“It’s not all a Hollywood film is it?” Discourses of stay-at-home mothers over thirty

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Psychology
at
Massey University,
Manawatu,
New Zealand.

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2015

Abstract

Research has remained limited on the lives of women over thirty who decide to stay-at-home upon having children. The present research sought to examine the discourses and subject positions available to partnered stay-at-home mothers over thirty, and the opportunities and constraints these positions offer. Following ethical approval, ten partnered stay-at-home mothers over thirty took part in a semi-structured, in-depth interview. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and analysed using a Foucauldian discourse analytic approach. In particular, the discourses, subject positions and discursive resources these mothers use to construct their experiences were identified. This study found a strong adherence to a 'good mother' discourse, which was comprised of four underlying discourses. The first discourse, the 'relational mother', emphasises the relational aspect of mothering and this discourse was co-articulated with the intensive mother discourse, requiring mothers to spend large amounts of time with their children. A third discourse, the 'selfless mother', requires women to sacrifice career, time and energy to provide for their children. Finally, mothers drew on a 'best caregiver' discourse, which positioned them as solely responsible for the expert care for their child. At times, some participants resisted the good mother discourse, and instead drew on a 'good enough mother' discourse, which constructed mothering as a complex and unique learning process. Stay-at-home mothers and their partners also negotiated multiple and contradictory constructions of the working mother, which positioned them in various ways. The primary working mother discourse constructed working mothers as financially contributing to the family unit and providing women with a fulfilling career. This positioned stay-at-home mothers as financially dependent, and outsiders from the paid workforce. In their talk about being older mothers', participants discussed preparing for being a 'good mother'. Their time prior to children was constructed in positive ways, making the discursive transition to being a 'good mother' challenging. Future research into the way in which mothers over the age of thirty discursively negotiate the transition to motherhood, and how families with young children make sense of both financial and domestic responsibilities would benefit both working and stay-at-home mothers.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to acknowledge the stay-at-home mothers who bravely entered my home or welcomed me into theirs, to share their experiences. I always felt humbled and amazed that you would trust me in sharing your experiences that were sometimes emotional and very private. This research would not have been done without you.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Rachael Pond who provided me with invaluable guidance into the world of discourse analysis.

I would like to thank my husband Stephen, the best husband in the world who contributed to this research in multiple ways including formatting, childcare and cooking.

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Introduction

Motherhood is a life-changing experience for most women and affects nearly all aspects of a women's life: her identity, responsibilities, priorities, perceptions of the community and those within her family (Vejar, Madison-Colmore, & Ter Maat, 2006). Recent years have seen mothers' position in both public and private spheres continue to expand and evolve, resulting in mothers negotiating employment outside the home in multiple and complex ways. The ways in which women negotiate family have been hugely affected by demographics including the rise in age of first time mothers (Statistics NZ, 2014), the decline of the nuclear family, reduced fertility, and gains in female education (Cherlin, 2010; Ryan & Siebens, 2012). However one of the major demographic changes affecting all industrialised countries, including New Zealand, has been a large increase in women's participation in the paid labour force (Davies & Jackson, 1993; van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2001). Much of this increase has been attributed to women returning to employment after having children (Kahu & Morgan, 2007), and many researchers agree, that this has been one of the most important social changes in historical times (Davies & Jackson, 1993; van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2001). A body of recent research has examined the rise of women in paid employment (England, 2005; Goldin, 2006), however, there has been little research interest in the experience of the women that choose to contract their roles to focus on their family (Desimone, 2001; Vejar, Madison-Colmore, & Ter Maat, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000). Specifically, research is limited when focusing on first time mothers over the age of thirty, who have been engaged in the paid workforce prior to motherhood. This research focus is the subject of the present study, which explores the ways in which partnered stay-at-home mothers over the age of thirty construct their experience of motherhood.

This chapter will firstly focus on the historical background of the stay-at-home mother role, and the way in which it has been shaped by social, economic and technological forces. These forces will be discussed in light of how they continue to shape present ideologies of motherhood. Secondly, the discourses surrounding motherhood will be reviewed including, the 'motherhood mandate', the 'good mother', the 'intensive mother' and finally, the 'working mother'. Thirdly, I will discuss the change in the way in which mothers engage with the paid workforce and the current way mothers are now working in the public and private sphere. Fourthly, the rise in the age of first time mothers to thirty will be outlined; the factors that have led to this change and the implications for mothers and research. I will also argue that current discourses of mothering are shaped and guided by the

media, formal organizations and other mothers. Finally, I will outline aims and rationale for the present study.

A historical overview

From a historical perspective, the stay-at-home mother ideal is an inherently 20th century phenomenon, created by social and economic forces. These forces were shaped by important historical events including the advent of the industrial revolution, the great depression and World War II. These events were followed by the rise of the cultural phenomenon of feminism and technological advances which changed the way in which caring for children and domestic housework is performed (Mayer, Franks, Volpin & Wagner, 2012).

Prior to the industrial revolution, all members of the family contributed to the household labour and produced goods required for economic survival (Hays, 1996; Kaufmand & Richardson, 1982). However, the industrial revolution, which began in the late 1700s and early 1800s, created huge changes in the economic landscape and the way in which women and children contributed economically to the family unit (Kaufman & Richardson, 1982). Society became increasingly industrialised, family responsibilities and roles shifted and each member of the family unit became responsible for specific duties (Oakley, 1976). Most significantly, child labour laws came into force in 1802, regulating children's work and drastically changing social responsibilities (Mayer et al, 2012). As a result of these social and economic changes, the man in the family unit often became the sole breadwinner and provider of economic resources for the family. The home became the private sphere that women became associated with, and women became defined by their position as family caretaker, excluding them from the private sphere of paid work (Hays, 1996). Women's duties in terms of domestic labour remained invisible and separate from work outside the home and dominant discourses viewed the unpaid labour of women as crucial while also devaluing its contribution to society (Walsh, 2003).

The evolution of the stay-at-home mother may also be traced back to the Great Depression where employment was scarce and women were expected to stay home and leave most of the jobs for men. This ideology was supported in New Zealand by policy, such as the New Zealand Education Department refusing to employ married women teachers (Pearson & Plumridge, 1979). In New Zealand, the great depression saw large numbers of women registering as unemployed, further relegating them to childcare and domestic duties.

The social and economic upheaval created by the great depression was continued with the beginnings of World War II in 1939, which created a multitude of complex social issues regarding women and their position in the home. As most men left their families to go to war, many women were mobilised into work previously reserved for men. This engagement with work outside the home altered the cultural and social landscape for women during the war and these changes in employment continued to evolve once the soldiers returned. Despite the New Zealand government's efforts to encourage women back into the home following the war, women continued to join the paid workforce at the same rate as during the war (Hays, 1996). The trend of women entering the paid workforce continued to rise until it stabilised in the 1970s (Edwards, 2001). Researchers assert that the dual income family was driven by economic uncertainty and the fear of downward mobility (Edwards, 2001). Many factors contributed to women's accelerated engagement in the paid workforce including smaller family sizes, higher wages for women, higher rates of divorce, a growing discourse that accepted working mothers and an overall increase in educational and job opportunities for women (Edwards, 2001). This trend for women in paid work meant that women with older children were working but also that the number of mothers with pre-school children was increasing (Edwards, 2001).

However, many researchers maintain that the phenomenon of the stay-at-home mother is inherently class and socially based (Thistle, 1996). Working class households have always required women to work in paid labour and the social and economic upheavals of the industrialised revolution, the great depression and World War II left many working class families unable to survive on one income. Working class mothers did not have the option of staying at home to look after children as financially, they were required to engage in paid labour to provide resources to sustain the family unit (Weiner, 1985).

Next, women were affected in the 1960s by the beginnings of a powerful social movement in the form of feminism. This movement revolutionised the way in which women viewed their role in society. In particular, the expectation that women with a middle class background would stay home to look after children became far less prevalent. The feminist movement encouraged women towards work in the paid labour force demanding policy and action on equal pay, childcare, and abortion (Dann, 1985). Legislation was also brought into place which promoted the access and equality of women into education (Pearson, Shavlik & Touchton, 1989). Access to higher education was the door through which many women accessed to enter previously male dominated

professions. This was also a way to become financially independent from men and gave women an identity outside the role of wife and mother. One of the greatest factors in these social and cultural changes was the distribution of birth control, giving women the power to decide when they became mothers. Access to birth control measures opened up opportunities for women to be highly educated, travel, and put time and energy into self expression and building a career (Frost & Lindberg, 2013).

Another factor influencing the trend of women in paid work was the increasing demand for consumer goods. The 1956 census showed that over half of New Zealand homes had washing machines, refrigerators and electric ovens. These time and labour saving devices meant housework, which was the domain of stay-at-home mothers, became easier and less time consuming. Elder (1999) concludes that the mass marketing of household time saving devices meant that more women had more time on their hands and therefore the ability to work in the paid labour force.

How to be a mother: the influence of media, formal organisations and other mothers

Culture and society 'tells' us what it means to be a mother, as well as which particular behaviours and attitudes are appropriate for mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Petrasse, 2012). Mothers receive a range of complex and conflicting messages about these from several sources, including the media, health professionals, and other mothers. The media in particular, has had a profound effect on the way in which women negotiate motherhood, from magazines, internet sites and mommy blogs. Women are increasingly turning to the media for validation, advice and support on how to be a mother. In this way women are bombarded with messages about childrearing, which reinforces the notion that mothering is one of the most important jobs that woman can do (Akass, 2012).

Research into online communities and information exchanges have been found to empower women (Hall & Irvine, 2009; Youngs, 2001). The current trend for mothers on the internet means that mothers are able to share personal experiences on a blog or social networking site and receive feedback from other parents that reinforces perceptions of social support. Indeed, recent research by McDaniel, Coyne and Holmes (2012) suggests that feedback via blogs and social networking sites may increase perceptions of social support and reduce a mother's stress. Mothers may also learn through observation as they read about others' experiences. As a result, other aspects of wellbeing are enhanced, including increased positive perceptions of marital quality, decreased marital conflict, and decreased depressive symptoms (McDaniel et al, 2012).

Conversely, other research claims the internet affirms traditional constructions of femininity and consumerism (Pitts, 2004), negatively influencing mothers' feelings of parenting stress, competency, and adjustment to the transition in general. The print media also send contradictory messages about mothering with magazines in New Zealand such as *North and South* having front covers devoted to 'the worrying rise of the motherhood police' (Wane, 2014a) and 'should we care that smart women aren't having kids?' (Wane, 2014b). Furthermore, research on 'women's magazines' has revealed a discourse promoting 'the good mother' (Jiang, 2007; Stewart, 2013). The American media is particularly dominated by the notion of 'mommy wars', pitting working mothers against stay-at-home mothers in a battle of ideologies (Akass, 2012). However, recently academics and some media have argued that this battle exists mainly in the minds and marketing machines of the media (Graff, 2007). Rivers (2008) points out that in focusing on disparaging other women's choices, mothers are distracted from pressing concerns such as maternity benefits, childcare and equal pay.

In terms of wider society, messages regarding mothers can be viewed on a structural level by organisations which provide formal, authoritative sources of information about parenting. Some researchers contend that modern mothers are subject to surveillance from formal organisations that pressure mothers by watching and judging behaviour in formal situations (Henderson et al., 2010). Professionals, such as those in education, medicine and child psychology, are given legitimacy as objective sources of information on how children should be cared for (Henderson et al., 2010).

At an interpersonal level, some research suggests that other stay-at-home mothers 'surveil' each other. They do this through interpersonal communication and observation, which may include conversations about children's appropriate development to a covert, silent monitoring of other mother's disciplining behaviour in public places (Henderson, et al., 2010). This surveillance provides valuable opportunities for mothers to measure their own behaviours and abilities in relation to others. It can also provide opportunities to judge and criticise other mothers parenting styles further validating their own parenting.

Motherhood discourses

Despite significant changes to women's involvement in the public sphere, the cultural discourse of motherhood being central to femininity has remained strong (Hayes, 1996). Societal expectations and dominant discourses are viewed as shaping mothers' roles and the positions they take on board when negotiating their lives (Mayer et al., 2012). Nancy Russo (1976) coined the phrase

'motherhood mandate' which represents the idea that motherhood is central to the definition of the adult female and that a 'mandate' exists as to how to be a 'good mother'. Central to her argument is the notion that society holds the belief that all women 'should' become mothers and that 'real' women 'yearn' for the experience. A large body of literature proposes a discourse that features two main ways that women demonstrate their womanliness in today's society. The first is the pursuit of beauty and sexiness; the second is the 'good' mother (Chrisler, 2013). Motherhood is seen as essential for femininity, and femininity and motherhood are therefore viewed as inextricably linked. As Gillespie (2000) argues: "Motherhood has predominantly been perceived as natural for women, the desire for it inevitable, unquestioned and central to the constructions of normal femininity" (p. 223).

