was a mother, and it's not possible now. I'm exhausted, my priorities are different...So you know, so you push yourself so hard to a point of making yourself sick, of getting yourself burnt out. You know, because we don't give ourselves credit to say you know what, I'm exhausted, I can only do this much (Lindelwa).

However, this mourning and 'letting go' brings about tension. As can be inferred from the above quote, rationalisation is used defensively to self-soothe around the loss of capabilities that are no longer possible since becoming a mother.

4.4.2 Fear of failure and desire to be a 'supermom'.

As can be seen in the above section, interviewees faced a great deal of difficulty in adjusting to the demands of working motherhood and felt like a disappointment or failure in, at times, being unable to meet the demands that others place on them (as well as those that they place on themselves). Juggling multiple roles and finding themselves unable to be fully dedicated to the majority of their tasks seemed to leave these mothers feeling scattered and as though they are falling short on numerous responsibilities. This appeared to be especially difficult for those who identified as being high achievers in a number of spheres before motherhood.

> So, it really tying it back to answer, just getting to a point of surrendering and being okay with not being able to do it all. If you not that type of personality, that can actually take quite a toll on you, that can make you feel like a failure (Koketso).

To this point, five of the women who were interviewed mentioned fearing being a disappointment as a mother, while half of the participants reported fearing being a disappointment as an employee. Similarly, four of these same participants spoke of the desire to be able to manage all of their responsibilities well, holding ideas that are aligned with a supermom narrative. Therefore, it became evident that these women had internalised a standard for being a working mother that entails being high functioning in all spheres of their lives. However, finding it difficult or impossible to maintain these standards without facing serious consequences (such as

exhaustion or burnout), these mothers eventually adjusted their standards in one or more spheres and tried to re-align their self-expectations as well as those of others.

> ...I try my best to, like, do the cooking and make sure he has like the healthy things to eat, to make sure the things for his lunch the next day are gonna be healthy. Sometimes it doesn't happen hey. I'm not gonna lie. I'm not superwoman. Sometimes it doesn't happen and that's okay. Like I've had to stop and learn to stop like beating myself up about not being able to do everything a hundred percent, like you know...I've had to let that go (Naomi).

> You fail and you know, you try again, it's okay. Because I fail every time being a mom to my kids, you know. You fail so much being a mom to your kids. Your kids cry, you try to find when they are crying and sometimes you don't even know why they're crying and you feel like a failure. But you keep trying. So it has taught me to try in life. Keep trying Lindelwa. Keep trying. You will get there, keep trying (Lindelwa).

Despite adjusting standards and using self-affirming words to reassure themselves, feelings of not being good enough seemed to linger and be reinforced in various ways. Thus, it is possible that they spoke of having adjusted their standards to defend against their self-judgement at no longer meeting their own expectations. This could be seen in stories throughout the interviews around women feeling guilty for not being able to cook for their families, not knowing why their child is crying, not being able to meet deadlines or even having to adjust working schedules. Remarkably, two of the mothers also mentioned feelings of failure upon reaching out for support in their role – further pointing to the entrenched narrative that being a good mother means being able to do it all. Notably, for one of the mothers, asking for help felt similar to surrendering or giving up, and it took a great deal of introspection for her to accept and find new ways of taking care of responsibilities.

> ...both of us are working, you know both of us would like to have a certain type of a comfortable lifestyle, therefore both of us require to work but over and above that we have all of these other responsibilities. So, being at home is not an option, so what is the next best thing to make sure that my home life is still well taken care of? And the next best thing is to get people that I trust in the home and therefore pay them, and you know not looking at that as you being a failure, because you just doing what you need to do to make everyone around you as comfortable as possible. But, getting to the point where you saying, okay I cannot do this, I definitely need help, that's tough (Koketso).

4.4.3 Scrutiny and judgment.

Participants were not asked about this aspect directly, however, most of the participants spontaneously spoke of feeling judged and scrutinised in their working motherhood role. This sense of judgement was experienced at work for being a mother, outside of work for working and mothering, as well as in relation to how they choose to parent in general. Regarding judgement for working, participants experienced shame and guilt when reminded that, at times, they are missing out on experiences with their children. Koketso spoke of this aspect in relation to an experience with her housekeeper:

> So, her nanny had dressed her in an outfit that she's never worn before...and then the lady that was helping us out in the house, the housekeeper, she obviously saw that she looked pretty in her new dress but I hadn't seen her because I was working. And then she came down to me and she said to me, did you see how beautiful your child looks? And I was like no, no, no, I haven't seen her, and she essentially said something… well, this is me reading between the lines but what she implied was you working here you missing out on so much, but it was said in such a bad tone, it had such a...it had malice behind it, and I remember feeling so guilty (Koketso).

Moreover, some of the participants additionally experienced judgement at work for being a mother. They felt a greater need to prove their competence upon becoming mothers and thereby experienced additional pressure once stepping into a working motherhood role. Lindelwa explained feeling as though others see her as incompetent and having her capabilities questioned as her priorities have shifted, while Ayesha similarly shared being seen as different or less focussed at work due to being a mother. There was a subtle sense for both of these women that motherhood had impacted perceptions of them at work in a disadvantageous way.

> Because as women already, you have your own struggles in the office. Now you're a mother...it's like all of a sudden people think you can't do your work now. You know? Which you've been doing for years because now obviously things are different and you have different priorities...And I think it's so unfair, not only for mothers but for women as a whole because we keep proving ourselves in the office, but as a mom it's on another level...So you're still trying to juggle so much and people will see that as a point of being a weak and being a failure. And then you try so hard to prove yourself, prove yourself, but you know, it's hard juggling being a mom and working (Lindelwa).

> ...I felt like they used it against me getting certain roles where it was a little bit more intense maybe around people interaction or travelling. And not that I wasn't qualified or skilled, but by virtue of me being a mother. It, it sort of gave the view that I could less focus importance on my work, which was not true. So as much as there's [a] view that they support, I've seen very little mothers that have been promoted or in senior roles. Mothers, women, because I think mothers just amplify it....I think as you speak more about your kids, there's a, a perception is created especially in an organisation that you know what, your focus won't be at work as much because you've got spread focus (Ayesha).

At other times, participants experienced or expected judgment from admitting that they enjoy work. Thus, deriving benefit from work other than to provide for one's children is expected to be judged as selfish, as enjoying work was understood as being in conflict with motherhood as epitomising a sense of complete selflessness. Enjoying work thus has the potential to become a threat to some women's parenting identity or how they feel they ought to approach mothering in terms of societal standards. Notably, some of the participants also displayed scrutiny or judgement towards other mothers in talking about their own experiences. In these instances, there was a strong sense of social comparison taking place. It appeared as though evaluating another mother may be a strategy whereby one is able to affirm where to place oneself on the spectrum of good and bad mothering, thus further aiding in justifying one's own parenting choices. Cast against the backdrop of these mothers' own feelings of guilt and failure, these judgements or beliefs about other mothers' mothering was thus intertwined with both a sense of resistance and conformity to mothering ideologies.

> ...And look I would see moms at work. I have a very good friend that's a mom at work. And when I would leave at like five, she'd still be sitting at her desk. And I'm like you're not going to go home and you've got to battle traffic and she's like ja. And I, I would like wonder like well what time do they eat? You know so, I mean, there's a rule in my house, we all have dinner together (Ayesha).

> Um, so there's that kind of pressure right in terms of the peer pressure of living up to that expectation of a mother... (Gemma).

Interestingly, Gemma understood her decision to deliberately stay away from parenting literature as the reason that she felt more relaxed in comparison to other mothers during the transition to motherhood. This suggested the idea that parenting knowledge may set a standard that is anxiety-provoking:

> So it was an exciting journey to take care of this little person but at the same time becoming a mom in our context was different to others. I think and lots of moms read books and they tell you, you must do this and you must do that. I was very relaxed. I did not read a single book. I still don't read books (Gemma).

Gemma's disregard for parenting literature was met with feelings of judgement from the researcher – pointing to deeply held beliefs and internalised standards of mothering that are difficult to escape, even when one has knowledge of the impact of ideologies. While it could be argued that these mothers have the agency to decide how to parent and are able to do as they wish despite judgement, powerful prescriptions about mothering appeared to influence their decisions as well as others' reactions to their decisions. These prescriptions on mothering standards emerged as deeply entrenched, difficult to identify and name, and perhaps unconsciously accepted.

4.5. History and Context

The experience of working motherhood emerged as being influenced in complex ways by historical and contextual factors. These factors included the impacts of the participants' own childhoods on their working motherhood experience, the idea that working motherhood experiences are cultured and gendered, and the impact of supportive or unsupportive work environments.

4.5.1 Impacts of own childhood on working motherhood.

The themes that emerged around the impact of participants' childhoods on their experiences of working motherhood included: the experience of motherhood as shaping a new understanding of participants' own childhood experiences, the use of childhood experiences in parenting behaviour or decisions, as well as the idea that their own parents' careers have an impact on their experiences of working motherhood.

4.5.1.1 Motherhood as impacting understanding of own childhood experience.

All of the participants mentioned re-processing their own relationships with their parents and the way in which they were parented since becoming mothers. For some, motherhood appeared to elicit a strong sense of empathy for what their own mothers had endured and added an extra layer of complexity to their understanding of what being a parent means, or the depths to which one is affected in becoming a parent.

> Because our moms made it look so much easier. Even our grandmothers, they never tell us these stories. But I realised that you know, it's a thing for everyone because I told my mom this is hard, and she was not shocked. She knew it was hard but she had never said anything to me (Lindelwa).

Some of the participants expressed greater appreciation of their mothers. Becoming a mother allowed them to have more knowledge of an unseen selflessness that is required to be a parent – thus further alluding to a sense of loss or sacrifice that is associated with their motherhood role.

> ...you come to appreciate your mother a lot more. And your siblings. And you realise what was sacrificed for you and what was done for you. And you become a lot more cognisant of that (Ayesha).

