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Emotional labour and the 'Never-ending Shift'- Narratives of Working Mothers during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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754139

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the Master of Arts in Social and Psychology Research Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, February 2022

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Declaration

I, Arshima Khan, declare that this research report is my own original work. All sources used have been acknowledged in the report. The report is being submitted for the degree of Master's in Social and Psychological Research in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



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Arshima Khan

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has emphasized the simultaneous necessity and invisibility of care work and emotional labour undertaken by working mothers, disproportionately increasing their domestic, childcare and employment responsibilities. It highlighted the centrality of relational care ethics, revealing the indispensability of unacknowledged care work to the economy and human survival. This study aimed to explore narratives of 10 working mothers about their experiences of the extended lockdown from March to July 2020, to observe aspects of emotional labour and the never-ending shift undertaken by them. This study employed a cross-sectional qualitative research design, using purposive sampling and narrative methodology through a feminist, critical and Foucauldian narrative theoretical framework. Experiences and perceptions of participants were explored through a critical feminist lens to examine discursive complexities that emerged through semi-structured interviews. Narrative analysis demonstrated the socioeconomic intersections of emotional labour performed by participants, as well as the active centring of care work within their lives. It also revealed the complexities of choices that participants face, showing the concurrent resignation towards and ownership of the challenges placed upon them as mothers in a patriarchal society. A Foucauldian and critical reading of narrative themes exhibited the various ways that participants subvert and reproduce patriarchal matrices in their daily lives, as well as the idealisation and apotheosis of motherhood that occurs in society. This study emphasises the inherent economic and societal value of care work and defines it beyond capitalist narratives of valuable labour. Future research can expand further upon the racial and socioeconomic dynamics of emotional labour and care work undertaken by women.

Key words: Care-work, never-ending shift, pandemic, feminism, Foucauldian narrative

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Dedication

Dedicated to Mumma, Pappa and Baba- my guiding lights

Chapter 1

Introduction

Care is the fundamental undercurrent on which human life is centred (Maina & Kimani, 2019). Unpaid domestic and care work is essential to familial well-being through the nurturing of healthy children into functioning individuals (Maina & Kimani, 2019), as well as maintaining and sustaining other adults. Research suggests that child development is positively correlated with maternal multitasking in particular (Kalenkoski & Foster, 2010). This in turn amplifies the economic potential of society, thereby investing in both social and human capital and well as contributing to the economic development of a country (Maina & Kimani, 2019). More than 75% of this vital unpaid care work is performed by women globally, while in Africa the onus of unpaid care and domestic work falls on women between the ages of 15 and 54. These women usually belong to lower socioeconomic strata of society, have several children, low level of education and are often employed in low-paying jobs (Maina & Kimani, 2019). Women pervasively subjected to the inequitable division of care work, the responsibility of emotional labour, and the onus of work-life balance as well as the mental load. In addition, these excessive expectations and costs increase exponentially during times of crises (Power, 2020). The tumultuous change that the world has experienced because of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has resulted in a massive cultural shift, emphasizing numerous social realities

In accordance with global Covid-19 prevention restrictions, South Africa rapidly imposed a lockdown shortly following its first recorded Covid case on March 5th, 2020. The South African lockdown, lasting upwards of three months, was one of the most restrictive in the world (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020), subsequently developing into 5 distinct levels of varying stringency. While populations belonging to middle socioeconomic strata of South African society responded well to the strict conditions of the lockdown, lower income strata were affected with food shortages and difficulties in social distancing (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). The socioeconomic and racial diversity within South Africa led to unique circumstances, especially for women facing multiple challenges during the months of lockdown, including care-work, domestic responsibilities, emotional labour, distance learning, childcare and remote paid work (Adeagbo, 2020). As the

South African government imposed a country-wide home confinement, day-cares and schools closed down, and au-pairs, domestic helpers and nannies were forced to return to their own places of residence, except in certain cases where domestic helpers were live-in or from other countries (Haider et al., 2020). Social structures that usually aided South African mothers for their multiple care-giving responsibilities, such as extended family networks and domestic help (Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011), were also eliminated during lockdown.

This study approaches the concept of gendered structures of power as relationally and socially constructed. Biological sex is only referred to in this study to describe the cohort of participants, as defined and identified with by participants themselves. In accordance with the poststructuralist framework, gender is regarded not as an essentialist and objective category, but as a socially agreed upon identity that emerges through situations, contexts, and performances of the same (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al.,2021) Gender work involves activities and interactions that are bound by the contextual times and places in which they occur, producing normative gendered narratives. These established patterns of thought and behaviour inform individuals' organisation and reproduction of their everyday lives. Consequently, gender work is an interactive process that influences individuals' patterns of thought and behaviour as much as societal gender matrices are shaped by them (Rutherford, 2018).

In the context of this study, 'gendered subjectivities specifically are characterised as unconscious and conscious understandings of the self and one's world, which also involves understanding our relation to the world' (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018, p.303). The experiences and perceptions of gendered identity and subjectivity described by the participants in this study were used to explore the process through which women enact their own understandings of themselves and their realities through a gendered lens. Because womanhood and motherhood as feminised identities were explored through the gendered subjectivities of the participants themselves, this exploration leads to an understanding of gendered structures of power as patriarchal hegemonies that are further described in chapter 3.

Within the context of this study, care work refers to the amalgamation of mental, physical and emotional labour (James, 1992) that women in particular undertake within the contexts of their daily lives. Emotional labour is defined as the effort that an individual expends in managing their own and others' emotions, particularly in dealing with their feelings and outward expressions

(Hochschild, 2009). The addition of care work, including emotional, physical and mental labour, to the paid work that women engage in for their employment is referred to in this study as 'the never-ending shift' (Boncori, 2020). These concepts are explored further in chapter 3.

This study first describes the personal and societal impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on gender inequalities in South Africa, as well as describing the gap in critical research on the relevance and significance of care work. Research questions are identified followed by the aims of this study. The theoretical framework of this research is expanded upon, as located firmly within feminist and critical theory. Synergies between both theories are explored in addition to narrative theory. The theoretical framework is then connected to relational care ethics as the theoretical basis for the research. The literature review explains the key concepts of care work, emotional labour, the never-ending shift as well as patriarchal hegemonies that form the underpinnings of this study.

The methods section details the qualitative research design, as well as sampling and data collection methods followed. Foucauldian narrative method of data analysis is also described, and the procedure of the study is noted followed by a note on reflexivity practiced by the researcher. The data analysis section first expands on the key themes identified through thematic analysis of participant interviews, namely the socioeconomic intersections of emotional labour, the centeredness of care work, and the complexities of choice. Furthermore, aspects of the data are chosen for Foucauldian analysis of micro-linguistic components within discourses. This analysis adds to the way that the concept of motherhood is idealised within discourse, and emerging patriarchal matrices are critically examined.

This study concludes with a discussion on the implications of results, the limitations of the study and ethical considerations. The study concludes with suggestions for future research

Rationale

South African research has largely focused on how the Coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities particularly among women belonging to vulnerable populations (Casale & Posel, 2020), as well as incited disruption of healthcare, increased care responsibilities, a sharp incline in domestic violence and sexual exploitation, in addition to loss of paid work for women (Cousins, 2020).

In addition to broader ramifications, the personal costs of the pandemic to women, and mothers in particular, were also an area of focus in several studies. Some personal accounts of women and working mothers emerged during the pandemic with a focus on navigating multiple roles and responsibilities, revealing the difficulties that accompanied taking on the dual role of full-time mother as well as a paid employee; including anxiety, frustration, guilt and exhaustion, accompanied by mental health challenges and traumatic responses to the pandemic (Guy & Arthur, 2020). Therefore, while global and personal repercussions of the pandemic have been discussed, this study added further to the literature through personal narratives from working mothers, gathered directly through interviews, providing direct accounts.

Critical discourses in South Africa have largely focused on contextual discussions of domestic violence, autobiographical accounts of women, as well as research in pertinent socio-political issues such as sexual health implications of motherhood (Singh & Hamid, 2015), victims of domestic and sexual violence (Boonzaier & de La Rey, 2003), and teenage motherhood (Chohan & Langa, 2011; Naidoo et al., 2019). However, limited research exists on the typical daily experiences of South African women and therefore insight into ordinary working mothers' perceptual realities is limited as they navigate within political, social, and cultural environments of South Africa. This study addressed the lack of research that recognises the gendered structures of power and agency that exist within social reproductions of women's everyday worlds (Elias & Rai, 2019), especially through a decolonised lens that views social reproductions of daily life in South Africa as relevant instead of problematising phenomena in the global south (Dyck, 1990; Segalo & Fine, 2020). Feminist psychology in South Africa has often been employed in pathologizing the experiences of marginalised and vulnerable populations (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018). This study sought to centre the voices of ordinary working mothers instead of purposively selecting women belonging to specific vulnerable populations in an attempt to avoid the pathologizing of South African motherhood in research. Experiences of vulnerability and marginalisation within the lives of South African working mothers were expected to emerge through the interaction of the narrative interview, instead of intentionally self-selecting for experiences of marginalisation. This study aimed to address this gap in research by critically examining the social reproductions of the everyday for working mothers during the pandemic and observing how ethics of care, identities and social and cultural matrices emerged through these narratives, particularly from a South African context.

Interpretivist ethnographic framework has been used to describe and explore experiences of female informal caregivers of people afflicted with HIV in semi-rural South Africa, who subscribed to traditional gender roles to excuse men in their lives from sharing in caregiving, often denying any personal difficulties and consequences they faced as a result of caregiving burdens (Akintola, 2006). Thus, while an interpretivist paradigm allows researchers into the constructed reality of participants, it often shows that women construct their realities in accordance with existing patriarchal power structures. A Foucauldian feminist view was adopted in relation to the topic because the way that hegemonic systems of heteronormativity and patriarchy influence the way participants make meaning from their lives is almost always invisible and socially accepted (Speer, 2002). Thus, a feminist paradigm did not merely reproduce responses, but actively deconstructed and challenged the organisation of their discourse in relation to underlying power structures (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997).

The experiences of working mothers during Covid-19 have been reproduced through personal reflective accounts of researchers themselves engaging in discursive practices while recording their own experiences (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Vohra & Taneja, 2021). As recommended in Adeagbo (2020), this research extended the approaches of these studies further and garnered women's first-hand accounts through in-depth interviews of an extended sample of 10 women, to explore further the implications of being a working mother during the pandemic.

The social significance of care and care-work has never been more crucial than it is now, in a political and global climate that has made the unpaid and unacknowledged tasks of life indispensable to human survival. For far too long, national and international governments have been influenced by neoliberal capitalist motives, which serve to disenfranchise vulnerable populations (Timmins, 2019) and exploit care-work for capitalist gains (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). The pandemic has revealed the shared vulnerability and interdependence of humanity, which is underscored by an ethic of care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Acknowledging the centrality of care allows marginalised issues to emerge and is thus transformative to society and improves lives (Branicki, 2020). The conversation about feminist ethics of care needs to be emphasized to allow countries to adopt policies that are relational at their core (Lynch, 2009) and recognise connection and relationships as the basis for development instead of promoting the neoliberal myth of self-sufficiency (Guy & Arthur, 2020). The social relevance of this research lies in highlighting the

necessity of unpaid care and domestic work that women provide, so it can no longer be ignored or taken advantage of by hegemonies of institutional power (Timmins, 2019). Discourses of motherhood and womanhood give expression to the unacknowledged phenomena of invisible care-work through women's perceptions, making them part of the public foreground (Branicki, 2020; Lynch, 2009).

Research questions

This study therefore addressed the following research questions:

- What are working mothers' experiences of emotional labour during the lockdown of 2020 due to the pandemic?
- How is the never-ending shift managed and prioritised in times of crisis? (emotional, mental, physical and paid labour)
- How do women engage in sensemaking and negotiation of identities within their lived experiences as working mothers?
- How are patriarchal matrices reproduced and/or subverted by working mothers in their constructions of their own experiences?
- How do ethics of care emerge through narratives of working mothers?

In the following sections, I describe the theoretical underpinnings of this research, then follow with a literature review on the key concepts used within this study. I then describe he methodology of the study, followed by the analysis, findings and a brief discussion on the implications of the results.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

This study is firmly placed within the realms of qualitative inquiry as it sought to record and explain experiences of individuals through in-depth data collection methods. Qualitative research aims to develop knowledge about the meaning of human experiences and social worlds (Fossey et al., 2002). The concept of experience is such that the experience being observed and analysed transforms through the simple act of retelling and observation (Davies & Davies, 2007). Thus, the generation of the retelling in itself is a unique experience that can be studied and observed. Within this retelling of an experience, the subject both constructs themselves and their social and conceptual worlds in relation to the researcher, who in turn is bounded by their own experiences and perceptions (Davies & Davies, 2007). As experience is rarely unmediated, this study observed the interview context as the experience to be studied and analysed (Silverman, 1998).

While traditional feminist discourse has emphasised the treatment of women's experiences as a transparent and direct route towards the meaning of those experiences, post-structuralist feminist theory calls into question the absolute acceptance of 'experience' without observing language as a constitutive process that shapes and influences the very experience it conveys (Gavey, 1989). Therefore, a critical perspective highlights the ways in which forms of discourse reproduce and contest hegemonies of power within local, interpersonal and historical contexts, while a narrative approach still integrates the privileging of experience within a critical viewpoint.

This study operates within a framework of feminist, narrative and critical theories. Synergies between feminist and critical theories will be described below, which will then be connected to narrative theory as a foundation for methodology and analysis. Ethics of care as a moral theory will be elaborated as a central thread within the objectives of this research.

Feminist and Critical Theory

This study will be located from a conceptual framework of feminist social constructionist theory. Feminist post-structuralism is defined as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand

existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Gavey, 1989, p. 460). Feminist theory aims to discover and assess the mechanisms of gender systems within societies, often through a lens of women's experiences (Tong, 2001). Feminist theory views gender as a set of social practices instead of a biologically reductionist view that naturalises differences between men and women (Radtke, 2017). Thus, within the context of this study, women are viewed as being biologically female, while their identities and constructions of womanhood and motherhood are viewed as socially practiced instead of being defined by their biological sex.

In accordance with Foucauldian ideas of discourse, language is viewed as the medium for representation of reality within particular times, spaces and contexts, and is believed to reflect hegemonies and dominant discourses situated within specific socio-political settings. These systems of concepts that correspond to common values and meanings are constructed through socio-political practices instead of individual beliefs held in an apolitical vacuum (Gavey, 1989). A post-structuralist feminist lens aims to reveal and deconstruct the ways in which prevailing power structures are represented and resisted within discourses (Radtke, 2017). The subjectivity of language used by individuals to construct their experiences signifies that self-reported experiences are examined as discursive productions and not as reflections of true, unmediated experience.

In critiquing feminist theory, it is often argued that liberal feminism or choice feminism often commodifies feminist language and praxis and co-opts them to reproduce the same patriarchal matrices that feminism opposes. Post-feminism is a form of neoliberal feminism that presents all of women's choices as agentic and inherently empowering, especially when individual women exercise their free will and agency to produce actions that align with reproductions of patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies (Rutherford, 2018). Freedom of choice as empowerment and autonomy for women is usually defended through neo-liberal feminism when women use it to exert their sexualities in a way that gratifies patriarchal norms of sexual objectification of women, as well as capitalist notions of unbridled consumerism in the pursuit of empowerment. Feminist praxis is therefore commodified to benefit existing hegemonies of power (McRobbie, 2004). Liberal feminism reorients capitalist and patriarchal practices into empowerment and achievement for women and presents them as equally valid choices as resistance (Lazar, 2005). This study

problematised the concept of free choice in women's narratives and how choices are constructed and communicated in discourse.

Feminist theory has also been criticised for its emphasis on privileged viewpoints and issues (Grant, 1993). Liberal and second-wave feminism in particular overlook the role that social orders such as capitalism and racism play in propagating inequalities for women as a class (Campbell & Wasco, 2000), insisting on individual empowerment through economic and social advancements (Orloff & Shiff, 2016). Feminist theory has historically been criticised for exclusion and 'othering' of women of colour, often through sexualisation, fetishization as well as naturalisation of subservience to men. This criticism gave rise to Womanist and other forms of feminism which placed emphasis on the struggle of black women and amplifying black voices within feminist discourse (Frenkel, 2008). These concerns can be addressed in part through the lens of intersectionality within feminism, which highlights the different ways that sexism is produced for women belonging to multiple, simultaneous and interconnected social positions (Collins, 2009). This study intended to centre diverse women's voices from South Africa, and to examine the social reproductions of women's daily lives, which are often overlooked in research within the global South.

There are several points of convergence between feminist and critical theory. Both critical and feminist theory are based on revealing and eradicating systemic social and economic inequalities, as well as sifting through language to reveal how capitalist and patriarchal interests have been universalised and naturalised through discourse (Martin, 2003). Critical feminist research has also focused on the orchestrated nature of the willingness that individuals display to participate in the systems of their own oppression (Kandiyoti, 1988). Feminist studies have highlighted the way that false dichotomies between the male and female have been naturalised within academic discourse and in society, devaluing concepts associated with the feminine, such as the emotional-rational concept. In addition, while critical theory deconstructs how the interests of the wealthy have always been promoted and protected, feminist theory reproduces the same for patriarchal hegemonies.

Lack of applicable action plans and mechanisms for systemic change is a common critique of critical and feminist research, which is often restricted to ideological critique. While discursive feminist activism has been acknowledged, it is often upheld as the preliminary phase leading to

subsequent action and not as politically emancipatory in its own right (Clark-Parsons, 2016). This study addressed these concerns through the Foucauldian ethos of critiquing the system as an emancipatory endeavour in itself (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Maina & Kimani, 2019) and of using discourse itself as a form of individual and collective resistance to hegemonic narratives (Ryan et al., 2021). It also seeks to assign value to philosophies traditionally coded as feminine (Martin, 2003), through the centrality of relational care ethics (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

This study applied a combination of narrative and critical methodologies, through a feminist constructionist approach.

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory posits the interview as a discursive context to be studied and considers the researcher and participant as contextually and temporally influenced (Stokoe & Edwards, 2006) . Narratives are defined as "the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time." (Clandinin, 2007, p.40). Narratives are the instruments through which individuals construct their identities, by taking up positionalities and aligning their discourses in accordance with those positions (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008).

Narrative inquiry in its traditional form concerns itself with the knowledge that can be derived within narratives, while acknowledging that narratives are produced through a sociocultural context. Post-structuralism argues that since true and unmediated experience cannot be deciphered by researchers, only the representations of those experiences are valuable for study. While narrative theory focuses on the lives and lived experiences of individuals, post-structuralism places emphasis on broader social discourses that are embedded within the re-telling of an experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). A Foucauldian narrative approach combines the post-structuralist and critical focus on underlying hegemonies of power, while also attending to the individual experience as a unit of analysis.

This study will operate within a framework of Foucauldian narratives, as expanded upon by Maria Tamboukou. Foucauldian narrative theory is "concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are interrelated in the production of narratives" (Squire et al., 2008, p. 15). A Foucauldian approach to narratives suggests that underlying power structures produce practices and conditions that ultimately generate discursive production of narratives from

where truth and knowledge emerge. Therefore, power is seen not as a negative entity but as the core which produces the situation, subject and discourse of the narrative (Tamboukou, 2013). According to this approach, the self and identity are seen as functions of narratives and counter-narratives that are produced in discourse within the hegemonies of power. Critical and narrative methodologies were combined to from a Foucauldian narrative analysis in order to address the existence of multiple truths, contradictions and diverse viewpoints within the data, arising from hegemonies of power that affect individuals differently.

Within a feminist view, narratives operate as practices of self-formation of women, while simultaneously serving as mechanisms of objectification, through which women are 'categorised, distributed and manipulated' (Tamboukou, 2013, p. 109). Narrative theory considers experience, not as an objective truth or reality but a discursive reflection of experience, through which experience, identity and power relations are actively constructed. Identity is socially constructed within narratives as a performance and as a way of negotiating space within a worldview for participants (Andrews et al., 2013). Feminist and narrative theory concur that all knowledge is socially constructed (Radtke, 2017). Thus, instead of claiming to transparently reproduce truth and reality, feminist narrative methodologies can be used to challenge and resist dominant narratives prevalent in society, especially essentialist ideas of gender and gender roles (Smith, 2017). Situated in the patriarchal influences of South African society, women's experiences are considered suppressed discourses, which require a critical layer of analysis for meaningful interpretation (Nicolaides, 2015). This study examines the narrative performance of identities within the social context of an interview and will explore the ways in which personal narratives are influenced by wider sociocultural contexts through a focus on micro-linguistic aspects of discourse (Andrews et al., 2013).

This study was situated within the urban setting of Johannesburg, constituting what might be described as 'backyard research' (Kim, 2016) as participants were recruited through surroundings available to the researcher. Within narrative research in particular, this might pose a Hawthorne effect (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), producing socially desirable responses or causing some participants to be reserved. This was addressed within this study by interviewing participants who were not part of the researcher's social circle but were referred to the researcher through other acquaintances.