Despite significant changes in the expectations and activities of mothers, many researchers argue that Western women persistently adhere to discourses that support 'good mothering' (Cannold, 2005; Hattery, 2001; Hays, 1996; Maher &Saugeres, 2007). Idealised versions of what constitutes a 'good mother' are prevalent throughout the Western world and both men and women have been shown to hold strong notions and expectations about what this position entails (Cannold, 2005; Hattery, 2001; Hays, 1996; Maher & Saugeres, 2007). Hayes (1996) reports that to be 'good mothers' women must adhere to a discourse that children are priceless, and that mothering should be child centered, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, guided by experts and financially expensive. 'Good mothers' are described as highly communal, demonstrating selflessness, high concern for others, and a desire to be at one with others (Bakan, 1966). Further characteristics of the 'good mothers' are constructed by researchers as patient, kind, nurturing, receptive, gentle, and soft-spoken, requiring years of self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and self-silencing (Hays, 1996). These qualities have been identified as central to the feminine and domestic role of the 'good mother' (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and require high levels of 'invisible' effort as most of the 'good mother' requirements prioritise children and husbands above women (Russo, 1976). Good mother discourses position mothers as best suited to look after young children and requires them to have an all-encompassing commitment to motherhood. In this way, mothers are constructed as the primary and most suitable caregiver for their children.

The leading twentieth century Western discourse which is associated with good mothering is the 'intensive mother'. This discourse dictates that mothers devote large amounts of energy and time to mothering their children (Garey, 1999; Hays, 1996; Wall, 2001). . Hays (1996) suggests that in today's society, even more 'intensive mothering' is now required for mothers to be 'good' mothers and that "all mothers ultimately share a recognition of the ideology of intensive mothering" (p. 131).

The stay-at home-mother is strongly associated with the intensive mothering discourse, and is held up as the idealised model of motherhood (Friedan, 1963). Stay-at-home mothers are able to concentrate all their time and energy on their children and as a result provide the best of care for their children according to the intensive mother discourse. Through positioning themselves at home rather than in the paid workforce, mothers prioritise their children's needs above financial gains and career advancement (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Stay-at-home mothers therefore, can be constructed as prioritising involvement with their children, and in particular, able to provide for the care and development of all their children's self-esteem and emotional needs (de Marneffe, 2004).

However, the intensive mother discourse has been met with some resistance, and many researchers have argued that these ideals do not benefit either mothers or their children. Philip Wylie first coined the negatively defined term 'momism' in 1942, and went on to define it as a way of mothering that characterised mothers who are "smothering, overprotective, and invested in their kids which turned them into dysfunctional, sniveling weaklings, maternal slaves chained to the apron strings, unable to fight for their country or even stand on their own two feet" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 5). According to this definition, momism resulted in negative outcomes for children; their independence was sacrificed, they suffered psychologically, and maintained a dysfunctional relationship with their mothers because of intensive parenting practices. Two decades later, Friedan argued that many women followed the requirements of the intensive mother discourse, devoting large amounts of time and energy to their role of both mother and wife. However, she argued that women became resentful as they fail to meet the unattainable requirements of the idealised intensive mother and wife that were perpetuated through the media (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Friedan, 1963). Friedan also points out that adhering to intensive mother requirements has created a range of negative implications for stay-at-home mothers' psychological wellbeing. Recent research has concurred with Friedan, showing that stay-at-home mothers have to deal with depression and diminished psychological wellbeing as they struggle to balance the demands of children and 'self-care' (Rubin & Wooten, 2007).

More recently, Maher and Sauger (2007) found that although women share this ideal of 'intensive mothering', their experience of mothering as a practice changes these ideals and their expectations and practices regarding mothering were adjusted. They found that women with children had much less stringent definitions of 'good motherhood' than women without children. These mothers were able to negotiate both motherhood and their own personal goals without feeling constrained by intensive, all encompassing, and sometimes overwhelming mothering ideals

(Maher & Sauger, 2007).

At the current period in time, most women with children work in the paid workforce in one form or another (Statistics NZ, 2013). This has created a strong working mother discourse that incorporates the traditionally dominant good mother ideals. One of the dominant constructions of working mothers was suggested by Faludi (1991) who coined the phrase 'supermom', the women who has it all, being fulfilled by being the ideal mother, wife, and professional. This woman should be able to switch from career woman to 'intensive mother' without sacrificing her job or children (Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 2012; Perkings & DeMeis, 1996). Furthermore, a 'supermom' is a woman who is able to juggle the responsibilities of a full-time career and family with effortlessness and attention to detail (Mayer, 2012). This supermom discourse still requires working mothers to meet the societal expectations of intensive mothering and prioritise motherhood as their main focus.

Working mothers are often viewed in conflict with stay-at -home mothers through a discourse that constructs working mothers as placing finance and personal career goals as of a higher priority than their children. There is significant cultural tension for women to negotiate between the blending of career and family life, and some research suggests that there is a tendency to castigate women in the paid workforce as being ineffective mothers (Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farell, 2002). Current research, also demonstrates that the discourse of working mothers as 'having it all' that is, both the rewards of mothering and career, can provide conflict for stay-at-home mothers (Desimone, 2001).

Mothers in paid work

As a result of these social, cultural and economic changes, the trend in New Zealand and other Western countries, is that more and more women work after having children (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). New Zealand women today are far less likely than women or recent generations to terminate or moderate their employment status to care for children (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). In particular, this rapid increase in the employment of women over the past forty years has resulted in women with young children spending less and less time on child bearing and rearing (Barrow, 1999; Casper & Bianchi, 2002). However, a report comparing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries found that despite large increases in labour force participation, New Zealand continues to have lower than average participation rates for women of childbearing age (e.g., 25–34 years) (Bryant, Jacobsen, Bell, & Garrett, 2004). Women who stay-at-

home to care for their young children still make up half of all mothers in New Zealand (Statistics NZ, 2014). Several factors may explain this, including more traditional roles for women, a greater emphasis on family, or women occupying low wage, part-time roles in the paid labour force, which makes childcare less affordable and paid employment financially unviable (Bryant et al, 2004).

In New Zealand, the age of one's children is the largest factor as to whether a woman works or not. Mothers with children under the age of five are more likely to stay-at-home (Statistics NZ, 2013). For couple households with young children, around half have the father employed with the mother caring for the children, and approximately 45 percent are both employed outside the home (split relatively evenly between both parents being full-time or the mother being part-time and father full-time) (Statistics NZ, 2013). This represents a large number of women caring for young children at home and negotiating both the transition from the paid workforce into the home, and then re-entry into the paid workforce after time away.

As women's involvement in the paid workforce has changed, women's responsibilities as mothers and domestic labour workers has remained remarkably consistent. The responsibility for childcare and household labour has been maintained by women for many decades and with the advent of women working in the paid workforce the responsibilities for childcare and housework seem to remain most often with mothers (Hoschild, 2003). Research has shown that the majority of household duties and even finances are perceived as being work that women take responsibility for whether they are working in paid employment or in the home (Coltrane 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard 2010). Most research shows that although women have entered the domain of paid work, men have not entered the domain of the home (Hoschild, 2003).

However, recent decades have seen women take on increasingly diverse roles in terms of both work and family, challenging the traditional dichotomy of either working or stay-at-home mother. Women have become more visible in a multitude of public positions outside the home and family (DiQuinzio, 1999) and continue to find unique ways to manage both work and family responsibilities. There are many conceptions of motherhood (Buxton, 1998; Collins, 1994; Darnton, 1990; Golden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Thurer, 1995) and mothers find a wide range of solutions to the multiple challenges of staying at home or engaging with the paid workforce.

Mothers over thirty

More women are becoming first time mothers after the age of 30 than ever before in New Zealand's history (Ministry of Statistics, 2012). This trend has been attributed to factors such as an increased participation in higher education, delayed marriage and a working discourse that constructs a need for women to develop a career and ensure relationship and financial stability before starting a family (Cooke, Mills, & Lavender, 2012). With the age of first-time mothers increasing, several biological issues become relevant, including a greater likelihood of needing assisted reproductive technologies to conceive (Andersen, Goossens, Bhattacharya, Ferraretti, Kupka, de Mouzon, Nygren, 2005), and increased risks of pregnancy and birth complications (Carolan & Frankowska, 2011). However, older first-time mothers are more likely to be better educated, financially secure and to bring with them psychological resources that may positively contribute to their parenting ability (Bornstein, Putnick, Suwalsky, & Gini, 2006; Sutcliffe, Barnes, Belsky, Gardiner, & Melhuish, 2012). Many first-time mothers have also had time to construct significant adult identities before the advent of children. Because the transition to becoming a mother is constructed as one of the most important identity transitions of female adulthood (Block 1990; Golden 2001; Maushart 1999), it is vital for research to be conducted on how older mothers negotiate this transformation.

The present study

As mentioned above, the current generation of women are experiencing dramatic shifts in the way in which mothering is being constructed. Due to the cultural shift from the home to the paid workforce, much recent research around mothering has focused on women who choose to juggle career and family activities (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Vejar, et al., 2006). This research has focused debate, particularly in the media, around the tensions that mothers face when making decisions around employment. Research into mothers has also focused on teenage mothers (Wilson & Huntington, 2006; Woodward, Horwood & Fergusson, n.d.) and highly educated mothers who choose to stay-at-home in the United States (Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Stone, 1987; Williams, 2009). Research into stay-at-home mothers remains limited, and Zimmerman (2000) suggests that this lack of research is due to stay-at-home mothers being a minority in society. In terms of age, other research suggests that because first-time mothers in their thirties are a relatively new phenomenon, research in this area is also lacking (Bornstein et al., 2006; Fergusson & Woodward, 1999).

Much of the research that does exist on stay-at-home mothers is quantitative rather than qualitative in nature (Desimone, 2001; Manetta, 1992; Stone, 1987). While quantitative designs are able to generalise and track trends and patterns, they are unable to reveal the rich and interesting

language and stories that are central feature of qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because discourses have powerful effects on people's lives and social practices, research that conceptualises motherhood as socially and culturally constructed is much needed (Lewis & Ridge, 2005; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012; Miller & Brown, 2005).

Aims

This research aims to generate understanding around how stay-at-home mothers over thirty construct their lives and in doing so, more fully understand the complex social processes involved in shaping their lives. Further examination of the discourses of stay-at-home mothers over thirty will provide depth into the positions available to them in this role. This research will also shed light on the tensions these women negotiate around the competing discourses surrounding motherhood, highlighting how these positions constrain and create opportunities. This research may also bring to the fore family dynamics and the priorities that both mothers and their partners have to negotiate. The specific goals of this research are as follows:

1) To examine the discourses that partnered stay-at-home mothers over thirty draw on to construct motherhood.
2) To explore the way in which partnered stay-at-home mothers over thirty are positioned by these discourses.
3) To identify the opportunities and constraints that these subject positions offer partnered stay-at-home mothers over thirty.

Epistemological, Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions

This study is informed by particular epistemological, theoretical and methodological assumptions which will be outlined in detail in this chapter. I will first discuss the epistemological lenses of social constructionism and feminism, which have been used to frame this research. I will then discuss the theoretical lens that has been used: discourse analysis, in particular, Foucauldian discourse analysis where I will outline the way in which the wider processes of legitimisation and power are inherent in language.

Epistemological approach: Social constructionism

Epistemology is concerned with ”how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p8) and provides the researcher with a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we ensure it is valid and legitimate (Maynard, 1994). The epistemological position of this research is a social constructionist one which views experiences and perceptions of the world as being mediated by history, culture and language (Willig, 2001). It proposes that the world is given meaning through its construction and negotiation between individuals, in particular through the use of language (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985; Tuffin, 2005). ‘Truth’ is not able to be accessed through observation, rather when we use language we utilise or create a particular set of meanings about the objects of which we speak. In this way, multiple ‘truths’ are possible and they are always partial, situated and relative (Gergen, 1985; Taylor & Wetherall, 2011; Willig, 2001).

Language can be seen as both constructive and constructed. Language is constructive in that it actively creates social meanings and can be utilised to perform particular functions in specific contexts (Gergen, 1985; Tuffin, 2005). Language is constructed in that people carefully select the linguistic resources that exist and are available to them in particular cultures or social groups. In both of these ways, the world is given particular meaning, locating people and objects in certain ways and opening up or constraining particular actions. Discursive approaches are therefore a compatible and useful tool for researchers to understand how objects such as motherhood and paid work are constructed through discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2007).