Some participants also engaged in meaning-making around how they were parented and how they impacted their parents as children. For instance, motherhood enabled Sophia to take a meta-perspective which not only brought about greater empathy for her own parents, but allowed her to think of herself as having an impact on them. She became aware of herself as a child that demanded and as someone who had the capacity to exhaust her own parents' resources. Sophia also engaged in thinking about her parents as people who are flawed and who performed parenting duties to the best of their ability. It also appeared that part of this narrative was additionally directed at herself as a parent, and partly served to re-assure her that she is doing the best that she can. She further alludes to the idea that there are limits to who she is and what she is capable of as a mother, just as her parents were limited by who

they were. This was experienced as an evocative statement and left myself as the researcher wondering about my own capacity to parent.

> ...it takes on new a meaning when you have a child like you really do understand that your parents did the best that they could do. And you also understand like children are impossible and difficult and like at the best of times and they're extremely tiring...and so how much can you reasonably expect of parents, of your parents, how much could you have reasonably have expected of them, you know, if you were just a child like your child...So, you know I like I do think my parents did the best that they could, and I also think, you know, your parents, like anybody, you can't escape who they are to be better people you know (Sophia).

4.5.1.2 Use of childhood experience in own parenting.

Five of the mothers also spoke of improving on their own childhood experience of parenting in some way. As such, their own experience was seen as a starting point from which to expand their skills and knowledge – with the ultimate goal of providing their children with perceived improvements in the way they are raised. These improvements varied between participants after an evaluative effort (which did not always take place consciously) where decisions were made about what required adjusting in their own parenting. For half of the participants, this meant changing parenting values in some way. For instance, Koketso relayed how she and her husband changed the way their children are disciplined from the way that she and her husband were disciplined as children. She also explained the difficulty of parenting in a different way, and the pressure she experienced from previous generations to parent according to certain beliefs:

> ...I almost like wanted to default back to how I was brought up and you know how I was expected to act in that way. And it's like continuously trying to switch between your world, like your reference point and like no, that's not my new reference and now I'm creating this new thing (Koketso).

Moreover, some of the mothers expressed a desire to be more involved with their children than their own parents were. They wished to show greater physical availability as well as emotional availability to their children than they received growing up. Working appeared to make this more difficult. For Sophia, this evoked a sense of longing and sadness as she spoke to this through tears. On the one hand,

she reported wanting to be able to provide for her family and to act as a role model that shows her children women can work. On the other hand, doing so takes her away from her children and reduces her emotional availability in much the same way as she experienced with her own mother.

> ...my mother instilled in me, she probably instilled in me kind of like the current view that I have around, you know, being available for your children. But I, ja I think in kind of, in defiance to how I was raised - you know, where my mother maybe was quite hands-off or only involved when it really mattered or when she perceived it to really matter - I think my desire is to be much more involved or available for my children emotionally than my mother was. But then it's also kind of compounded by like, I also want to provide more for my children than my mother did (Sophia).

There was a great deal of pain and helplessness in the countertransference as the above was relayed, and I felt compelled to reassure Sophia – perhaps pointing to the extent of the difficulty she herself is facing. As well as reflecting on what needed to change, half of the participants also spoke of keeping the perceived good parts of their childhood and imparting that into their own children's experiences. For Gemma, this meant imparting a sense of resilience, for Lindelwa it meant teaching self-acceptance, and for Ayesha it meant keeping certain family traditions that they enjoyed.

> So you, you think back about what are the traditions that your mother did for you that you want to bring into your household...So it's those little nuggets of joy you know that I brought back into my family and I see that all of us are doing it in my family amongst all our siblings (Ayesha).

4.5.1.3. Parents' careers as influencing working motherhood.

Albeit in unique ways, four of the mothers interviewed spoke of the impact that their own parents' careers had on their approach to work and motherhood. For some, having a working mother evoked a desire to be a working mother themselves. Half of the participants perceived their own mothers to identify as career women and felt this influenced their own perception of work. Having observed their own mothers as workers not only imparted the idea that it is possible to manage the dual role, but allowed them to observe the more desirable aspects of having a career - such as financial reward and independence.

> I think because I saw that and because she worked maybe it like instilled that in me a little bit. So maybe it was like, it's okay like not to be a stay at home mom, like you don't have to do it that way. There are other ways to do it. You can still be a mom. I mean my mom had three kids and she worked full time and she was still like making dinner and doing all the things. So I suppose I had that as a role model... (Naomi).

For some of the mothers, adverse childhood experiences also imparted a desire to be able to provide more for their own children in terms of financial stability as well as overall life experience. Half of the sample alluded to a strong desire for emotional as well as financial independence. Thus, working motherhood allows for the solidifying of a desire to provide for children, to have a sense of control and to not have to rely on a partner for financial security.

> When I was a little child, like under the age of ten, I think I saw the role of a mom as being at home with the children. And then in my teens...an independent kind of desire like emerged. I think that's when I saw like, you know, like the role of a mom is like to provide. You know, so that she's not reliant on the whims of a father you know. Ja or not to be controlled…I didn't want to be controlled... (Sophia).

> ...although my mom remarried, she took on the responsibility of looking after her kids. So she never expected my stepdad to care for us, look after us, provide for us...So what I saw was a very independent woman that made sure that we had everything. So I guess this was just for me a continuation of what came out of my household...why it's so important for me to work is, because I need to be independent. I can never ask. It's not that I can never, it's that I don't want to ask my partner to do things for me if I can do it on my own (Ayesha).

Lindelwa spoke of how grateful she is to her mother for modelling having a career. In turn, Lindelwa makes meaning of her working motherhood role as modelling to her children that it is important to pursue one's dreams. Thus, she hopes that, by observing their mother working the way she observed her mother working, her children will also strive for individuality and pursue their ambitions. However, this was explained with an excessive sense of self-reassurance – possibly as though to defend against opposing mothering ideals and her own internal fear that she is falling short of being a good mother in some way. By telling herself that her children benefit, she is able to feel more assured of her time away from her children.

> And I think I would want to spend more time with my kids, but one thing I've learnt from my parents when it comes to me is it's okay to have a career...It's okay to pursue your dreams and your goals. It's okay. You know, that liberates you as a

> mother...You know, my mom to this day, she still encourages me to be Lindelwa and not forget the dream that I have within me. Because she always says to me, you see by you pursuing those dreams, you are doing something to your kids. They are watching you saying I matter. My dreams matter. I am worth it. And if we can instil something within them saying a-ha, if mommy matters, I matter (Lindelwa).

4.5.2 Working motherhood as cultured and gendered.

Working motherhood experiences appear to be cultured and gendered in a number of ways. This could be observed in the gender discourses that are drawn upon in the negotiation of household responsibilities and childcare tasks, as well as mothering expectations that are imparted through participants' cultures and upbringing.

4.5.2.1. Gender discourses and negotiation of responsibilities.

For half of the participants, the negotiation of childcare and household responsibilities was predetermined by gender roles. Some mothers also spoke of how their own upbringing imparted the idea that childcare and household duties are a woman's responsibility, and that there is an expectation of a mother as having to be available to her family.

> But I also think that as women in society or, or how we adhere to the culture that I come from and just generally what's expected that you as a mother, you are responsible and in charge of everything...So I would run the household. I would run, I would run the household and I would manage everything that was related to my daughter at the time. And I would still be juggling a job and I was just promoted... (Ayesha).

While the negotiation of childcare and household responsibilities between the participants and their spouses varied, it appeared that these mothers experience an emotional burden of care or a psychological pressure, in addition to duties that they feel unable to share. For instance, Sophia explained how a greater emphasis on enhancing the fatherhood role would be more beneficial than further advocating for career for women. She alluded to how men are not given the same socialisation into having a parenting role - they thus feel less pressure to be involved at home, partly because they do not feel they have the option to be more involved at home.

> But I think in the modern world when we talk about like, like an equal society, an equal opportunities and equal opportunities for women, I think often times for what women have fought for is like to be treated like men in the workplace and like an equal turf for us both to play. Actually, when we should have been fighting for men to be given kind of the same footing at home...we don't give men the equal opportunity to play that role and that's why this burden at home is still carried by women. Because men are not compelled or forced or given the option to play an equal role with the mother in terms of the, how they raise their children (Sophia).

In a similar vein, for half of the mothers there appeared to be a discrepancy between how they understood childcare, and how they believed their husbands were able to understand childcare. In addition, it emerged that there are unseen things that these mothers felt that they had to think about that fathers do not have to think about. For some families, this appeared to result in a sense that fathers have to be managed or that they are 'second in charge' when it comes to household and childcare duties. This brought about resentment towards husbands in half of the participants, as they are torn between feeling pressure to perform a certain role (and resentful of the fact that their partners are not able to help) and the guilt of what it means to ask for more help from their partners. Moreover, having to change the way gender roles play out within their respective households appeared to cause a great deal of tension which was difficult to manage or resolve.

> ...so he doesn't expect it but at the same time he's not going to come and say I'm going to make this for supper tonight. You see so it's not an expectation, so if I say I'm not in the mood to make food then he'll be, then he'll say fine. But then his response to me, because I've always thought, like I said I'm thinking of is there a blanket in the car…For the sun and what directions the sun going to be on our trip, he's never thought that far. So, for instance he'll, his response is generally, okay no that's fine I'll make me something. And then I'm like so what must I eat? What must the children eat, what are we going to have for lunch tomorrow? (Gemma).

These ideas were at times relayed with resentment and anger; and at other times with a more passive tolerance that participants themselves questioned. Ayesha's narrative also highlighted the expectation that the mother will take more responsibility for the children, however, she was able to acknowledge that this dynamic is something in which she plays a part, thus perpetuating certain gender roles by taking on certain responsibilities.

> So what would happen is, is that my husband would go to mosque. The mosque is around the corner. But when he goes to mosque, who's at home with the kids? It's me right? So it's like you can practice your religion but it's okay for me to be at home with the kids....And you know again...it's also what the woman takes on. So it's what I've taken on...But I would cook at night and he would literally slide in five minutes before we eat and come and sit at the table and wait for it. And I'm like what the hell, we were both fasting today. We were both working. Both fasting. I would leave work early to come home and cook and he would slide in there, five minutes before the time and okay what are we eating...But it's what I've taken on (Ayesha).