A constructivist approach to narrative theory acknowledges the significance of the discourse relationship between the participant and researcher, accounting for the narrative process as a whole, centring the cognitive and dynamic processes that create the narrative along with the content and subject of the discourse (Passalacqua & Pianzola, 2016). Different approaches to narratives centre the content and structure of stories, while others place emphasis on the discursive practices that are involved in creating narratives. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998) suggest an amalgamation of both methods within narrative research, maintaining the significance of both in understanding reality. This study combines both methods and elucidates several themes from the content of the stories that participants told, and then goes on to examine the practices through which meaningful realities of everyday life were established and sustained. While a constructivist approach to narratives may seem to have a broad definition of what qualifies as a narrative, it has the advantage of greater applicability and generalizability for emerging theories in future research (Passalacqua & Pianzola, 2016).

Several tensions exist within narrative theory itself. The view of the self being one of them, it is argued that narratives do not exist separate from identity, and that narrative and identity are synonymous concepts. Other studies argue that it might be deterministic to conflate narrative identity to holistic selfhood (Clandinin, 2007). This study operates from a standpoint of identity being formed and constructed through storytelling, while also acknowledging the cognitive processes and psychic realities that are employed by the individual to build on a facet of their self through storytelling. Therefore, the self is seen as structured and maintained through stories instead of being equated entirely to the narrative (Kim, 2016).

While it is argued that human experience is 'multiple, fragmented, emerging, contradictory, contextual and distributed over time and place' (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, p.175), phenomenological research posits that people construct their identities and selves within a unified and coherent whole. However, the unity and coherence within stories of individuals is an active process that is engaged in by participants, researchers and readers, instead of being an inherent characteristic of the narrative (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry provides the opportunity for researchers and participants to engage in a deeper level of contextual understanding, which reveals often contradictory and fragmented nature of human experience (Nolan et al., 2018). Narrative theory allows the researcher to synthesize these contradictions and engage in a reflexive process that accommodates the

complexity of experiences in working mothers' lives. The reinterpretation of experiences in light of time, contexts, and focal points reveals structures and patterns in storytelling, encompassing the inconsistencies and variabilities of experience into a unified whole through the active process of narration (Kirkman, 2003).

Motherhood has been explored narratively to examine varied experiences of motherhood through diverse lens, such as those of adolescent mothers(Kirkman et al., 2010), infertile women who wished to be mothers (Kirkman, 2003), single mothers (May, 2004), and young mothers' experiences in light of social and community care discourses (Brand et al., 2014). Narrative research has also been used to explore gendered narratives around motherhood (Sevón, 2012), the temporal choices of becoming a mother (Kariman, 2014) and the lived experiences and perceptions of breastfeeding among Australian mothers (Robinson, 2018).

Narrative inquiry allows the similarities and differences to emerge between the canonical master narratives of society and personal narratives constructed by individuals, as well as holding space for contradictions within individual narratives, representing the holistic nature of lived experience. This was illustrated in (Kirkman, 2002), using narrative inquiry in exploring lived experiences of infertile women and adolescent mothers. Adolescent mothers acknowledged the dominant cultural narratives that viewed them as unfit and irresponsible, while actively resisting these narratives and positioning themselves as capable mothers who were performing well within their capacities and circumstances (Kirkman et al., 2010).

In addition, an exploration of single mothers' narratives revealed the ways that dominant cultural and hegemonic narratives are pervasive in the lives of mothers, despite their insistence on not being defined by societal classifications of motherhood (May, 2004). Their narratives construct a counter-normative view of their identities, which were still firmly bound by cultural definitions of motherhood and family. This canonical narrative of intensive motherhood was also reflected in narratives exploring Australian mothers' experiences of breastfeeding (Robinson, 2018), which reflected the struggles of first-time mothers in coming to terms with the physical and emotional difficulties of breastfeeding and in defining themselves through their ability to engage in breastfeeding. The emergence of a 'misshapen motherhood'- an imperfect identity that is emplaced and situated in corporeal women's bodies and in their sociocultural contexts- is a demonstration of the varied multiplicity that narrative research may be able to garner. These varied contexts show

that while dominant narratives can serve to disenfranchise and alienate some mothers, for others, it can form a basis for collective identity formation through which women can find support, solidarity, and a framework of meaning for their storied experiences, such as infertile women finding hope and social support through the collective narratives of other infertile women (Kirkman, 2003).

Indeed, normative cultural narratives themselves may be often contradictory in the modern world, as posited by Sevón (2012), which shows how Finnish mothers were conflicted between the inconsistencies of intensive motherhood narratives and shared parenting narratives. It was only through an active process of narrative reorientation that these mothers constructed a narrative of smooth transformation into parenthood for themselves and their partners, asserting the importance of collaboration and empathy from both mothers and fathers. The focus of narrative research embracing the complexities of the experiences of motherhood was also reflected through the way that Kariman (2014) reported on Finnish women's desires and ambivalence to become mothers and whether the timing of motherhood fit into their preconceived plans.

Thus, narrative research in the context of exploring motherhood allows this study to incorporate and uphold the complexity of motherhood in real life contexts, while acknowledging the agentic role of participants in actively constructing their varied realities. This study recognizes the multiplicity of human experiences, especially in narratives of motherhood, and the dynamic and changing nature of identities and selves while also acknowledging that participants engage in 'integrating, unifying, and synthesizing the disparate elements' of their identities (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, p.175) through a relational and interactional act of accomplishment. This view allows narrative analysis to explore the complex practices through which working mothers organise narratives in order to engage in meaning-making from their experiences.

Ethics of Care

Ethics of care refers to the moral theory that views human dependence and relational aspects of care to be morally significant within human lives. An ethic of care takes into consideration the view that cultivating a culture of caring and promoting the well-being of carers is a central moral concern as care work is vital to human life and progress. In contrast to rationalistic moral theories, emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness are recognised and valued within ethics of care. However, emotions are upheld as expressions of care that require analysis

and assessment, instead of being merely observed and described (Held, 2006). Care ethics as a paradigm is highly reliant on practice and completion, unlike other moral theories which are based on rational discussion of ideas (Raghuram, 2016) . Thus, feminist care ethics make a distinction between 'caring for' and 'caring about', with the latter being a passive sentiment that must ultimately create conditions for care work to occur in order to be effective (Vohra & Taneja, 2021).

The practice and application of care ethics is therefore a function of local and contextual exigencies within sites of care, such as the household. Inevitably, care and care ethics are situated within the interval of power, cultural and social production (Hankivsky, 2014). In a South African context, Ubuntu as a moral and ethical concept is interwoven in communal and societal praxis. Ubuntu, as related to ethics of care posits that every individual is 'radically dependent upon the goodwill and solidarity of others to become who we are' (Benhabib, 2001, p.19). Ubuntu feminism arises from the critique of ubuntu as ignoring the gender realities of South African society and thus advocates for emphasising mutual responsibilities of care between people and communities (Cifor, 2016). The mutually linked nature of human society and existence emphasised by ubuntu feminism highlights the transformative nature of this concept (du Plessis, 2019) , as this does not only apply to vulnerable populations but also to individuals with multiple intersecting identities. Ubuntu feminism advocates for protecting interests of women not as a monolith, but as unique individuals who exercise an interactive free will that is supported through social relatedness (Cornell, 2014). Thus, within the overarching theory of relational ethics, ubuntu feminism embraces 'accountable, relational, respectful transformation' (du Plessis, 2019, p.45) which promotes the interests of women with their unique individuality and varied identities while simultaneously calling for justice as equality. Ubuntu feminism is rooted in local knowledge, heritage and values of South African society (du Plessis, 2019), while also recontextualising the daily context of that society as embedded in patriarchal hegemonies instead of an apolitical stance that views social contexts as gender neutral (Cornell & Marle, 2015)

This study situates care ethics within the context of the developing country of South Africa, bringing to the fore intersections of social identities of race and class as well as gender (Raghuram, 2016). The practice of care is overwhelmingly gendered in the global north, but racial and financial axes of care work in South Africa are often overlooked, for example in the delegation of care work from high income working women to black women belonging to lower socioeconomic classes. A

theoretical framework of care ethics highlights the importance of enduring, interdependent relationships as sites of care through an emphasis on the centrality of care (Branicki, 2020).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will highlight and define the key concepts of care work, 'the never-ending shift' and emotional labour used in this study. This section will then contextualise patriarchal norms within the realities of South African society.

Care Work

The varied and nebulous nature of multitasking in women's unpaid care and domestic work makes it difficult to define in empirical terms (Kalenkoski & Foster, 2010). Irani and Vemireddy (2021) quantified the time spent in childcare as a primary and as a secondary activity, allowing women's involvement in childcare to be recorded even whilst they perform other tasks simultaneously. Results of quantitative regression analysis yielded a much higher score in multitasking for rural women in northern India than was previously estimated. Several quantitative studies have been conducted to explore the complex relationships between myriad factors women face while juggling multiple responsibilities, such as determinants of career success of women in South Africa (Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011), and emotional exhaustion and mental health of working mothers (Greaves et al., 2017). However, quantifying these relationships lack the in-depth insight that qualitative methods can provide into the lives and complexities of participants, which can also produce a rich database for further research.

Care is rendered through practice in relation to others. Many variations exist in the duties which can be defined as care work along with the sites at which care work occurs, based on various socioeconomic factors and psychosocial conditions that necessitate the care work. Some factors which affect these tasks are who pays for care work, how it is regulated, what relationships exist between the carers and individuals who are cared for, the level of dependency as well as individual factors involved. The organisation and mediation of this care work is influenced by the historical and institutional situations that exist within the site of care. In addition to the differences in tasks and duties, the rubric of care work itself differs based on political and cultural contexts (Raghuram, 2016). The responsibility of care work is seen as belonging to the state in Scandinavian countries, while in a developing nation like South Africa, care work is viewed as primarily a responsibility of familial and communal circles. The advent of a policy shift towards developmental social

welfare in South Africa diminished institutional care for the elderly, disabled, and children with special needs and gave way to increasing care responsibilities of household members, mostly women (Akintola, 2006; Lund, 2010), thus shifting the care burden from the state to communities and household settings (Colvin & Swartz, 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to light the disparity in division of labour in most dual-income households, where working mothers took up the mantle of managing household tasks, online education for children and remote working in addition to their regular responsibilities (Parry & Gordon, 2020). The pandemic dismantled the fragile idea of separation between the spheres of work and home for mothers with careers by highlighting the precarious balance of multitasking that mothers have to engage in to embody their multiple roles (Whiley et al., 2021). It exacerbated existing structural inequalities such as time spent on unpaid childcare and domestic tasks as well as socioeconomic imbalances (Hertz et al., 2020). The gendered impact of Covid-19 was evident through t-tests of structured surveys examining paid and unpaid labour, and satisfaction of Australian dual-income couples during the pandemic, which found that women were taking on a higher share of unpaid work and were more dissatisfied with their time and division of labour than men (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Women's employment reduced by 22% compared to a 10% decline in men's employment in South Africa. There was a significant gap between men and women's working hours, with women's paid work hours being reduced by 35%, compared to 26% decrease in men's working hours. Women accounted for two-thirds of job losses in the lockdown period between February and April 2020, particularly women belonging to vulnerable populations (Casale & Posel, 2020). 73% of South African women reported spending more time in childcare and unpaid work than men (Casale & Posel, 2020).

Girls were more likely than boys to be redirected towards care-related tasks and had less time, funds and resources allocated to them for online schooling and distance learning than boys in the same household. As more women globally are involved in the informal sector of work, they were excluded from formalised employee benefits and protections such as paid leave and healthcare during the pandemic. Multiple care responsibilities led to reduction in paid working time and permanent departure from the workforce for women around the world. A sharp incline in the severity and frequency of domestic violence against women was observed across multiple countries, as well as an increase in sexual exploitation (Deckman et al., 2020).

The unique conditions of the pandemic and the necessitated blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries between paid and care work (Craig & Churchill, 2021) has emphasised the futility of neoliberal capitalist narratives of 'having it all' for many women (Whiley et al., 2021). Conversely, care work has been rendered explicitly indispensable, visible, culturally important and socially valuable (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In its aftermath, mothers have emerged as front liners during the pandemic of 2020 (Adeagbo, 2020).

The Never-ending Shift

Unpaid domestic and care work is essential to familial well-being through the nurturing of healthy children into functioning individuals, as well as for the economic growth of society (Maina & Kimani, 2019). More than 75% of this vital unpaid care work is performed by women globally, while in Africa the onus of unpaid care and domestic work falls on women between the ages of 15 and 54. Women in the modern world are disproportionately assigned unpaid care and domestic work, as well as bearing their own career responsibilities, especially after parenthood (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Park et al., 2008; Steiner et al., 2019). Thus, the same care and domestic work that is essential for societal and economic well-being remains denigrated, invisible and unrecognised through its feminisation (Vohra & Taneja, 2021).

Women continue to excessively bear the responsibility of not only physical tasks of parenting and domestic duties, but also the planning, organising and management of schedules, appointments and virtually all family matters, even if they are breadwinners and contribute to family income (Lynch, 2009). According to a survey on American families (Wang et al., 2017), this creates an insurmountable mental load for 86% of working women while 52% are likely to burn out from the stress of these responsibilities. Furthermore, women are more likely to sacrifice their leisure time in dual-income households with one or more preschool children than men when pressured for time (Kay, 1998).

The transition into parenthood further increases this divide. Park et al. (2008) found that women were expected to engage in more childcare-related tasks than men, regardless of hours worked. The advent of parenthood in heterosexual relationships is considered a critical moment in the development of inequality in time spent on domestic labour between men and women (Baxter et al., 2008). Within the context of this study, care work refers to the amalgamation of mental, physical and emotional labour (James, 1992) that women in particular undertake within the

contexts of their daily lives. The addition of domestic responsibilities and life commitments to the paid work that women engage in is referred to in this study as 'the never-ending shift' (Boncori, 2020).

Emotional Labour

Emotional labour is defined as the effort that an individual expends in managing their own and others' emotions, particularly in dealing with their own inner feelings and outward expressions. Women are normatively assigned the tasks of emotional caregiving while simultaneously being denigrated for showing emotionality and being dismissed as irrational for having feelings of their own (Abstract, 1989). The concept of emotional labour is underpinned by Marxist as well as feminist critical theory (Riley & Weiss, 2016), as expectations of emotion work from employees and individuals are influenced by class and gender (Vincent & Braun, 2013).

Emotional labour often involves enhancing, altering, or diminishing one's emotions, whether to mask one's own emotional expression or to induce an emotional state in others (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting and deep acting are two strategies of emotional labour that may be applied separately or in conjunction, during different circumstances. Surface acting involves simulation of required emotions, while deep acting refers to efforts to truly feel an emotion from within (Fouquereau et al., 2019). Different forms of emotional labour are associated both with personal accomplishment and fatigue (Montgomery et al., 2005), depending on the social context of enacting the emotional labour, with deep acting having a higher association with feelings of satisfaction, especially in jobs requiring care work, such as teaching and nursing (Fouquereau et al., 2019). This implies that attempting to alter one's actual feelings in order to perform emotional labour may be more rewarding than a conscious performance of simply modifying the external emotional expression. This was found to be compounded within care work jobs, pointing towards the merit of care ethics within emotional labour. Emotional labour can be a means for personal fulfilment and achievement if enacted within certain contexts that centre relational care ethics.

While others actively benefit from the emotional labour of women, this labour carries a high cost to the women themselves due to the capitalist systems that control and profit off of this labour (Colley, 2006). The consequences of the subsequent dissonance between performative emotions and women's internal realities includes compassion fatigue, stress and burnout (Elliott, 2017). Emotional labour is principally invisible due to its naturalisation as innate to women (Hochschild,

2009), as well as because it is unpaid and unquantified work, and most often occurs in the private sphere of domestic life (Abstract, 1989). Research suggests that the distribution of emotional work, which maintains people's emotional needs and well-being in relationships, is still gendered, with women feeling accountable for emotional care in heterosexual relationships as well as those associated with motherhood (Unkel & Leonardo, 2018). This imbalance in emotional labour poses a significant health risk to women through the dismissal of women's emotional needs as excessive, thus inflicting psychological distress (Strazdins & Broom, 2004).

Moreover, emotional labour is undertaken within flawed systems of care, which causes individuals to either detach themselves from the undervalued and unacknowledged contexts of their work, or to assume the failures of the systems upon themselves, resulting in distress (Hochschild, 2009). A Marxist critique of emotional labour postulates that emotional labour becomes alienating and unrewarding when it is commodified and controlled by capitalist hegemonies (Vincent & Braun, 2013), while others argue that emotional labour can be autonomous and fulfilling in some cases, depending on the nature of the work (Bolton, 2009).

Women's emotional labour is typically reproduced within their roles of mothers at home, where their emotion work is the foundation for the social regulation of the feelings of their children and partners (Abstract, 1989). During the pandemic, mothers were designated with the undervalued and unrecognised task of emotional labour, which constitutes management of emotions of others, not only in the home sphere but also in workplace (Boncori, 2020; Power, 2020). This study explores the specific form of emotional labour that working mothers engaged in within their simultaneous and conflicting roles that they embodied during the lockdown. Syed et al. (2005) explored the specific emotional labour involved in embodying multiple identities within a conflicting sociocultural context, through a study on the performances of modesty in modern organisations located in Islamic countries. A description of a contextual emotional labour emerges through the complexities of Muslim women's experiences, who attempt to embody the religious and cultural norms of modesty, while also grappling with the emotional demands of modern multinational work organisations. The emotional tension that arises from the negotiation of these conflicting norms points towards a contextually embedded emotional labour that is internally oriented instead of attempting to alter emotional states in others.

The commodification of emotional labour in workplaces has been observed during the Covid-19 pandemic as being performed by paramedics (Hayes et al., 2020), teachers (Sobel & Evans, 2020), and nurses (Alharbi et al., 2019). However, the emotional work that is performed by mothers at home is as necessary as the emotional regulation required at the frontline of patient care in addition to being equally rooted in capitalist gains (Abstract, 1989). This study will examine the significance of emotional labour being provided by working mothers at workplaces and homes through discursive practices that women engage in while constructing their experiences of the pandemic.

Patriarchy in South African Context

Patriarchy is simply defined as "a social and ideological construct which considers men (who are the patriarchs) as superior to women. Patriarchy imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women" (Rawat, 2014, p.43). However, patriarchy is far more than merely an individual belief in the superiority of men over women. It is a deeply entrenched system of 'male dominated, male-identified and male-centered' (Mansfield, 2015, p.37) ideas, behaviours, social models, and values that people living in the world participate in and inadvertently perpetuate. Patriarchal matrices can therefore be defined as "a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film" (Mansfield, 2015, p.37). Patriarchy, as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1989, p.20), can be subcategorised into six interconnected but autonomous structures, which are 'emergent properties of practices' (p. 20), namely; patriarchal relations in the home, within paid work, state, male violence, sexuality and in cultural institutions (Walby, 1989, p.20). These structures constitute the private and public forms of patriarchal norms that women contend with.

South African society is deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms and structures due to several factors such as traditional leaders and organisations who advocate for a bounded view of culture, which relegate women to reproductive and sexual roles in society and present customs and culture as unrestrained from the constitutional law of the country (Albertyn, 2009). Within a historical context, this hegemony of patriarchal power was maintained through the intersection of colonialism with indigenous male leaders, who refused to recognise women in authority despite

tribal customs. In a contemporary context, the concept of culture is often leveraged to coerce women into compliance with patriarchal norms. As a whole, South African cultural formations contain ambiguities that reflect the simultaneous empowerment and marginalisation of South African women (Frenkel, 2008). Patriarchal practice in South African communities is characterised by lack of agency for women in reproductive and life decisions, marginalisation from sources of emancipation like education and financial independence, and exclusion from political and economic spheres of society (Mudau & Obadire, 2017).

Throughout its contentious history, women in South Africa from different economic and racial backgrounds have faced myriad socio-political oppressions, but patriarchal subjugation has been the unifying thread that has shaped women's lives across many diverse axes of social, cultural, racial, and political divisions. Even though gendered violence has been represented in mainstream media and academia as synonymous with poverty and black populations, gender inequality is woven into the fabric of South African society across all levels of social, racial and economic divides in varying ways (Helman & Ratele, 2016). While women's issues have taken enormous strides in the post-apartheid era, violence against women and gendered discrimination also continues to grow (Frenkel, 2008).

However, it would be equally fallacious to assume a westernised and neoliberal ethos is not ingrained in the same patriarchal norms, only that these norms manifest in different ways in typically westernised societies. A mindful approach is needed to examine patriarchal norms within multicultural societies like South Africa. This approach would recognise culture as dynamic and amenable to influences, acknowledge the public and private spheres as sites of social reproductions of power relations, and would consider individual choices as a function of community, socio-political environment and personal factors (Albertyn, 2009).

In any society with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, women strategize and negotiate with the underlying hierarchies of power to acquire patriarchal power for themselves, thereby often becoming complicit in and perpetuating the very same systems of oppression that subjugated them in the first place. This patriarchal bargain can be an active or passive method of resistance for women and can take the form of unquestioning compliance to patriarchal rules, adoption of interpersonal strategies to gain power over other women or even vocal resistance to feminist

philosophies. Regardless of the form it takes, this patriarchal bargain leaves underlying patriarchal matrices intact and unchanged (Kandiyoti, 1988).