Feminism

This research engages in a particular poststructuralist feminist perspective, which acknowledges that gender is multi-faceted and an important element involved in understanding people's social and material worlds. A central axis of poststructural feminist theory is criticism of the scientific, hegemonic and patriarchal discourses which homogenise women into a single defining facet, reproduction (Haraway, 1991; Schiebinger, 1999). These patriarchal discourses prioritise motherhood as the most important activity of a women's life, and as such, confine women to child-rearing in the home. It is only through research which critically examines these discourses, that other discourses have emerged showing motherhood to be a subjective experience with relational, social and cultural characteristics influencing the way in which woman conceive of and understand their mothering experiences (Badinters, 1981; DiQuinzio, 1999; Scheper-Hughes, 1997; Stack, 1974). Feminism highlights the dominant traditional discourse surrounding motherhood, which asserts that being a mother is desired by all women, natural and inevitable and essential to the construction of normal femininity (Gillespie, 2000). This dominant discourse is negated by feminists who argue that this 'natural' role of motherhood is socially constructed through discourse; that motherhood is socially constructed rather than naturally and biologically suited to women. Feminists argue that woman are exposed to powerful messages in the media insisting that woman can only reach fulfillment through giving birth (Friedan, 1963). In this way, feminists argue, women find that there is no other way to be herself, except as her children's mother, and her husband's wife (Friedan, 1963).

Feminists also point out the way in which women are exposed to particular ideals about how to be a 'good mother', from both society and the media (Russo, 1976). They highlight that the 'good mother' ideal, previously discussed, is a dominant patriarchal discourse which requires a woman to stay-at-home with her young children, with any other role being seen as an unhealthy anomaly (Russo, 1976). The ideals associated with the 'good mother', of being communal, selfless, and having high concern for others (Bakan, 1966), are constructed as being central to the both the domestic and motherhood role (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). In spite of feminist criticism of the dominant 'good mother' discourse, research shows that these ideals are as relevant and pervasive as ever (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2010). Images and messages saturate public policy, the media, popular culture and workplaces, providing a social regulation that shapes women's lives. As Sara Ruddick (2001, p.189) states, the good mother "casts a long shadow over other women's lives." Feminism views the implications of the 'good mother' discourse as limiting women's options in terms of personal

freedom, the ability to work and be educated, which negates women's individual desires for a life outside the home. As a result, this discourse is linked to the subjugation of woman into the private sphere of the home to take sole responsibility for both household and childcare tasks (Russo, 1976).

The lenses of both social constructionism and feminism allow the researcher to recognise the way in which stay-at-home motherhood is constructed by drawing on or resisting certain discourses and their associated subject positions. These constructions can then be influenced by gendered subjectivity, their 'being in the world' which has a social, material and discursive context.

Theoretical lens: Foucauldian discourse

Crotty (1998) defines the theoretical perspective of the research design framework as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology" (p. 3). This research has drawn on the philosophical notions implicit in discursive psychology, specifically Foucauldian notions of discourse, to understand the way in which stay-at-home mothers create meaning through language. Central to discursive psychology is the idea that language is productive and can be seen to construct versions of social reality, and achieve social objectives. Discursive psychology places a focus on analysis and how participants use discursive resources and with what effects; it is concerned with the action orientation of talk (Willig, 2008). Discourse analysis can therefore be seen as more than a methodology because "it involves a theoretical way of understanding the nature of discourse and the nature of psychological phenomena" (Billig, 1997, p. 43). Willig also argues that discourse analysis provides an alternative way of conceptualising language, which can tell us something about the discursive construction of social reality.

This research has been guided by several of the central notions of discourse analysis outlined by Willig (2008). Firstly, a discourse analysis approach argues that when people state a belief or express an opinion, they engage in a purposeful conversation which all participants have a stake in, and in order to understand discourse, the social context within which participants speak needs to be taken into consideration. Secondly, a discourse analysis approach argues that objects and events are, in fact, constructed through language itself; it is through language that meanings are created and negotiated. This is the reason why language is the primary focus of study. Thirdly, language constructs social reality and there can be no objective perception of this reality. Discourse analysis instead, places emphasis on the ways in which social categories are constructed and the

consequences of their use in conversation. Discourse analysts also view social objects as being constructed through language and that one person's version of an event may be quite different from another person's. Finally, discourse analysis views people's accounts, the views they express and the explanations they provide, as dependent on the discursive context within which they are produced. As a result, language informs us about what people are doing with their words (disclaiming, excusing, justifying, persuading, pleading, etc.).

Foucauldian discourse analysis emphasises the constructive power of language: that is, how discourses facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when (Parker, 1992). The focus is on the availability of discursive resources within a culture and their implications for the people who live within that culture (Willig, 2008). Here, discourses are defined as “sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions” (Parker, 1994, p.245). Their associated subject positions have implications for both subjectivity and experience and attune the researcher to the discursive world that the participant inhabits and the implication for possible ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of seeing’. Discourses are seen as working to define people’s subjectivity and lived experience, the ‘self’ being positioned in a network of meanings and viewed as fluid and dynamic, expressed and experienced in multiple ways (Willig, 2008).

Foucauldian notions of discourse are also concerned with the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power (Willig, 2008). Since discourses make available ways of being, a Foucauldian discourse analysis approach views discourse as constructive, and relations of power and structure as an inherent part of that discourse (Parker, 1999). This acknowledges that there are both dominant and subjugated discourses available for participants to draw upon to describe stay-at-home motherhood. Foucauldian views on discourse point out that dominant discourses are historically shaped by privileged groups who have gained relational power; that these discourses create cultural norms and expectations. In this way, particular groups maintain dominant ideologies that underpin these discourses, shaping individual consciousness, experiences and behaviors as accepted ways of being (Kreisberg, 1992). As such, dominant discourses contain particular ideological beliefs that maintain the relational power of the dominant group (Young, Kozak, Nancoo, Hao-Min, Middendorf, & Gale, 2013). Both privileged and marginalised groups often continue to accept messages from the dominant discourses regardless of whether they are aware of their implications (Goodman, 2001).

Dominant discourses are a diverse version of spoken, written, or behavioural expectations and social

practices that are shared within a cultural group, in this instance, stay-at- home mothers. These dominant discourses "both produce and are produced by social interaction, a particular language community, and the socio-economic context" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p.20). However, dominant discourses often remain invisible, and people remain unaware of the normative expectations and assumptions that these discourses support (Parker, 1999). In this way, dominant discourses can be difficult to become aware of, in particular for people with social power who are privileged by these discourses. It is important therefore for the researcher to identify and label a discourse as a function of accessing dominant cultural meanings (Parker, 1992). Thus, this research recognises that discourses about stay-at-home mothering legitimise certain behaviours, and ideals. In addition, a Foucauldian discursive approach allows researchers to identify dominant constructions and how they support certain social institutions such as motherhood. As a result, these constructions and the way in which women position themselves accordingly, affect the decisions that women make in terms of motherhood (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). Willig (2008) asserts that counter discourses, those that challenge the dominant discourse do occur and that these need to be identified. The possibility of resistance to dominant discourse is inherent in understanding power and may include 'reverse' and 'counter discourses' which may oppose dominant truths (Ramazanogle, 1993).

Method and Ethics

This chapter will outline the overall method by which this research was conducted in terms of participants, semi-structured interviews, procedures, and data analysis. Firstly I will discuss in detail, the process of recruiting participants and the issues that arose with this procedure. Secondly, I will explain how semi structured interviews were chosen to collect data and the power imbalance that can arise from an interview situation. I will also discuss how the interviews were conducted and the techniques used to interview participants. Thirdly, I will outline the exact procedure of the interview and how participants were informed of their rights and tape recorded. This will be followed by a description of the way in which the data was handled and analysed using the step by step process of Willig's Foucauldian discourse analysis (2013). Finally, I will outline the way in which this research was subject to careful ethical consideration and the processes required for ethical approval.

Participants

Ten participants, all from Southland, were recruited for this study. Due to the in-depth and exploratory nature of this research, a large number of participants were not required. The sample size was initially chosen to be large enough to represent the complexity of the discourses utilised by stay-at-home mothers. The sample size was then reviewed and considered during the data collection and analysis stage with respect to data saturation. The concept of data saturation can be applied to all qualitative research that employs interviews as the primary data source, and it entails the researcher gathering data to the point when nothing new is being gathered, thus reaching a saturation point (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

In order to be eligible, participants were required to have had their first child over the age of 30 and currently be a stay-at-home mother with the biological father residing at the same address. Participants were excluded if they were on maternity leave with a young baby as they had not necessarily made the decision to be a stay-at-home mother.

Recruitment of participants occurred through playgroups aimed at providing services for mothers and their children during the day, and run by a range of community groups, including church groups, Plunket, and Awarua services. Any playgroup that I had attended was excluded. I discussed the study with the playgroup managers and obtained permission to address the group at the beginning

or the end of the session. Once I had permission, I introduced the aim of the study and outlined what would be required of participants in terms of the time, location and type of interview. I then answered questions and discussed the research further with mothers who were interested. Written information with contact details were also left on information boards so that volunteers could contact me. Interested mothers approached me in person or via phone. Once a participant had read the information sheet (see Appendix A) I verbally explained the research and what was required. Next, a time to meet was established that suited both the interviewer and interviewee. A choice of venue that was comfortable for the interviewee was also agreed upon, including my own home or the participant's home. Altogether, five participants were recruited through playgroups.

Participants also provided me with other contacts who met the research criteria. This is known as the snowball sampling technique, which involves one person recommending someone suitable for a study and once that person has participated, asking this person for a subsequent recommendation (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). The initial participant confirmed they had gained consent for the recommended person's details to be communicated, before passing them on me. Altogether, five participants were recruited through snowballing.

Three participants identified as residing in the greater rural Southland area, and the remaining seven lived in suburban Invercargill. The participants ranged in age from 38 to 46 years old and all had two or three children with one participant having one child and being pregnant. All participants were engaged in the paid workforce before having children, with seven participants engaged in work that required tertiary education such as doctor, teacher or accountant. Two participants were engaged in secretarial work, and one owned a business, for which they had delegated responsibility for to a manager. Participants were not required to identify with a particular ethnicity or reveal their income for this research.

One issue that arose during the interviews was the revelation from two participants that they engaged in paid work for one or two hours a week. One participant also revealed that she was currently being interviewed for a job in the paid workforce. These participants were not excluded, as the work outside the home was minimal and the participants strongly identified as being primarily a stay-at-home mother. A further unanticipated complication was the revelation that one of the participant's three children was adopted. This participant was also included as the she strongly identified as being a stay-at-home mother, and had spent all her time since her first child was born engaging in caring for her children at home.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This research is interested in how stay-at-home mothers draw on socially available discourses to make sense of their experiences caring for their children. Semi-structured interviews allow a rich, deep and textured picture to form and therefore are a logical choice for this research (Klenke, 2008). A semi-structured interview requires a set of questions or topics to be explored with a general principle of minimum structure from the interviewer and maximum depth from the interviewee (Lester, 1999). This type of interview allowed me to elicit detailed descriptions from interviewees about their experiences and stories. This nondirective style of interviewing uses open ended questions asked by the interviewer, as triggers that encourage the interviewee to talk. However, it is important to acknowledge that I, as the researcher with the research question drive the interview (Willig, 2013). In this way, I am required to guide the interview in order to answer the research question, and to allow the interviewee space to explore the topic under investigation in a way that generates new insights. Willig (2013) points out that a carefully constructed interview agenda can go some way towards ensuring that the interviewer does not lose sight of the original research question.

The interview agenda for this research consists of a relatively small number of open-ended questions (see Appendix C), and as the interview progressed, I formulated questions designed to draw out further elaboration. This allowed me to incorporate the interviewee's own terms and concepts into the questions, and to make the questions more appropriate or relevant to the interviewee. This type of open ended questioning was chosen as the development of interview questions is usually informed by research, which is relatively limited in this case. More specific questions also give the researcher a greater form of power and can restrain the interviewee to discussing narrow aspects of their lives (Anyan, 2013). In this way, specific discourses may not be drawn upon by the interviewee, as they are directed in their responses. However, the problem with using follow up questions is that, as a result of their intense involvement in the interview process, researchers may come up with impromptu questions that are more directive and less open than necessary. Willig (2013) points out that a careful consideration of questions, especially when the interviewer is a novice may result in the formulation of more appropriate questions.

As this study is informed by social constructionism, it is acknowledged that the construction of knowledge is an active process between the interviewer and the interviewee (Willig, 2001). In this way, the interviewer is seen as an integral part of the interview process. Power in discourse is

constantly negotiated and constructed between participants engaged in an interview (Thornborrow, 2002). However, there is an acknowledged imbalance of power between the interviewer and the interviewee, with the majority of interpretation being performed by the interviewer (Kvale, 2006). It is important for the interviewer to reflect on the power inherent in an interview methodology, which may include, controlling and constraining others' views and achieving one's goal by enforcing one's will on the other's opinion (Wang, 2006).