Despite half of the participants mentioning that household tasks are equally shared between both parents, a pressure to adhere to gendered norms meant that most of the participants felt compelled to take responsibility for tasks and tended to adhere to gender norms around household and childcare duties – whether they agreed with gender roles or not. This indicated the extent to which these norms are entrenched and may explain the tension that accompanies efforts to change gender roles within households – something two of the mothers mentioned eventually giving up on.

Taking on most of the household or childcare burden is also further perpetuated by these mothers' difficulty in asking for help, and the guilt evoked by reaching out for assistance. Notably, two of the mothers mentioned a rebellion against gender norms and dominant mothering ideologies. They firmly positioned themselves as opposing such norms and made meaning of their role as something that is to be determined in a more personal way.

> ...I would say for myself like I tried to, I tried to avoid like thinking about how it should be, like how I should be like kind of fitting into a mould, if that makes sense. Like for me now if I look at it, maybe when he was first born and I remember seeing my mom like struggle with it as well like with her friends and everything else, to kind of fit in. And okay, are you like the stereotype of the mom who's like kind of doing all the things around the house and whatever. I don't buy into that and I still don't buy into that, like now, and I don't want to be that way. Like ja, I really don't, still don't. I still don't, like I just I will do my best that I can, I will do the best that I can to be as good of a person and as a role model to my son and as good a mother as I know how to (Naomi).

> Um, so there's that kind of pressure right in terms of the peer pressure of living up to that expectation of a mother. So, for instance the routine of a baby, putting the baby, doing bath time and then putting the baby to bed at half past seven so that the baby wakes up gently. Don't put the baby in your bed put the baby in the cot. You know all those dramas which we tried, and we would take a chance and see but to this day

> my six-year-old is still in my bed...Um, so in that terms of motherly pressure of meeting expectations there's that pressure which I didn't necessarily succumb to I still don't (Gemma).

The negotiation of responsibilities is therefore multi-layered. Participants felt the pressure to perform certain roles according to societal pressure and gender roles, but whether or not they agree with these roles was further determined by individual beliefs. Moreover, even in cases where participants explicitly expressed their disagreement with ideologies and gender roles, there were parts of their interviews which revealed a sense of guilt at not conforming to certain stereotypes. Thus, it appears that gender roles and mothering ideologies are deeply ingrained and have the capacity to affect mothers regardless of what they express as their personal beliefs.

4.5.2.2 Mothering expectations imparted through culture and upbringing.

Participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Interestingly, culture was seen by some of the mothers as something that is adaptable to changing times and personal beliefs. Some of the participants also spoke of having multiple cultural influences in their background, while Lindelwa mentioned looking outwards to other cultures as well as referencing her own in deciding on her own parenting rules.

> I think with our culture, especially with our Black culture, you know, you know with every culture there are good things and there are things that needs to be unlearnt, with every culture. That's why culture it's changing. Culture was not meant to be static but we get ourselves getting stuck in things that used to work for our parents but they do not work for us. But that's where you must step in and change the culture because culture must change. It's always evolving (Lindelwa).

The strongest theme or similarity that emerged in the findings around cultural influences were that four of the women who were interviewed were brought up – through culture or familial socialisation – to believe that mothers are nurturers who are responsible for the household, while fathers are seen as providers. Although with sadness and surrender, Koketso spoke of coming to terms with not meeting cultural ideals of more intensive mothering that she witnessed growing up. Two of the

mothers spoke of the ideal mother as one that is a stay at home mom, or someone who is readily available for the needs of her children. Similarly, Ayesha shared that the role of a mother according to her husband's background is to manage the household:

> I don't come from one specific culture. But my husband comes from a very defined culture. I would say that a mother would be how he would have seen it is that person just does everything for the kid you know? Sole responsibility. Looks after the household. Manages the household. Manages the kid and dad just walks in and you know, at night. Kisses the children. Has a conversation and goes back to work...The house must be neat and in order. Everything's got to have its place. I know that's not how it works, but that's how culturally a mother is seen (Ayesha).

There were also a number of unique experiences around cultural backgrounds and instances of contradiction in expectations of mothering. For Ayesha, culture imparted patriarchy as well as independence. Sophia spoke of her cultural ideals around motherhood as evolving from believing mothers should be home to seeing mothers as providers. For Lindelwa, there was a strong sense of culture being both mother-blaming, yet simultaneously encouraging of mothers to draw upon support networks for assistance during motherhood.

Koketso spoke of the way she was raised as imparting a sense that performing household tasks, such as cooking, is a way of expressing love to your family. She underwent a great deal of self-scrutiny in being unable to meet this ideal through her working motherhood role, and appeared to experience this fact as a loss. Cultural and racialised expectations were also prescribed around coping as a mother. For Lindelwa, being a Black mother meant having a sense of control and therefore struggling to reach out during times when she feels unable to cope with the pressure of motherhood:

> I think with our culture, especially us Black women, there's this sense of you must pretend you have things together. You know? And there is this sense that Black women are still struggling to say you know what, I'm not coping. You know, I think I've got post-maternity depression, you know, because you must always be viewed like I've got everything in control as a mom. I've got everything in control as a wife. There's that sense (Lindelwa).

Overall, findings therefore revealed that cultural influences on mothering expectations were experienced in complex, unique, and deeply personal ways.

4.5.3. Enabling vs. unsupportive work environments.

Participants' experiences within the workplace varied, with some speaking of being in a work environment that enables their mothering function, while others spoke of environments as being unsupportive of their mothering role. For some mothers, whether or not their working environment was considered to be family friendly appeared to be related to how understanding their manager was perceived to be regarding mothering duties. Half of the mothers expressed that they did not have accommodating managers or policies at work.

> And then I think…so I said the workplace was accommodating from a policy point of view I think like as that policy translates into practice it probably could have been more accommodating. So, things like breastfeeding and how you're going to do that at work and facilities to like you know express and stuff that, like that didn't exist and I think they've only now started to put it in place (Sophia).

Some participants therefore feared openly acknowledging motherhood or childcare duties at work in order to avoid negative perceptions they believed accompanied this, particularly in relation to their competence or job dedication.

> But look just in terms of the narrative that was...what was my narrative or my perceived narrative, was that I was this traditional Muslim. I don't wear scarfs just by the way. I just find it so strange, but it's because I speak about my kids and my husband and you're not allowed to do that at work...So it has, it has impeded the growth (Ayesha).

> You need to make means for me to, you know, to function here at work, but to understand I'm still a mother. Some schedules don't suit me as a mom...And luckily I have an amazing manager who understands...But I've learnt we need to speak up. Because people never know that you're coping or not coping until we say something. But we are scared because we think we will come across as incompetent. That's another thing. You know, I think that is a word we fear as mothers, you don't want to come across as incompetent being a mom or just being a professional (Lindelwa).

Ayesha was particularly concerned that she would be perceived to be less committed to her work because of her motherhood role and due to taking maternity leave.

> ...with my second one I had a little bit of an anxiety because I was in the midst of some change and I didn't take my full, and I didn't take my full six months because of the angst around what would happen. What would the perception be if I had to take a full six months? I just started a new role as well and I fell pregnant and I left. So I came in, I had to come back to that new role and I was the, the sort of manager of that new team and I'd gone on maternity leave so you know, I felt a lot of anxiety around what do I come back to (Ayesha).

Being a woman working in corporate therefore seemed to bring with it an implicit understanding that one has to be more masculine to perform well, which becomes complex when work intersects with motherhood (which evoked far greater vulnerability for many of these women than a traditionally masculine role may allow for).

On the other hand, some of the mothers experienced more understanding management and were able to integrate their mothering role by adjusting their working hours, for instance. Working in a supportive environment alleviated some of the burden from these mothers, as it removed a layer of anxiety around having to leave work to attend to childcare duties, for instance. As explained by Koketso, supportive management also assisted with the settling in process upon returning to work after maternity leave. This led her to emphasise the importance of a supportive environment in enabling a smoother transition to working motherhood.

> So, I'm able to somehow interweave my life of being a working mom with that kind of thing, but I acknowledge that not everyone feels that. That's why it's very important I think for organisations, or corporates, or places of work to acknowledge that...But something happens when you become a parent and your life changes, and it's not just about work, it's like you are a mom first before you are a productive employee and it's so important to be able to accommodate that and acknowledge that, and somehow make room for that in the place of work...And then a supportive workplace also goes a long way, you know it also goes a long way in helping you just settle in a little bit (Koketso).

Interestingly, three of the mothers mentioned having a gendered perception around whether or not managers would be more or less understanding of attending to

mothering duties. In this regard, some were grateful to have female managers as this was assumed to mean greater understanding regarding being a mother. Others mentioned male dominated environments as being less understanding of childcare demands.

> So I, when I went back to work, I was working for an advertising agency at the time um and they were, they were really understanding actually. It was a woman led company. There were two women running the company and they both have families. So I found that they had the empathy, um, and they understood a little bit more about what, um, what it takes and what that means (Naomi).

However, upon thinking about this further, one of the mothers said that one of her male managers was very understanding of her role. Thus, it appears that the way in which managers respond may be influenced by their individual perceptions of working and mothering. Moreover, it is also possible that perhaps a working mother's perception of how understanding one could be as a male manager may, in turn, bear influence on her experience.

> I found that my functional boss as a man was less understanding, I felt like as a man you know perhaps coming like with conservative values of like in his home context didn't have like a wife who was also a working mother...And then I think on the other side like my business client was very understanding, has always given me a lot of autonomy would never push me around and also understood the transition. Interestingly enough also has children and his wife stays at home with their children and he was very accommodating of me. So, you know and maybe it's not about background it's just about perceptions (Sophia).

4.6. Meaning Derived from Working Motherhood Identity

Another theme that emerged is that of a sense of meaning that is derived from the working motherhood experience as well as from having a working motherhood identity. This took the form of experiencing gains from working and being impactful. It was also found that working mothers find unique meaning in motherhood, thereby finding enjoyment in individualised ways.