The family is the fundamental site where constructions of gender, gender equality, femininity and masculinity are enacted and formed, and where they can be reproduced and resisted through social and discursive practices (Helman & Ratele, 2016). Social reproduction refers to 'production and reproduction of a differentiated labour force and the cultural forms and practices that at once maintain these differences and make them common sense' (Katz, 2017, p.1). Praxis of social reproduction replicate, modify and develop existing inequalities in ways that compound racial, economic, and gendered forms of oppression. The specific ways in which social reproduction unfolds is contingent on geographical, historical, political, and economic contexts. The household, family and workplace are exigencies of social reproduction where global inequalities can be minutely performed, reproduced, and resisted in many ways. Accepted practices within homes and families can reproduce unequal gender hierarchies, which lead to prevalence of patriarchal power in wider society as well. Narrative studies involving men and their constructions of fatherhood have shown an emergence of more equal power relations within South African homes (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Ratele et al., 2012), but similar research on South African women and their constructions of motherhood within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic are limited (Kingsley et al., 2021; Molek & Bellizzi, 2022). This study will examine closely the patriarchal bargains that women engage in knowingly and unknowingly, explicitly and covertly through the discourses they use when describing their experiences of the pandemic within the context of their families.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Research Design

This research was a cross-sectional, qualitative study, employing aspects of feminist narrative research. Qualitative research in itself is significant for feminist epistemology as it allows marginalized issues to emerge, while empiricism has been historically rooted within furthering patriarchal hegemonies (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Narrative methodology is also a significant component of post-structuralist feminist research as minorities and disenfranchised groups, including women belonging to certain races and socioeconomic strata, are often not given autonomy to construct their own narratives, while dominating sociocultural narratives act against their interests (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Cohort of Participants

The cohort of participants for this research comprised of 10 working mothers from Johannesburg, as aligned with the aims of the study. Johannesburg was selected as the research site due to the feasibility of contacting participants and conducting interviews in the researcher's place of residence. 10 participants were considered a sufficient sample for this research as in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, producing extensive data for qualitative analysis and leading to thorough insights and analysis (Sandelowski, 1995). The sample of 10 participants was considered sufficient to fulfil the aims of this study as it provided adequate information power through in-depth interviews that explored multiple aspects of participants' stories (Malterud et al., 2016).

Participants were considered 'working mothers' if they fulfilled the following criteria: the women had one or more children under the age of 12 in the year 2020 and were employed during the pandemic and lockdown of 2020 since no less than 2 years. Biological, adoptive and stepmothers would have been considered as fitting for the research if they were one of the primary caregivers for the child and lived with them on a regular basis. However, the sample consisted of biological mothers entirely, as determined through demographic questions during the interview.

The age of 12 was considered as a cut-off point because according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children begin to grasp logical and tangible concepts between the ages of 7 and 11 years, transitioning towards the formal operational stage by the age of 12, depending on cultural and social variations (Babakr et al., 2019). When children enter the formal operational phase, they acquire higher level skills and develop inductive reasoning (Lefa, 2014), thus becoming more independent with their tasks and cognitive processes while relying less on parental figures for assistance. It follows that at the age of 12, children would be less dependent on mothers, who would then experience the 'never-ending shift' to a lesser extent than mothers with younger children, who would be in acute stages of reliance on mothers in particular.

The sample was procured purposively due to the small number of participants and the specific criteria required for the research (Flick, 2018). Non-random convenience sampling was conducted. Convenience sampling refers to the practice of locating suitable participants in proximity for the researcher and selecting the participants who agree to participate first until the planned sample size is achieved. This is a non-random technique as the possibility of selection for participation was not equal for all possible participants (Schreier, 2018).

Five suitable participants were initially contacted through schools and workplaces of the researcher's acquaintances. The rest of the five participants were subsequently procured through snowballing, whereby selected participants referred subsequent participants to the researcher (Schreier, 2018). Participants were first approached through word of mouth. They were informed about the nature of the study and invited to participate. They were then emailed the details of the study if they agreed to participate. All potential participants approached agreed to participate in the study.

Attempts were made to diversify the sample as much as possible in terms of race, age, socioeconomic status and other individual factors, to obtain a wide range of views and experiences (Seale et al., 2004) and to arrive at conclusions that can have broader relevance (Schreier, 2018). The sample consisted of 4 Indian women, 3 Black women, 2 white women and 1 coloured woman, thus representing all four of the main racial groups located in Johannesburg (*Johannesburg Population 2021 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)*). Participants belonged to a number of different occupations as seen in Table 1, with four women being single mothers and six being married and cohabiting with spouses. Their ages ranged from 26 to 42. The criteria for the sample did not

specify a certain age range but the requirements of having children under 12 years old self-selected the age range of late twenties to early forties on average. The sample was homogenous in terms of heteronormativity and biologically female participants due to the limited reach of the researcher in terms of procuring participants. Although participants were not asked to disclose their economic details, participants belonging to different social and economic backgrounds were gathered, as evident through occupations and other details within their narrations.

Name	**Age (in years)**	**Race**	**Highest Level of Education Completed**	**Occupation**	**Number of Children**	**Ages (in years) of Children in 2021**	**Marital Status**
Cindy	42	White	Graduate	Primary teacher	2	8 11	Married
Karen	41	Coloured	Graduate	Compliance officer in a bank	2	9 13	Single
Laura	37	Black	Undergraduate	Banker and small business owner	2	2 7	Married
Maria	43	Indian	Postgraduate	Head of compliance in a bank	2	9 13	Single
Parisa	42	Indian	Graduate	Corporate and investment banker	1	5	Single
Samina	28	Indian	Postgraduate	Lecturer and economic analyst	1	2	Married

Shanti	38	Indian	Postgraduate	Orthodontist	2	6 11	Married
Susan	37	White	Postgraduate	Occupational therapist	3	2 5 9	Married
Thato	26	Black	Undergraduate	Bank administrator	2	3 6	Married
Ziwa	35	Black	Secondary Education	Cleaner	2	6 10	Single

Table 1: Demographic Details of Participants

Purposive non-random sampling led to the sample comprising of urban working mothers living in Johannesburg, who could communicate in English.

Data Collection

Interviews are known to have substantial linguistic interface and is made up of a large number of observations in relation to the people engaged in conversation (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Semi structured narrative interviews were conducted in this study to elicit open-ended and in-depth responses in accordance with the qualitative aims of the research (Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews were used instead of free-association interviews as the narrative interview is considered a collaborative process of meaning making between the researcher and participant (Andrews et al., 2013). Semi-structured and unstructured questions were asked in combination to prompt deeper inquiry into the narratives of the participant. Space was held to ask narrative-generating questions as per the situation (Rosenthal, 2021).

It is argued that because interviews are mediated and moderated by the researcher, this method of data collection prevents the discourse providing unmediated data, which can enable the exploration of experience in its purest state (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). This study addresses this concern by applying a Foucauldian narrative analysis, which considers the interview itself as an interactional context to be examined, since the interview is the only version of experience that the researcher

has access to in the experiences of the participant (Wilkinson, 2000). The interview itself is the discursive context that is explored through the vicissitudes of language in this study, as this study sought to explore narratives that represented the experience, instead of validating the experience itself.

Participants selected were contacted through email. They were sent information about the nature and aims of the research (Appendix B), as well as a consent form (Appendix C), and demographic information form to fill prior to the interview. The demographic information form was included to give the researcher an idea of relevant background of the participant to refer to, should something be unclear during the course of the interview, as well as to save time during the interactive part of the interview. However, this demographic form was subsequently excluded from the study as most participants found it difficult to complete and submit. Relevant questions from the demographic forms, such as ages of children and marital status were then asked during the interview. Signed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their interviews.

Participants were asked to select the mode of interview, which was either in person or through online video call. Three participants chose in-person interviews, in which case the researcher met them at locations of their choice. Susan was interviewed at a coffee shop located inside the school housing her occupational therapy practice. Ziwa was interviewed in a conference room inside her place of employment, while Thato preferred to be interviewed in her personal office inside the bank where she is employed. The rest of the participants were interviewed through online video conferencing apps, such as Zoom and Google Meet, based on their convenience.

All Covid-19 protocols were met while conducting face-to-face interviews. The researcher and participants were always seated at least 4 feet apart and sanitisation was followed. The researcher wore a mask until permission was sought from the participant to remove it. All three participants who were interviewed in person had received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccination at the time of the interview. Interviews were conducted in closed rooms to allow for private conversation.

Interviews were recorded in the researcher's phone and transferred to a personal private computer. Interviews were then closely transcribed and recorded in the computer. Names of participants, their children and other identifying details such as places of employment were changed during transcription.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained in written form from all participants. Participants were informed of the nature, duration and aims of the study prior to participation. Participants were not offered incentives to participate and were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. They were informed that should they withdraw from the study, their recording and transcripts would be immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality was maintained by conducting online interviews through a private video conference. The interview was conducted in a closed, private room by the researcher and headphones were used to protect the privacy of the participant. In case of the three in-person interviews, semi-private locations of the participants' choice were used. It was made sure that the conversations were private and could not be overheard.

Anonymity was ensured through changing names and details of participants on the research report, as well as keeping anonymised records of all data. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and all identifying names and details were changed. Voice recordings and transcriptions were stored in a password protected mobile phone and laptop, which was accessible to only the researcher. The original audio is stored with the researcher until the research report is generated and will be deleted afterwards. The anonymised transcripts will be hosted on a Wits University database as part of the appendices of the research report.

In the case of face-to-face interviews, all Covid-19 prevention protocols were followed, as instructed by governmental regulations. Participant and researcher were at least 4 feet apart and the researcher wore a face mask at all times until permission was sought to remove it from the participant. In addition, Frequent sanitisation of hands, instruments and space was done.

There was a potential risk for some emotional distress due to the sensitive nature of some questions and prompts. Participants were allowed to avoid any questions that might have them uncomfortable. In case of any emotional or mental trauma, participants were referred to the free of charge Emthonjeni counselling service at Wits. They were also provided contact details for LifeLine telephonic counselling services in the participant information sheet.

Ethical considerations pertaining to this study were reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical).

Data Analysis

A constructionist approach to narrative analysis was applied to analyse the data collected. Narrative analysis focuses on the function of stories in discourses and how people organise and make meaning out of their experiences through the use of stories. In addition to recognising the personal significance of stories as an expression of individuals' internal states (Squire et al., 2008), a constructionist approach of narrative analysis aims to explore intricacies of social and power relations that manifest through multiple levels of the narrative (Flick, 2014). The socially oriented constructionist approach is concerned with the micro-linguistic aspects of the narrative to reveal interpersonal, social and cultural relations that emerge from the discourse. A Foucauldian approach to narrative analysis views power as multiple, dynamic, relational and embedded within language itself (Tamboukou, 2013). Therefore, the narrative analysis in this study examined excerpts produced by participants for eruptions of resistance to or compliance with existing hegemonies of power.

The transcribed interviews were thematically analysed in accordance with the research questions. Themes were extracted in terms of experiences of emotional labour, the never-ending shift, identities that emerged during the interview, and examples of patriarchal matrices as well as ethics of care emerging through the stories. Key themes of emerging narratives were identified from the thematic analysis, which described the common threads within stories told by women. These principal commonalities that described the narratives were the socioeconomic intersections of emotional labour, centred care-work and the complexities of choice.

Coding Process

Participant interviews were thoroughly read and coded for emerging themes from the data. Two examples of the codes that were initially identified are presented in Table 2.

Excerpt	Codes Identified
Thato: It means no time for myself. It means having to always have my eyes open, because with kids, you never know where they are, what they doing so you need to watch them all	Sacrifice of time Vigilance required Equating life/purpose with motherhood Defining actions in terms of effect on children

the time. So I- it, it actually means that my life is now them. They're my life. So whatever they do, it affects me. Whatever I do, it affects them. So I try not to do much so it doesn't affect them. So yeah, that's what it means to me	Valuing motherhood over 'working' Motherhood emerging as oppositional with other aspects and identities Self-sacrifice
Thato: I have to, financially but I would prefer being at home. I would love (laughing) to be at home if I could afford it. I would love to- because spending time with them I think it's more important to me than working, honestly.	Self- sacrifice Emotional prioritisation of motherhood role over financial needs Identity of motherhood in opposition to employee
Ziwa: Yeah, I did like, uh, they were going to school twice a week, I couldn't prepare them to go to school, according to my- their laundry, you know, asking people and people like 'ah, I'll do it on Friday' and Friday it's not done. So some of the things you can't rely on people, you need to do things your way. As much as they would say, isolate, you would. But after three days, you can't. Things won't happen if you don't do it. So you need to stand up and say, OK, I'll do, I'll wear the mask. I'll, you know, I'll do the laundry, I'll take them to school and do this. I'll do that. So, yeah, you might feel overwhelmed (l.220-225)	Prioritised care-work Mental load (planning, organising) Lack of choice Unavailability of help Futility of complaining/ feeling unhappy Prioritised care-work over own health Emotional work of asking others to help Overwhelmed feelings

Table 2: Example of Coding Process

The codes that emerged from the data indicated a number of overarching themes that would describe the narratives of participants. These themes were first identified as presented in Figure 3.

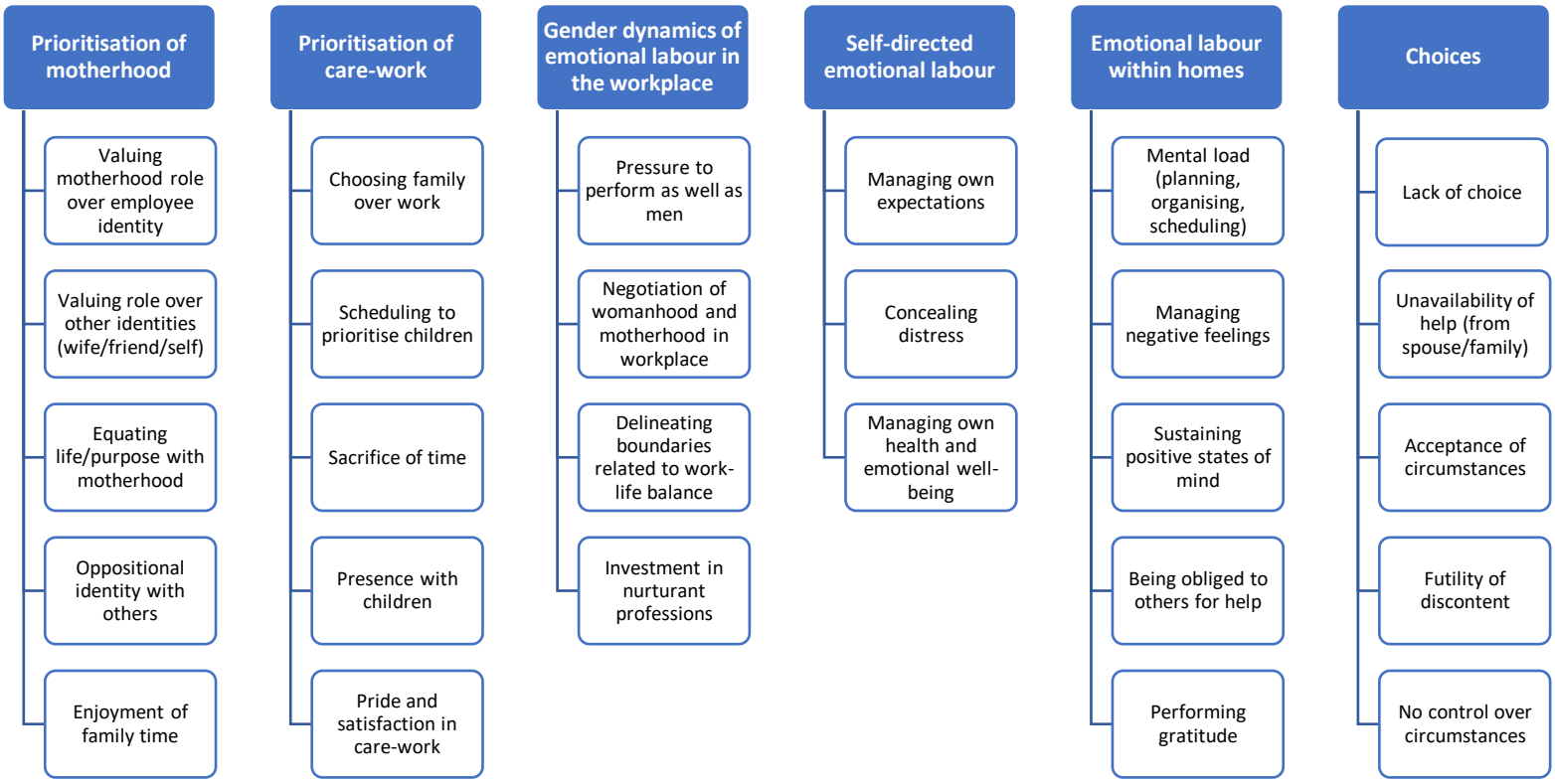


Figure 3: Preliminary Themes Identified

The themes identified in the initial coding process were further categorised and collated according to the research questions addressed in the study It was observed that participants valued their roles as mothers within the framework of the care they could provide to their children and families, whether through physical labour or emotional connection. Due to similarities in the ways that participants prioritised their roles as caregivers and mothers, these themes were collapsed into a key theme that was labelled 'Centered Care-work'. The multiple dimensions of emotional labour were collected into one key category, encompassing the social, gendered and financial intersections of the kinds of emotional labour participants performed in their homes and workplaces. Discourses of choice formed a key category on its own within the data and its subthemes were refined in the second step of the coding process. The key themes emerging from the narratives and their subthemes are presented below in Figure 4.

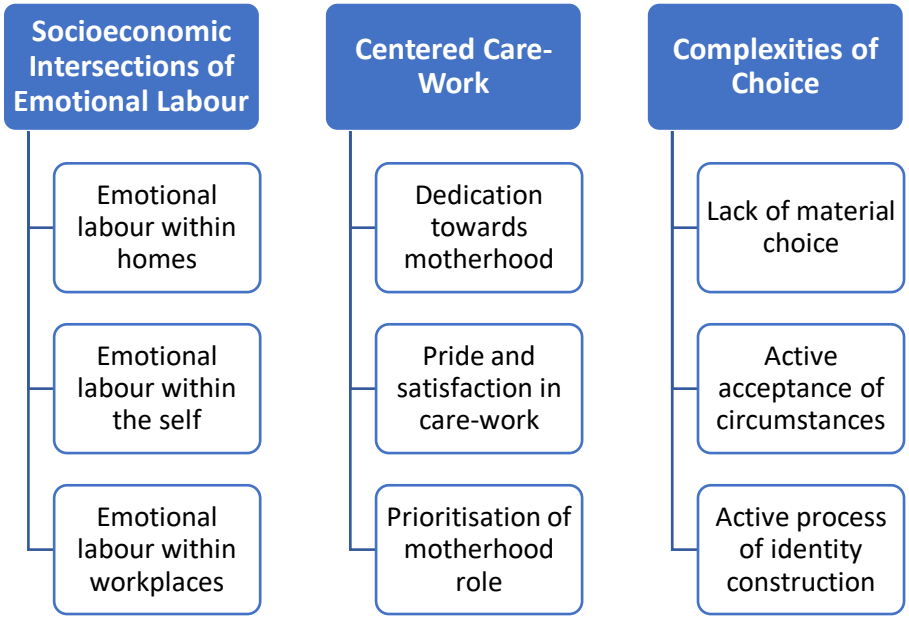


Figure 4: Key Themes

Narrative segments were selected from the interviews conducted with participants that aligned with the overarching moments of the narratives, and the stories within those segments were considered as units of the analysis. A segment is defined as a move, in the telling of a story (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008) or as a self-contained episode. These segments were then analysed using categorical-form and a critical perspective (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). The categorical-form perspective examines the linguistic features and discursive complexity of a particular segment, theme or story and explores how those linguistic features serve the purpose of the narrative. For the purpose of this study, features such as participants' use of diction, tonal changes, adverbs, mental verbs, tenses, use of active and passive voice, intensifiers, disruptions and repetitions, as well as others (Lieblich et al., 2021) were considered and analysed. The positioning of the researcher was considered in the co-construction of the narrative with the participant. The implicit influence of the researchers' presence and multiple aspects of identity was taken into account when analysing discourse. Examples of this analysis are demonstrated in chapter 5 under the section 'Discursive Readings of Thematic Categories'.