As a result of this power imbalance, researchers engaged in qualitative semi-structured interviews need to be mindful of the possible effects of their own social identities on the interviewee. Power in the interview can be built up and determined by socioeconomic status, educational or professional background, and gender or ethnic identity of the parties involved (Anyan, 2013). In this study, it is impossible to directly compare myself with the interviewees as little demographic information was sought from them. However, I identify as a white, female New Zealander which seemed to align with all participants except one American who had lived in New Zealand for several years. During the interview process, this nationality difference may have resulted in cultural misunderstandings in terms of specific language or colloquialisms. I was mindful of these difficulties and checked understandings through repeating answers and using clarifying questions where appropriate with all participants.

Broad questions and active listening on my part allowed interviewees to discuss their experiences without assumptions being made. I was mindful of using several strategies in the interview process to draw out interviewee's talk and check I correctly understood what they meant (Wengraf, 2001). I asked for examples of events or experiences, particularly when interviewees referred to abstract ideas such as the lack of value that society placed on their role as a stay-at-home mother. I checked understanding through paraphrasing responses, and I refrained from asking questions which the participant had answered in previous discussions. According to Willig (2003), these techniques demonstrate to the interviewee that the interviewer is listening, and they allow the interviewer to check with the interviewee that they have understood correctly. These techniques also serve to maintain coherence and continuity throughout the interview.

The rapport established between the interviewer and the interviewee is one of the key aspects of semi-structured interviews (Willig, 2013). To help develop rapport, and to encourage interviewees to speak freely and openly, before an interview began, I engaged in discussion around topics that affected us both, including the weather, our children and houses. During these discussions, tea or

coffee was usually prepared, children who were present were given tasks and time frames were outlined.

Procedures

Once rapport was established, the formal part of the interview began and I verbally reminded each participant about the purpose of the research. Confidentiality and privacy procedures were discussed and the informed consent form was signed (see Appendix B). I then turned on the digital audio recorder with her written and verbal consent. As discussed above, in addition to pre-prepared open ended questions, I asked questions in response to the participant's answers, and encouraged them to speak freely. Interview times ranged from 20 to 60 minutes. Some participants responded with short or monosyllabic answers such as 'fine' or 'good' to early questions and needed a great amount of verbal encouragement and follow up questions to provide further detail to their responses. In contrast, the same question would generate a fifteen minute answer with other participants.

Five interviews were conducted in the participants' home, and five were conducted at the researcher's home. Four of the participants were interviewed with their children present and this is reflected in their transcripts, which have intermittent interruptions due to children requiring attention. Two interviews were stopped and then started again due to interruptions by children. These circumstances were unavoidable due to the constraints of childcare and limited time for many participants. These disruptions also reflect the nature of a stay-at-home mother's work environment.

All interviewees discussed their experiences further once the tape recorder had switched off, sometimes for up to an hour. This may have been a reaction to the recorder being switched off which gave interviewees more freedom to speak without thinking formally about the 'best' answer. In some cases, I asked to put the recorder back on to capture what the interviewees were saying, however, if the interview had been longer than forty minutes and the interviewee had discussed their experiences in sufficient depth, I made a decision not to record any more talk. This phenomenon may also reveal that a 'warming up' procedure was required, in which participants answered some introductory questions about being a stay-at-home mother for ten minutes before the actual interview was conducted.

Willig (2013) points out that the semi-structured interview can be ambiguous in that it combines features of the formal interview such as a fixed role of 'interviewer' and 'interviewee' and the existence of an interview agenda, with aspects of informal conversation such as open-ended questions and the emphasis on narrative and experience. Middle age professionals have been found to be more comfortable with formal interviews which are associated with administration and judgemental assessments (Willig, 2013). As most of the participants were 'middle aged' or thereabouts, and had been previously engaged in the paid workforce, some responded in a more formal manner than was anticipated. One participant asked several times if her answer was the 'right' one, to which the researcher explained that everything she said was right and that there were no wrong answers. In retrospect, a ten minute warming up period would also help alleviate the preconception of a formal assessment interview.

Data analysis

I started the data analysis phase by transcribing the interviews verbatim. Some research argues that transcription should be viewed as interpretative (Bird, 2005) where meanings are created and changed in the process of putting verbal data into the written form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used Microsoft media player during this process to listen to the audio files and write the transcriptions into a Microsoft word document. Pseudonyms were assigned to all names of children, husbands and interviewees. The written transcriptions utilised normal literary conventions such as pauses and complete stops to denote the structure of the speech. The transcription process was occasionally hindered by noises from children, music or simply indistinct speech. Words that were hard to transcribe were left blank with brackets to indicate an utterance had been made. No attempt was made to estimate the word so as not to infer one meaning where another was intended. The transcription process was used as a process of familiarising myself with the data (Riessman, 1993). I was mindful of keeping the verbal data as close as possible to the written data and aimed to transcribe a verbatim account of all verbal utterances.

Communication between the interviewer and the interviewee included non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and body language. This gave the written transcription more formality than the interviewee's tone and laughter intended and parts of the written transcription may be ambiguous without an understanding of the visual context, such as a child pulling on a sleeve to ask for something. When transcribing, action such as this is noted in brackets. There was also some humour in the form of sarcasm and exaggeration when participants described an expectation about motherhood that they felt was ridiculous. Their laughter was noted in brackets in the transcriptions.

A Foucauldian Discourse Analytic (FDA) framework was utilized to systematically analyse the text. Although multiple ways exist regarding how to conduct FDA, this research was guided by Willig's (2001) six stages of analysis, including discursive constructions, discourses, action orientation, positioning, practice and subjectivity. The first stage of analysis involved an initial reading of the transcripts with no analysis, so that I, the analyst, could experience 'as a reader' what it is like to read the text and gain an understanding of the discursive effect of the text (Willig, 2001). The transcripts were then uploaded into Atlas.ti, a qualitative software programme that facilitates the coding and management of data during qualitative analysis.

Once I read the transcripts and noted an initial list of ideas about the data (Tuckett, 2005), codes were chosen and organised into groups of meaningful data that were interesting to the researcher. These codes can be identified as "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998 p. 63). These were generated by assigning a label to an associated segment of text; the surrounding text was included to give a context to the extract. Once the transcripts were coded, overlapping codes were combined or separated and labelled appropriately. One example of this was the concept of 'time' which was referred to in a variety of ways. An initial code of time was created with a variety of extracts, however, it soon became evident that within this code there were more specific aspects of time being discussed. This particular code was separated to become 'time out', 'constancy of time with children' and 'pressured time'.

Once the codes were finalised, I I looked at the different ways in which the text constructs discursive objects such as motherhood. Researchers using discourse analysis are also required to include all implicit constructions (MacNaghten, 1993) at this stage and all constructive and functional dimensions of the discourse. In order to do this, I attended to the context, variability and construction of the discursive accounts. In addition to identifying the ways in which the text constructs discursive objects, I looked at how these constructions vary across discursive contexts. In doing this, I also looked at what consequences these constructions have created.

During the second stage of analysis, I focused on the differences between the constructions, and located the discursive constructions within wider discourses of motherhood. The context in which each construction was used was also considered during the interview. Because very little research exists on this population, the current study benefitted from an inductive or 'bottom up' way of

identifying discourse. This approach means the discourses are strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990) and is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, this kind of analysis is data driven and the coding frame itself emerges from the data (Willig, 2013). However Braun and Clarke (2006) note that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological presumptions, and it is important to recognise that data is not coded in an epistemological vacuum.

The third stage of analysis was concerned with the action orientation of the text, which requires the researcher to look closer at the contexts in which the constructions are being used by asking "What is gained from constructing the object in this particular way at this particular point within the text? What is its function and how does it relate to the other constructions produced in the surrounding text?" (Willig, 2013, p. 175). This was then expanded, in stage four, to consider the subject positions offered within the discourses. A subject position gives "a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire" (Davies and Harre, 1990, p.35).

The fifth stage required me to look at the possibilities of action that are offered within the identified discursive constructions and discourses. I focused on the way in which speaking and doing are supportive of one another in creating subject positions and constructions. Through positioning subjects in particular ways, I looked at how discourses limit what can be said and done, opening up and closing down opportunities for action. Finally, I traced the consequences of taking up different subject positions by identifying what can be thought, felt and experienced from these particular positions. This includes questioning the social and psychological way of seeing and being in this particular world.

The process of analysis is considered to be logistically entwined with the writing up of discourse analytic research. Research shows that the researcher's decisions about what is and what is not important can evolve throughout the analysis and writing process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Billig (1997) highlight the fact that by writing down the results, researchers are often organising and clarifying analysis. In this way, the analysis continued throughout the writing of the analysis chapters. This process allowed the researcher to identify problems and refer back to the data to address inconsistencies or difficulties that arose.

Ethical considerations

The study complied with the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants. My supervisor and I determined that there was a low risk of the study causing any psychological harm to participants, and consequently a low risk notification was filed instead of a full application.

Although there was a low risk of the study causing psychological harm, I realised that discussing experiences of motherhood can be deeply personal and often entangled with notions of responsibility, marriage, relationships, self esteem, and identity. It was thought, therefore, that discussing motherhood may potentially elicit strong emotions for some participants. It was hoped that by engaging in a one on one interview, with an empathetic and non-judgmental researcher, such participants would feel supported. In the unlikely event that a participant revealed to me that she was depressed, mentally unwell, in a domestic violence situation, or not coping with her present life situation, it was decided that I should give pamphlets and information about the issue and/or appropriate support services for example, WellSouth (n.d.) provide a brochure with support for breastfeeding. Although a small number of participants talked about challenging times, I did not feel it was necessary to give any support information, as the interviewees framed most of these challenges as in the past. In light of me being a stay-at-home mother, playgroups were targeted for recruitment that I did not frequent. This ensured the relationship between myself and the interviewee was free from any prior personal relationship and assumptions about each other.

Finally, the research was thought to have potential benefits for participants, the wider community, and policy. In some ways the interview process proved to be a positive way for interviewees to share their experience. Many of the participants said that they began to think about their role in a new light, and although some of them struggled to verbalise their thoughts and feelings, they conveyed gratitude and pleasure about having been interviewed. Many participants continued discussing their experiences long after the interview had concluded. They seemed to enjoy the process of having their thoughts and opinions valued and/or formally recorded. In terms of the wider community this research also has potential benefits for playcentres, childcare facilities, schools, playgrounds and exercise groups wanting to attract stay-at-home mothers. A greater understanding of the discourses used by stay-at-home mothers, may also be useful for policies surrounding women in the paid workforce, childcare arrangements and subsidies, and for Plunket and other family support services

Although data on ethnicity was not collected for this research project, it was considered important that the research was culturally responsive. In the context of the researcher entering private homes, it was important that I respected the diversity of the participants and their families, as well as their cultural practices and beliefs. This meant that times and places for the interview were decided by the participant so that participants and their families were in culturally appropriate situations, and they felt safe and an equal part in the interview decision making process. This research obligation also required an acknowledgement of my own Pakeha world view as a white New Zealander. This required reflexivity at all times during the research process and an awareness of how my own ethnicity and culture has influenced the research. This may be exemplified by the choice of the topic of stay-at-home motherhood, which is viewed primarily as a white, middle class phenomenon rather than an experience which can be applied to a wide range of race and socio-economic groups (Thistle, 1996).

Reflexivity

There is no single perspective on reflexivity, although though the most common understanding of reflexivity is understood as a broadly social constructionist concept (Thistle & Lieb, 2012). It is through the ideals of social constructionism that we view our understanding of reality as the product of our negotiated constructions of it. As a result, the researcher is always in the thick of the research process rather than distanced from it (Thistle & Lieb, 2012). It is from this position that the researcher must 'stop and think' about the way in which their own position in society, and the language they use, affect the outcomes and development of their research.

Epistemological reflexivity encourages the researcher to question and reflect on his or her assumptions about the world, knowledge acquisition and the implications of such assumptions on the research (Willig, 2013).. Some of these reflections are outlined below regarding the current research. There are several different ways in which the current research question could have been investigated, however Foucauldian discourse analysis was chosen through a particular bias of the researcher. The choice of Foucauldian discourse analysis has been influenced by my growing interest and alignment with feminist research in which reflexivity and power relations are some of the main themes (DeVault, 1990; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Harding, 1992; Olesen, 1994). I felt it was important to draw attention to the way that power is used to shape the expectations and construction of stay-at-home mothers and no other analytical framework focused so completely on these aspects of language.

I have also found it essential to reflect on what it is exactly that I am collecting and analysing in terms of 'truth' and how this contributes to our understanding of a particular experience. My current position is that although I cannot gain an objective and transparent truth from a subject's account, there is 'a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences' (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 3). While subjects are never completely known, it is possible through a research process, to gain something of their articulated experience and subjectivity (Doucet & Mauthner, 1999). As a result of this position, I have tried to take a more critical approach towards my own account as a researcher and those of the interviewee by paying attention to the conditions and constraints under which these constructions are produced.