4.6.1 Gains from working.

All of the mothers spoke of work as providing a sense of validation - allowing them to feel impactful or as though they are making a contribution to society. Having a career thus appeared to impart a sense of being productive and valued. Half of the mothers also mentioned work as providing purpose outside of their household or just a sense of purpose in general, with an indication from some of the participants that they yearn for more than their motherhood identity alone is able to offer.

> ...What does having a career mean to me...it means being able to be impactful in other pockets of my life, like I know at home I know I'm needed, I know I'm mom, it's like a default given thing. But I think having a career allows me to be impactful in other pockets of my life and touch other people's lives...like at this point with where I am and you know thinking about where I want to take my career, it's really not about the job anymore, it's not about what title or what position or what salary, it's about the purpose. So, what do I feel my purpose is, and what do I want to bring into the…onto the table? (Koketso).

Mothers also spoke of having a career as helping them to regain a sense of self after the transition to motherhood, powerfully describing the toll motherhood took on her sense of womanhood.

> Because you know, it takes so much for you to get back to your role after being a mom. Because you sometime lose yourself and you look at yourself and you don't even know who is this? And that kills you inside as a woman. And then you want to come back again and just find yourself (Lindelwa).

Notably, four of the participants spoke of work as providing their minds with stimulation. Thus, they find enjoyment in being able to grow and learn. Similarly, half of the interviewees find meaning alongside a sense of accomplishment in being able to set goals and fulfil their ambitions through their careers. Other gains from working that emerged in the interviews included having a sense of independence, enjoying financial gains and the ability to provide for one's family.

> ...my mind is like what is important for me. I've, I've got to add value. I've got to know that I could also be independent. That's what's important. So it's finding that something that's going to give me all of that. It's, I need a purpose beyond just looking after a household. So I need to be independent. I don't want to ask my

> husband for money. He'll give it to me but I don't want to. I want to provide for my kids as well. Both emotionally and financially and I just, I want to give back to society (Ayesha).

Similarly, Sophia also mentioned work as helping her to earn a sense of power and equality in marriage, especially around decision-making regarding household and childcare management.

> ...I think I wanted to work because I didn't want to be controlled by somebody else. So, if I had to raise my children then I could make decisions about what I provide to my children...I don't have to rely on somebody else because you know I'm the provider. Or my husband and I are the providers like in unison as opposed to a paternal figure that makes all the decisions. But like by working and my earning an income I can establish myself as an equal decision-maker in how the house is run (Sophia).

Interestingly, half of the mothers constructed their identities as individuals who have to be busy in order to be happy. This construction appeared to be set up in opposition to being a stay at home mother.

> It was hard at first but it did get a little bit easier. I am the kind of person that needs to work. I couldn't be a stay at home mom I don't think, I have never done it but I imagine that I would need something to do, to keep me, I don't know, to keep my brain occupied (Naomi).

Whether it is through constructing their identity in a certain way (as someone who needs to be busy) or through rationalising why working does not make one a bad mother, it appeared as though some of the women felt a strong need to defend their decision to work in addition to being a parent – as opposed to, for example, feeling free to talk about the benefits that they derive from working. For instance, for Lindelwa, gaining benefits from work and enjoying it in some way seemed to evoke ambivalence. As such, she alluded to the tension that she feels in finding meaning beyond motherhood, and how she expects others to equate this with her having less love for her children.

> That's the one thing we need to be taught as mothers. Someone needs to teach us that you know what, for your children to function, you much function first. It's okay to go to work and have a great time and enjoy yourself with your colleagues without feeling like you're a bad mom because you're having fun here and wondering what

> your kids are doing at home. It's okay because you are not only a mother...And you ought to function fully at your role at work. Because you love your job and you're sure it's okay to love your job. It doesn't mean you hate your kids (Lindelwa).

It is also possible that Lindelwa may have been pondering her experience of having hateful moments towards her children and that she may find relief from full-time mothering at work. However, she defends against this hatred and ambivalence by convincing herself they do not exist – perhaps because she fears that such feelings are unacceptable.

4.6.2 Motherhood as uniquely meaningful.

Notably, few common themes emerged across the sample regarding the meaning of motherhood. Rather, it was found that participants find motherhood meaningful in different ways, signalling that the journey of motherhood is uniquely and individually determined. That noted, two themes emerged from half of the mothers interviewed. The first was around the great responsibility attached to motherhood, while the second was how mothers finding meaning in bearing witness to their children's growth and moulding who their children become as people.

> Being a mother is a, it's a bigger responsibility than a career. Um, for me, because you're shaping these little people.. (Gemma).

Moreover, Lindelwa spoke of motherhood as the discovery of an innate or natural capacity to offer protection and caring that seemed very gratifying for her.

> You know, motherhood means you are a natural, you know. You know the word natural, you take care of these little ones, you protect them, you watch over them, you create a space for them where they can flourish once they learn their surroundings... (Lindelwa).

Naomi also spoke of nurturance and protection, and additionally found a sense of selflessness in being a mother. She seemed to derive meaning through watching her child grow.

> So when I look at it that way, I would say motherhood is a very selfless thing. And you are, you are kind of guiding this human and looking after this human and kind of

> building him into something. You know hopefully that he will be a great young man. And ja, it's just like the most amazing thing for me is just seeing him like learn and grow (Naomi).

Ayesha mentioned a more active role in parenting, whereby she sees herself as a mother as imparting ideas that manifest and become whatever her child chooses for those ideas to become. There was, however, some ambivalence for her related to the responsibility of motherhood and shaping a human being, as she believes that – knowing what she does now – she may have followed a different path. This suggested that the role of mother is an anxious one for her.

> I want to be involved in molding who you are...So it's just for me, it's planting these little seeds...That they become good human beings that looks after the earth that's ultimately there for them...So for me being a mother is just to make, it's a hell of a responsibility. And if I had to go back I'm not sure I would do it again. I'll be very honest with you...because it's too much of a responsibility...but it's my responsibility now that I've got it, to mold them into really good human beings (Ayesha).

Ambivalence was a common experience. Sophia spoke of her children as providing renewed sense of purpose, adding a layer of meaning to her professional role that was not there previously. Whereas before, her purpose felt more closely aligned with her career, becoming a mother changed this, with her children creating a new sense of purpose for her. However, her comment below carries a reminder that this 'renewal of purpose' comes at a cost.

> But I think it is about, you know they give me a renewed sense of purpose. And so, like they become my reason for being as opposed to like my career was my reason for being before, my children are now my reason for being now. And whether that's like welcome, on some days it's welcome and on other days it's not because I feel like all I do is live for them (Sophia).

Lastly, Koketso viewed motherhood as space of comfort and freedom, and believes it offers her the ability to express her true self. Koketso additionally spoke of embracing the expectations and consequent potency of her motherhood role, as she finds a sense of authenticity in motherhood that is not as readily available to her outside the home.

> It means that I can be wholly full in myself and that's enough. So, my children and my husband don't expect me to be good looking, to be rich, to be sexy, do you know what I mean? They don't expect me to be the things that maybe the world around you might require...they are looking for someone who will deal with a forty degree fever and know exactly what medicine to get, and know exactly if you mix this, this and that we get the fever down, we monitor you if it's not then we take you to the hospital, I know how to deal with those things. I know how to deal with constipation. I know how to deal with a relative that needs this, this and that. So, being a mom means that I can you know step up into that role without the expectations of the external world, because those expectations they are not put on you. I'm not expected to be perfect, I can just show up as myself fully...and completely, and that's enough (Koketso).

4.7 Conclusion

Findings from interviews conducted with working mothers revealed five main themes. These include the transition to motherhood, an integration of identities, the pressure of working motherhood, historical and contextual influences on working motherhood, as well as the meaning derived from having a working motherhood identity. The transition to motherhood was found to be characterised by a shattering of expectations, subsumed needs, a loss of self, changes in the family dynamic or marital dyad, as well as mental health concerns. Upon returning to work, participants additionally experienced ambivalence as well as a sense of loss around the motherhood role. During this time, they have to compromise in a number of ways, by letting go of pre-motherhood functioning and learning to accept support from others. Their journey therefore appears to include a great deal of mourning. This results in working mothers' engaging in a number of defences to avoid feelings of loss, sadness, resentment and anger related to their role.

They also experience a degree of integration between their professional and motherhood identities, which further gives way to much personal growth and an expansion of the self as it was known before working motherhood. The working motherhood journey is further marked by numerous pressures such as juggling roles, the desire to be a supermom as well as experiencing a great deal of scrutiny and judgement. It was additionally found that the experience of working motherhood takes place within a gendered and cultured context that revealed deeply entrenched ideals around mothering. Lastly, participants derive meaning from their working

motherhood identity through being impactful in the world and by being able to provide for their families. They also experience meaning in their mothering role in highly individual ways. These findings and how they relate to existing literature will be explored further in the discussion section to follow.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This study's aim was to explore the experiences and identities of working mothers in South Africa from their own perspectives. The study was located in an interpretivist paradigm (Cresswell, 2009; Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010) within a psychoanalytic feminist framework (Tidell, 2008; Wolff, 2007) and data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews (Ayres, 2008; Fylan, 2005) with six working mothers. The explorative research questions that the study set out to answer are as follows: What do working mothers experience in their dual roles as parents and employees? How are motherhood and career identities negotiated? and lastly, What is the perceived influence of working mothers' cultural backgrounds and upbringing on their experiences and identities? In addition to the aforementioned questions, the study additionally aimed to investigate how findings relate to dominant mothering and gender ideologies.

This discussion aims to explore how the findings that emerged from the interviews answer the above research questions, and how they relate to the existing literature. As such, the discussion that follows will explore experiences of working mothers in terms of adjustments during the transition to motherhood, demands and pressure of working motherhood, as well as gains of working motherhood. The negotiation of motherhood and career identities will also be delved into - specifically pertaining to the compromises required, the intrapsychic negotiation of identities, as well as the expansion of self that takes place during working motherhood. Thereafter, the influence of working mothers' upbringing and cultural backgrounds on their experiences will be explored. Lastly, the relation of findings to dominant ideologies will also be expanded upon and the ways in which working motherhood parallels a process of mourning will be explored.