Procedure

Once ethical clearance was obtained, participants were selected purposively. Potential participants were approached verbally by informing them of the nature of the study. If they agreed to

participate, they were emailed the participant information sheet, consent form and demographic information form. All participants approached agreed to participate. Participants were asked to select the mode of interview, either through online video conference or face to face interview. In the case of online interviews, a Google Meet or Zoom link was sent by the researcher at an agreed upon time and date. In case of in-person interviews, the interview location was decided by the participant. The interview was conducted according to the interview schedule and was recorded using the voice recorder application on the researcher's phone. The interviews recorded was transcribed onto a password-protected laptop. Thematic analysis was conducted from the data collected. Key themes of the narrative were identified through thematic analysis. Relevant excerpts were selected in accordance with the research questions of the study for the Foucauldian component of the analysis. The selected excerpts were annotated using Gail Jefferson's system of transcriptional notation (Antaki et al., 2003), which is a conversational analysis code used to identify speech patterns (Appendix D). These segments were further deconstructed into units of discourse. The narratives were examined in accordance with multiple levels of context; firstly, within the context of the research process, secondly within the context of personal and interpersonal circumstances of the participant and thirdly within the broader sociocultural and historical context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The micro-linguistic complexities in the discourses were used to determine the functions they serve in constructing experiences, identities, and perceptions of the participants. These segments were analysed using categorical-form and a critical perspective (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008) to reveal existing power structures that the narratives and subjects are constructed within. Results of the analysis were written and formulated into a research report.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be defined simplistically as 'an explicit evaluation of the self' (Shaw, 2010, p.4). It refers to a process of introspection by a researcher that is undertaken during qualitative research and refers to an examination and exploration of the contextual realities stemming from the researcher and the broader social, political, and historical contexts around them. Within qualitative research, the process of reflexivity engages in the exploration of the processes of knowledge production and the way that these processes are influenced by the researcher and their contexts (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007) . More clearly defined, reflexivity is 'a form of critical thinking which

aims to articulate the contexts that shape the processes of doing research and subsequently the knowledge produced' (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020, p.2).

The process of reflexivity engages with the researcher's positionality, contextual understandings, and bias. It seeks to make apparent the interpretive lens of the researcher through a nuanced view of the ways that the researcher influences the research process (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). It allows the researcher to contextualise their voice in the retelling of their participants' narratives, to clarify their aims and justifications and to promote a process of ongoing relational inquiry that investigates the role of the researcher in being part of a narrative retelling (Dubnewick et al., 2018).

This section examines some of my positionalities and contexts as a researcher that influenced the research process of this study.

I am a 28-year-old cisgender woman, a mother of two children under 6 years at the time this study was conducted, a Muslim, and a Pakistani expatriate. I identify as a feminist with a focus on intersectionality and leftism. As a self-identified 'Muslim feminist' raised in Pakistan, I have a keen interest in how religious, cultural, and social identities are often used to create systems of oppression against women which are naturalized within individual choices through discourse. My beliefs shaped the research questions pertaining to experiences of women, especially with regards to negotiation of identities within those experiences and their alignment with and resistance of patriarchal matrices. As a financially dependent young female growing up in a patriarchal society, underlying patriarchal and capitalist power structures have been defining influences in the directions that my life has moved in as well as the intangible forces shaping the very choices and decisions I make today. An examination of these power structures was necessitated through these experiences to make them evident. My positioning and beliefs not only informed the topic of the study but also the critical and Foucauldian theoretical approaches decided upon.

My personal experiences of the never-ending shift must be prefaced with the acknowledgement of an incredible amount of privilege. I had the privilege of live-in domestic help, the privilege of my children having a two-parent household as well as extended family support nearby, the privilege of financial freedom and comfort, and the privileges of space and health. As a master's student during the lockdown, I was grappling with online studies, assignments, projects, and examinations. I made the active choice to prioritise my own academics over my children's academic activities, who were then six and four years old. It was apparently an easy choice because of their young

ages, but one I had to rationalise repeatedly to myself, my husband and to their teachers who often checked in regarding their homework inactivity.

Even though household chores were entirely taken up by my domestic helper, I was responsible for the children's mealtimes and cooking. As my husband was the primary breadwinner of the family, his work was prioritised over mine in an implicit arrangement. I was therefore responsible to keep the children busy, engaged and quiet during my husband's meetings and work commitments. While lack of physical space was a problem described by many participants, the existence of a delineated study room that became my husband's home office allowed him a separation that I was not afforded. This separation existed not only between 'home and 'work' for my husband, but also between 'his work' and 'my work'. While his work was limited to his employment and allowed him to retain a semblance of life before the lockdown, my work was unlimited, incessant, and ongoing. This relates to the arguments presented in this study, which discuss the devaluation of life-making labour and position it as separate from labour that has economic value, despite the reality that the labour of social reproduction makes economic labour possible in the first place. It also made apparent to me, that the choices women make for themselves are often rooted in the same patriarchal and capitalist beliefs that they claim to denounce, such as the prioritisation of my husband's work over mine for myself.

My experiences of emotional labour consisted of managing the children's many emotional states of distress, hyperactivity, excitement, and boredom. In addition, my own guilt of not designing and providing my children with stimulative and productive activities that other mothers were seemingly managing to provide intensified every day. Despite compounded feelings of guilt and inadequacy, I felt an immense relief at disengaging with the rest of the world for a few months and spending time together as a family in our own microcosm- cooking, reading stories and not following any timetables. At that point, even checking up on my own friends felt like emotional labour I could not manage, and so my own social life fell by the wayside.

In retrospect, my own experiences have informed the crux of this research as the complexities of choice emerged in my own experiences. The choices I made were always freely and actively chosen. The care work I engaged in was always a labour of love- for my house, spouse, and children. Yet, my agentic choice does not absolve the patriarchal and capitalist structures of society

for taking advantage of that labour and depending on it despite its devaluation in discourse and master narratives of society.

With regards to this research, my identity as a woman and mother was particularly relevant as it enabled me to have insight into issues faced by mothers during the Coronavirus pandemic. As a mother who dealt with increasing burdens of childcare, online learning, emotional labour and care work along with my responsibilities as a master's student during the lockdown of 2020, I experienced issues congruent to those that were explored in this research. This insight allowed me to ask relevant follow-up questions and probe into aspects of participants' experiences through the lens of a mother.

My position as a mother allowed me to approach the interview context with a deep sense of empathy and understanding for participants. I could see my own experiences in the same stories that I was requesting participants to recount, which made it difficult for me to resist from interjecting the interviews with even more reassurances and support than what I offered. During the interview process, I was faced with the insight that this was perhaps the first time that participants were allowed to introspect over the time and experiences of lockdown, and the first time that most women were thinking actively about the choices they made during lockdown and why. The context of the interview therefore evolved into almost a therapeutic session for some participants, who made confessions and expressed feelings that they had not allowed themselves to divulge before.

I was younger than most of my participants, which served to reduce any power imbalances felt by participants during our interactions, who did not conform their answers to social desirability. Participants were recruited through personal acquaintances. In some cases, this proved to have a social desirability effect especially for participants belonging to the same communities as mine, such as Samina being a Muslim and Shanti being an Indian woman. This was also a limitation as participants may have felt uncomfortable disclosing certain details to a social acquaintance but was an advantage for establishing trust and rapport within a single interaction.

My position as a non-native South African meant several things. Firstly, pop-culture references or contextual information may have been missed during conversations with South African raised participants. Language was also a barrier as I could only communicate in English with participants, which meant that certain expressions or sayings may have been lost in translation. I was born and

raised in the largest metropolis of Pakistan, which despite its population size and cultural diversity, was religiously and racially homogenous. This limited my perspective on the complexities of racial realities and contexts present in South Africa. I addressed this by consulting resources on racial dynamics before the interviews as well as allowing participants to take the lead in talking about race as an intersecting identity with motherhood. As an example, this identity emerged for Ziwa in her experiences as part of a traditional African communal household and revealed how her experiences of emotional labour were informed by her identity as a black African woman embedded in her cultural realities of practicing gratitude.

My feminist viewpoint may have contributed to some expectations I had formed about the results of this study. I expected that working mothers would be involved in performing the majority of household labour and care work even during the lockdown. My own experiences of invisible and normalised sexism as a relatively ordinary middle-income woman in Pakistan and South Africa consisted less of violent forms of oppression and more of subtle and insidious ways of marginalisation that were normalised through discourse. Therefore, I had expected patriarchal matrices to be invisibly sewn into women's narratives rather than explicitly stated, which influenced the choice of a critical theoretical framework and a Foucauldian discourse analysis.

The critical feminist theoretical framework that was employed in this study informed the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis to deconstruct the ways that participants narrated their stories, which was in turn influenced by my own views on productions of gender and power. In the analysis and active deconstruction of participants' micro-linguistic expressions, I was faced with the concern that as an interpreter, I may read further into their expressions than what participants would have intended, and that I may be prioritising my own interpretations over the participants' narratives. This concern was addressed through the practice of narrative theory, the purpose of which is not to validate the objective truth of a narrative, but to hold space for retelling and interpretation. In particular, the practice of feminist narrative research aims to make the personal political (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997), in questioning how well women are served by master narratives prevalent in society and by their own narratives. By critiquing present narratives and seeking narratives that can advantage women, feminist narrative research can achieve the balance between respecting and valuing women's voices while still deconstructing them and asking questions about how and why these narratives are constructed. As reflected in Woodiwiss (2017),

"Asking questions enables us to look beyond hegemonic stories and currently circulating narrative frameworks to explore the background and context to those stories and to open up other possibilities for women's stories and women's storytelling - multiple stories that not only reflect the complex, nuanced and intersecting contexts of women's lives but which do not constrain their possibilities and which might also suggest new opportunities and challenges for further research on women's lives." (p.16)

This chapter described the methods and procedures that were employed to fulfil the aims of this study. The method of narrative analysis produced three key themes which described the narrative turn in participants' experiences of the lockdown. In addition, discourse analysis revealed several ways that hegemonic power structures influenced the narratives of participants. These themes are discussed in the following chapter that describes the findings of this study.

Chapter 5

Findings

In this section, the results of the narrative analysis and Foucauldian analysis will be discussed.

This section first describes the key themes within the narrative turns from the interviews of participants. I will then go on to explore how the construct of motherhood was formed through discourses within the narratives. Then, this analysis will explain the patriarchal matrices that were reproduced and resisted through the discourses in the narratives. Identities that emerged through discourses and narrative turns will be discussed as they emerge in different sections of the analysis.

Narrative Analysis Key Themes

The Socioeconomic Intersections of Emotional Labour

Participants' experiences of emotional labour during the pandemic were congruent with some aspects of emotional labour that were investigated in previous research and diverged from previously studied experiences in some respects. Working mothers displayed surface acting and deep acting aspects of emotional labour in different aspects of their family lives and workplaces (Fouquereau et al., 2019)

In the current study, within the context of the lockdown situation, the emotional labour that participants engaged in was characterised by the mental load of planning, organising and scheduling lives within the household. The majority of participants were solely responsible for taking on this mental load, while only two women either placed this responsibility on their husbands or reported receiving equal support from their spouses. Within the home, emotional labour comprised of managing and showing sensitivity towards feelings of anxiety, restlessness and frustration for children, as well as encouraging optimism, promoting togetherness and sustaining activity.

Ziwa, a black single mother, for example, struggled with the emotional burden of having to accept favours from family members, juggling two children along with her job as a cleaning lady at a financial firm. Her dissatisfaction stemmed from not only being obliged to family members for childcare and admin related tasks, but also from having to resentfully accept a level of competence

that was far below her standards, where the safety and well-being of her children was not always assured to the extent that she would have liked:-

> Researcher: All right. And why would you feel guilty?
>
> Ziwa: Hmm...because you don't want to leave them to ask you why. And if you're not there, no one is going to explain to them. So they would listen to me if I say don't go outside because there's Covid and don't play with other kids. But if I'm not there I feel that they can do whatever. So to feel very sad- I'd call every now and then just to find- 'they're not- they're playing inside' and I knew that they were just lying. But it's something that you cannot change because you need to work at the end of the day (l.129-134)

This shows a struggle between her identities as a mother and as an independent and self-reliant woman who was compelled into a position of having to choose between basic care for her children and her pride. It also points towards an emotional struggle of re-evaluating her own standards of care for her children as well as the emotional stress that accompanied worrying about her children's safety during her working hours. In addition, the emotional labour of having to perform gratitude towards family members while not feeling that gratitude internally also constituted Ziwa's struggle during this difficult situation.

On the other end of the financial spectrum, Parisa, a high-level executive at a national bank, had a live-in domestic helper, an au-pair for schoolwork, as well as both her parents who moved in to look after her 4-year-old daughter during the pandemic. As a single mother, Parisa credited her parents' help and social support for the relatively easier time she had juggling all her responsibilities at work and as a parent. Her experience with emotional labour was characterised by the struggle to maintain and uphold parental authority and delineating boundaries between her role in the parenting unit and her parents'. In a striking similarity with Ziwa, she also expressed the frustration of having to rely on family members for childcare while accepting levels of care that were below her standards as a mother. However, while Ziwa had to perform gratitude and silently accept any help that was provided to her, Parisa's social and financial position enabled her to communicate directly with her parents and her au pair and set clear boundaries regarding her role and authority as a mother. Ziwa, on the other hand, had to rely on free childcare inside the house she lived in with her extended family in her communal home, placing her in a difficult situation with regards to being particular about the level of care she received.

The gendered dynamics of emotional labour were made apparent by women taking charge of not only their own emotional states and mental health, but also taking it upon themselves to regulate and manage their families' by concealing their distress and making efforts to maintain emotional stability for their children and spouses. Thato, for example, revealed breaking down in her car before going home to prevent her children from finding out about the extent of her stress. A number of women also sought professional help to manage their mental health and emotional states. The responsibility of making the decision to seek help from a therapist or psychologist and following through on it seemed to be an entirely sole one that was managed without spousal help or support:-

> Researcher: OK, so did you feel like you had to be the anchor, the strong one?
>
> Thato: It is- it is, always. Always, especially with kids, because they don't know better and by the time they know better, things won't be the same. So putting them through those emotions, it makes no sense to me.
>
> Researcher: So did they notice that you were having anxiety attacks?
>
> Thato: No, no. I always had my breakdowns and things in the car. (l.233-238)

In addition, women also experienced emotional labour at the workplace, highlighting the gender dynamics of the lockdown situation. For most women, temporal and spatial boundaries between different aspects of their lives were blurred, which meant having to juggle emotions and tasks related to workplace and children literally at the same time and in the same space of the same room that the family was in. For working mothers, the lockdown and lack of office space meant that the tangible divide between their identities of mother and employee was broken down. Women were compelled to resolve home schooling and remote work tasks on the same tables and rooms that had become makeshift workspaces for the entire family. The emotional labour between both aspects was characterised by juggling children's issues and feelings along with managing work related tasks, often at the same time:-

> Cindy: My- initially we all started, we all worked together. So we had one big table and everyone had a corner at the table and we were working that way. And then we discovered that's not going to work. (l.25-26)

The convergence of their identities as mothers and employees was a source of complex feelings for participants, even more so for Cindy, who often felt like she was prioritising other children whom she was teaching, over her own. She grappled with feelings of inadequacy over not being able to provide her children with the same undivided attention that she felt she was obligated to provide for her students.

> Cindy: y'know it's different, you know, like being a teacher is very different to being a parent with your own children. They don't listen to you. (l.95-96)

In addition to a clash of identities within the same space, the blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries also meant that the never-ending shift was now intensified as workplaces had no material limitations on the timings they could contact employees.

> Karen: Because when you working from home and your kids are online, they know at work that you're not going to be sitting in traffic or rushing to prepare a meal me or see to your kids. So they tend to schedule meetings from earlier or those that are early birds. And then you get those that start working only at midday, where they wanna have a meeting at 5. So I had a lot of instances like that and it continues. (l.45-49)

In this instance, Karen had to grapple with the emotional labour of dealing with blurred boundaries at work, as she no longer felt there was a 'valid excuse' for her to disengage from her employment responsibilities.

Negotiating the identity of a woman within the workplace in itself was a source of complicated emotional tension for working mothers. On the one hand, Laura felt like she was expected to justify her role as a working woman by exerting herself much more than she did during the pandemic, while other women like Maria grappled with the implications of being the only female executive within the top management of her bank. Regardless of their individual positions, women contended with the emotional negotiation of justifying their presence as a woman and a mother within the workplace, while grappling with an awareness that their male colleagues and fathers in the workplace were unburdened by similar issues. Frequently, schedules would be set by male colleagues and others who did not have children, placing the emotional labour of delineating boundaries within the workplace on working mothers, for example in the case of Karen, who had to block out a lunch hour specifically in order to discourage meetings from taking over her time

with her children. Other participants also expressed negotiating their female identity at workplaces in different ways.

> Maria: And I think for me, I am the only female on Exco and I'm the only female in the top management of our bank. And it's different because, well, for me, the responsibility of my home and my family is mine, you know, whereas for a man, the responsibility of his home, his family is not his. (l.266-267)

> Laura: Yes, I didn't want- yes, I- I prioritised my work, I prioritised my work, because I didn't want them to feel that now that I'm working on home, at home and they can't see us or come to see me, I'm not productive. I'm not how I used to be, you know, when we were going to the office. (l.124-126)

The assumed flexibility of boundaries entailed further emotional labour of boundary setting from participants, while benefiting their employers through increased working hours.

> Parisa: I think it was this, you know, unwritten or unexpressed- what's the word? - expectation that you should be available because you're in a lockdown, where could you possibly be? So you should always be available for work. I must say during the hard lockdown, it was the first time that clients were contacted me- contacting me on Saturday. So it felt like, you know, all kind of boundaries had been dismantled and yeah, you should be available for work (l.101-105)

This shows the flexibility of boundaries that was implicitly expected from women, where workplaces assumed they would always be available for work related tasks, while women grappled with the very same assumptions on the home front. It is interesting to note that men were constructed in these experiences as the transgressors of work-home boundaries, revealing the gender disparity of expected adaptability from employees. The excerpt above from Maria shows the assumptions underlying the expectations of increased working hours, in which women were expected to match the increased productivity of their male counterparts, overlooking the reality that most women took on amplified care work burdens during the time of lockdown. It reveals the invisibility of care work performed by women to the extent that it was not a factor of consideration in work scheduling. It also shows how care work was not a significant factor for male employees in their decision-making. This reveals that male counterparts were not burdened with the extent of overlapping of roles and domains that participants had to grapple with. Moreover, the emotional

labour of bringing this care work burden to the notice of employers and male co-workers also fell to women, in reconstructing the time and labour spent for care related tasks from invisible to explicit. Parisa's experience reveals that clients in addition to employers were also complicit in breaking down of temporal boundaries.

For women like Susan and Cindy, the nature of their employment meant a higher level of emotional investment. As an occupational therapist and business owner, Susan dealt with a high number of calls from parents almost daily, requiring help in managing their own children. Susan often felt compelled to help even without additional payment, especially in the case of children requiring special accommodations. Cindy also had to engage in informal counselling of parents and her own students. As female employees in nurturing and caring roles, they were approached and expected to fulfil more roles requiring emotional management, highlighting the assumptions of emotional labour occurring naturally and effortlessly for women within care-work (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006):-

> Cindy: You know, just making sure that all the teachers are being support for all the other staff members, making sure that everything was OK, being a support for the parents, I think does take on a lot. It takes on you- like, people become emotionally dependent on you as well, so they could build up all these things on top of you and then you have to try and manage that. (l.241-244)

A pervasive example of emotional labour for working mothers was the negotiation between the pressures of their own expectations of themselves and others and the management of their own expectations. This conflict arose in most women's situations where they not only had to contend with lowered standards of care that they were receiving from their spouses and support structures, but also the struggle to let go of those standards and to relinquish control of the circumstances. The unvarying result of this emotional dissonance was the emotional labour of lowering their own standards and handling their own expectations, which again meant an emotional struggle to manage their internal states:-

> Susan: It was just juggling everything, just, just trying to be, yeah, just trying to cope and just, I suppose also trying to be, you know- I would set a lot of expectations on myself as well. You know, you have to be good at this and you have to be good at that. So that's also hard, to drop your expectations and say, well, you can suck at this. That's OK. You need to. I think that was hard. (l.191-194)

Researcher: Absolutely. Would you do anything differently looking back?
Maria: Yeah, maybe not be so…high strung, you know, yeah let it go (l.463-464)
…And then also not to feel so pressured all the time because you kind of create a lot of expectations. You put on- you put it onto yourself, you know, and you realize as well that things will carry on. You know, it may not get that 80 percent that you're used to, but it's OK. (l.468-470)

Laura: And then I also, what I couldn't control, I would not fuss about it, I would not fuss about it. So I got to- the, the, the psychologist who asked me, do you think you can control that? If you can't, then just let it be. So I think that's how I managed everybody by letting them do what they want. I think that gave me peace, you know. (l.203-206)

Participants constructed a narrative of self-pressure to describe their emotional experiences. They constructed their own expectations of themselves as significant hurdles during lockdown. Maria, for example, stated her own expectations and feelings as something she would change about the lockdown in retrospect. She constructs herself as an obstacle for her own peace of mind and strives to alter her emotional experiences to make things easier for herself and her family. Laura found it more useful to enact the emotional labour of adjusting her own expectations regarding the behaviour of her family and spouse instead of expending effort to change those behaviours. She assumed responsibility for this emotional labour by sorting out her feelings in therapy and committing to relinquish control in the aspects of her family life that she was unable to cope with. Similarly, Maria admitted in the above excerpt that she had to accept standards of care that were 80% of what she would manage before the lockdown. In these narratives, these circumstances are constructed as uncontrollable and inevitable by participants, who find it more convenient to change their own feelings and thoughts rather than disrupt the order of their home lives.

These struggles of emotional labour indicate a contextual dimension as described by (Syed et al., 2005), which is characterised not only through the "induction or suppression of feeling in order to sustain the appearance that is appropriate for the social and the organisational contexts" (p.161), but primarily through an internally oriented emotional struggle within the individual. This emotional labour goes beyond deep acting into an internal reconfiguration of participants' own thoughts and feelings. Participants assert their introspections in a way that serves to malign their

own expectations of themselves and others and construct their standards of care as unreasonably high. They perform the emotional labour of shaping their experiences in light of these constructions, while absolving the hegemonic systems that influence the organisation of their lives. This is evident through the active reshaping of the narrative that unfolds as participants recount their experiences.