In terms of both data collection and analysis, I noticed very early on that many of the interviews focused on the difficulties of motherhood. I have certainly struggled with personal challenges regarding motherhood and my own identity which has in part, inspired this research. However, some of the participants constructed their motherhood experiences as positive. This position surprised me and made me reflect that much of the data collected, and the discourses identified, seemed to construct a view of motherhood as challenging rather than rewarding. This may mean that either the questions themselves needed to be amended to reflect a more positive response about motherhood or that through my interviewing I have encouraged this kind of feedback through my own emotional responses. This could also be a response to the 'good mother' literature I had been exploring prior to the interviews which resonated with my own experiences and the challenges I experienced in negating these ideals.

In terms of data analysis, I have tried not to simplify the 'voices' of the participants as independent objective sources of knowledge. Instead, my role as researcher has been to make choices about how to interpret these voices and I have a subjective decision to make as I decide which transcript extracts to use as evidence. Research has shown that the interpretation of data is a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made rather than found (Mauthner, Parry & Backett-Milburn, 1998). In addition, I am aware that much of the research I am exposed to in psychology is of a quantitative nature and many of the qualitative research articles do not emphasise the role of the researcher. I reject the notion of the detached, neutral and 'objective' researcher and as I have experienced the complexities of stay-at-home motherhood I am acutely aware that, motherhood can be constructed in a myriad of ways, and that I construct it in particular ways.

Personal reflexivity involves reflecting on the way our own values, experiences and social identities shape the research (Willig, 2013). In addition it involves the researcher reflecting on how the research has affected them as people and as researchers. This can be done in numerous ways and every researcher will address these issues in a slightly different format. In this particular study, there will be a discussion of the researcher as a subjective person, and the ways in which this may affect data collection and/or analysis. The research process will also be reflected on at the end of the discussion section.

In terms of personal reflexivity, I need to firstly acknowledge that I belong to the population I am researching. I am female, over 30 years old, and I primarily stay-at-home to look after my young children, although I do study, and work sporadically as a relief teacher. I also reside in Southland which is the area in which all of my participants were situated. I outline this in the Information sheet which I give to participants so that they are aware of this. This can open up a greater depth of communication and a sense of being understood by participants who have a general sense of being undervalued by society.

In terms of my personal history, I am a white middle class New Zealand woman, who is a relatively 'new mother'. I had little interest in motherhood or becoming a mother until I married and became pregnant in my early thirties. However, the experience of mothering was compounded for me as a result of having twin boys and this quickly became the biggest identity challenge of my life. The transition to motherhood had been an enormous emotional, mental and physical change for me, and I felt this was particularly so because I was in my thirties. I struggled with the transition from a childless professional to a full time mother, so much so, that I was diagnosed with post natal depression and I explored many avenues to improve my mental health. I returned to the paid workforce for a year before returning to becoming a stay-at-home mother and I became interested in the way in which stay-at-home mothers were regarded, as the decision to stay-at-home was particularly challenging for me. I had completed all my Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology papers by the time I became pregnant and just after the boys became two I decided to complete my thesis on something to do with motherhood. It was through my own experiences and talking with other women in similar positions that I realised there were a myriad of ways to construct motherhood. It is for these reasons that my research interest in stay-at-home motherhood was chosen.

My own experiences as a stay-at-home mother impacted my decisions and interactions with the research process in a multitude of ways, but particularly during the interviews. Data collection using

face to face semi-structured interviews means that participants get an immediate response in terms of visual and verbal clues from me about how I feel about the responses. The interviews conducted were informal and I gave some honest responses, reflecting my own values, to some of the participants' discussion. The questions which were asked came from some predetermined questions however, many follow up questions were negotiated between the interviewee and myself. My position as a stay-at-home mother is reflected at times in the kinds of questions I posed. I expressed genuine empathy for the challenges and difficult experiences that participants discussed. This was as a result of the first hand knowledge I have about being a stay-at-home mother. Many participants also used humour to construct some of the challenges and frustrations, and these were laughed at together as a shared understanding of these challenges were acknowledged. Assumptions about me and the way in which I construct motherhood may also have been inferred by participants who were interviewed in my own house and who could make assumptions based on my housework standards and implied socio-economic status.

Finally, by living in the same geographical area as the participants, an area which has a limited number of stay-at-home mothers, there was a chance that we knew people in common. Participants may have felt concerned that we would meet again in social circumstances, and as a result, that personal information may not remain confidential (despite being assured of confidentiality). This may have been further reinforced by the informality of the interview and relaxed setting of private homes. These settings may have shaped how participants constructed themselves and what the discourses they drew on when sharing their experiences.

Research findings

The 'good mother' discourse

The good mother discourse prioritises mothering as an all encompassing aspect of a woman's life. Research shows that 'good mothers' are constructed as being patient, kind, nurturing, receptive, gentle, and soft-spoken, requiring years of self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and self-silencing (Hays, 1996). Further aspects of the 'good mother' discourse include constructions of children as priceless, and that mothering should be child centered, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, guided by experts and financially expensive (Hays, 1996).

In this chapter, I will show how participants drew on four underlying discourses which worked together to maintain the overall constructions of the good mother discourse. First, I will illustrate and discuss participants' use of the relational mother discourse which emphasises the nurturing aspect of the good mother according the relationship between mother and child primary importance. This discourse is co-articulated with the intensive mother discourse which constructs mothers' as spending large amounts of time and energy involved in their children's lives. Both of these discourses position mothers as 'good' mothers, providing for their children's needs and emotional wellbeing.

Second, I will illustrate the selfless mother discourse which positions participants as subordinate through constructions of selflessness, and sacrifices in terms of finance, career, time and energy. This selflessness requires mothers to place children as the focus of all their resources and themselves as the last priority. The final discourse will look at how mothers are constructed as the best caregivers for their children, resisting the use of professional childcare, and positioning mothers as being solely responsible for caring for their children.

The final part of the chapter will discuss the way in which mothers are constrained by the overarching constructions of the good mother discourse. Two constraints in particular will be outlined including the constraints on activities and spaces that mothers inhabit, leading to monotony and a lack of mental stimulation. Second, the constraint of constant time with children will be discussed, shedding light on mothers frustration and resentment. Finally, the construction of time with young children as a temporary phase will illuminate the way in which mothers manage constraints of the good mother discourse.

The relational and intensive mother discourse

One of the underlying discourses of the good mother discourse is the relational mother discourse which requires mother to spend a lot of time with her children, maintaining and developing the mother-child relationship. The intensive mother discourse is co-articulated with the relational mother and both discourses construct large amounts of time spent with children as necessary for mothers to meet their children's needs. The time spent with children also means that both the relational and intensive mother doesn't 'miss out' and they are able to be highly involved in important aspects of their children's lives. These aspects of the relational and intensive mother, position her as a good, virtuous mother that provide the best for her children.

Prioritising time spent with children to develop relationships

The relational mother prioritises time with her children and this is so she can develop a strong connection with her children. However, this time spent developing the mother-child relationship is also constant, meaning that participants drew strongly on the intensive mother discourse. Anne discusses her decision to become a stay-at-home mother and highlights the relationship with her children as the reason she stays at home to care for her children while they are young:

> Yeah financial is only part of it. I know research says or some research says that so long as it's a loving relationship until they're about three it could be with anybody, but I actually want that anybody to be me, yep I want them to be developing that relationship with me. *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old)*

Anne highlights financial factors as only part of the reason she chooses to stay-at-home, with the primary reason being she wants to develop a strong relationship with her children. Time spent with her children is therefore associated with developing strong relationships. The mother role in the relationship is constructed as being "anybody" until the child is three which is legitimised by an academic authority who has done "some research". This research constructs the relationship with the child as being "loving", implying a strong emotional connection which Anne identifies as the relationship she wants to have with her children. Molly also links time spent with her children to the ability to form close relationships with them. She responds to a question about the rewards of being a stay-at-home mother:

> Yeah I think you have time to get a really good bond and you know what's going on with them I think, you know you really know what's going on with them I think and it's nice *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Here, Molly positions herself as a relational mother by prioritising the "good bond" between herself and her children. This good bond represents the quality and closeness of the relationship between mother and child and it is developed with the time she is able to spend with her children as a stay-at-home mother. In this way, she also draws on the intensive mother discourse by prioritising time spent between mother and child.

Affection and connection with children

The relational mother is concerned with building connections with her children and this is highlighted through physical affection as well as communication between mother and child. Natalie draws on this relational aspect of the good mother discourse when she talks about her desire to be affectionate and warm with her children:

> Trisha: Um anything you would like not to be in terms of mothering?
>
> Natalie: Oh we never want to have grumpy days do we, we never want to yell at our kids but it happens. Never wanted to be that grouchy one that wasn't involved that didn't show affection, some of those parents that are quite removed so yeah I like to be involved. I like to be there and available for my kids. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

In this extract, Natalie constructs the relational mother, as someone who is calm, affectionate, warm and available for her children. She does this by contrasting herself with non-relational parents who are grouchy, unaffectionate and removed from their children. As a result, she positions herself as a virtuous 'good' mother in that she provides the right kind of mothering for her children. In contrast, non-relational parents are constructed negatively by Natalie who "never wanted to be" one of these kinds of parents. Natalie also draws on the intensive mother discourse by constructing herself as wanting to be "involved", and "available" for her children, implying she spends a large amount of time providing for her children's needs. Rose also aligns herself with the relational and intensive mother when she discusses affection in terms of the "connection" with her children:

> Trisha: So what are your ideals in terms of being a mother?
> Rose: I want to be an affectionate mother, you know never withholds touching, I constantly

> want to wrap my arms around them and so they've got that connection. Um I want to be strict, both my parents were strict, and I feel I am not as strict as my parents and sometimes I feel I need to be stricter but I, I think being strict is really important (*Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2*)

Rose draws on the intensive mother by constructing herself as physically available and affectionate with her children. This connection with her children is highlighted by Rose as the most important ideal as it is the first aspect she talks about. Her connection with her children is manifested in physical touching and it is in this way she is able to feel close to them. This affection and warmth is also a construction of the relational mother.

Giving children what they need

The time spent with children enables intensive mothers to provide everything their children needs, and this positions them as good mothers providing the best for their children. In providing for their children's needs mothers are also building an understanding of how their child functions so they can better respond to their needs. This responsiveness is a requirement of the relational mother as it is constructed as helping to create a closer relationship between mother and child. Natasha draws on this relational mother discourse when she responds to a question about the skills required to be a stay-at-home mother:

> That's the nice thing about being a stay-at-home mother, I am here to do their homework with them and to make sure they are....to make sure they have what they need, yeah.. *(Natasha, 40 years, 1 child aged 5)*

Natasha specifies that a positive aspect of being a stay-at-home mother is that she is able to provide for her children's needs, specifically homework. However she infers that by spending time with them and being available, she is able to provide her child with everything he needs to be happy and successful. In constructing mothering this way, Natasha draws on the intensive mother discourse which positions her as a good mother, responding to her child's needs and providing the best resources for her child. This contrasts with other discourses which may draw on constructions of motherhood as providing financial resources, or other needs such as food, shelter and clothing for their children. Natalie also discusses being able to provide for her children's needs as a positive aspect of the time she spends with her children:

> Trisha: So any other positive aspects for you?
> Natalie: Yeah, I like being there for them and giving them what they need, whether that be a cuddle or just putting them to bed. It's a nice feeling to think about someone else's needs instead of just my own and it makes me feel connected to them…. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie constructs herself as an intensive mother and relational mother by providing for all her child's emotional needs in the form of a cuddle and physical needs by being able to provide a sleeping space. Through responding to her children's needs, Natalie also strongly aligns herself with the relational mother discourse in this excerpt, as she constructs herself as able to better understand her children and connect with them through spending time with them. Providing her child with what he needs also provides Natalie with pleasure and suggests a feeling of competence in that she is capable of providing for her child. This may also provide her with a sense of confidence in terms of being a 'good' mother, providing the best for her child.