5.2 Experiences of Working Mothers

All of the mothers who were interviewed had careers before becoming parents. Motherhood thus signalled the transition to a period wherein life as it was known

before changed drastically, as their priorities had to be adjusted in a number of ways. This gave rise to much loss, ambivalence and often vastly contradictory feelings. As such, the experience of working motherhood inevitably seemed to entail a sense of mourning, constant compromise, juggling of multiple demands, and feelings of inadequacy as well as guilt. However, these aspects coexisted alongside a number of gains - including a sense of purpose, achievement and competence.

5.2.1 Loss and adjustment during the transition to motherhood.

The transition to motherhood has substantial psychological impacts on mothers (Hollway et al., 2008; Hollway, 2016). Women experience a sense of shock or personal crisis upon becoming mothers (Kitzinger, 1978), with the results of this study pointing to a strong sense that motherhood is not something that can be prepared for or understood until one experiences it. Women who had idealised notions of motherhood quickly found these replaced by the far more overwhelming reality of their mothering experience. Thus, aligned with what is concluded by Stone (2014), findings indicate that the transition to motherhood makes for a highly challenging adjustment period.

For most of the mothers interviewed, maternity leave created a period wherein their primary role was that of mothering. With societal ideals of mothering emphasising all-consuming motherhood and self-sacrifice (Hays, 1996), this period is thus aligned with these ideals to a greater extent than their return to work. Upon returning to work, there is not only a sense of loss and ambivalence, but feelings of inadequacy as a mother, that those interviewed reported having to contend with. In addition to experiencing anxiety around leaving their infants in someone else's care, some participants felt a sense of loss over the ending of their more intensive mothering role.

Peterson et al. (2018) explained that employed mothers feel concerned about whether or not they are adequately addressing their child's needs. For some of the participants in this study, this was experienced alongside excitement at the prospect of returning to work. Being a working mother therefore meant having to endure a great deal of ambivalence and tension as different roles were straddled. In those

interviewed, this gave way to powerful feelings of guilt and inadequacy related to their mothering role. Perhaps partly to compensate for these concerns, accepting their new status quo resulted in meaning making and self-consolation around not being perfect (or not having to perform tasks perfectly) for many of those interviewed. Thus, working mothers tried to evaluate themselves differently to how they did before they had children, and tried to acknowledge that who they were and what they were responsible for had changed.

At the same time, some of the mothers also admitted to a sense of relief at being able to return to work. However, fearing judgement, they were unable to admit to their excitement at the prospect of working without feeling guilty. Congruent with Thurer's claims (1995), they may fear being perceived as neglecting their mothering role by pursuing an identity outside of motherhood (in the form of work). Some were also afraid that they would be perceived as hating their children if they admitted to enjoying work – perhaps pointing to the idea that feelings of ambivalence towards one's infant are difficult to accept, despite being a common occurrence amongst mothers (Parker, 1997).

5.2.2 Demands and pressure of working motherhood.

Working motherhood has been shown to be a highly demanding role that calls for notable adaptation on both a personal and social level (Berger, 2018; Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Having to balance careers, motherhood, and all the associated responsibilities of these roles, meant that the participants had to juggle many different demands. This juggling appeared, at times, to give way to a great deal of emotional strain (Berger, 2018; Guendouzi, 2006; Peterson et al., 2018; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Waterhouse et al., 2017).

Most of those interviewed came to realise that a number of their responsibilities would have to be shared with others, but struggled to do so as it meant mourning their previous selves and accepting a new way of being, in which they felt less capable (and potentially had to contend with having less control or potency). As such, accepting help from others was anxiety-inducing for many of the mothers, and sharing responsibility evoked a sense of surrender for some. It is important to note

that this surrender did not imply acceptance, but rather a sense of giving up - as within most of the mothers there still existed a desire to be capable of more. Therefore, it is proposed that, what they may additionally be surrendering, is their ability to attain supermom status or to “do it all”. For instance, results indicated that most women feared being a disappointment as a mother, as well as being a disappointment as an employee. It also appeared that they had internalised a standard for being a working mother that entailed being high functioning in all spheres of their lives. Thus, working mothers found themselves trying to attain standards related to both the successful woman and intensive mothering ideologies (Kahu & Morgan, 2007).

Feeling incapable of meeting contradictory demands (without consequences such as burnout) imparted a sense of inadequacy and failure. Similar findings were reported by previous research, wherein it was found that maternal guilt and feelings of failure are prominent for working mothers as they find themselves unable to live up to various mothering ideals (Gendouzi, 2006; Medina & Magnuson, 2009). Further to this, those interviewed felt that they were faced with a great deal of scrutiny and judgement in performing their various roles – both for being mothers who work, as well as for being employees who mother.

In consideration of the above demands and pressure to attain particular mothering standards, it is not surprising that some mothers additionally had to contend with strains on their mental health, such as depression and anxiety. This is congruent with what was found by Adhikari (2012) and Chatterjie et al (2013), who conclude that working motherhood entails a vulnerability to such mental health problems. There is also evidence for a higher likelihood of Postnatal Depression in those with perfectionistic tendencies (Gelabert et al., 2012), which were evident in some of the women interviewed. Moreover, studies have found that working mothers had a greater propensity to stress, a lower likelihood of having a balanced lifestyle, and lower levels of happiness, as opposed to mothers who are not employed full-time (Treas et al., 2011; Stier et al., 2012). Others have proposed that the various losses associated with motherhood (alongside the lack of encouragement to grieve these losses) play a role in Postnatal Depression (Nicolson, 2011). Not having a way to process these losses was additionally found to give way to much anger and

resentment in those interviewed. With anger directed inwards believed to predict depression (Clay et al., 1993), this may additionally account for some of those interviewed reporting strains on mental health.

Moreover, the transition to motherhood was characterised by shifts within the family dynamic and marital dyad. The expansion of the family was not only reported to add a great deal of pressure on the marital dyad, but created resentment between some partners as the burden of childcare was found to fall predominantly upon mothers in half of those interviewed. This added to the amount of stress working mothers felt that they experienced relative to their partners (Poduval & Poduval, 2009) and represented a loss in terms of their relationship as it was known before. While this experience, which is supported in the literature (Frizelle & Kell, 2010; Medina & Magnuson, 2009; Poduval & Poduval, 2009) was evident for half the women in this study, the other half of the mothers reported that their partners were involved in household and childcare tasks. This suggests the beginnings of possible shifts in gender roles.

5.2.3 Gains of working motherhood.

In addition to being fraught with difficulty and conflicting demands, the experience of working motherhood also held a number of benefits for the women interviewed. Having a career imparted a form of validation which meant that working mothers were able to feel impactful, productive and valued. Other rewards from working that emerged in the findings included gaining a sense of purpose outside of motherhood, as well as enjoying mental stimulation and the ability to grow and learn. Findings also indicated that some of the mothers gained a sense of accomplishment through their work and enjoyed the opportunity to set goals or fulfil their ambitions through their careers. These findings all echo previous studies (see Christopher, 2012; Guendouzi, 2006; Laney et al., 2014; Poduval & Poduval, 2009; Wilson, 2006). It is proposed that these rewards were considered substantial for the women who were interviewed, and may act as a balancing force in having to manage the numerous challenges that are associated with their dual role.

Similarly, others have argued that there are significant financial as well as psychological gains to be had from working and mothering (Wilson, 2006). Similar to Christopher's (2012) findings, in this study, many of the interviewees mentioned the benefit of earning an income and spoke of gaining independence from having their own jobs. Interestingly, one of the working mothers mentioned work and income as helping her gain greater footing in household and childcare decision-making. Therefore, it is possible that there is a sense of power that is gained through employment. As such, working may partly empower some women to feel more equal to their male partners, and as though they are deserving of being part of making family decisions. The notion of working motherhood as a means to more equal gendered decision-making in the family has been found previously (Kumar & Maral, 2015).

5.3 Negotiation of Motherhood and Career Identities

Regarding the negotiation of motherhood and career identities, findings indicate that there is a great deal of compromise that takes place once mothers return to work from maternity leave. Participants reported difficulties in parting with their pre-motherhood functioning and learning to accept support from others. This was partly because doing so feels vastly incongruent with how they perceived their identities before becoming mothers – a loss which was difficult to accept and bear. At the same time, working mothers reported a great deal of personal expansion and found ways to integrate their various roles. Therefore, although there is an initial sense of loss and identity disorganisation, this at times gave way to the merging of selves that initially seemed vastly different; with their professional selves taking on aspects of motherhood, for instance. However, working motherhood identities were additionally found to be fluid and changeable.

5.3.1 Compromise related to various roles.

Becoming a working mother entailed a number of compromises and identity adjustments for participants. As explained by Laney et al. (2015), becoming a mother is associated with an initial loss of personal identity, after which children become integrated into one's self-concept and a new identity emerges. It is believed that this

necessitates a process of mourning upon becoming a mother (Nicolson, 2011). Similar to what was found by previous research, for the women interviewed, the transition to motherhood was therefore marked by a loss of self (Laney et al., 2015) and saw mothers' needs becoming subordinate to those of their infants (Stone, 2014).

Motherhood was also experienced as an all-consuming, anxiety provoking task; and participants described complete changes in their lifestyles and how their free time is spent. It has been found that, during this period, friction arises as mothers are caught between the desire to care for their children, and their own sense of independence or personal wishes they may want to fulfil (Hollway et al., 2008). Therefore, having to navigate the demands of caring for a child and putting another's needs above their own leads to conflicts with what mothers previously deemed as important, as well as conflicts in how they perceive themselves (Hollway et al., 2008).