Centred Care-Work

The stories of the never-ending shift for participants were manifold. For most working mothers who were working full time, the lockdown was a time of juggling child-care, housework, remote work and home schooling. Women grappled with scheduling issues at work, as well as with expectations of constant availability, even before and after working hours. Different women experienced aspects of the never-ending shift in various ways. While some had to prioritise work, others had to put their children and family first, while still others managed to juggle many different aspects of their lives at different times. The financial situations of different women also factored into the tasks they had to perform. Some women outsourced tasks to au pairs and domestic helpers, while other women had to rely on family members for help or cut back on their working hours. Despite professional and mental costs of care work, teachers and others belonging to care work professions still engaged in nurturing even without financial compensation for their time. The aspect of the never-ending shift during lockdown that women struggled with most was the expectation of constant availability by their families and workplaces. The lack of specified childcare and work timings resulted in women having to work even before and after their working hours, while their presence around the house signalled to children that they were available for childcare related tasks.

Women constructed the labour they engaged in as challenging and difficult, incurring personal costs to themselves, their bodies and mental well-being. Thato sacrificed on her own time with her friends, Ziwa remembers being stressed, anxious and angry for the entire time that her children were at home during the hard lockdown, while others like Susan and Karen experienced feelings of isolation and depression. Physical costs of the never-ending shift manifested themselves as insomnia, fatigue, irritability, and having to manage housework while having Covid-19.

The extent to which women dedicated themselves within their roles as mothers was evident through the sheer absurdity expressed towards the question that the researcher asked them about how they were taking care of themselves during this time. While some women reported taking care of themselves through beauty routines and self-care, others avoided the question entirely and still others admitted to not even thinking about themselves and their own needs during lockdown:-

> Researcher: Um, and what were you doing to take care of yourself at that time?
> Susan: oh not very much, I doubt. Um…I'm not good at doing that so, um, yeah, because you couldn't, even for me, just before lockdown (l.264-265)

> Researcher: All right. And what were you doing to take care of yourself at that time?
> Samina: um…in what way?
> Researcher: Did you feel like you needed to take care of yourself emotionally, physically?
> Samina: um…no, no. I didn't think of that much. (l.217-218)

Care work was also seen as inherently in contradiction with employment. Participants often talked about performing care related tasks as in contradiction with what they were supposed to do as employees and constructed work as a disparate component of their lives from motherhood:-

> Parisa: Good question, what does being a working mom mean to me? Um, for me, I think it's about awareness- you know, being aware of and maybe not- maybe this is not the right word, but how much of myself I give to work. This is how much of myself I give not just to being a mother, but to myself as well from a self-care perspective. So I think that's what-you know, a working mom means for me. It's about being aware of different aspects and it's all too easy to give work the um priority the- I'm in a client-facing role where you are at the mercy of client deadlines and you're in a very competitive markets and you've got to deliver and you've got to deliver fast. And so if you're not careful, work and take over. (l.8-15)

Work and motherhood were repeatedly perceived as being at odds with each other, producing a binary that is in line with neoliberal capitalist notions of labour (Taylor, 2004; Wall, 2013).

> Laura: So prepare everybody, around eight o'clock we start the class. I'll open my laptop and start the work but at the same time, I also have to be listening to what's happening there so that she does her work and- and she understands what the teacher is saying on the other side and not playing.

Researcher: Yeah

Laura: So to be like then waking up, popping up at school. Around 10, maybe around 10, it's snack time. But I would wait then go make some snacks or something so then watch, check with the nanny if she's made that. Also my meetings at the same time. Kids, they know that I'm here, they want to start running towards where I am and start screaming, shouting at the wall, crying. Then in the middle of the meeting somebody walks in and you like, you know, it's- it's a hectic day. (l.66-75)

Laura's experience of the never-ending shift clearly shows the blurring of care-work along with paid work through a collapse of the physical and symbolic spaces she occupied during lockdown. Within the symbolic space of Laura's work commitments, her children also felt entitled to her time because of her physical presence within the space of her home. Care work was experienced by participants during the never-ending shift as ongoing and continuous, simply because they were always expected to be available to their children and to their workplaces. Laura's experience shows that her care work consisted of the labour of paying attention to her children's routines and activities as well as other physical tasks of care. In her attempts to integrate the tasks of childcare with her paid work, she allowed increased permeability of care work into the temporal and physical space of her paid work. It is interesting to note that in Laura's narrative, childcare was constructed as invading her work, showing how she constructed her time as belonging to her employment. This construction varied for all participants depending on their socioeconomic positions, financial dependence on work and their own individual contexts.

Parisa: There's so much value in parents being able to see children more, and it's not- you know, she comes and says hello and goes off and I'm still working, but that moment of being able to say hello to me at home when she comes home from school is- is a game changer, I think (l.187-189)

Parisa described the permeation of her home life into her working hours not just as a happy distraction but something she deeply enjoyed about the lockdown. It provided her a sense of ease, satisfaction, and profound joy to be able to experience small moments of interaction with her daughter and even to observe her daughter from the periphery. Thus, the blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries for Parisa allowed her an immensely valued insight into her daughter's daily life and personality. This shows that care work was centred in participants' lives when it allowed them to have depth of connection with their families and children in relational contexts.

Ultimately, women placed the value of the care-work they performed as central and important to their lives and themselves. Alongside their struggles with the never-ending shift, women told stories of how they took pride in their tasks and in their ability to maintain their children and families. Their accomplishment and satisfaction in overcoming their challenges, surviving lockdown, and handling the several aspects of their lives during lockdown marked the essence of the stories that participants narrated. Engaging in care work gave meaning and value to the time spent in lockdown for working mothers, showing care work to be a 'labour of love' (Hutchison, 2012). They revelled in slowing down and being able to savour the childcare tasks they had often found mundane before the advent of the pandemic:-

> Karen: But I got to be- I was able to provide them with uh, a home cooked meal for lunch and for supper. That's something that I know any working mother would love to do for their kids, be there to assist with homework. I've always done that. But now I had more time. It wasn't a rush. (l.190-193)

> Cindy: And so definitely the quality time. We spent a lot of time together, which we don't usually during turn time we, we just, we don't see each other as often as we should all spend time with each other because we're always working (l.190-192)

Women constructed their identities within the care-work they performed and how they perceived that work as benefiting their families and children. In providing quality time and attention to their children like Cindy and Karen, as well as taking pride in household tasks like spring cleaning and providing home cooked meals, working mothers positioned themselves as valuing their roles as mothers and caregivers far more than their career responsibilities, when that care work afforded them the opportunity to form bonds with their families and children. Care work was located within the identities of being dedicated mothers, homemakers, counsellors and teachers, as these identities related to meeting needs in an attentive, respectful and responsive way (Gouws & Zyl, 2015):-

> Thato: So I- it, it actually means that my life is now them. They're my life (l.19)

Participants felt pleasure at performing the care work that brought them closer to their families. A narrative of centered care work emerged, in which participants described engaging in childcare and household responsibilities out of their own choosing, prioritising care work over other tasks

as well as enjoying that labour. This was also evident through the participants' contentment with the time they spent with their families, regardless of the difficulty of the labour they had to perform.

Ultimately, regardless of the dynamics of power that produced these narratives and the difficulties experienced, participants make the active choice to centre care-work within their lives, whether through their work or through their families and households. All ten participants, irrespective of their differences, expressed that the aspect of lockdown they enjoyed most was having more time with their families and children. The value of human connection, empathy, sensitivity and closeness to others was consistently seen as rewarding and meaningful. The practices of care, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness emerged as the core of enjoyable and valued experiences unanimously across all women's accounts.

The Complexities of Choice

Women engaged in the never-ending shift and emotional labour as an act of resignation to their assigned and assumed roles. They recognised the lack of choice they faced while actively constructing a choice out of their experiences that enabled them to push through the challenges and obstacles they encountered. They acknowledged the lack of power to choose anything else, while recognising that the construction of motherhood within their lives was what compelled them to have no other choice.

Despite their very different experiences of the kind of labour they performed, whether it was physical, financial, mental or emotional, women simultaneously constructed their situations as having no choice but to perform that labour, while positioning themselves as making an active choice to engage in that labour. In this way they engaged in a concurrent resignation towards the roles as well as ownership of them:-

> Maria: Not at all (laughs) I mean, I think eventually, you know, we kind of got used to it and we kind of finally found a way to- to- to get used to it because you can't you couldn't change anything, you know, so being unhappy and complaining about a situation that you have no control over kind of makes it worse. It's such a state of mind is actually not calm, it's not settled, you know, and then if you are not settled in your mind everything is just miserable, you know. So we kind of had to accept and adapt to, OK, that this is now the new norm and just be OK with it (l.415-420)

Maria's perception of the choices she had available to her to improve her conditions in the lockdown only extended to her own self and emotional experiences. This ties in with participants' experiences of emotional labour that were described earlier in this chapter, but also shows the rationale behind the act of choosing to perform that labour for Maria. She engaged in this emotional labour because she could not materially change the reality of her circumstances in any meaningful way. The only aspect of her experience she exercised control over was her own feelings and behaviour, thus making this choice an active one, but stemming from lack of any other functional option.

Similarly, women acknowledged that the tasks and never-ending shift fell to their lot because of a lack of choice- whether no one else was available, willing or suitable to perform the tasks the way they did. Yet, they also performed the emotional labour of actively accepting their circumstances and doing the work. They did this by positioning themselves as willing, available and suitable to perform the work, as well as performing the emotional labour of constructing the illusion of choice:-

> Researcher: How did you feel about you being the one to draw up all the schedules instead of, say, your mom or your spouse or even the babysitter?
>
> Thato: I-I was comfortable because I think I know my struggles more than anyone else (laughs). So and I'm a person who likes to do things themselves because I want to make it right the first time so that's what I did. I was OK with it. (l.82-86)

Thato recognised that the only way to accomplish household tasks efficiently was to do them herself. Yet, she reconstructed this lack of material choice into her own preference, naturalised her role as better suited to household planning and in doing so, absolved her spouse from attempting to perform his share of the labour.

> Researcher: So were you doing the scheduling and planning or was your husband helping you as well?
> Susan: No (laughs) he doesn't do that. So that was my job. So, yeah, I had to, I had to- and I quickly learned that I had to be in a routine. If there was no routine, I couldn't cope and at the end of the day, you know, we had to make sure the house was ready for the next day. (l.51-54)

Susan, for example, found it almost comical to expect her husband to do his share of household planning and scheduling. Aside from naturalising this by stating it as a simple fact ('he doesn't do that'), she also rationalised why she assumed the responsibility of the household mental load. She constructs this as her own agentic choice by stating her reasons of organising the following day and being efficient with routines. However, her earlier statement contradicts this assertion of agentic choice as it shows that Susan simply did not have another option. If she did not engage in doing the mental load during lockdown, their lives would devolve into disarray.

The active construction of choice does not alter the facts of their circumstances, but it makes a difference in the identities that emerge through women's experiences. By actively constructing a choice and accepting their roles within the never-ending shift, they construct for themselves a dignified, caring, and responsible identity that made them feel accomplished and competent- as mothers, wives and workers.

> Karen: I found it difficult to prioritize work. Everything else came easy because you *have* to be a mom and you have to see to the house and you have to make sure that there's bread and milk and everything else (l.93-95)

Karen described the prioritisation of care work and household labour over her work as the easier choice for her, naturalising it through established gender roles. She also revealed a contradiction- constructing this prioritisation as both a choice and an obligation ('you *have* to be a mom'). This problematizes the concept of free and agentic choice for participants, as they feel that they cannot opt out of being mothers, which is synonymous with labour. Therefore, they choose their conceptualisations of motherhood in what is apparently an agentic choice, while also being bound by hegemonic discourses of motherhood and labour. Karen described this 'choice' as easy for her because it felt comforting to her to choose to be a 'good' mother to her children, out of her need to extend care for the family that she loves. This is an indication of the 'prisoners of love' effect, where the genuine love and care that women engage in makes it difficult for them to withhold their labour even under difficult and unfavourable circumstances (England, 2005).

Therefore, even though they do not get a choice of their circumstances, women eke out a choice in who they want to be within those circumstances. Unable to change the situations they are in,

women gain what little power they can by insisting on defining that situation on their own terms (Kitzinger, 2021).

Discursive readings of Thematic Categories

The narratives produced through this study provide an insight into the way that gendered subjects and identities are constructed by South African working mothers. Individuals become gendered subjects through the linguistic and physical praxis of their daily lives. Motherhood as a contested subject is constructed and reproduced through gendered 'sayings and doings' within the context of discourses, norms, concepts, practices and accepted beliefs and expectations (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). These practices of the everyday provide valuable insight into the processes which shape wider society and culture as the family and daily life are exigencies of social reproduction (Dyck, 1990). It is imperative to delve deeper into these discourses which are reproduced within daily lives of working mothers as they shape the social and spatial realities of society at large.

An in-depth view of how social reproduction is formed can problematise the ways that naturalisation of patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies occurs within accepted, ordinary and commonplace cultural forms. A critical examination of how existing hegemonies of power are mediated, reproduced, concealed, maintained and carried out within discourses can lead to understanding and recognising these hegemonies so they can ultimately be acknowledged, altered and resisted (Katz, 2017).

Because socially accepted hegemonies of institutional power are almost always obscure and invisible within the fabric of society and culture, a critical discursive approach was adopted to dissect how these power structures were embedded into the discourses of daily lives (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997). The complexities and multiplicities of discourse are especially significant within feminist theory and research as they unveil the many ways racism, capitalism and sexism are embedded in the minutiae of public discourse, and thus challenges them, instigating change in the public consciousness (Young, 2013). Furthermore, marginalised discourses rarely provide direct and verbal resistance of the hegemonies of power that dominate their existence (Breeze, 2011). Therefore, a discursive reading was necessitated to draw out forms of resistance and reproduction from discourse.

Following are the ways in which a Foucauldian discourse analysis revealed the structural underpinnings and outcomes of existing power structures.

Apotheosis of Motherhood

The principal construct that emerges through discourse is the concept of a mother and what that means to different women according to their lives, perceptions, and experiences. This section will discuss the apotheosis of motherhood that occurs in women's discourses and examines how women relate to this construct within their own lives and identities. Women glorify the identity of motherhood through naturalisation of selflessness, agreeableness, and persistent labour. In the same vein, women are quick to distance themselves from an apotheosized concept of motherhood, either by denigrating their own feelings and performances as mothers or resisting it through asserting their humanity.

Firstly, women construct motherhood as synonymous with selflessness and a perpetual state of happiness while performing altruism:-

> Thato: >I know I'm a mother, I know I'm supposed to do this, but Ih can't. But I'm not coping [yeah, absolutely]. I'm not coping because a lot of people fall into depression because of that. Because you thinking you're supposed to do this, you're NOT supposed to be feeling overwhelmed. You're not supposed to be tired. This is what you do. But we're forgetting that we are all human, especially if you are a mother doing <so much>, you deserve a break more than anyone, I think. (l.285-289)

Thato constructs her view of motherhood as an individual who is not only 'supposed' to perform labour, but also have almost a superhuman control over her emotions. A mother in her view is never tired or overwhelmed and should be incapable of complaining. She positions this as a common societal view through evidentialities ('supposed to') and using the second person 'you', which positions this knowledge as accepted fact. Thato also participates in the same view through presenting her definition of motherhood as a fact but repositions herself as human. Her repetition of the mental verb 'I know' and 'you're supposed to' denote her internalisation of a selfless, happy, and obliging mother, while also expressing her frustration at falling short of this ideal. Her resignation and exhaustion of this ideal is expressed through her half sigh (l.285). Thato's shift from a second person 'you' to the royal 'we' almost reads like a reminder to herself to acknowledge her human limitations. With 'you', Thato gives voice to the pressures of society that compels mothers to pursue unrealistic ideals of motherhood. Her assertions read almost as commandments

that are forced upon all mothers, while her shift towards 'we' positions herself in solidarity with all mothers. With this rhetorical strategy, Thato positions herself between societal constructions of motherhood and the reality of mothers' own experiences.

> Cindy: Um, I think I always put myself last↑, to be honest. *I don't*- like w:e make sure the children are fine. We make sure that the husband's fine, we make sure that the household is running and everything's functioning and >then we're like<, OK, well, am I ok? I just go, go, go, I think. (l.249-251)

Through her shift from first person singular pronoun from when she is talking about her own actions to first person plural pronoun (we, l. 250), Cindy positions her action of putting herself last as something that all mothers do and are expected to do, inviting the researcher as well into her conceptualisation of motherhood. She presents motherhood as an exercise in self-sacrifice and normalises the action of prioritising family and household tasks above her own needs as something that is simply just done. Her repetition of 'we make sure' hints at the laboriousness of the exercise that contrasts with the position that it is natural for mothers to deprioritise themselves. By naturalising the act of deprioritising herself as something that all mothers do, Cindy reduces the value of her own labour as negligible. She does not construct this as anything out of the ordinary but as something that 'we' all do as mothers.

> Susan: Ye(h)ah (laughs) I hope as a mother, I've changed from what happened. So I've, I have learned, you know, oh goodness, it takes like, it takes mothering to learn. So it's been for the last seven years of having a child learning to, to be calmer, to tolerate, you know, their emotions and not to explode when they're being emotive. (l.298-301)

Susan concurs her conceptualisation of a mother who never engages in unpleasant feelings and is always an example of serenity and tolerance. She presents this as something natural within the act of 'mothering' by making emotional fortitude synonymous with 'mothering'. However, she asserts her humanity by positioning herself as requiring effort and improvement through active learning in order to achieve the ideal state of motherhood. She seems to highlight the incredulity of these expectations of mothers through her laughter.

The continual state of sacrifice and selflessness that motherhood is constructed with is expressed through Parisa's self-censure for the different choices she had to make to balance her career with her child:-

> Researcher: And how often did you choose- did you have to choose? Did you feel like you had to choose sometimes with work or maybe your child was more of a priority at some point?
>
> Parisa: Yeah↑, well, it was less of a choice- it was more of a kind of a- uh, a- again, you know, being on a call at 7 30 at night, yo:u know, the choice should have been different, you know, I should've been doing bedtime, rather, um I should have been- in certain cases, these calls have to take place. The work had to get done so I was making choices that I wasn't entirely happy with at the time. (l.85-90)

Parisa positions her choice to prioritise work over childcare through a passive voice, for example 'the work had to get done' as opposed to 'I had to do the work', which conveys a sense of compulsion instead of an active free choice. She constructs motherhood as another inflexible ideal by positioning her child's bedtime as the right choice that 'should' have been made. Through this discourse, Parisa constructs mothers as uncompromisingly sacrificial with their time and energy, highlighting the absolute values that are tied up within the concept of motherhood.

Endless labour and constant presence are also a part of the glorification of motherhood. Mothers are not only expected to provide unceasing physical, mental, and emotional labour to everyone in their lives, but are also required to be physically present with their children at all times, indicating the superhuman expectations enveloped within the concept of a mother:-

> Researcher: All right. And so tell me, what does being a working mother mean to you?
>
> Thato: <It means> no time for myself. <It means having to> always have my eyes open, because with kids, you never know where they are, what they doing so you need to watch them all the time. So I- it, it actually means that my life is now them. They're my life. So whatever they do, it affects me. Whatever I do, it affects them. So I try not to do much so it doesn't affect them. So yeah, that's what it means to me (l.17-22)

The norm that is constructed through this narrative segment is that children need constant looking after and the pervasive presence of the mother. This is implied by the 'you', where Thato is positioning herself as speaking to another mother of two children. She presumes we share in the knowledge and expectation that children need constant vigilance and that mothers need to be the ones to provide that vigilance. Emotional labour in the form of time commitment and hyper-vigilance is thus naturalised as an inevitable part of motherhood. The fact that Thato immediately equates the identity of 'working mother' to having no time for herself shows how her own

personhood is viewed in her mind as a separate entity from motherhood. She characterises the very identity of being a 'working mother' as naturally not having any time to serve her own interests. This is further delineated through her use of metaphor in saying that her children are her life. She has completely surrendered her separate identity to that of a mother in this moment, where she does not seem to consciously view a distinction between who she is and her role as a mother. Her identity as a working mother is only as important to her as her goal of providing financially for her family. Her personal investment in the identity of a mother takes precedence over her identity as a working woman.

> Maria: But the reality is that suddenly became a big challenge for me, you know, and as a mother, you feel like, you know, in terms of your kids, you need to be able to do all and be all. You know, and you don't want- you start to feel guilty when you say, >please, can you take you iPad and go into the room and *leave a little bit* because, you know, I'm going to do something<, you know, you feel guilty. And you feel guilty when you- you can't sit down and help them or take the time to study with them. But I- you don't have the time yourself. (l.277-282)

Maria also uses the second person 'you' to position herself, the researcher and other women as subscribing to the belief that mothers 'need to do all and be all'. Maria speaks in absolute terms when describing her ideals of motherhood but positions herself as separate from these ideals through using a present perfect tense (you start to feel guilty), providing an urgency in her narrations of her lockdown experience. This urgency conveys a contrast between the perfection that is expected within motherhood and Maria's actual present reality which falls short.