Being involved and not missing out

Through spending time with their children, relational and intensive mothers are able to be involved in many aspects of their children's lives and in doing so they don't "miss out" on important parts of their children's lives. This is contrast to working parents who do miss out and are not able to see their children grow and develop in the same way. For many relational mothers, being involved in watching their children grow is also aligned with a stronger relationship and a better understanding of their children. Amelia discusses the rewards of being a stay-at-home mother as not missing out on her children's lives:

> Trisha: . And what is the most rewarding thing about being a stay-at-home mother for you?
> Amelia: Seeing every little change in Stuart and Lachie and not feeling like I'm missing anything, yep that's just awesome and I just feel so in tune with both of them. *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

Amelia constructs staying at home as being able to see the growth and development in her children, which in turn gives her pleasure. Due to the constant time she can spend watching them grow and develop, she understands them better and they are connected. She ascribes seeing the changes in her children with importance in terms of being able to build relationships, and not missing any of them is vital. She also describes herself as "in tune" with her children suggesting that her

relationship is harmonious and free from conflict. Rose also discusses this time to watch her children grow as important and as something not to be missed:

> Trisha: Right. Well finally, what is the most rewarding part of being a stay-at-home mother for you?
>
> Rose: Woah, well it sounds so cheesy but you are getting to bring up little people and I love them so much and I love spending time with them and I think I am really lucky just to spend every day with them, you know, it's worth it, it's worth it because I think they are just becoming amazing little people. You know.
>
> Trisha: So just to be able to spend time with them and watch them grow.
>
> Rose: Yeah, I mean when you are working you miss out on so much and I guess I am so lucky because I get to see everything. (*Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2*)

Rose uses the word 'lucky' twice in order to reinforce the importance of the time she spends with her children and that working parents are not so privileged. She echoes Amelia in that she ascribes importance to watching her children grow and develop and getting to "see everything" is an important reward for staying at home. Rose also asserts a very emotional connection with her children in that she "love(s) them so much", and this connection means there is a strong desire to be physically connected to them by spending time with them. Lisa also discusses the way in which she is highly involved and does not miss out on important aspects of her children's lives:

> Trisha: what about them? What do you find rewarding about them?
>
> Lisa: Just the fact that I can go to school things, the children just had a maths sharing day and I can do that for them and they're pleased as punch that I can do that and I'm seeing already you know with Jodies's class as a ten year old she had maybe two parents turn up because most parents are back at work by now and she felt like she was the bees knees you know her mum turned up, you know so I like to be able to do that for them, I like being able to take them to class and I worry about going back to work once Charlotte turns five that I won't be able to do all the ferrying round, she won't get the same opportunities for after school stuff that the bigger kids had because I was at home with her and I could take them to things so that for me yeah is rewarding that I can share these things with the kids and I am seeing um I know my children quite well because I am seeing every aspect of their day pretty much *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Being an intensive mother means that Lisa is very involved in a variety of activities connected with her children, and in this way she gets to know her children very well. As a relational mother, watching every aspect of their day is constructed as important for her to maintain a connection and understanding of her children. Working in the paid workforce is associated with not being able to provide the same opportunities for her children and being unable to see as much of their children's activities. There is an implication that as a result, working parents will not know their children as well as mothers who stay-at-home to provide their children with time. Jodie is also described as feeling like the "bees knees" when Lisa comes to her school for a maths sharing day. In this way, Lisa provides her children with pleasure through her ability to spend time being involved in her children's daily activities. The time spent being involved with her children as an intensive mother is associated with pleasure for both mother and child, reinforcing the importance and priority of this time spent together.

In summary, the relational and intensive mother discourse requires mothers to stay-at-home and prioritise time with their children in order to develop strong relationships. These relationships are characterised as being warm, loving, and harmonious, with importance placed on the ability to provide children with everything they need. This positions the relational and intensive mother as a good, virtuous mother who provides the best environment for her children to grow and develop. Through the amount of time she spends with her children relational and intensive mothers are constructed as being able to see every aspect of their children and as a result, are better able to understand their children. This is in contrast to working parents who miss out on seeing their children grow up, and there is a suggestion that they don't understand their children as a result of this lack of time.

The selfless mother discourse

The selfless mother discourse is another key discourse which comprises the overarching "good mother" discourse. The selfless mother discourse requires mothers to have particular personal qualities such as patience, kindness, gentleness, the ability to be nurturing and in particular selflessness (Hayes, 1996). This discourse requires mothers to make specific sacrifices in their daily lives in order to consistently focus on their children's needs. The selfless mother discourse requires an all encompassing commitment to mothering and puts children as the focus of importance in family life. In adhering to the selfless mother discourse mothers position themselves as subordinate to their children's needs, placing their children at the top of their list of priorities and themselves at the bottom.

Selflessness

Being selfless is a quality that is a key requirement for this discourse and this requires mothers to give up their own needs in order to provide for others. Feminist researchers such as Russo (1976) agree that most characteristics of the 'good mother' require women to be overlooked in favour of her children and husband. This selflessness can also be linked to the all encompassing nature of motherhood which requires mothers to place mothering and as a result, children, as the focus of their lives. This selflessness is reinforced by authorities for one participant's who is expected to endure pain and difficulty in order to selflessly provide for her children. Lisa discusses her personality, as being "a carpet" for her children, in that she selflessly serves their every need and requirement:

> Lisa: I am a bit of a carpet, walk all over me because, and I know that other mothers aren't necessarily as, umm I don't know haven't given up as much of themselves as I sort of had and that's just me.
> Trisha: yeap
> Lisa: I'm not very good at saying no am I Charlotte? Exactly, what do you want me to do? I'll do anything! It's personality isn't it? *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

The metaphor of a "carpet" describes someone who is there to provide for other people's

needs, and subjugates their own needs. She describes herself as 'giving up much of herself' in her role as a mother, implying that she has lost many aspects of herself in order to give to her children. This phrase also highlights the all encompassing nature of motherhood and Lisa's total focus on her children's needs. Lisa also acknowledges other ways of mothering which resist selflessness and sacrifice for children. However by using the phrase, "that's just me", Lisa resists the possibility for drawing on other mothering discourses. She suggests that selflessness and sacrifice for her children are part of her inherent identity. She exemplifies this by telling her child that this is her "personality". The selfless mother discourse was also reinforced for one participant through authoritative sources such as midwives and breastfeeding consultants. Molly discusses this selfless mother discourse when she responds to a question about the challenges of being a stay-at-home mother:

> The two women that I saw when I had Clara, basically just said, oh just keep trying, she looks like she's latching just keep trying and I went in and I said to this women, Oh I've got blisters on my nipples, like really painful and you can see them and she said oh it doesn't look too sore and she said with my last child my nipples bled the whole time and I breastfed him until he was seventeen or something and I thought oh yeah, it was just really unhelpful, like, this is really painful……it didn't look painful, off you go. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly resists the selfless mother discourse by rejecting the consultant's advice to continue with the painful process of breastfeeding. The consultant justifies this expectation with her own account of breastfeeding with bleeding nipples for a long period of time. This period of time is ridiculed by Molly with the suggestion of sarcasm, and an account of the breastfeeding going on "until he was seventeen". In ridiculing this advice, Molly resists the selfless mother discourse, and is able to justify the formula feeding of her children later on. This selfless mother discourse, which is reinforced through midwives and lactation consultants, may be used to enable mothers to feel virtuous about breastfeeding. This discourse may be also be used to engender guilt in mothers who don't breastfeed, positioning them as selfish.

Prioritising children first, mothers last

The selflessness of this discourse is exemplified in a hierarchy of priorities which place children as the most important people in a family unit, and mothers at the bottom. In this way, mothers are positioned as subordinate to the rest of the family, with mothers being required to provide for others needs and subjugate her own. These priorities are constructed by participants as frustrating,

and tiring, as they are required to put a large amount of effort and time into prioritising their family. Lisa exemplifies this hierarchy of priorities by responding to a question about the rewards of being a stay-at-home mother:

> But there are times when I think ten years in, bloody hell when is it my turn? You know I am mum then wife and then I am Lisa um and it is, but I also know that it's the kind of parent I am too.. *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa discusses her frustration with the requirement to put her family's needs above her own through asking 'when is it my turn?' In phrasing this question she suggests that her personal needs are not being met and that other people are of greater importance. In outlining her hierarchy of importance she uses the words "mum" and then "wife", positioning herself in terms of her role in a relationship. Research into the linguistic representations of gender found that women are often represented in relation to states like motherhood or wifehood, while men are usually described as involved in processes of doing (Michard-Marcha and Ribéry 1982; María Jose Luzón Marco). Lisa also linguistically separates her personal identity from the position of mum and wife, indicating that her own personal needs are different from these other roles. Although she discusses frustration at this hierarchy which requires her own needs to be subjugated, she constructs this hierarchy as immovable; "it's the kind of parent I am too". Anne constructs her priorities similarly although she names the people in order of importance rather than using the language of "wife" and "mother":

> Yeah well this is the trap, selfless is the wrong word because if you are that then you just start feeling all martyred and sad about things and resentful but you know there is a pecking order in my mind and it is definitely kids, Peter, basic housework and then underneath that is me and so that is I need to have an awareness of myself as to when I get a bit tired and frazzled and bump myself up that list a wee bit to get my equilibrium back *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old).*

Anne echoes Lisa's frustration at the requirement of the selfless mother discourse to position her children at the top of the list of priorities. However, she resists the word "selfless" as too negative, as a state that creates emotional responses such as resentment and sadness. In conflict with this, she positions herself at the bottom of a hierarchy of importance. Using the language of "pecking order" she suggests that the kids, her husband and basic housework, are all aspects of her life that occupy a higher status than her own needs. Any focus on her own needs is separate and incongruous

with the focus of her first two priorities of children and husband. Anne discusses feeling tired and "frazzled" and it is suggested that these priorities are part of the reason she experiences these emotions. However, unlike Lisa, she manages this challenge by constructing her low position in the hierarchy as changeable and she is able to "bump myself up that list a wee bit". This priority of children and husband positions mothers within the selfless mother discourse as subordinate in that they subjugate their own needs in order to meet their families needs.

The sacrifices for motherhood

Many participants discussed how their role as a mother required them to sacrifice aspects of their life. These sacrifices are outlined in terms of finance, career, personal health, all of which are resisted by mothers in that they experience frustration and resentment as a result of these sacrifices. Anne explains how she sacrifices in terms of finance, health and grooming in order to provide for her children:

> Anne: Yeah I find myself frustrated, I need to get my hair done and go to the dentist and there's always something else that seems to need to be paid for like oh well another week won't matter, oh look I'm completely grey.
>
> Trisha: Is that also maybe because you don't have the time when you stay-at-home?
>
> Anne:Yes time is also a factor it's just there's always....this massive list of needs and wants and you know you are sort of constantly rejiggling rejuggling them depending on what's, the time of year or the kids have got xyz that has to happen so I guess it comes back to the mental pecking order of things that, where I am quite far down so everything keeps being reshuffled and each time I seem to get further down in the deck of cards
>
> Trisha: Do you think that's a stay-at-home mother thing?
>
> Anne:Yeah I think that...ahhh maybe not, maybe other women are better at prioritising themselves..
>
> Trisha: It's only your opinion so yeah..

> Anne: Well I think most mums would find that that happens, you know I am not going to value teaching my child, I am not going to value getting a haircut as more important than teaching my child to swim.
> *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old)*

Anne firstly states her frustration with the sacrifices she has to make before she lists some of the aspects of her life she now is unable to do due to prioritising her children. She highlights specific financial sacrifices such as haircuts, and the dentist which are constructed as less important than "teaching my child to swim". However, she specifically notes; "oh look I'm completely grey", suggesting that mothering has required her to sacrifice her outward appearance of youth and beauty, as grey hair is associated with older women. Anne refers to the "mental pecking order" which prioritises her family's needs and wants, however, this order is constantly being rearranged according a myriad of factors. Reshuffling and rejuggling the order of things does not change the position of Anne at the 'bottom of the pile', as more needs are added to the list, the further down the list Anne finds herself. In this way, sacrifices are constantly being required, and Anne's position of subordinate is immovable. Mary echoes Anne's construction of motherhood as requiring sacrifice. She explains the differences between staying at home and working and how she has not spent money on herself since her son was born:

> Mary: Ahhm the money
>
> Trisha: Yeah that's a big difference
>
> Mary: Yeah so I can't go out and buy some new skis
>
> Trisha: No
>
> Mary: Not that I could go skiing at the moment
>
> Trisha: Well you might want to one day.. yeah that's a huge difference
>
> Mary: Yeah so the first eighteen months I haven't bought any new clothes or shoes. *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant*

Mary finds the financial sacrifices as the biggest difference, although she does not discuss any frustration with this, it is a sacrifice for her not to have any new clothes, shoes or skis which may be constructed as part of activities she engaged in prior to motherhood. The limited financial resources of one income for the household are described as challenging for many participants and money for personal use is often constructed as limited or not available. This financial sacrifice is also

constructed in broader terms by Lisa who highlights how staying at home to be a mother requires women to sacrifice their career gains in terms of salary and financial security for the future:

> I know that my sister and her husband, he is now a principal, she was actually in a higher paid, more well thought of role, she took ten years out to have her kids, they've now split up he has gone up to be a principal of a school she is back at the bottom again clawing her way up. He's got a wonderful pension. And all those years that she took out to look after their children, she doesn't get that *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

This extract constructs staying at home as a ticking time bomb, the longer the time spent in caring for children the worse off a woman is in terms of personal finances and career progression. Staying at home means mothers sacrifice their career progression and their financial security in terms of pension. Mothers re-entering the paid workforce are required to 'start again' with their career and pursuit of financial gain after being dependent on their husbands to provide them with financial support. Mary discusses sacrifice of a different kind when she outlines sacrificing her time for exercise:

> Mary: And the other thing which I think is a big difference is I used to do a lot of sport, I was fit, strong and a lot slimmer than I am now with a little baby and I really miss that, I mean I know I am pregnant but I haven't done any exercise since Harry was born.
>
> Trisha: Yes well it's another way in which your identity is lost in that was who you were..
>
> Mary: And that was a huge part of me. And that that taking a back seat to do...yeah has been a big deal for me. *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant).*

Mary discusses the 'difficulty' she has had in sacrificing her time for exercise in order to care for her children's needs. This sacrifice is explained in broader terms such as her fitness, strength and weight, all of which have been sacrificed or has taken "a back seat", once she became a mother. Mary also implies that this loss has been a "big deal for me" in that she feels constrained by the requirement to sacrifice so much of what was important to her prior to motherhood.