Conflicts in self-perception before and after working motherhood were highly evident in this sample and, in speaking about these aspects, some of those interviewed appeared angry and resentful. Many of the participants previously constructed themselves as being capable of high levels of performance in a variety of household and work-related tasks. However, greater time constraints related to being a working mother meant having to part with their sense of achievement motivation and perfectionism (or, at least, having to bear the discomfort of not being able to perform in the same ways as before). Largely through the discomfort of this adaptation and the letting go of the pre-motherhood self, findings indicated that the working motherhood role elicited complex identity negotiation within individuals (for similar findings, see: Hollway, 2016; Stone, 2014).

Being on leave for a number of months, adjusting to vastly different schedules at home, and trying to cope with a severe lack of rest meant that employed mothers experienced an initial period of adjustment upon their return to employment and experienced a consequent sense of lost self-efficacy. This, in turn, resulted in a loss of confidence as well as a loss of self-experienced competence at work. For most, this was difficult to bear as they associated a sense of pride and accomplishment in being able to excel both at work and at home. Similar to that established by Ladge

and Greenberg (2015), re-entry into the workforce after maternity leave was therefore a stressful experience where perceived self-efficacy was questioned and a number of adjustment tactics were relied upon. In this sample, these tactics included re-adjusting work schedules; changing time management and working strategies; and re-working the perception of productivity as ensuring enough gets done while one is at the office, to allow for household and childcare responsibilities when one is home.

5.3.2 Intrapsychic negotiation of identities.

While there were a number of commonalities between participants, the way working motherhood identities were negotiated and constructed appeared to differ between mothers. Interestingly, the way in which identity was defined also altered throughout individual interviews as well – indicating that working motherhood identities are fluid. This is echoed by Frosh (2010), who states that identity is continuously in a process of change, with a number of influences playing a role in an individual's attitude towards the world around them.

As reported by others (Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013), the integration of working motherhood identities is also likely to come with some tension. In order to cope with the experienced differences between who the participants felt they are as working mothers and who they were prior to this role, working mothers made a number of changes to their perceptions. For instance, it appeared that this sample of working mothers engaged in a variety of defences to manage societal scrutiny as well as the tension between their multiple roles psychologically. Similar to Buzzanell et al.'s (2005) findings, these defensive strategies included constructing their identities as people who 'need to be busy' or who 'could not be stay-at-home mothers'; providing reasons for working that are related to benefitting their families; or defending their desire to work through excessive self-reassurance, for instance.

This rationalisation may be explained by the fact that employed mothers experience tension between their mothering and working roles and have a desire to meet their children's needs as well as enjoy the gains of being employed full-time (Buzzanell et

al., 2005; Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013). Moreover, not only do both roles impact on one another, but there is an underlying pressure to live up to conflicting discourses around motherhood – more specifically, the successful woman and intensive mothering ideologies (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). Thus, it is possible that a renegotiation of identities takes place partly because of working mothers' own psychological dynamics, and partly because of the pressure experienced through dominant ideologies.

It is proposed that identity renegotiation is also necessitated by the feelings of inadequacy that are imparted through dominant mothering ideologies. Therefore, it was found that a possible tension exists between what working mothers consciously acknowledge as impossible standards, and at times, unconscious wishes to be able to attain these impossible standards (Christopher, 2012; Kahu & Morgan, 2007; Turner & Norwood, 2013). Having to make sense of not fitting within a prescribed category, working mothers therefore have to create their own category and find identities that they can subscribe to without feeling as though they are falling short in some way (Buzzanell et al., 2005; Kahu & Morgan, 2007). However, it should also be noted that there is a dual process related to accepting ideologies as well as opposing them. Thus, working mothers actively grapple with and contest dominant ideologies and reconstruct what it means to mother; rather than passively accepting imposed ideals (Frizelle & Kell, 2010). Similar findings have been noted in other South African literature, wherein it was stated that there is a greater resistance to more traditional ideologies and that mothering identities are not wholly defined in relation to these (Patel et al., 2006).

5.3.3 Expansion of self.

For many of those interviewed, remarkable shifts were experienced in how their identities were constructed, allowing for an expansion of self. Most of the working mothers interviewed underwent a degree of integration between their motherhood and professional selves. Through this integration, they were also able to establish and appreciate themselves as complex beings with multiple needs and desires. Aligned with Laney et al. (2014), it was found that there was remarkable personal growth that took place through navigating working motherhood. Most of the women

interviewed spoke of applying parts of how they perceived themselves as mothers to their professional roles, for instance. Thus, they reported being able to engage with greater vulnerability, as well as being more patient and nurturing at their place of employment. Participants also reported experiencing a greater capacity for empathy.

Findings additionally indicated that motherhood gave way to a period of self-evaluation. For instance, since becoming mothers, all of those interviewed engaged in a re-processing of their relationship with their own parents (as well as how they were parented). Some additionally gained insight into how they impacted on their own parents as children. Similar introspection was noted by Nelson (2003), who explains that women engage in a process of facing their past and their own childhood experiences, as well as an evaluation of their own parental abilities, upon becoming mothers.

5.4 Influence of Upbringing and Cultural Background

The way in which motherhood is perceived and interpreted is influenced by cultural ideas surrounding motherhood (Bell, 2004). Thus, parenting expectations as well as expectations around working motherhood are believed to be influenced by such cultural beliefs (Budig et al., 2012). Interestingly, findings indicate that cultural influences were experienced in very unique and personal ways between the individuals interviewed. Despite originating from a variety of cultural backgrounds, it appeared that participants did not follow cultural prescriptions rigidly, but rather engaged with parts of their cultures that they perceived as relevant to their lives. In other words, whether or not they subscribed to cultural or family values was further impacted by their own personal beliefs and behaviour (Lehman et al., 2004). Congruent with that concluded by Brislin (2006), culture was therefore not wholly predictive of behaviour, but rather provided those interviewed with a variety of behaviours to choose from. Findings therefore echo the idea that mothering patterns are transmitted intergenerationally in some ways, but not in all ways, and that mothers preserve some culturally learned aspects of mothering while choosing to part with those that are considered less useful to their role (Glassman & Eisikovits, 2006).

Most of those interviewed mentioned cultural and familial socialisation as imparting the idea that mothers are nurturers and responsible for household tasks, while fathers are more likely to be seen as providers. This is aligned with previous findings (Selin, 2014), which indicated that the majority of mothers across the globe bear most of the responsibility related to childrearing. Some, but not all participants alluded to beliefs from their background that being a good mother meant being fully available to one's children, and being devoted to them above all else – ideas which are aligned with dominant societal portrayals of a good mother (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Russo, 1976).

These ideas are also congruent with traditional gender ideologies, where greater emphasis is placed on specific roles and responsibilities being allocated to each sex (Kroska, 2007). However, findings also indicated that not all mothers perceived this to be the case. For instance, some participants were brought up in more egalitarian households and had mothers who worked. How this was experienced seemed to further depend on each individual. For some, having a working mother meant having a role model for independence and financial reward; for others it signified that there are manageable possibilities beyond being a stay-at-home mother. Therefore, findings not only pointed to societal discourses as influencing perceptions of working and mothering, but deeply personal reasons that could be traced back to participants' childhood experiences and perceptions of what it meant to mother - as well as what it meant to be a good mother.

5.5 Relation of Findings to Dominant Mothering and Gender Ideologies

Despite half of the working mothers interviewed mentioning that their partners are involved in household and childcare duties, there seemed to be an emotional burden related to childcare that some of these mothers felt they could not share with their partners. There was also concern over how their partners performed tasks, or a sense that women have knowledge about household and childcare tasks at a level that men do not – something that evoked resentment alongside a sense of potency in participants. Thus, it appears that there is a sense of the idealisation of motherhood that may have been internalised by those interviewed. This may also be

aligned with beliefs that motherhood and womanhood are closely intertwined, and that being a mother serves as a natural inevitability for women (DiQuinzio, 1999).

Interestingly, aligned with Butler's (1990) ideas around gender performativity, some of those interviewed also admitted to perpetuating gender ideals around task responsibility. Attempts to shift how tasks are distributed came with anger and tension that was difficult to bear – not only tension between married partners, but an internal anxiety around whether their role of mothering is performed adequately at times when they hand tasks over to others. Thus, mothering ideologies provide an accepted standard against which mothers measure themselves (Kruger, 2006) and working mothers, at times, internalised and perpetuated beliefs from society regarding their mothering role (Green, 2015).

Thus, despite evidence of some shifts in gender roles, performance of dominant, traditional notions of motherhood were clear. Some participants touched on the idea that motherhood is something natural and inherent to being a woman, thus aligning with ideas of essential motherhood (DiQuinzio, 1999). There was also evidence for knowledge that the societal portrayal of a good mother is someone who prioritises her children's needs above all else and who is devoted to these needs full-time (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Russo, 1976). Traditional psychoanalytic ideas that mothers are objects in relation to their infants, rather than human beings in their own right also appear to have perpetuated these notions of motherhood and become internalised by generations of women (Benjamin, 1988; Hollway, 2001; Raphael-Leff, 2010).

Having had these ideas around mothering modelled and imparted to them from their early years have been found to have implications on the mothering experience. For instance, working mothers are then inevitably set up for failure as their circumstances do not allow for conforming to intensive mothering ideals (DiLapi, 1989). Facing a great deal of pressure to meet dominant ideologies (Macdonald, 2013; Medina & Magnuson, 2009), working mothers are bound to experience increased guilt as well as anxiety (Macdonald, 2013) – which was evident in this study's findings.

However, psychoanalytic models of motherhood have been criticised for being perpetuating of idealised, intensive motherhood ideals (Chodorow, 1978). The findings of this study indicate that women are challenging these dominant mothering ideologies by expanding their roles in (and value to) society. Whereas ideologies of essential motherhood claim that a woman's happiness is dependent on whether her natural need to mother has been fulfilled (DiQuinzio, 1999), results showed that working mothers challenge these notions by finding meaning both in mothering as well as through having careers – at times appearing to rage against norms in their interviews.