The juxtaposition of how the ideal of motherhood contrasts with participants' real feelings as individuals is also shown through Maria's disruptions:-

> Maria: Now, it's just you, and after a while they don't £want to see you£ and you don't wa(h)nt to see them either. As much as it's- you know, it was good in the sense that you kind of got uh the time to- to like- >I want to say bond with them< bu:t it also created a lot of tension and a lot of frustration↑. (l.48-51)

She laughingly expresses the fatigue that she and her children were experiencing at their constant proximity during the lockdown, passing it off as a joke. Within the next moment, she feels the need to clarify and convey the advantage of being in close quarters almost as an obligation of performing gratitude and grace at her children's continual presence. This is also evident through

the way she positions her disruption of 'I want to say bond with them', which presents this as an afterthought rather than what she wanted to express in this moment. This segment shows the monitoring and censoring that women engage in to present their forms of expression as in line with ideal motherhood.

Through these discourses, women develop a concept of motherhood that is an impossible ideal for any individual to reach, thus setting themselves up for disappointment and distress when they inevitably fall short of these standards.

Patriarchal Matrices: Between Subversion and Reproduction

The norms that emerge through these discourses serve the interests of the patriarchal hegemonies that dominate society, especially with regards to the roles of mothers and women. There is a simultaneous cultural and societal expectation from women of providing constant presence to children while also fulfilling financial needs, which traditionally are not the mother's domain. This creates a contradictory norm, where the traditionally patriarchal responsibilities of a mother stay constant, while she also must contribute within the financial domain in the household.

Patriarchal Subversions

Patriarchal norms are subverted through these narrative turns in a number of ways. Firstly, the construction of spouses as supportive, helpful and understanding subverts the infantilisation of men with regards to childcare and household tasks that is propagated through traditional gender roles (Malacrida, 2009):-

> Shanti: So I asked Aditya, I said what must we do↑? because two hours. And he was like 'no, take it up. I'm not travelling, I'm home, I'll look after everything. You just go, enjoy your work and come back home'. So: he was the one who motivated me literally that you know, 'go: and set yourself free from the child uh duties and I will look after them as I'm home↓'. (l.101-105)

Shanti emphasizes her husband's role in encouraging her to accept a challenging job by using second-person direct speech to quote her husband and by repeatedly stressing on his use of first person 'I' within his quotes. These discursive decisions position her husband as someone who was not as involved in childcare responsibilities prior to her new job but is now stepping up to take on

a share of childcare responsibilities as the lockdown situation allowed him to be home. It also places him in a position of responsibility and magnanimity, as his generosity with his time is what allows Shanti to pursue her career without worrying about childcare responsibilities. Shanti's use of direct speech positions the conversation between her husband and herself as occurring directly before the researcher. Through this emphasis on her husband's direct speech, Shanti shows an awareness that her husband's behaviour is exceptional, especially within the South Asian diaspora (Chaudhuri et al., 2014), as she narrates this to the researcher, an Indian woman by race who is encultured within Indian and Pakistani custom and who is assumed to share in the implicit knowledge of how exceptional this act is.

Women resist patriarchal hegemonies by finding meaning within their lives not only through their experiences of traditional motherhood and femininity but also through their identities as working mothers. They display and exercise agency over their sense of self and identity, defining their womanhood on their own terms. Through their agentic constructions, a varied identity emerges that shows a multi-faceted view of womanhood instead of narrow constructions by patriarchal norms:-

> Susan: I-I value being a stay-at-home mom more than a working mom so I think it's important to be at home, that a working mom- you know, >I think is another side of important because< I'm- I am a working mom, because I enjoy keeping myself stimulated. So keeping my, you know, my interests engaged and doing what keeps me going, because being a stay-at-home mom is more hard work(h). (l.5-7)

Susan uses a comparison of stay-at-home mothers to working mothers to show her investment within the identity of being a working mother, shown through repeated emphasis on 'home' and 'working' mothers. Since she values the labour that stay-at-home mothers perform so highly, Susan's investment in the identity of working mother is reflective of her own personal desires and goals that are at odds with what she thinks is more valuable for her children. This is an act of placing her own identity and personal ambitions above what she thinks the construct of ideal motherhood expects her to be, shown through her emphasis on 'am', 'my' and 'me' and through her use of first-person pronouns.

Within the discursive moment where participants talk about what the identity of 'working mother' means to them, most women shed the use of second person and universalities of 'you' and use first person pronouns:-

> Laura: It's yeah, I think overall >it's being a working mom for me< is (.) just achieving- well, I- for me to work is because I want to achieve something. I shouldn't be sitting down or something, but I need to work to provide. So for me, it's to be able to provide for my kids and family (l.13-15)

Laura uses passionate language and reiterates the use of first person to construct herself as a provider for her family and an accomplished woman invested in her own achievements through her career.

> Ziwa: And besides, I'm not the stereotype person that want to sit at home and work from home and everything to do from home. I'd die. I just want to go out and get some fresh air and see other people. That's who I am. (l.250-252)

Patriarchal norms are further resisted through women's sensitivity to and awareness of the intersectionality of other women's struggles within the same conditions they were experiencing. While women often construct their views of other women in light of the very same patriarchal matrices that they experience (Kandiyoti, 1988), in this instance, women expressed compassion and understanding for other women and constructed them as offering help and support in many capacities.

> Cindy: Um and having friends who are teachers, like Mrs. Margaret is a shoulder to cry on and she understands and she's a mom and she's been through it. So she would definitely (.) like I have that support and we work so closely together- >during lockdown we worked so closely together< so (.) she definitely helped↑ (l.226-233)

Cindy, for example, uses present continuous tense to highlight how her friend was not only a support to her in lockdown but also in the present. Her use of the idiom 'shoulder to cry on' is evident of the emotional and mental support she received from a friend who herself was a working mother. Thato also conveyed the significant emotional support she received through her female colleague, through her use of present perfect tense, which brings immediacy to her experiences of the lockdown:-

> Thato: No:, here at work, one of my colleagues, we're very close friends. So (.) she: >came up with this thing< that we have to hug every morning £so we still do it and it works£. I didn't believe it at first when we started, it was just weird(h) like 'OK, what's a hug going to do (h)?' So: after we started that↑, since then, I felt fine. *I was even looking forward to it*, you know, when you have that busy morning then you come here at work and then she just hugs me and *I feel like everything is fine* (l.256-260)

Thato's positioning of being sceptical of the act of hugging providing any real change for herself is countered by her laughing admission of the fact that physical and emotional support from her colleague helped her. Women also convey a sense of acknowledgement of their own privileges and construct other working mothers as possibly having more difficulties or having different needs than them:-

> Shanti: ok so for rest of the working women lockdown was a bit hectic but I must agree that this lockdown brought me new phase and new challenges in my life >which I have not gone through< (l.36-37)

Shanti's emphasis on her own pronouns constructs her as an individual in her own right, with an explicit acknowledgement that her privileges allowed her to experience lockdown challenges in a positive way, something which other working women might not be in consensus with. This points to her understanding of the fact that all working women are not a monolith. She resists a generalisation about all working women, and a vilification of other women who may not have had the same experiences as her, similar to Samina, who also emphasises her own pronouns without generalising her preferences towards all working mothers:-

> Samina: So I think, yeah, if um, if companies realize that it's <OK to work from home>, if their goals are still being met, their work is still being completed, and if it's helping moms um like myself to just be at home with their child and manage well, then (.) yeah↑, I think they should consider it. Ihh know some, some paren- uh, some mothers um may find it a bit too much to do stuff at home because they prefer their own space at the office. But (.) um, yeah…
>
> Researcher: For you it worked perfectly
>
> Samina: for me, it works (l. 242-247)

Patriarchal Reproductions

Patriarchal matrices were reproduced in a number of subtle ways, all the more insidious for their pervasive invisibility to the participants themselves.

Firstly, women constructed their struggles as personal failings instead of systemic. Their issues and obstacles were always configurated as personal issues to be resolved and dispelled through their own efforts rather than viewing them as endemic to the patriarchal and capitalist systems of society itself. Part of this was the construction of their labour as their own personal choice in an effort to absolve men and society.

When asked what she needed to make things easier for her during the lockdown, Maria responded with:-

> Maria: >No, no, no<, because I'm trying to think about it. What- what would I have needed to have helped me? You see, it's almost like (0.4)- we put a lot of pressure on yourself <to try and keep things or maintain a certain standard>. And uh (.) based on that alone, you kind of create your own pressure↑. >You know what I'm saying?< as much as you know, no one is really (.) putting that additional pressure on yourself- like for me, I felt that I had to- I had to get everything right and I had to make sure everything gets done. So: you know it (.) I can't really say what would have helped me specifically because, I mean, I did have help, but (.) I think it was a lot about myself- (l.424-432)

The difficulty Maria has in articulating what she means to say is indicated by multiple pauses and disruptions within this segment. This shows how little thought she has previously given to her ease and needs. Maria constructs her own feelings and the pressure she puts on herself as an impediment in her life during lockdown. Her hurried aside of 'you know what I'm saying' attempts to naturalise this self-pressure through including the researcher as a mother and as an individual into acknowledging this strain as a matter of fact. Her mental verbs (I think, I felt) also place this burden of strain purely on her own mental and emotional exigencies. She refers in an offhand way to her having 'help' through her domestic helper but cannot think beyond that about any other material entities that would have made lockdown easier for her.

> Researcher: So what did you- what do you think you needed at that point to make things easier?

> Cindy: Um (.), I don't think anything↑, anything that I physically or anything that I actually need, I think .hh we probably need <mo:re experience with the idea of working remotely with young children>. Um (.) but it was never a concern or it was never raised, there weren't any causes at the time and it wasn't anything that could actually change the way the things we did. (l. 178-182)

Cindy also cannot indicate any material or physical aspects that would have made the lockdown easier for her. Her slowed down response indicates that she had to think about the question quite carefully, again revealing how little thought women gave to their own needs.

In the same way, other women also attributed their difficulties during lockdown to their own ability to let go of their mental stress and on their own emotional processes instead of delving deeper towards the systemic roots of the stressors they experienced. When asked what she would do differently in retrospect, Maria pointed to her unrealistic expectations and her own stress levels that she would change instead of desiring to change the material conditions she was in:-

> Researcher: Absolutely. Would you do anything differently looking back?
>
> Maria: Uhhh yeah, maybe not be so: (h) be so high str(h)ung, you kn(h)ow, yeah let things go… (l. 463-464)
>
> and then (.) also not to feel so pressured all the time because you kind of create a lot of expectations. You put on- you put it onto yourself, you know, and an:d you realize as well um (.) that things will carry on↑ (l.468-469)

Maria's laughter is indicative of her discomfort towards her own unpleasant emotions and an attempt to frame her expectations and feelings as comical and unreasonable. Her use of the second person pronoun 'you' presents the self-pressuring of women as evident fact. This serves to display the irrationality with which women's standards of care are constructed in societal norms. Instead of expecting these standards of care to be fulfilled according to their requirements, women actively construct themselves as unreasonable for having these expectations in the first place.

Secondly, women defined themselves with multiple, intersectional and complex identities, but despite their active engagement and emotional investment within those identities, their eagerness to romanticise their struggles and difficulties through anecdotes and passionate language is symptomatic of larger pressures from society and culture that manifest in women's behaviour as compliance. This uncritical acceptance of the motherhood ideal is reflected by Samina's way of

justifying her giving her time to her career, wherein she subscribes to the societal view that demands constant presence of mothers with children:-

> Samina: Yeah, I- I always had the um (.) I was always worried about how I'm going to do it because of, you know, people always say, >'if you're going to go to work, how are you going to look after the child?< These are the early years, they need you for the development'. And I, I, I personally didn't want to feel guilty by leaving him with someone else all the time because- >just because other people also need to:<- y'know they're also busy with their lives. (132-136)

Samina displays a cognitive dissonance (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) in this segment. Her use of the word 'personally' constructs her beliefs as independent of societal pressure and other people's remarks about motherhood. The fact that she believes herself unaffected by other people's beliefs about motherhood is reflected by her offhand hurried way of quoting those remarks. Within the next sentence Samina justifies her choice of taking on fewer hours of work through hurriedly explaining that she does not want to burden other people but her choice is ultimately compliant with the patriarchal view that mothers should not have lives outside of their children and families (Mudau & Obadire, 2017).

This view is also reflected by Thato's beliefs about how her presence with her children would have shielded them from the emotional effects of the lockdown:-

> Researcher: And OK, finally, what would you do differently, looking back?
>
> Thato: Hmm: I think I would have left my job. Honestly↓, I think it would have been easier for me just being at home. It would have been easier for my: kids also just being at home. I don't think they would have experienced the pandemic .hh the way they did <if I was there like>, all the time. (l.302-306)

Thato's emphasis on 'all' shows the double bind that mothers face even when conforming to patriarchal standards. While Samina believes that she is safe from criticism of neglecting her infant's developmental needs by reducing her working hours, Thato's belief shows that nothing less than all of a mother's time would have sufficed to placate patriarchal expectations of women.

Shanti constructs herself as fulfilling her own expectations of being a working mother because she refrained from complaining about her difficulties:-

> Shanti: I did, yes↓. I wanted to be uh: (.)- I always wanted to work an:d uh I- I think maybe <I was so over-excited to pursue my career after a long time, that I: fulfilled all those expectations>, you know I never cribbed, that today there was so much work, or I'm tihhred or I don't want to go to work today, never ever. (l.160-163)

Shanti's choice of diction 'cribbed' and her elongation of 'tired' construct the choice to express unpleasant emotions as an unreasonable and off-limits. The word 'cribbed' suggests that exhaustion and fatigue are insignificant matters to complain about, thus diminishing and invalidating the experiences of working mothers. She positions herself as fortunate for being able to work and constructs it as a privilege. In this way, Shanti believes that the right to express unpleasant emotions is unavailable to her because she has been allowed to fulfil her passion through her career and perhaps because she feels lucky to even have an opportunity for employment in her field, which constructs it as a selfish choice. Since she has indulged her 'selfish' passion, she cannot complain about how difficult she finds it because she chose it freely. In positioning herself as above complaints and weariness, she separates herself from the other working women who do complain about their workload, and also from the act of expressing emotions. This shows her internalisation of the apotheosis of motherhood that patriarchal hegemonies have perpetuated, which place mothers on a pedestal higher than human emotions.

Thirdly, men in the participants' lives were constructed as needing guidance and direction from women, who were presented as primary caregivers and homemakers. Moreover, this support was positioned as limited and conditional, while women's own standards of task completion and expectations regarding support were conceptualised as unreasonable and unrealistic. This reflects the ways that gender binaries have been naturalised through the master narratives of gender roles in social reproductions of the everyday. Men's support was only normalised in the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic and constructed as 'help' even when their labour was directed towards their own homes and children. Moreover, this labour was unrestrained from the high standards of quality that participants expected from their own performances. In contrast to the guilt and inadequacy participants felt for their own performances of labour, they felt that holding their male partners to the same standards would be unreasonable. These attitudes convey gendered expectations and acceptance of patriarchal norms by women, despite experiencing feelings of dissent. Disparities in the division of labour between men and women were naturalised through discourse.

One of the common features that emerges during conversation about physical and emotional support is the use of the word 'good at'. Certain tasks are delineated as belonging to the husband's domain because he likes them or is proficient at them:-

> Researcher: So who was doing the physical labour of cooking and cleaning?
>
> Susan: Oh, that my husband was really good at so he did- he did the cooking. He did most of the cooking actually and that he- he took over↓ (l.64-65)
>
> Researcher: So were you doing the scheduling and planning or was your husband helping you as well?
>
> Susan: No (laughs)£ >he doesn't do that<. .hh So that was my job£. (l.51-52)

Susan's emphasis on 'that' multiple times shows the limited nature of the tasks her husband assumed onto himself. Her hurried admission of 'he doesn't do that' and use of the evidentiality 'actually' normalises the division of tasks and positions it as a factual reality. Susan's laughter further portrays the absurdity of the mere thought that her husband would take on responsibilities like scheduling and planning, presenting it as ridiculous.

This is also reflected through Cindy's brief laughter and her sarcastic delivery of 'think' and 'me':-

> Researcher: Between you and your husband who was doing the emotional management more.
>
> Cindy: I think that would probably be me(h). Um (.) yeah, I think <definitely I'm probably the more level-headed or bring the calm in the h(h)ouse> (h) especially with the children, um yeah, definitely. I think I managed it *more than him*. (l.219-221)

Cindy's tone reflects the preposterousness of expecting emotional management from her spouse, and her laughter conveys her own level of expectations from her husband. This low benchmark of expectations of physical and emotional support from spouses is reflected through Laura's narrations of the support she received from her husband:-

> Researcher: So how much support did you receive from your spouse?
>
> Laura: U:m (.) <I'd say over 100 percent, I'd say- I'd say 80 percent, you know (.) I think he was also> in a place where he's trying to find his feet with his business, you know, trying to make means. So he was not, yes, mostly home bu:t where he could, like if I say, I need few things, when he- on his way back he'd get those things so that support um helps. When he's home, help with the

> homework. Um, I'll just say >please do this, do that<. So yeah, I'd say 80 percent. But yeah, you know, for me as a mother, I- I run my house, I run the show, so. (l.102-107)

Even though her husband was not physically present most of the time, Laura constructs her situation as having his support for 80% of the time, revealing the low bar she has set for spousal support. She also believes that she received adequate support despite her having to bear all of the responsibility for planning, scheduling and assigning tasks. Laura positions herself as taking on these responsibilities as a natural part of being a mother, showing not only how she has romanticised her having to perform disproportionate amounts of labour under the guise of 'run(ing) the show', but also the way she constructs her husband's natural state.

This reveals the dichotomy of choices faced by women, where they view demanding help or waiting for support from their spouses as futile, leading to resignation in their roles, regardless of how difficult they find them. It also frames the existing division of labour as something natural and factual through the implication that women engage in daily tasks because they enjoy them or are naturally better at them than their husbands.

Chapter 6

Discussion

In this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and key concepts identified earlier. Firstly, the findings of this study are discussed in relation with similar studies conducted on the experiences of the pandemic. Then, discourses of motherhood within social reproduction in daily life contexts which arose from the participants' narratives are discussed. I will then highlight the aspects of care work and emotional labour that emphasise the concept of relational care ethics as well as underline the value of unpaid invisible labour performed by women. Discourses of choice will then be discussed through the lens of post-structuralist feminism. The social reproduction of patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies within the household and workplace will be discussed throughout this chapter as they emerge within other contexts. Women in a South African context occupy a contested space of concurrent empowerment and oppression, in subtle and implicit ways (Frenkel, 2008). During the course of this chapter, the intersections of patriarchal matrices with aspects of everyday life for working mothers will be discussed.

Similar studies have been conducted on the gendered impact of the pandemic and on the experiences of women and mothers during the lockdown. Other studies have reflected on the exemption of fathers from caregiving roles (Manzo & Minello, 2020), even in Covid-19 risk management in families, which entailed a form of care in itself (Umamaheswar & Tan, 2020). O'Reilly (2020) explored the lived experiences of mothers during lockdown by means of a private Facebook group created for the express purpose of mothers sharing their experiences and perceptions through pictures and posts. Similar to the findings of this study, O'Reilly (2020) found mothers taking on increasing burdens of childcare and household tasks, often at the expense of their careers. Manzo and Minello's (2020) exploration of the experiences of remote working for Italian mothers revealed a complete upheaval of paid work and care work for participants, showing various ways that mothers took on the responsibilities of negotiating schedules, spaces, and emotions in order to accommodate the escalating demands of the never-ending shift. An emerging narrative of the lockdown for mothers is the centring of care ethics within their lives, through creating networks of social support in online spaces, organising virtual gatherings, and espousing

practices that promoted community, empathy and sharing of resources even within limited capacities (Manzo & Minello, 2020).

O'Reilly (2020) also highlighted the unacknowledged nature of the transition of care work from a paid economy to unpaid mothers, showing the way that capitalist hegemonies depended on the invisible and unpaid social reproductive labour that mother performed, while the state took no responsibility for the well-being of mothers as frontliners in the pandemic. A qualitative study on the lockdown experiences of female street vendors in India highlighted the way that capitalist and patriarchal hegemonies exploited the conditions of the pandemic to strip low-income working women of the agency they had gained through the gendered skill of cooking by relegating their labour to the private sphere (Guha et al., 2021). This reiterates the forced binary that confines women's labour to the private sphere, thus serving to devalue it. Most interestingly, mothers were faced with the impossibility of the choices they were presented, for example in the case of a single mother, who was faced with the choice to leave her children unattended at home or to take them along to run an essential errand while exposing them to the possibility of a Covid-19 infection. Regardless of the direction she chose, she would have been vilified by other mothers (O'Reilly, 2020). This corroborates with the complexities of choice that working mothers constructed in their narratives in this study.