In summary, mothers subscribing to the selfless mother discourse are required to display the key characteristic of selflessness in order to provide the best for their children. This selflessness led participants to outline a hierarchy or priorities positioning their children as the most important focus of their lives and themselves as the least important in terms of needs. Mothers made many specific

sacrifices as a result of their selflessness such as finance, career, health and time for exercise. Within this discourse, mothers positioned themselves as subordinate to the needs of their family. However, many participant's resisted this selfless mother discourse by discussing frustration and resentment in terms of not being able to meet their own personal needs.

Mother as best caregiver discourse

The discourse of mother as best caregiver constructs mothers as the most appropriate and competent people to care for their young children. A mother's natural place is with her baby and as such, mothers are required to spend all their time with their children. Through this discourse the subject position of best caregiver is offered for speakers to take up and draw upon. Mothers are positioned as the experts in understanding how to care for their children and as the person responsible for raising them. As such, passing responsibility for their children to others in terms of professional childcare is constructed as detrimental to both mother and child. This discourse is particularly difficult for mothers to resist and many participants' discuss being unable to remove themselves from this position.

Natasha draws on the mother as best caregiver discourse as she discusses the responsibility she feels in terms of looking after her child at the end of her one year of maternity leave:

> but when I had him, um when the year sort of came around, upon itself, I just, for me personally, I found it really hard to have an idea of handing him over to someone else to raise, and he's sort of I've brought him into the world, you know he's my responsibility, I know him best and if I was in a position where I could stay-at-home and raise him, then I felt really strongly that I wanted to do that. (*Natasha, 40 years, 1 child aged 5)*

Natasha uses the words "for me personally", suggesting that she is aware of different ways in which children are cared for and mothered. She constructs staying at home as the most responsible position for a mother, and "handing him over to someone else to raise" is constructed as lacking in parental responsibility. Mary also positions herself as best caregiver by explaining that being at home to care for young children is a 'natural' place for mothers to be:

> Mary: "Ummm Could afford it umm and it was something I wanted to do. Just wanted to be at home with baby.
>
> Trisha: No particular reason? Can you tell me why? Why do you think that was important?
>
> Mary: Ummmmmmmmm from my point of view it was what I wanted to do, I wanted to spend time with my baby uhmm and enjoy it for myself uhmm for me, I feel that babies, it's a

> natural place for a baby to be with its mother but I have no judgement on other people who feel differently that's fine, yeah I respect that and yeah am fortunate enough to be in a good enough position to be able to choose that and .....yeah.....and I think, I was fully breastfeeding so that's, I didn't express so which sounded horrendous for those that had to do it yeah so I could just feed him when I needed to and that was just my main concentration so I like it..
> *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

The use of the word 'natural' is a powerful way of legitimising a discourse (Potter & Wetherall, 1989), and in this way, the construction of a mother as being constantly physically present with their baby is privileged. Although she does not use professional childcare, she quickly resists a negative construction of professional childcare by saying "I have no judgment on other people who feel differently", and she constructs herself as lucky enough to be able to choose this option of staying at home to care for her child. This construction of stay-at-home mothers as 'lucky' is also echoed in the relational mother discourse where mothers discuss feeling lucky due to their ability to spend time watching their children grow and develop.

Childcare as inappropriate

Within this discourse of mother as best caregiver, other forms of childcare are constructed as acceptable in small amounts but not ideal for long periods of time, particularly for young children. Working outside the home and children spending long periods of time in professional childcare is constructed as lacking in parental responsibility. This is evident in Rose's response to a question about the challenges of being a stay-at-home mother:

> you know, since you're interviewing me I'll be honest, Sara does a couple of mornings at preschool and I know, you know people have a couple of days at preschool and that's fine but you see these little tiny babies and they're there and they're under six months old and they are there all day till eight thirty to five thirty, I mean, I feel quite strongly about that because I think, uhh I don't know, we have babies and where does the responsibility stop you know.
> *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose prefaces her statement with, 'I'll be honest' indicating that she is aware of other discourses surrounding childcare. She also puts her answer in context with "since you're interviewing me", suggesting that although she is discussing this with the interviewer, she is cautious about

constructing childcare in other contexts. These linguistic devices also suggest she is aware that her construction of childcare is not widely socially accepted and not part of dominant discourses which currently surround mothering. She asserts that leaving children for long periods of time in childcare is abdicating parental responsibility. Although Rose does use childcare, she constructs 'responsible parents' as those who are physically present with their children for long periods of time. Natalie also positions herself as opposed to long periods of childcare when she responds to a question about her ideals in terms of motherhood:

> OK. I wanted to be involved with my child as they grew up. I wanted to be able to talk to them and them to talk to me and just learning with them and that's the whole philosophy of playcentre and that's why I stayed there [at Playcentre] for six years. It just sat with my philosophy, it's being part of family. I didn't have kids to put them in childcare from eight 'til five Monday to Friday um. Happy and healthy and parents that are the best teachers of that child in the first few years. Or even up to seven years old I reckon. Just because Liam is seven now and he is just coming to terms with being at school two years later. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Playcentre is a parent led and managed organisation that provides a space for preschool children to learn and develop. As a formal organisation, Playcentre legitimises and reinforces the discourse of mother as best caregiver through constructing parents rather than childcare teachers as the 'best teachers' of young children. Playcentre also highlights the priority and presence of family as the best way in which children learn, reinforcing the negative construction of professional childcare. Natalie's use of the best caregiver discourse is legitimised through Playcentre and in this way she positions herself as being responsible for providing the best learning environment for her child.

The immovability of best caregiver position

Through positioning themselves as a best caregiver for their children, participants' construct their role of mother as immovable. This immovability points to a powerful and dominant discourse which participant's found difficulty resisting. This position provides mothers with a sense of importance in their children's lives and may provide a sense of confidence and pride in their ability to provide their children with the best care. Mothers may also find it difficult to remove themselves from their children in that they find themselves 'lost' without the position of best caregiver taking up all their time. Natalie points out that this position as best caregiver is a permanent role in her life and she finds it difficult to reposition herself:

> I think it's a problem when you always fall into that role of wife and caregiver, you always play the role of caregiver even when you are out with your partner, they don't have the same awareness of the kids as what you do at all...they don't intentionally do it, I believe Sam doesn't intentionally, "Oh Natalie will just look after the kids, I will just look after my mates," but that's what happens, we go to a friend's house, Olivia's wee friend's house, we go to their house for tea sometimes or they come to ours, and its Janet and I that sort the food, clear the table and watch the kids, and sometimes we do say, "Well actually it's your guys turn to do this," but you have to direct them you know and I am sure that's not fair or what happens to everybody but I do think that might be slightly women. (laughs) *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

This difficulty in repositioning herself and relinquishing the responsibilities of mother as best caregiver is constructed as unfair and disempowering as her husband has the power to choose his activities, while she continues to be solely responsible for caring for children. She resists the continuation of these responsibilities by 'directing' her husband and her friend's husband to perform the domestic and childcare responsibilities and in doing so, takes on board a position of power. However, Natalie also generalises this permanence of responsibilities to all women, who can be positioned as the "caregivers" in all situations. The difficulty in removing oneself from this position suggests a natural inevitability about women assuming caregiving responsibilities. Research supports this construction of women as caregiver and there are multiple discourses that justify or explain this position. Social constructionist researchers however, have maintained that "maternal labour" such as the work of raising children is the "the product of culturally and historically specific determinations, not the inevitable product of sex differences" (Weeks, 2004, p. 184). This research aims to position women's labouring practices as situated within the larger field of social relations within particular historical and cultural contexts (Schultheiss, 2013). In terms of laboring practices, Natalie also highlights the domestic work of clearing tables and providing food as work that 'women' do, positioning women in this context, not only as best caregivers but as domestic labourers. Lisa also outlines the difficulty she has with relinquishing her position as best caregiver when her children went to school:

> I'm not seeing them at school and it was hard to hand them over and to see that someone else was more important to them like their teacher knows more than me now. Yeah I fought that one for a long time. Yeah mum always knows best. Um I do know that I am going to look

> back on these years and think that these were just the best years of my life and I do know that the really grim times where you are really gritting your teeth through it all, I do know that I I should be grateful. *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

She strongly adheres to the position of mother as best caregiver through her statement "mother knows best". However, in this excerpt she discusses the difficulty in letting go of her responsibility for being the primary caregiver of her children where she is the most important person in their life. In their physical move to school, she is positioned differently for her children, lessening her importance, in that she is no longer physically available to meet their needs. Teachers are constructed as more important to her children now they go to school and she is resistant to this role of second best where her children no longer require her as much. Lisa continues to exemplify the difficulties mothers may have in removing themselves from the position of best caregiver by discussing the delegation of childcare to her husband:

> I've made that time for myself, still not enough, um but I think um James does appreciate that I do need time away from the children and is better at doing that but he's not a coper, you know on a Saturday morning they'll be times when he will take the kids out so that I can wash the floors and things like that, that counts in his eyes as me having some down time and it isn't, I just manage to accomplish tasks without the children underfoot. But he is getting better at understanding that but me time….. it's coming as Charlotte is getting older, it's coming...ummm *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

By positioning her husband as "not a coper" Lisa is by default, the parent who can cope with the childcare. This in turn positions her as the best caregiver in the household, and the one who will be able to manage the demands of their children. This position has constrained her in terms of time out, however she uses her time out to engage in activities that will benefit the family rather than spending time engaged in personally fulfilling activities. This points to a continuous and strong uptake of the mother as caregiver role and difficulty in drawing on alternative discourses which allow her to engage in personal activities.

In summary the discourse of mother as best caregiver discourse constructs mothers as the most appropriate, competent and natural people to care for young children. As a result, mothers are positioned as solely responsible for the care of their children. Through this discourse childcare is constructed as inappropriate for long periods of time particularly with young children, however, participants are aware that childcare is not a choice for those who are required to work for financial

reasons. Participants' in this study discuss difficulty in resisting this position as best caregiver and passing responsibility for their children to their husband's care or to schoolteachers. This may reflect the importance and all encompassing nature of the mothering role and the lack of purpose or importance for women once the sole responsibility for their children is removed.

Constraints of the good mother discourse: Lack of time out, monotony, lack of mental stimulation and childhood as temporary

All four underlying discourses associated with the good mother discourse require mothers to spend large amounts of constant time with their children. Time away from children is consistently constructed as being both beneficial for mothers in terms of self care and difficult to gain. This difficulty in gaining time away from children may be linked to various structural difficulties such as difficulty transporting children to childcare or limited financial resources for childcare, however, none of these difficulties are mentioned by participants in this study.

Anne explains the difficulty for time out in response to a question about the challenges of being a stay-at-home mother:

> Ummm that fact that there is no down time, you know there is no holiday, I can't take a sick day, I can't take a day off, um the weekends I just have an extra person to look after, and there's more mess, because there's an extra person making mess, there isn't really time out. That would be the biggest thing. Yeah. *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old)*

Lily also discusses the difficulties of gaining time without her children:

> Trisha: Um what sort of skills do you think are important for your job as a stay-at-home mother?
> Lily: Oh god, multitasking, lack of sleep, tiredness
> Trisha: yeap yeap
> Lily: or maybe coping with tiredness, umm I think that;s just gotta, it's the monotony of the thing, coping with that is really hard and you've gotta cope with not having your own time again you know it's 24 hours a day job you know it's all day every day um and I think that women have great coping skills I think but that is quite a big.. *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

Both Anne and Lily highlight the constant nature of their role as stay-at-home mother with Lily explaining that, "it's a 24 hours a day job", implying that mothers are to be available and responsible for their children at all moments of the day and night. Anne compares this to paid work where she is

able to take a sick day or a holiday but this is not an option for stay-at-home mothers, there is no event or emergency that removes a mother from providing for her children. This construction of motherhood aligns with the all encompassing nature of the 'good mother' discourse which requires mothers to be completely devoted to their children.