This challenging of traditional motherhood roles is, however, not without conflict. Finding their roles in contrast to that which is expected of them, some working mothers seemed to question whether it is acceptable to desire things that are traditionally considered to be more masculine, whether there is normality in resenting motherhood at times, and whether they are adequate mothers for engaging in more ambitious drives. This experience of maternal ambivalence emerged in the research interviews as a fear of being judged by the researcher. At points, these working mothers may have felt exposed in sharing their ambivalence, as it is, in itself, a painful experience riddled with conflict and shame (Raphael-Leff, 2010).

5.6 The Significance of Mourning in Working Motherhood

Overall, one of the most significant findings that emerged is a general theme of loss that is experienced throughout the journey of working motherhood. Upon becoming mothers, participants had to surrender previously held ideals about what motherhood would entail. Participants also had to renegotiate their identities, thus mourning their previous sense of self, as well as their lives as they were known before. They underwent change in their marital dynamics and therefore had to mourn a sense of equality in their relationships, as well as their expectations of parenthood. Having to juggle multiple roles and demands led to a different way of functioning in the world that was characterised by the loss of attaining perfectionist ideals, and, at times, having to part with a sense of themselves as competent and in control. Some additionally experienced discrimination at work and felt as though they missed out on career progression since becoming mothers.

These losses accumulated and resulted in much anger and resentment that working mothers alluded to but mostly felt unable to express explicitly throughout the interviews. Working mothers felt angry that other mothers (including their own) made the role look easier than it is and that their idealised notions of motherhood had been shattered. Their anger was also evident in how they no longer felt as competent as they did before becoming mothers. Some additionally realised that they are not only victim to gender roles, but actively play a part in perpetuating these in their household – thus creating resentment towards their partners and themselves for being unable to change these roles. They further feel anger and helplessness around experiencing judgement and scrutiny for how they choose to work and mother – both from themselves and others.

Being left with a sense of loss in a number of ways, it appeared that their experience paralleled that of mourning as described by Kernberg (2010). Thus, working motherhood was characterised by an initial sense of shock, alongside pain, guilt, aggression and regret which were difficult to process. However, some have argued that little allowance is made for new mothers to grieve, despite the various losses they undergo (Nicolson, 2011). Therefore, it was difficult for working mothers to acknowledge that they are in a process of mourning their becoming mothers, perhaps partly because they fear that doing so would signal that they are ‘bad mothers’.

As echoed by Frizelle and Hayes (1999), motherhood also signified a great deal of ambivalence. At times reflecting on gains and engaging in meaning-making, at other points expressing loss, sadness and resentment; it further appeared that working mothers’ mourning process was intermittent yet continuous. Thus, similar to what is concluded by Kernberg (2010), it is possible that this mourning process does not have a fixed beginning and end point, but rather evolves and becomes part of who working mothers are. Perhaps sensing this and realising that they therefore have to accept a more complex and painful reality, working mothers made use of defences to survive psychologically. This was evident in interviews through the use of rationalisation, intellectualisation, projection and denial (Lemma, 2016) in conveying the more agonising parts of their experiences.

Through their experience of mourning, women come to accept their new situation and reconstruct ideals around mothering in a different way – providing evidence for a resistance to dominant ideologies. To this end, Walker (1995) states that multiple meanings are given to motherhood and women act with agency in their challenging of dominant gender norms. Women therefore actively grapple with these ideals and reconstruct what it means to mother, rather than simply accepting imposed gender norms (Frizelle & Kell, 2010).

It is proposed that being allowed to engage with the mourning process more fully and processing all that has been lost (as opposed to defending against this) may simultaneously bring about the opportunity to acknowledge what has been gained. However, it is further suggested that this processing should not take place with the ultimate aim of greater optimism, but rather a more integrated, realistic view of motherhood wherein positive and negative possibilities are accommodated. It is believed that doing so, in turn, could assist in the adjustment to motherhood (Churchill & Davis, 2010).

5.7 Conclusion

The above discussion explored the findings that emerged from the research questions and how they relate to the existing literature. Overall, findings indicated that working mothers experience difficult transitions to motherhood as well as a variety of demands and pressures related to their dual role. The return to work is also a challenging transition. Working mothers experience loss and ambivalence related to their various roles; and engage in identity renegotiation to facilitate the co-existence of their multiple roles and identities. It was also found that working mothers' cultural backgrounds and upbringing provide a framework against which to measure their own experiences, and that observing parents' careers impacts on the desire to pursue one's own.

Dominant mothering and gender ideologies were evident in the results, albeit to varying extents between individual experiences. It is also interesting to note that results were characterised by a great deal of tension and contradictions that are informed by dominant mothering and gender ideologies. Additionally, findings

indicate that working motherhood is an experience fraught with ambivalence. Working mothers are torn between a desire to change or oppose societal norms regarding the equality of women, while simultaneously playing a role in the continued idealisation of mothers. At the same time, women actively resist and contest ideologies – making way for their own meanings and identities to emerge. It appears that motherhood cannot be idealised or denigrated but is rather marked by nuanced and complex experience that is mediated by wider gender norms and ideologies as well as intrapsychic processes. Lastly, findings indicate that the experience of working motherhood entails a great deal of loss, which meant participant experiences and identity negotiations paralleled a process of mourning. The implications of these and other concepts will be explored further in the conclusion chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Findings

The aim of this psychoanalytic feminist study was to explore the experiences of working mothers in South Africa from their own perspectives; as well as how mothering and career identities are negotiated. It also aimed to explore the perceived influence of working mothers' cultural backgrounds and upbringing on their experiences and identities. Within these aims, the relation of findings to dominant gender and mothering ideologies was also explored, alongside how working mothers make meaning of their experiences and identities.

Interpretive thematic analysis of six semi-structured interviews with working mothers revealed that the experience of working motherhood entails a great deal of loss, ambivalence, tension and contradictory feelings alongside a number of gains. The transition to motherhood is characterised by a sense of being overwhelmed, with mothers' own needs becoming subsumed – thus giving way to a loss of self. This period is also marked by shifts and tension in the family dynamic and marital dyad, as new roles and responsibilities have to be negotiated. Moreover, findings indicate that working mothers experience an overwhelming sense of pressure and demands - and are prone to experiencing strains on their mental health.

Returning to work entails much compromise, as working mothers experience a sense of loss regarding their motherhood role. They are additionally faced with having to let go of pre-motherhood functioning as the volume of tasks and responsibilities increases with the additional role of mother and requires compromise in the standard to which tasks are performed. This gives way to an acknowledgement of being unable to "do it all", relinquishing the superwoman ideal and accepting support from others. Much ambivalence is experienced during this time, as working mothers find themselves unable to live up to dominant mothering ideologies – thus experiencing guilt, feelings of failure and judgement for being a mother who works, as well as for being an employee who mothers. These difficult feelings are contrasted with a desire to return to work and to be productive and impactful in their careers.

Conflicting demands in terms of work responsibilities and childcare or household responsibilities result in a great deal of pressure and tension that has to be managed on a daily basis. This further impacts on working mothers' identities, as who they perceived themselves to be before working motherhood changes in a number of ways. Through an initial sense of loss and identity disorganisation, a renegotiation of identities therefore takes place. Working mothers experience a merging of professional and motherhood selves, with their professional identities taking on aspects of motherhood, for example.

It was additionally found that working mothers draw upon their childhood experiences and cultural backgrounds in choosing how to mother. These historical or background influences were experienced in deeply personal ways by those interviewed. Working mothers did not follow cultural or childhood prescriptions rigidly, but rather selected aspects of these that felt relevant to their lives. Most of those interviewed spoke of culture and familial socialisation as imparting the idea that mothers are nurturers and responsible for household tasks, while fathers are more likely to be seen as providers. Those who grew up in egalitarian households found inspiration in their working mothers and aspired towards similar goals. In addition to these influences, it was found that societal ideals around mothering impart much pressure on working mothers, who find themselves torn between complying with ideologies, and rebelling against them in an effort to create their own category of good mothering. Lastly, findings indicated that the working motherhood experience can be paralleled with a process of loss and mourning. Participants had to surrender their lives as well as who they were prior to motherhood but felt unable to process these losses openly for fear of being perceived negatively. Having to mourn aspects of their lives that had been changed indefinitely resulted in a more complex and painful reality that working mothers needed to defend against to ensure their psychological survival.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study is the small sample size; only six working mothers were interviewed. While this allowed for in-depth accounts of their experiences to be collected, it means that their experiences cannot be generalised. Similarly, the

research only explored middle-class, partnered, heterosexual women and thus may have produced a relatively 'normative' account of motherhood. It is likely that the struggles faced by working lesbian mothers, working single mothers and mothers from lower, and even higher, socio-economic groups would reveal some overlaps and some divergences with those reported by the working mothers in this study. While those who were interviewed were from different cultural backgrounds and this provided insight into a variety of experiences, the inclusion of much heterogeneity in the sample may have prevented stronger common themes emerging. Moreover, two Black women, two Coloured women and two White women were interviewed, which means the sample's racial ratio is not representative of the overall South African population.

It should also be noted that psychology is considered to be a traditionally 'mother-blaming' profession (Thurer, 1995). With the interviewer collecting data for a Master's degree in this field (and the participants being aware of this), they may have held back on certain mothering practices or information for fear of being judged by the interviewer. Moreover, it was the researcher's first attempt at collecting data first-hand; this inexperience may have resulted in questions or probing which were inadequate or which could have biased the data.

On the other hand, the study's psychoanalytic feminist stance allowed for much exploration of what may have been left unsaid during interviews. Underlying meanings of accounts could be explored – allowing for much richness in the collection and analysis of data. Moreover, as an exploratory qualitative study, data provides a great deal of depth and richness which may not have been the case if this was a quantitative study (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Furthermore, interpretations were reviewed by a research supervisor to ensure they accurately represent the participants' narratives and that the influence of the researcher on the study was adequately considered. Lastly, conducting one-on-one interviews in private settings created a research environment wherein mothers were able to express some of their most private thoughts. Those interviewed were mostly experienced as forthcoming in the sharing of their experiences and enabled the collection of much useful information.