The family and household were indicated to be sites of social reproduction (Katz, 2017) for working mothers through which their identities, lives and experiences were constructed. Participants engaged in sense-making through the lens of their experiences within the roles they occupied at home and in their families and workplaces. Despite the clear demarcation in participants' narratives between their roles as mothers and employees, the physical conditions of the lockdown necessitated a merging of their different roles and responsibilities, occupying the very same physical and temporal spaces (Whiley et al., 2021), causing role conflict and tension due to the scarcity of resources available, such as time and energy (Adisa et al., 2021; Stuhlmacher & Linnabery, 2013) This not only highlighted the careful balance that working mothers engaged in during lockdown, but also revealed the intricacies of prioritisation that participants engaged in to fulfil their multiple roles. It reflected the ways that many mothers managed and juggled multiple roles and responsibilities even before it was necessitated by the lockdown, which was simply an extension of their natural management (Adisa et al., 2021).

Prioritisation between different aspects of participants' lives was informed by their differing socioeconomic conditions, phases of their lives as well as the occupations they belonged to. Participants in nurturant professions were more likely to view their work as an extension of their parental roles, and often expressed empathy with other parents who were struggling during lockdown. Participants involved in corporate jobs such as banking grappled with the rigours of corporate life and felt compelled to often prioritise work over motherhood in terms of time and mental labour. Still others had no choice in the matter and expressed living in a crisis mode, where priority was given to any urgent matter arising within the home or workplace without clear plans or the ability to choose.

The blending of temporal and spatial boundaries during the lockdown has been experienced and observed in varying aspects globally. Studies have shown the gendered influences behind different aspects of boundary work, which entails enforcing boundaries and negotiating roles and identities in the process (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2021). The negotiation of boundaries is characterised by concepts of permeability and flexibility. While permeability refers to the allowance of disruptions of one domain within another, flexibility refers to the expansion of roles at the expense of other domains (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2021).

Experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown have made this blending of boundaries endemic to the nature of employment, aided using technology and the sharing of personal communication even between professional acquaintances (Choroszewicz & Kay, 2020; Mols & Pridmore, 2021). A study of South African academics teaching at Unisa observed the spatial challenges of dual-functioning homes that had to serve as makeshift workplaces, as well as the pervasive nature of academic work that led to lecturers working at night. The study also concluded that the difficulties of blurring boundaries were exacerbated for female academics who took on multiple roles during the lockdown and a large share of childcare and care work (Modise & Naidu, 2021).

This corroborates with the experiences of working mothers in this study, who are shown to face difficulties regarding boundary setting and maintaining work-life balance due to a breakdown of spatial boundaries by working in the same physical spaces as their children (Carreri, 2020). Working mothers also faced the overflow of paid work into their family time. The intersections of socioeconomic conditions made this blurring of boundaries a different experience for all working

mothers, as the availability of sufficient space and help factored into how this blending was emotionally negotiated by working mothers, reinforcing the nature of boundary work as inherently influenced by societal, cultural and institutional matrices (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2021). Lack of control over the porosity of the different domains and roles occupied by working mothers, however, was an experience common to all. This emphasises the nature of spatial organisation of the home as a site where gendered hierarchies of power are maintained and reproduced (Bowlby et al., 1997).

The home, along with the workplace, has been identified as a structure that intersects with cultural institutions in reproducing patriarchal practices (Walby, 1989). The cultural and societal influence of patriarchal practices can be observed in increasingly progressive households (Hassim, 2005), and even in households with single mothers. The family in particular is the space through which constructions of gender roles, identities, sexualities and accepted practices are formed, reproduced, and often resisted (Helman & Ratele, 2016). Hegemonic narratives dictate that the home and its exigencies should be the focus of women's lives and aims (Bowlby et al., 1997). These accepted practices form the cultural and societal fabric which is then reproduced within other interconnected structures such as the workplace.

In South Africa, motherhood as an identity has been used to confine women to the limited spaces of homes and traditional femininity. Women are acknowledged to wield power and influence only within the realm of motherhood (Walker, 1995). Motherhood is a contested identity that emerges in many ways through participants' narratives. As an identity of mother was very closely associated with the feminine, participants constructed motherhood through gendered sayings and doings (Leung, 2011). In associating the feminine with motherhood, participants themselves revealed an awareness of becoming gendered subjects to others, showing how closely motherhood is tied with perceptions of others (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). They constructed motherhood not only as a personal identity, but as a performance of altruism, self-denial, and contentment (Gatrell, 2013).

In battling gendered stereotypes about working mothers, participants attempted to distance themselves from their female identities and nurturant roles. This reflects the power hierarchy between the corporeal existence of being a mother and the traditionally masculine public realm of the workplace (Gatrell, 2013). Participants felt the need to increase productivity and work harder

to prove themselves equal to the masculine ideal of productive employee, as well as enacting strategies to maximise their value at work. These strategies included upskilling themselves, prioritising work over their time with children, and physically going to work despite Covid-19 restrictions, among others. In doing so, they enacted the unequal power dynamics enforced by the patriarchy that deems womanhood and motherhood as inherently lesser, compelling women to strive to dispel this tacitly perceived inferiority (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019; Stuhlmacher & Linnabery, 2013).

While historically, south African constructions of motherhood have been characterised by intensive mothering, recent studies have shown the emergence of a self-oriented model of motherhood in younger generations of mothers, that seeks to emphasize personal growth, financial independence, and accomplishment of personal goals (Moore, 2013). This is reflected in the participants' experiences of managing their work, children, and personal lives, in which they sought to achieve perfection in every aspect of their lives. The tensions that exist between women's struggles for fulfilling the demands for the ideal employee and a perfect mother are compounded by the concept of 'having it all', which ensures that women ultimately face failure regardless of the aspects of their lives they decide to prioritise (Daniels, 2015; West, 2018)

The discourses that were observed in this study lend support to the notion of intensive mothering- an idealised concept of motherhood which consigns mothers to responsibilities relating to childcare and frames motherhood as an all-consuming state of identity (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). This was reflected in participants' awareness and reproduction of societal understandings and expectations of motherhood, in which motherhood was equated to self-sacrifice, interminable labour and emotional investment. Participants' narratives revealed the dominant ideology of intensive motherhood as the accepted norm in society, in which mothers are expected to conform with ideals of self-sacrifice, altruism, and physical and mental devotion to children (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019; Jeannes & Shefer, 2004). At the same time, participants often expressed resistance and fatigue at the endless demands that this construct placed on them, emphasizing the ways that this idealisation serves the interests of patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies (Green, 2015).

The Foucauldian analysis of women's narratives highlights a few key features of how the never-ending shift and women's emotional labour is constructed through discursive complexities. As is

consistent with a post-structuralist framework, the critical analysis of participants' experiences expressed through micro linguistics represents only one reading of the text (Gavey, 1989). This reading is influenced by the researcher's values, experiences, perceptions and understanding, and thus the discourse can be constructed in multiple ways.

Care work is highlighted as valuable, fundamental, unavoidable and necessary (Fakier & Cock, 2018). As highlighted through women's narratives, the care work and never-ending shift that women performed was the foundation of societal functioning during the Covid-19 lockdown. Tasks such as housework, schoolwork for children, managing remote work, and planning and organisation were building blocks of how society was operating during the pandemic (Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2021) . This corroborates with feminist research within the paradigms of Marxist and social reproduction theories (Mezzadri et al., 2021; Winders & Smith, 2018) that posit housework and the labour of life-making as a complex set of skills that should have tangible financial compensation (Oakley, 1985). In addition to the care work and never-ending shift that all working mothers performed, professionals in caring occupations assumed additional care work responsibilities in working with children, such as pedagogical caring- managing their academic expectations, moral caring- caring about moral values imparted through education, and cultural care work- dealing with cultural norms and expectations within the learning and teaching environment (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006).

Ethics of care emerged in accounts of participants through the active emotional engagement they embodied within their daily lives. In accordance with an ethic of care, participants use responsiveness, sympathy and sensitivity (Held, 2006) to put 'caring' into practice as opposed to passively 'caring about' (Vohra & Taneja, 2021) those dependent on them. This distinction was made clearer by the way that spouses and other support structures were constructed in participants' narratives. In contrast to the active caring that participants practiced, spouses were relegated to supporting roles within the household if present at all. Passively 'caring about' children, home and emotional management was sufficient for the spouses to be constructed as helpful (Mansfield, 2015), while participants being mothers had to engage in care work physically for their 'caring' to be effective (Vohra & Taneja, 2021).

The centred nature of care work and the satisfaction it brought to participants highlights the value of Ubuntu, as practiced within south African tradition, which espouses an anti-capitalist ideal

(Cornell & Marle, 2015). In contrast to a highly individualised neoliberal philosophy, the practice of ubuntu by South African women shows that interconnectedness and interdependence should have value rather than labour being defined purely in capitalist terms. Moreover, ubuntu feminism does not treat women's needs as a monolith but highlights the individuality and autonomy that women possess in making choices that support social relatedness (Cornell, 2014). This throws the principles of second wave feminism into sharp relief through its insistence on individual empowerment and financial autonomy (England, 2005; Orloff & Shiff, 2016). In a collectivist culture and society like South Africa, social relatedness and systems of interconnection are highly valued beyond individual gains (Phaswana, 2016), because of which ethics of care are more often upheld than a highly individualised ethos of personal benefit. This is shown by the way that South African women form extended networks of care to fulfil the needs of childcare even before the pandemic (Maqubela, 2016a). Therefore, this study highlights the value of care work, in bringing intrinsic satisfaction to families and in keeping the economy and societal processes afloat. This argues in congruence with the principles of ubuntu that labour has value beyond capitalist gains and should be recognised as such, whether through financial or other means of compensation, such as government assistance and incentives.

The Foucauldian analysis of participants' narratives in this study show that the rationale for care work differs in a South African context from that of the global north (Raghuram, 2016). The self-sufficiency and responsibility of urban South African working mothers in terms of care work show the dearth of reliance on governmental or regulated assistance. Care work is most often relegated to paid domestic helpers, highlighting the burden of care placed on vulnerable, mostly black immigrant women (Budlender & Brathaug, 2004.; Ntshongwana, 2010). This shows that even when care work is shared, women of other socioeconomic strata are expected to fulfil the gap in lieu of additional support from employers, governments or even spouses (Macdonald, 1998). Some women rely on family members, grandparents and extended families for childcare and domestic support. However, this support is conditional and not always available to the standard of care that would be desirable. Thus, the responsibility of care is allocated foremost to mothers, then extends to fathers, domestic helpers, and then familial and communal circles. Within the perceptions of South African working mothers, the state is not a significant stakeholder within the responsibility of care.

In a South African context, the practice of care is not only gendered but heavily leaning towards the lower spectrum of financial and socioeconomic axes (Cock, 1981). It is indicative of the omnipresence of the class divide that most participants did not even acknowledge the physical help they received from domestic helpers and nannies until prompted with a question. The presence of a live-in domestic helper and nanny was invisibly sewn into the fabric of household life for most participants, highlighting the fundamental nature of class and racial inequalities (Seepamore, 2018). This reveals the pervasive nature of the economic gulf in South African society, which compels women into caregiving roles as employment, while also making other women oblivious to their own privilege under the very same patriarchal fabric (Fakier & Cock, 2018).

Despite the necessitated nature of care work, this study highlights that care work largely remains undervalued, unpaid and invisible even today. England (2005) explains that cultural biases which devaluate women and thus extend to work that is traditionally coded within the feminine realm may lead to the invisibility of care work. In addition, since care work constitutes a public good, its benefits cannot be marketed and packaged for consumption and therefore, care work cannot produce capitalist gains, leading to underpayment of nurturant professions. Within the context of care work that is performed in exigencies of home and family life, it is possible that women may experience an 'emotional hostage' effect for the labour they perform (England, 2005). This study reflected on the increase in women's burdens of care during the pandemic as was necessitated by the dearth of infrastructural facilities offered by the state (Hassim, 2008). It indicates in practice the stance that women's unpaid labour subsidises and supports social reproduction as it generates social bonds, communal practices and produces new generations for economic turnover (Fakier & Cock, 2018).

The labour that working mothers provide their families may be underpinned through their selfless love and personal satisfaction, but it serves the interests of capitalist hegemonies, which devalue this reproductive labour while tapping into it to create profit through the production and maintenance of the working class (Mezzadri et al., 2021). Care work was highlighted, prioritised and centered in participants' narratives as a 'labour of love', showing the value of human connection, interrelatedness, and familial bonds to participants. However, the concept of 'labour of love' has been used in hegemonic narratives to denigrate the value of the essential labour that this love produces (Daniels, 1987). As shown in studies on the care work performed by teachers

during the pandemic, the emotional capital and caring labour provided by individuals in nurturant roles is often relegated to the private sphere, ignored, and overlooked in performance metrics (Rio Poncela et al., 2021). The concept that this labour is freely chosen and lovingly performed is used to rationalise the devaluation and of said labour and to justify not providing ample compensation for it (Choi et al., 1991). This reveals the gendered intersections of capitalism that simultaneously benefit from the practice of the 'never-ending shift' while devaluing its existence.

The male-centred nature of current society means that labour and value is defined with a male-centric benchmark (Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2021) and deviations from the male norm are treated as anomalies rather than neutral fact. Maleness has been associated with cerebral rationality while the female is synonymous with the physical and emotional (Gatrell, 2013). Thus, the concept of valued labour has been defined in societal matrices through capitalist ideologies, which prioritise profit maximisation rather than maintenance of life. This study argues in accordance with the principles of Marxist feminism that 'life-making' labour is essential to the economic, social, and cultural aspects of everyday life (Fakier & Cock, 2018; Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2021). In light of the pandemic, therefore, the concept of worth needs to be redefined to reflect the value of essential life-making labour.

Emotional labour is indicated to be a key aspect of building strong and effective relationships with children (Cooper, 2017). The negotiation of womanhood within workplaces reveals a contextual emotional labour performed by participants (Syed et. al, 2005). As women and mothers in the workplace, participants embody not just themselves but are also representative of women as a social stratum (Stuhlmacher & Linnabery, 2013). Motherhood is positioned as an identity that requires struggle and compensation to exist within the workplace.

This emotional labour is often indicated by participants as frustrating and exhausting, adding to their burdens of mental and physical labour. While emotional labour within the home may provide fulfilment and other social gains through creating a positive family environment and providing a supportive environment for children, this emotional labour of identity negotiation reflects the patriarchal bargain of gaining financial power within a traditionally masculine realm (Carbado, 1998). Women gain patriarchal power through financial stability and ascension of status by exerting the emotional labour of female identity negotiation in the workplace (Hassim, 2008). Capitalist and status gains allows women to exert their power beyond the domestic sphere and

challenge the devaluation of womanhood through their own choices and agency (Bhogal-Nair, 2013). The patriarchal bargain of cooperating with the male-centred norms of the workplace allows women to gain status and economic power over the situation, which requires significant emotional labour (Arieli, 2007). This bargain affords women the privileges of outsourcing household chores to other lower-income women, and maintaining their socioeconomic positions in society, while allowing the patriarchal structures of the workplace to endure.

This is indicative of the male-centredness of South African society and prevailing mindsets, as it positions the male-centric view of work and labour as the norm. The prevailing view is that employment coexisting with motherhood and interjection of care work into the workplace is seen as anomalous and as 'making excuses' for unproductivity. This positions values of empathy, sensitivity, and connection as inconsistent with modern employment. The way that participants renounced their womanhood to prove their competence as employees is indicative of the constricted space that patriarchy creates for women in reinforcing stereotypes that ultimately women must bear the burden of dispelling (Gill et al., 2008).

Participants' expressions of struggles in dealing with and managing their own expectations, self-pressures and standards of care-work indicate 'deep acting' upon themselves, in which individuals undergo an inner transformation of their feelings, emotions and mental states in addition to changing their outward performance (Hochschild, 2009). This transformation can be observed in the way that participants expressed the difficulties of grappling with the pressures and expectations they placed upon themselves and in how they reframed their standards as unreasonable and demanding. This reflects the way in which societal pressures enact upon women's internal states, compelling them to undergo the emotional labour of self-reflection, introspection and sifting through their feelings to conform with existing social order (Arieli, 2007; Csank & Conway, 2004). Thus, emotions and feelings are commoditised through the process of alteration and modification in order to maintain hegemonies of power.

Within the context of experiences of working mothers, their emotional labour is commoditised and controlled by capitalist and patriarchal hegemonies (Baehr & Bhandary, 2021). This is evident through the way that participants' compliance and resistance towards the necessity of enacting this emotional labour bears a high cost for women involved, benefits stakeholders of patriarchal and capitalist structures and ultimately leaves them unchallenged. Participants reported experiencing

emotional fatigue, depression, frustration, guilt and resentment while undergoing their experiences of emotional labour, in addition to physical exhaustion. The mental, emotional, and physical costs of the emotional labour burden are compounded by the systemic consequences that arise (Seery & Corrigall, 2009). Women are unable to acknowledge the underlying power structures that compel them to take on the burden of emotional labour and further disparage their own emotional states by dismissing them. In collusion with the neoliberal myth of personal responsibility for systemic failings, this contributes to women feeling inadequate and irrational and occludes the role of the patriarchy in the unfair expectations on mothers. This leads to patriarchal structures remaining unchallenged because the trials that working mothers face are recontextualised into individual issues that women themselves can fix through emotional labour upon the self. Capitalist systems also remain unimpeded as this emotional labour remains invisible and unpaid, thereby diminishing its value (Vincent & Braun, 2013).

Moreover, the emotional labour is performed under flawed systems, contributing to its unfulfilling and alienating nature (Hochschild, 2009). Teachers or pre-primary children have been shown to find emotional labour taxing instead of rewarding when burdened with more workload (Cooper, 2017). Montgomery et. al. (2005) shows that emotional suppression and regulation demands specifically for employment purposes leads to burnout and interference in the work-family dynamic. This requires consideration of the care burden placed on women in caring professions that may have influences in their homes and family lives. Within the context of this study, working mothers performed emotional labour under the overarching systems of patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies, that serve to benefit the system itself rather than individuals. In such a context, working mothers often found themselves isolated, resentful and guilty. Capitalist interests were served through the emotional labour women expended through making the home and workplace environments pleasant and minimising negative affect, thus providing an optimal environment for productivity (Colley, 2006). Patriarchal stereotypes of mothers led to women overcompensating by increasing productivity at work. This further reinforced the role of women as naturally capable of handling emotions better and served to naturalise traditional roles for women (Hochschild, 2009). The same structures that benefited from their emotional labour disenfranchised women further for having to engage in it.

It is argued that emotional labour has the potential to be personally fulfilling (Bolton, 2009). Within the context of this study, working mothers showed a propensity for autonomous, rewarding and fulfilling emotional work if it was enacted in relational contexts which were personally significant for individuals. Participants expressed great pride in managing their children's anxieties and emotional states, as well as satisfaction for providing their families a positive and thriving space during the lockdown. It is revealing that the only kind of emotional labour that is constructed positively in participants' narratives is one that centres care work at its core.

Similar to the ways that women take on the shortcomings of flawed systems under which they perform emotional labour upon themselves, women's obstacles and issues arising from patriarchal matrices are constructed as individual problems instead of systemic, emphasising women's own responsibilities in alleviating them (Baehr & Bhandary, 2021). The complexities of choice faced by working mothers in the context of this study indicate a reluctance to disengage from care work regardless of its cost. This is in large part due to the bonds that mothers have with their families and children, which makes impossible for them to withhold the benefits of care work, despite the high emotional toll. Therefore, mothers' altruism, love and sense of obligation towards their children leads to their disproportionate burden of care even in the absence of extrinsic compensation and financial gains. Radtke (2017) indicates this construction of individual responsibility on women as the reason that social change within daily reproductions of patriarchal standards has been hindered. As evident through participants' narratives, care work and employment were considered inherently opposed to one another, which reveals one of the ways in which patriarchal hegemonies present a forced binary for women, preventing them from embodying the full spectrum of human emotion and experience (Muzaffar, 2011). This reduces women to one-dimensional objects and denies them the full personhood and complexity that is afforded to men- who can be constructed as caring and supportive simply through the act of existing (Mansfield, 2015). Discourses within popular culture, media and women's own articulations serve to naturalise the traditional division of labour and position the difficulties women face as individual instead of systemic failures.

This is characteristic of neoliberal feminist thought that urges women to 'work upon the self' instead of investing in systemic and structural change in the burdens of care (Rutherford, 2018). This 'work upon the self' can take many forms, including skincare, yoga, introspection and

therapy, all packaged as self-help and self-care, as shown by participants' various ways of taking care of themselves. This serves a more insidious purpose than simply profiting off the consumption of 'self-care'. It obfuscates the role of material and structural realities of women in the unequitable division of labour and shifts focus towards personal responsibility and individual empowerment (Riger, 1993). This highlights the insufficiency of neoliberal feminist discourses in truly representing and uplifting women, as neoliberal feminism repackages the labour that women verbally say is their choice as an inherently empowering act of exercising agency (Gill, 2007).

The very act of participants' verbal assertions of actively choosing to participate in labour that costs them their mental and physical health among other things is symptomatic of the pressures that post-feminism places on women- that every action be perceived as autonomous and freely chosen, regardless of its consequences on women's roles and lives (Ringrose, 2007). This points towards a renouncement that occurs in participants to distance themselves from the victimhood role (Jacques & Radtke, 2012) or from avoidance of being labelled as difficult and inflexible (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). This shows that women have been trapped within the dichotomies presented to them by patriarchy and that neoliberal feminism does nothing to broaden the kinds of material and symbolic spaces that women can occupy within modern society. In participants' discourses, if every action is not inherently agentic, then they are victims (Budgeon, 2015), unable to recognise the subtle ways societal and cultural matrices coax them into making the choices that they do (Hadfield, 1998). Participants oscillate between the self-created mental categories of victim and empowered woman with no nuanced spaces where their own unique reality can exist.