6.3 Clinical Implications of the Study

The implications of the study are two-fold: firstly, relating to implications for psychoanalytic theory from a feminist perspective, and secondly relating to the treatment of working mothers in clinical practice. Findings indicated that working mothers feel a great deal of pressure to conform to societal expectations of motherhood and that idealised mothering ideologies still bear influence on the motherhood experience. Therefore, the treatment of motherhood in traditional psychoanalytic theories could be expanded to include more complex views of pathology, rather than heavily relying on ideas that continue to blame mothers for poor developmental outcomes. Through challenging the continual repetition of relational dynamics that influence psychic structures, the oppression of women could be interrupted (Graff, 2012).

In clinical practice, it would be helpful to affirm mothers as individuals rather than objects in relation to their infants. Thus, their experiences should be empathised with and explored rather than pathologised in relation to the impact they have on their children. In a similar vein, those who work with children may need to be wary of their own position in relation to gender roles and how this may affect their practice. For instance, clinicians should be careful not to reinforce mothering ideologies through parental feedback sessions when working with child clients. To this end, it would be helpful to evaluate the roles of all family members and parents in a child's presenting problem rather than focussing only on how the mother may play a role.

When treating working mothers, clinicians should also be aware that the demands of their role and the complexity of the context within which it takes place, means working mothers are at risk of anxiety, burnout and depression. Moreover, it may be helpful to think of becoming a mother as a process of mourning, and to provide clients with a containing space where they can openly grieve the various losses of motherhood. Clients should also be assisted in gaining a more realistic perception of motherhood to enable integration between the positive and negative aspects of the role. Lastly, it may be helpful to normalise ambivalence in motherhood to a greater extent.

6.4 Recommendations for Further Research

While this study explored cultural dynamics and upbringing as influences on working motherhood, it would be helpful to study these more specifically and in greater depth. This will allow for greater insights into the role that culture plays in how motherhood is experienced, as well as expand on knowledge regarding childhood experiences of motherhood and one's own perception of what it means to mother. It would also be helpful to study specific cultures individually and then to compare their influences, as it was difficult to ascertain differences given the small size of this study's sample and the heterogeneity of cultures that were present in the sample.

Findings also indicated that parenthood has a marked impact on the marital and family dynamic. Further research into these aspects could provide information on difficulties that bring about a great deal of distress on marital dyads, and how these difficulties can be negotiated more successfully. Greater insight is further needed in the experience of fatherhood to understand how the transition to parenthood is experienced by fathers, and what the emotional impact is on them. Such research could also explore their perceptions of gender roles and how they perceive themselves in relation to these. It is further suggested that future studies expand on research insights that are less heteronormative, to make room for greater complexity in understandings of motherhood, as well as allowing for multiple parenthood voices to be heard.

Further applied research is also needed on the type of workplace support and maternity leave working mothers need to help their adjusting to the role. It is believed that knowledge and implementation of such support may be useful in preventing burnout and ameliorating the effects of the initial shock of motherhood as well as the difficulties experienced in returning to work after maternity leave.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET





Dear Madam

My name is Daniele Broadley and I am a Master of Arts Clinical Psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand. Part of my degree includes undertaking a research project. As such, I am researching the experiences of women who are full-time employees as well as mothers.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation would include being interviewed by myself for 60 – 90 minutes on your experiences, thoughts and sense-making around being a working mother. The interview would be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to you, and where the contents of the interview will be allowed to remain private and confidential. You will not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

There are no benefits from participating in the study and you are allowed to withdraw your participation at any point, without any consequences. Permission to digitally audio-record the interview will be requested. Only the interviewer will have access to the audio-recording. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the anonymised transcripts of these audio-recordings. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your identity will only be known to the researcher, and none of your identifying details will be disclosed in the reporting of the study. Instead of your real name, a pseudonym will be used in the interview transcripts as well as the final research report to ensure anonymity is maintained. These anonymised transcripts will be stored on password-protected computers throughout the study. Once the research project is completed, transcripts will be archived by the researcher and her

supervisor for use in future studies (with your permission). Audio-recordings will be deleted after publication of this research.

If you wish to participate in this study, kindly complete the interview consent form as well as the audio-recording consent form.

Should anything that is discussed in the interview be a source of distress for you, please let the researcher know. We are able to arrange for counselling services at the University of the Witwatersrand's Emthonjeni Centre. Should you prefer to make such counselling arrangements yourself, the centre's number is 011 717 4513. If you would like assistance with a referral to a private psychotherapist, at your own expense, this can also be arranged.

If you have any questions about the study or would like to request further information, please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor using the details below.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards

Daniele Broadley
MA Clinical Psychology Student
Cell: 072 321 5079
Email: dani.broadley@gmail.com

Dr Katherine Bain
Research Supervisor
Tel: 011 717 4558
Email: Katherine.bain@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I _____ hereby give my consent to be interviewed by Daniele Broadley for the purposes of her study on the experiences of working mothers.

I understand that:

- Participation in the study is voluntary.
- Participation in the study does not include any direct benefits or anticipated risks.
- Participation will include being interviewed by the researcher for 60-90 minutes at a mutually convenient time and place.
- I have no obligation to answer interview questions that I do not want to answer.
- My participation may be withdrawn at any point up until publication of the study.
- Audio recordings will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisor.
- Information provided in the interview will remain confidential and transcripts will be anonymised.
- Anonymised data may be used in future studies that include other researchers.
- While direct quotes may be used in the reporting of the study, a pseudonym will be used instead of my real name in such reporting.

I consent to the anonymised transcript being archived by the researcher and her supervisor for use in future studies:

Yes___ No___

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

I _____ hereby give my consent for the audio-recording of my interview with Daniele Broadley for the purposes of her study on the experiences of working mothers.

I understand that:

- The audio-recording will only be accessed by the researcher.
- The audio-recording will be kept on a password-protected computer.
- Transcripts arising from the audio-recording will be anonymised.
- Where direct quotes from the interview are used in the reporting of the study, a pseudonym will be used instead of my real name.
- Audio-recordings will be deleted after publication of the research findings.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section 1: Working Mothers' Experiences and Meaning-Making

1.1. What was it like becoming a mom?

Prompt for the type of adjustments that had to be made, what was enjoyable, what was difficult.

1.2. Can you tell me about your experience of being a working mother?

Prompt for day-to-day experiences as well as overall rewards and challenges of the dual role.

1.3. What was it like to return to work after becoming a mother?

Prompt for her personal experience of the transition, as well as how colleagues and managers have responded to her since becoming a mother, whether she has picked up on any changes in how she is treated or perceived at work. Ask for examples.

1.4. What has needed adjusting in your role as a working mother?

Prompt for examples from home life and professional life.

1.5. Can you tell me about the type of support you receive at home and at work in your dual role?

Prompt for support in childcare and household duties, emotional support, any extra assistance or lack thereof that makes her role easier or more difficult. The type of support she might want more of.

Section 2: Working Mothers' Professional and Motherhood Identities

2.1. What does having a career mean to you?

2.2. What does motherhood mean to you?

2.3. How has your idea of who you are professionally been impacted by how you see yourself as a mother?

Prompts: how have you made your mothering and working roles fit or not fit, what do you struggle with?

2.4. In what ways have you seen or experienced growth as a working mother?

Section 3: Perceived Influence of Culture and Early Experiences on Motherhood

3.1. How would you describe your cultural background?

3.2. How would a good mother be described according to your cultural background?

3.3. How do you think your cultural background has influenced your experience of motherhood?
Prompt for any thoughts or behaviour around mothering that she may identify with because of her cultural background.

3.4. How do you think being a working mom is affected by your cultural background?
Prompt for examples.

3.5. In which ways do you think the way you were parented may influence your own views on parenting and working motherhood?
Prompt for examples of how she was parented may positively or negatively influence her own parenting beliefs and beliefs around working motherhood.

3.6. What sense have you made of how you were parented since becoming a mom yourself?
Prompt for whether parenting views have changed in any way.

APPENDIX E: ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/19/002 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	The experiences and identities of working mothers: an explorative psychoanalytic feminist study
INVESTIGATORS	Broadley Daniele
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	05 July 2019
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 05 July 2019

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Esther Price)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Katherine Bain
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2021

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX F: TURNITIN REPORT

1943107:MA_Research_Report_Sakai_Submission_09_Decemb.

ORIGINALITY REPORT

1%	0%	0%	1%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Witwatersrand Student Paper	<1%
2	Submitted to Avondale College of Higher Education Student Paper	<1%
3	Submitted to University of East London Student Paper	<1%
4	Submitted to University of Johannsburg Student Paper	<1%
5	ujdigispace.uj.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	ul.netd.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
7	Submitted to University of Cape Town Student Paper	<1%
8	sajp.org.za Internet Source	<1%
9	Submitted to Le Jardin Academy	

	Student Paper	<1%
10	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1%
11	Submitted to Royal Holloway and Bedford New College Student Paper	<1%
12	Submitted to Regent's College Student Paper	<1%
13	www.alealovely.com Internet Source	<1%
14	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	<1%
15	Submitted to University of Salford Student Paper	<1%
16	Submitted to University of Sheffield Student Paper	<1%
17	Submitted to City and Islington College, London Student Paper	<1%
18	Submitted to 8779 Student Paper	<1%
19	Michael C. Gottlieb, Alicia Coleman. "006 Ethical challenges in forensic psychology practice.", American Psychological Association	<1%

	(APA), 2012 Publication	
20	Submitted to The Hong Kong Institute of Education Student Paper	<1%
21	Submitted to University of Strathclyde Student Paper	<1%
22	Submitted to Kedron State High School Student Paper	<1%
23	Patrice M. Buzzanell, Rebecca Meisenbach, Robyn Remke, Meina Liu, Venessa Bowers, Cindy Conn. " The Good Mother: Managerial Women's Sensemaking and Feelings About Work–Family Issues ", Communication Studies, 2005 Publication	<1%
24	Submitted to Swinburne University of Technology Student Paper	<1%
25	Submitted to University of Lincoln Student Paper	<1%
26	Submitted to De Montfort University Student Paper	<1%
27	Submitted to Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman Student Paper	<1%