Thus, the solutions to the disproportionate burden of care cannot be addressed until it is acknowledged as arising from socio-political and sociocultural conditions rather than framed as individual choice.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The cross-sectional design did not allow for follow-up interviews, thus long-term effects of the pandemic on the social reproductions and variations in the never-ending shift could not be observed. The sample was limited to participants who could communicate in English, thereby limiting the perspectives produced through this study to English-speaking urban mothers living in Johannesburg and belonging to a certain socioeconomic class and geographic location. Online interviews may have lacked the detailed and rich information conveyed by in-person interviews, due to unstable connections, load shedding or participants' discomfort with online interactions. Participants may not have been able to ensure a separate room for online interviews, which may have affected their responses. Racial dynamics were not observed in detail due to the researcher's limited perspective on racial identities and dynamics, which may have led the researcher to overlook certain racial complexities in the data.

Implications

This study was conducted in August 2021, while South Africa and the world still grappled with recurring waves of Covid-19 as well as intermittent lockdowns. The recency of the pandemic allowed participants to recall and reproduce their experiences and perceptions faithfully. This study created a database of detailed first-hand experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic for further research and reference.

As the world adjusts to a 'new normal' of online learning, remote work and increased childcare (Adeagbo, 2020), it is imperative that mothers' voices should be heard in modifying working conditions, building and maintaining adequate resources, and promoting capabilities according to their needs under the ethics of care. Women's narratives of overlapping duties and responsibilities can provide insight into the harmful impact of the artificial divide between the home and work spheres and lead to the reclamation of forms of communal life necessary for survival (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). It is recommended that the artificial divide of family and work should give way to a more flexible manner of incorporating parenthood into sites of employment, which will not only

make the labour of motherhood more visible but also improve work-life balance and encourage empathetic and affective practices in workplaces (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). The practical implications of this study will have an impact on promoting sustainable employment and domestic conditions for South African homes and workplaces (Whiley et al., 2021), especially by promoting flexibility.

The onus of care work and other forms of welfare such as healthcare, childcare and economic stimulus during the pandemic shifted from the government and state levels and was placed on women. Since states and societies have a vested interest in future citizens who are raised through care work and in the cultural and societal norms that are shaped through it, states should provide benefits and incentives to ensure that this care work continues to occur to a high standard (England, 2005). This labour performed largely by women needs to be recontextualised and care work needs to be subsidised and recognized by the state through financial and other forms of compensation.

This study conceptualises care work as a valid form of labour, including mental planning as well as emotional labour, while highlighting women's struggles while performing this care work. The freedom of choice that is presented to women by societal narratives dictates that since their labour is freely chosen and performed as an act of love, it does not require compensation, regardless of the value and impact it creates to benefit society. This study argues for the recognition of the economic and social validity of this 'labour of love' regardless of the rationale behind the choices undertaken by women. This not only challenges the assumptions that care work is natural and endemic to motherhood, it also highlights the value of that labour to a functioning family and society at large (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Making care-work visible will contribute towards reassessing its value in financial, educational, and social policies. Through a lens of relational care ethics, this study reveals the need for multiple levels of support for working mothers in order to encourage women to continue in nurturant professions as well. These narratives of working mothers' lives can encourage workplaces and governments to revise and deconstruct capitalist values of commoditised labour and ultimately push a cultural change to alleviate the burden of care from women through work flexibility (Couch et al., 2020), improved infrastructure, and practical policies to promote work-life balance.

Moreover, care work was shown to be immensely valuable in bringing happiness and joy to individuals through this research when this care work was detached from capitalist and patriarchal

matrices and enacted in relational contexts. Care work performed in a familial setting unencumbered with the pressures of the outside world formed the foundation of joyful and fulfilling family experiences that all participants valued. This highlights the value of interconnectedness and the importance of relational care ethics as the fundamental ethos that should inform societal matrices- because they lead to happier and more fulfilled individuals and families. It is therefore incumbent on workplaces and the state to promote these values through their policies.

Recommendations

Future research can delve deeper into the racial dynamics of the pandemic, as well as explore further how socioeconomic circumstances affect the extent to which patriarchal hegemonies are resisted and reproduced by women. Narratives of working mothers can be used to examine the ways that emotional labour is performed under differing circumstances and in different professions by women. Future research can also expand on the ways that gender intersects with socioeconomic class, race, and culture to reproduce hegemonies of power in experiences of care work for women. Additionally, experiences of other kinds of mothers would also add significantly to the growing literature on constructions of motherhood. It would be interesting to explore the constructions of trans and homosexual motherhood in South Africa, as well as the narratives of motherhood from other viewpoints, such as the perspectives of working women who choose a childfree life and professional women without children.

Future research can further explore the dynamics of care work for women and mothers who are not employed in the formal sector. This study placed emphasis on the experiences of working mothers due to the focus on the 'never-ending shift' which includes paid work. However, the daily care work that is performed by stay-at-home mothers and even by women who are not mothers is equally important in contributing to the life-making labour that is fundamental to societal processes. It would also be useful to explore the growing contributions of men and male partners to the labour of care work in homes, and to observe the ways that gender roles and expectations have changed with time and the experiences of the pandemic. Studies have been conducted to determine the gendered negotiations of temporal and spatial boundary work for parents (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2021). Research exploring the ways that fathers and husbands

experienced the emotional labour of setting boundaries during lockdown would be useful in revealing the subtle patriarchal matrices influencing our world today.

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown has been instrumental in changing the ways that employment, social reproduction, and care work is carried out. It would be beneficial to explore how care work and gender roles are handled during times of crisis by individuals, workplaces, and the state. Moreover, it is recommended to examine the discourses of the vulnerable populations of domestic helpers who were mentioned in passing by many participants and yet rarely fully acknowledged for their labour and sacrifice in staying away from their own families (Maqubela, 2016b)

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to garner narratives of working mothers about their experiences and perceptions of the 'never-ending shift' during the lockdown period in 2020 necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic. This study observed aspects of the never-ending shift undertaken by these women and explored how underlying power structures were reproduced and resisted through discursive complexities. It examined multiple aspects of the never-ending shift, namely mental, physical and emotional labour that is expended in the process of care work by working mothers in their homes and workplaces. Narratives were critically explored through a Foucauldian narrative approach, which deconstructed patriarchal and capitalist hegemonies of power within discourses of participants. Feminist theory and relational care ethics informed the analysis of this study and provided a theoretical basis for its conclusions. This research was a cross-sectional, qualitative, narrative design, using Foucauldian narrative methodology and employing a critical, post-structuralist theoretical framework (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008; Tamboukou, 2013).

This research garnered women's first-hand accounts through in-depth interviews. It addressed the lack of research that recognizes the gendered structures of power and agency that exist within social reproductions of women's everyday worlds (Elias & Rai, 2019), especially through a decolonized lens that views social reproductions of daily life in South Africa as relevant instead of problematizing and pathologizing phenomena in the global south (Dyck, 1990; Segalo & Fine, 2020). South African cultural formations contain ambiguities that reflect the simultaneous empowerment and marginalization of South African women (Frenkel, 2008). Praxis of social

reproduction replicate, modify and develop existing inequalities in ways that compound racial, economic, and gendered forms of oppression (Helman & Ratele, 2016), leading to prevalence of patriarchal and capitalist power in wider society (Katz, 2017). National and international governments have been influenced by neoliberal capitalist motives, which serve to exploit care-work for capitalist gains (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

Three key themes emerged from narrative analysis. 'The Socioeconomic Intersections of Emotional Labour' revealed an internally oriented emotional struggle within participants from different socioeconomic situations (Syed et al., 2005). Participants experienced altering their emotional states to sustain positive environments in homes. In addition, they contended with the negotiation of their female identities at workplaces by working longer hours, justifying their presence as mothers at work and being compelled to delineate boundaries between work and home. Self-directed emotional labour included management of their own expectations of themselves and others as well as lowering standards of care for their children and homes. Experiences of emotional labour revealed that emotional labour is not only limited to sites of employment but evolved into a contextual form within the family and home for working mothers. The kinds of complex emotional labour that women performed was largely influenced by their socioeconomic standing, revealing the patriarchal bargain of accruing capitalist power. This emotional labour is commoditized by capitalist and patriarchal hegemonies (Baehr & Bhandary, 2021) and performed under flawed systems, contributing to its unfulfilling and alienating nature (Hochschild, 2009). Emotional labour was only constructed as autonomous and fulfilling when enacted in personally significant relational contexts (Bolton, 2009).

'Centered Care-Work' formed a central theme in the narratives of working mothers. Engaging in care work gave meaning and value to the time spent in lockdown for participants, who expressed immense joy, pride and satisfaction in prioritizing motherhood. The practices of care, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness emerged as the core of enjoyable and valued experiences unanimously across all women's accounts, highlighting the adoption of Ubuntu as an anti-capitalist ideal, which upholds the importance of social relatedness and interconnection beyond individual gains (Cornell & Marle, 2015; Phaswana, 2016). This concurs with the principles of Marxist feminism that posit 'life-making' labour as essential to the economic, social, and cultural aspects

of everyday life in forming social bonds and communal practices. (Fakier & Cock, 2018; Ozkazanc-Pan & Pullen, 2021).

The 'Complexities of Choice' revealed the ways participants acknowledged their lack of material choice as an act of resignation to their assigned and assumed roles, while actively constructing an illusion of choice out of their experiences that enabled them to overcome the challenges they encountered. They actively accepted their circumstances by constructing themselves as willingly choosing to perform this 'labour of love' (Kitzinger, 2021). Participants' active assertions of freely choosing the labour that costs them their physical, emotional and mental well-being revealed their inability to recognize the subtle ways societal and cultural matrices coax them into making the choices that they did (Hadfield, 1998). It also highlights the hegemonic structures that take advantage of women's 'emotional hostage' effect to assign them unpaid labour.

Foucauldian discourse analysis revealed the structural underpinnings and outcomes of existing power structures. Women glorified the identity of motherhood through naturalization of altruism, agreeableness, emotional investment, and persistent labour. Working mothers constructed an idealised concept of motherhood, while holding themselves to impossible standards of perfection The concept of intensive motherhood was upheld as an inflexible ideal which framed motherhood as an all-consuming state of identity (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019), ultimately setting them up for distress and inadequacy when women inevitably did not measure up to this ideal.

Patriarchal hegemonies were resisted and reproduced by women as part of a patriarchal bargain they engaged in through discourse and construction of narratives (Kandiyoti, 1988). Patriarchal matrices were reproduced through the way that participants' issues and obstacles were configured as personal issues to be resolved and dispelled through their own efforts rather than viewing them as endemic to the patriarchal and capitalist systems of society itself. This obfuscates the role of material and structural realities of women in the inequitable division of labour and shifts focus towards personal responsibility and individual empowerment (Riger, 1993), serving to reconfigure women's contested choices as inherently empowering acts of exercising agency (Gill, 2007). Patriarchal matrices were also reproduced through an uncritical acceptance of the ideal of motherhood, which coerced women into compliance with patriarchal norms. Traditional gender roles were naturalized by working mothers through this acceptance and through constructions of spouses and men as naturally not suited to care work.

Participants resisted patriarchal hegemonies by finding meaning within their lives not only through their experiences of traditional motherhood and femininity but also through their identities as working mothers. They displayed and exercised agency over their sense of self and identity, defining their womanhood on their own terms. Participants reflected on an increasingly progressive culture within homes where men also stepped up for domestic tasks. Patriarchal norms were further resisted through women's awareness of the intersectionality of other women's struggles. Women expressed compassion and understanding for other women and constructed them as offering help and support in many capacities. Patriarchal hegemonies were simultaneously resisted through the emergence of more egalitarian division of labour with spouses and the construction of women's varied, multiple and complex identities that defied patriarchal standards of motherhood.

In conclusion, capitalist hegemonies of materially productive labour and economic value influence perceptions of shortcomings and deficits in systemic structures and reconstructs these as personal failings for women. In the same way, patriarchal matrices seek to limit the multifaceted realities of women by idealising the image of motherhood and creating inequalities through societal norms.

Despite the necessitated nature of care work, this study highlights that care work largely remains undervalued, unpaid and invisible (England, 2005). In light of the pandemic, the concept of valuable labour needs to be redefined to reflect the value of life-making labour rather than profit maximization. Reassessment of the value of care work in financial, social and educational policies needs to occur in South Africa, as well as incorporation of parenthood into sites of employment (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). Flexibility in workplaces and compensation of social reproductive labour (England, 2005) can assist in alleviating the burden of care for women through infrastructural transformation and promotion of work-life balance (Whiley et al., 2021).

This research challenges the assumption that care work is natural and effortless, especially for mothers. It promotes the intrinsic and societal value of care work and reconceptualises emotional labour as a form of care within households, as well as highlighting the need for policies at state and societal level that ensure that care work is sustained and promoted. The social relevance of this research is to emphasise the inherent satisfaction and fulfilment that values of interdependence, receptivity, responsiveness, and interconnection offer for individual and communal relationships

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Following are possible interview questions with follow-up questions and prompts, to be used as per the decision of the researcher as the narrative process unfolds.

- Preliminary questions:
    - Tell me about your experiences with the Covid lockdown.
    - What does being a working mother mean to you?

- Emotional labour
    - What did you find most difficult about your experiences of the lockdown?
        - What do you think you needed in those moments to make life easier for you?
    - What did you find most enjoyable?
    - What was your experience of managing feelings in the household?
        - What feelings did you and your family experience?
        - How did you cope?
        - Was it easy/ difficult?
        - What about your own emotions?
    - Did you feel the need for social support?
        - How did you meet that need?
        - How often?
    - Did you ever feel overwhelmed or guilty?
    - Did you ever feel satisfied and content during the lockdown?
    - Did you experience loneliness at any point?
    - How did you take care of yourself at that time?

- Pressures of productivity
    - How productive would you say you were during the lockdown?
        - In terms of household, children and employment responsibilities
        - Did you fulfil your expectations of being productive?
        - Did you feel like you fell short?
        - How did you perceive societal and other people's expectations of being productive?
    - Did you ever feel inadequate or not enough?
        - In what ways (as a mother/ wife/ etc.)
    - How was the lockdown situation different from your regular life?

    - Are you satisfied with how you handled all the different aspects of your life during the lockdown?

- Division of labour
    - Tell me about a typical day during the lockdown.
    - Who did the management of tasks and lives during lockdown?
    - Who did the physical labour?
    - How did you manage planning and organising your lives during the lockdown?
    - How much support did you receive from your partner?
    - Did you feel like you had to prioritise tasks and people?
        - How did you prioritise different aspects of your life in the lockdown?
        - How often did you renegotiate these priorities?

- Ending questions
    - In the aftermath of the lockdown, do you feel that society needs to change in any way, especially for working mothers?
    - Would you do anything differently?

Appendix B

Participant Information Form

Good day. My name is Ms Arshima Khan. I am a master's student at the School of Human and Community Development, at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting a research project which aims to examine narratives of working mothers during the pandemic of 2020 in order to observe and record aspects of the never-ending shift undertaken by women. This research will focus on understanding the experiences and perceptions of working mothers during the lockdown of March to June 2020, with an emphasis on emotional experiences, prioritisation of tasks, and division of labour.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be invited to be part of a video or in-person interview, depending on your preference. You will be asked to fill a biographical information questionnaire at least a day prior to the interview, which will comprise of basic questions about your family, education and career. This is included to give the researcher an idea of your relevant background and situation to refer back to as well as to save time during the interactive part of the interview. Within the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences of the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020 and how you navigated the unique circumstances of the pandemic as a working mother. This interview can last from 1 to 2 hours and will be audio recorded.

There will be no benefits to participation in this research. No risks to participation in this study are anticipated. I would like to stress that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any point. You may also refrain from answering any particular questions with no negative consequences. In case of counselling services required subsequent to your participation, you can contact the Emthonjeni Centre at Wits University (011 7174513) for free of cost, as well as LifeLine (011 7281331) for telephone counselling available 24/7.

This study involves audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Only the principal researcher and supervisor will have access and be able to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and will be stored in a password protected cell phone and laptop. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or publications that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or publications resulting from the study.

Your identity as a participant will be only known to the principal investigator and my supervisor. The test protocols/recordings/transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinet and a password protected cell phone and the results stored in a password protected computer. Only the principal investigator and my supervisor will have access to these files. To protect confidentiality, your name or other personal identification data will not be used. Instead, a pseudo name will be used in each protocol and the data will be saved as anonymous.

Prior to participating in the study it is required that you completed the attached consent form. This will be kept separately from the rest of the data for the purpose of confidentiality. The consent form will only be made available to the University authorities should a random audit process require this.

The results from this research will be used for the purpose of the fulfilment of the Degree of Masters in Arts in Social and Psychological Research. The research report will be hosted on a database on the Wits website, which will be accessible to future students and researchers. The results will be emailed to you if requested.

Ethical considerations pertaining to this study have been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at Wits University. Please contact Shaun Schoeman (011 7171408) or Charmaine Khumalo (011 7171788) for further queries. For further clarifications and queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0794023086 or email me at arshimakhan.9@gmail.com. You may also contact my supervisor: Associate Prof Peace Kiguwa *(011 717 4537 /Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za.)*

Participant name: _____

Participant signature: _____

Researcher name: _____

Researcher signature: _____

Supervisor name: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

I am an adult person above the age of 21 years and I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided in the information sheet in relation to the research entitled: "*Emotional labour and the 'Never-ending Shift'- Narratives of Working Mothers during the Covid-19 Pandemic"*. I have been informed about what the research entails and what is required from me. By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape me as part of this research study.. I also

I also understand that:

- My participation is completely voluntary.
  __ YES __NO
- I may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences for me.
  __YES __NO
- I understand my results and identity will be kept anonymous and the information will be kept in a password secure file in a password secure computer and the protocols of the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet, both only accessible to the principal researcher and the supervisor.
  __YES __NO
- I understand that my participation will be treated with confidentiality.
  __YES __NO
- I understand that I will be recorded.
  __YES __NO
- I understand that this recording will be used to create transcripts for use in a research report.
  __YES __NO
- I understand that no risks are associated with participation.
  __YES __NO
- I have received the contact details of the principal investigator (Ms Arshima Khan) and their supervisor (Associate Professor Peace Kiguwa).

__YES __NO

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Researcher's name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Supervisor's name: _____

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Transcription Notation

Symbol	Definition and use	Key(s)
[yeah] [okay]	Overlapping talk	
=	End of one TCU and beginning of next begin with no gap/pause in between (sometimes a slight overlap if there is speaker change). Can also be used when TCU continues on new line in transcript	
(.)	Brief interval, usually between 0.08 and 0.2 seconds	
(1.4)	Time (in absolute seconds) between end of a word and beginning of next. Alternative method: "none-one-thousand-two-one-thousand…": 0.2, 0.5, 0.7, 1.0 seconds, etc.	
Word Wo:rd	Underlining indicates emphasis Placement indicates which syllable(s) are emphasised Placement within word may also indicate timing/direction of pitch movement (later underlining may indicate location of pitch movement)	
wo::rd	Colon indicates prolonged vowel or consonant One or two colons common, three or more colons only in extreme cases.	
↑word ↓word	Marked shift in pitch, up (↑) or down (↓). Double arrows can be used with extreme pitch shifts.	↑ Wingdings 3 (104) ↓ Wingdings 3 (105) ↑ ALT+24 ↓ ALT+25
.,_¿?	Markers of final pitch direction at TCU boundary: Final falling intonation (.) Slight rising intonation (,) Level/flat intonation (_) Medium (falling-)rising intonation (¿) (a dip and a rise) Sharp rising intonation (?)	¿ ALT+168
WORD	Upper case indicates syllables or words louder than surrounding speech by the same speaker	
°word°	Degree sign indicate syllables or words distinctly quieter than surrounding speech by the same speaker	° ALT+248
<word	Pre-positioned left carat indicates a hurried start of a word, typically at TCU beginning	
word-	A dash indicates a cut-off. In phonetic terms this is typically a glottal stop	
>word<	Right/left carats indicate increased speaking rate (speeding up)	
<word>	Left/right carats indicate decreased speaking rate (slowing down)	
.hhh	Inbreath. Three letters indicate 'normal' duration. Longer or shorter inbreaths indicated with fewer or more letters.	
hhh whhord	Outbreath. Three letters indicate 'normal' duration. Longer or shorter inbreaths indicated with fewer or more letters. Can also indicate aspiration/breathiness if within a word (not laughter)	
w(h)ord	Indicates abrupt spurts of breathiness, as in laughing while talking	
£word£	Pound sign indicates smiley voice, or suppressed laughter	
#word#	Hash sign indicates creaky voice	
~word~	Tilde sign indicates shaky voice (as in crying)	
(word)	Parentheses indicate uncertain word; no plausible candidate if empty	
(( ))	Double parentheses contain analyst comments or descriptions	