Resisting the good mother discourse

Time away from children is often discussed in contradictory terms, with participants drawing on the good mother discourse of wanting to be with their child at all times, however this constant time with children led to tiredness and frustration. In this way, participants' are resisting the good mother discourse and their desire for time away from their children is in conflict with the ideals of the 'good mother'. Mary discusses this conflict by first noting her desire to spend time with her first child:

> Trisha: Um my first question is about your first experience of being a mum and how the first six months to a year was when you had your first child and how that was staying at home and how you found that process?
>
> Mary: Ummmm well it was something I had been wanting to do for many years and so I was pleased in that way ummm it was a big difference to life before baby
>
> Trisha: Yeah what was some of those differences for you?
>
> Mary: Well having someone who completely depended on you 24/ 7 ahhhm but then I didn't particularly want to be away from him either so it wasn't that it was a big deal, ahhhm sleep deprivation was hideous, still is ahhhm *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary did not want to be away from her child and the physical constancy of the mother child relationship is constructed as a positive aspect of motherhood that Mary enjoys. However, further on in the interview she positions herself as wanting time away from her child so that she could exercise:

> Mary: And the other thing which I think is a big difference is I used to do a lot of sport, I was fit, strong and a lot slimmer than I am now with a little baby and I really miss that, I mean I know I am pregnant but I haven't done any exercise since Harry was born
>
> Trisha: Yeah well it's another way in which your identity is lost in that was who you were..

> Mary: And that was a huge part of me. And that that taking a back seat to do...yeah has been a big deal for me.
>
> Trisha: Well once again its back to putting their needs ahead of yours.
>
> Mary: And also Grant's. I wanted to go rowing but it was early in the morning and he was on shift work and he couldn't get up at eight o clock to look after him while I went rowing for two hours. *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary discusses trying to engage in a pleasurable activity separate from her child however, she draws on the selfless discourse by implying that her husband's need for sleep has been prioritised above her own need for time away from her child. Lisa's account also reflects variability in that her lack of time out conflicts with her desire for children:

> And I know that sounds really ungrateful god we wanted children so badly and now we have the three of them and I hate the fact that I do feel resentful.....there isn't really time out. That would be the biggest thing. Yeah *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa outlines her resentment in having to be with her children at all times and her lack of time out, however this resentment is in conflict with her great desire for children. In this way she positions herself as a good mother who spends all her time selflessly attending to her children's needs. This good mother discourse requires her to silently devote all her time to her children, and she should feel grateful for being able to spend all her time with her children rather than resentful. Lisa both resists the good mother discourse through resenting the constancy of her role as stay-at-home mother and adheres to the good mother discourse by admonishing herself for this resentment.

Engaging in time out activities

Participants who did manage to have time away from their children used it to engage in a multitude of activities they took pleasure in including exercise, reading and resting. Lily outlines time out from her children and how she uses professional childcare to gain time for herself:

> I put the kids into care, they both go into care, and George's at kindy and Hugo goes into childcare and that's when I go and have a coffee by myself, I tend to try and sit down for half an hour. And the gym has been the big saviour. And for the alcohol, a drink is always nice put

> the kids to bed and actually sit down with your husband and try and turn off the tv and have a conversation. I think exercise for me has been the biggest, biggest thing for me. I am just grumpy a lot and I'm lost without it, I don't know how other people, other mothers cope. *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

Lily also asserts that the time when the children go to bed is time away from her children, and provides her with the opportunity for a discussion with her husband. She constructs time out for exercise as an essential part of her emotional rather than physical wellbeing, being "grumpy" and "lost without it". The word "saviour" is associated with the gym, constructing exercise as a positive personal activity that has saved her from something negative. This physical separation from children and the experience of a different environment enables mothers to construct versions of themselves which may also link to a pre-maternal self. Molly also discusses how she has taken some time away from her children, with her husband looking after the children so that she could visit her mother and friends in Dunedin:

> Trisha: so would you say um the most challenging part was lack of time to yourself?
>
> Molly: Yes I think it is. I mean I went up to mums and she cooked me tea and I sat and read a book and she did the dishes, no one woke me up in the night, I went and had a coffee with my friends in Dunedin had a wee look around some nice shops and bought a present for a friend who has just had their third baby. Three boys under three what could possibly go wrong? (laughs) yeah and it was just really surreal and I was actually even looking forward to the bus trip because I would have three hours on my own reading a book on a bus so that's a bit sad. And I think if we still lived in Dunedin we would have because Mum's in Dunedin and you've got that support we would have probably got away more. Yeah, Greg's always like yeah sure go away go away but Clara's a bit needy and I feel a bit like...but having done it I will try and make the effort to do it more you know get a few girls to go up to Wanaka for the weekend or.. (*Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2*

She describes the experience of time away from her children as "surreal" suggesting that she has positioned herself as being physically present with her children for so long the experience of being without children is no longer part of her life. She outlines two issues with time out from her children, one of which is the lack of family support in terms of childcare, as her mother is physically far away. Her child Clara, is also positioned as "a bit needy" suggesting that Molly

draws on the good mother discourse requiring her to prioritise time with her child, and provide for their needs.

Monotony and lack of stimulation

Many participants also discussed the way their time was constrained to a series of endless tasks focused on selflessly caring for the household and children. The four underlying discourses of the good mother work together in terms of constraining mothers to places that are appropriate to young children and their routines. Hence, there is a lack of mental stimulation with all activities centered on housework or children's requirements. Most participants outlined washing and household tasks such as cleaning and tidying as a large part of their day. For example Lisa responds to a question about the tasks that make up her day:

> Washing. Copious amounts of washing. Three children who get filthy. I feel like it's a constant round of washing cooking feeding, cleaning up afterwards, and ferrying children to activities vast amounts of homework for each of these activities not just school *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

She uses the words "vast amounts of homework" and "copious amounts of washing" to reinforce the overwhelming nature of these daily tasks which take up large amounts of her time. As a result, she suggests there is little or no time left for her own activities and she implies that the monotony of her daily tasks are challenging. Similarly, Anne discusses the lack of variation in her work which creates challenges for her:

> Anne: The monotony, you know the kids make progress, you know the boys are ten and a half months old now and they are a lot different from newborns day to day you know they are not really all that different you still feed them clothe them change them, wash them
>
> Trisha: Lack of stimulation?
>
> Anne: Lack of variety yeap
>
> Trisha: And how do you manage this? Do you do anything to sort of..
>
> Anne: Wine Trisha wine.
>
> Trisha: Wine, right got it, I'll put that in..
>
> Anne: How do I manage it well..

> Trisha: Do you have any strategies that make you feel better about some of the challenges or the difficult parts?
>
> Anne: Not really. Time just gets so busy that I just find myself climbing the walls just thinking my god I just need to get outside and get some fresh air or I don't care what a mission it is to load up and take them somewhere but I have to do it because I need a change.....ahm but then its not worth it because its always such a drama. *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old)*

The lack of variety and the repetitive nature of caring for children creates great frustration for Anne who finds herself "climbing the walls" in search of a "change". She tries to manage this constraint by taking her children to a different place, however this change of space is constructed as more challenging and "not worth it".

Paid work is also associated with mental stimulation and as part of this, socialisation with other people who are not focused on children. In contrast, staying at home is constructed as lacking socialisation with adults and mental stimulation. Lily links the monotony of her day with a lack of brain stimulation and suggests that paid work can provide the opportunity for "a different kind of thinking."

> I think that's just a combination of tiredness and not using your brain. I mean motherhood is very repetitive and it feels like groundhog day I think, yeah your brain just isn't stimulated, of course it is in lots of ways, but but not like being at work and having to think on your toes, and um just a different kind of thinking yeah *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

She suggests that compared to staying at home to care for children where "your brain just isn't stimulated", paid work provides the brain stimulation where you "think on your toes". In this way, paid work is constructed positively in comparison to staying at home in that it provides mental stimulation. Natalie echoes this construction when she discusses her time between children when she went back to paid work and the benefits this gave her in terms of socialisation and mental stimulation:

> Trisha: So what about the work did you enjoy the work side of it?
>
> Natalie: Yeah cause I have always had to have my brain functioning and I think that's probably

> why I got onto training through the Playcentre diploma so I missed that and I missed the social aspect of it as well talking to other people about things other than nappies or breastfeeding or...vomiting or(laughs) *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie constructs mothers she socialises with as completely focused on children, with their discussions revolving around "nappies or breastfeeding or ….vomiting" with little to stimulate her brain. Working outside the home is a way in which she could keep her "brain functioning", and she misses both the mental stimulation and the socialisation with "other people" who are not mothers. However, she manages this constraint through completing a Playcentre diploma providing her with the mental stimulation she misses from the paid workforce. Natasha also discusses staying at home as lacking in mental stimulation and implies that paid work would provide this opportunity:

> Trisha: yeah you've talked about being disempowered which I think can be very challenging but I was wanting to know how you..
>
> Natasha: oh yeah just because I'm doing the same thing every day, my brain isn't getting stimulated and I think after a while, you know, you're not getting, you don't get any pay for raising children um and I think that can be you know you sort of sometimes you're just sort of..oh this is..not that cool *(Natasha, 40 years, 1 child aged 5)*

Natasha links lack of mental stimulation and lack of pay, both of which are constraints of her role as stay-at-home mother and which can be constructed as benefits of the paid workforce.

Amelia explains how she manages her lack of mental stimulation and in doing so, highlights social interaction as part of being mentally stimulated:

> Trisha: So what do you think would be the most difficult or challenging part of being a stay-at-home mum?
> Amelia: Um probably not having a lot going on mentally, like more mind food sort of thing, talking to a one or two year old all day, stimulation of the brain
> Trisha: Yeah that's a hard one definitely, and how do you manage this?
> Amelia: It helps having Stan [husband] being really into current events and reading so he keeps me, he scans things and then he talks to me about things which is and then I try and scan stuff so that I can try and make it two way yeah I try and do some reading or when I am

> driving listen to radio national just to get some, like it's really nice to um listen to music but I really need the stimulation. *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

Amelia provides specific examples of how she tries to manage this lack of mental stimulation, such as reading, talking to her husband about current events and listening to national radio. She attributes her lack of mental stimulation to "talking to a one or two year old all day", which highlights her difficulty removing herself from child focussed activities, spaces and conversations. This phrase also suggests that she not only lacks mental stimulation but specifically, stimulation in the form of adult interaction. Amelia specifically refers to discussions with her husband as a way in which she mentally stimulates her brain.

In summary, the good mother discourse always requires mothers to devote large amounts of time and energy focused on their children's needs. Stay-at-home mothers who draw on this discourse are therefore positioned in ways where they may find it difficult to gain time away from their children. The good mother discourse also places mothers in spaces that are child centered and limits social contacts with people who are not engaged with building relationships with children. In this way, mental stimulation is constrained to children's interests and activities which are often repetitive and monotonous.

Childhood as temporary

Many of the constraints of the overarching good mother discourse are managed by the construction of the good mother as a temporary phase while children are young. Children are constructed as being young for a small amount of time, and in the context of older children, the good mother discourse is drawn on less often. Constructing young children in this way means that financial gain, time for personal fulfillment and career gains are justifiably delayed in order to prioritise the development of the mother child relationship. Molly emphasises the importance of enjoying the close relationship with her children while they are young:

> Trisha: and what are the other rewards of being a stay-at-home mother?

> Molly: um..yeah I think you get a really good bond and you know what's going on with them I think, you know you really know what's going on with them I think and it's nice, it's nice to actually enjoy them when they are little because they aren't little for very long, they grow up really really fast, Clara is not my baby anymore and it just seems like the other day that she

> was a wee baby so I think that is rewarding *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly constructs the time frame when children are young as an important period of time in which to enjoy. She infers that because they "grow up really really fast", it is important to spend this fleeting time with them while they are babies. This time is constructed as precious and unable to be retrieved. This suggests that as children grow up, mothers may draw on the good mother discourse less often, as children are less in need of the close relationship and time with their mother. Amelia also constructs the short time frame when children are young as being important when she responds to a question about how she decided to become a stay-at-home mother:

> Hmmmm ummmm I think, I've been very um up front, if that's the right expression, about the fact that I'm at home now but I've got no intention of staying home full time forever, I do want to get back into the workforce ahhh I think they see it for what it is, a period of time while the children are really young to be at home and be the glue. *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

She uses the metaphor of "the glue" to describe her time as a stay-at-home mother highlighting the importance of this role in keeping the family and the household together in some way. Without her presence at home to be the glue, there is a suggestion that her household or family will fall apart or break. This in turn constructs her presence with her children as essential for the family to stay together. This aligns with the relational and intensive mother discourse which requires mothers to spend large amounts of time with their children. Anne constructs the requirements of the good mother discourse as a short period of time when her children are young and reinforces this by using her friends and family to agree: "I think they see it for what it is".

Amelia also constructs the requirements of the good mother discourse as a short period of time while children are young. She responds to a question about whether her husband was supportive of her role as a stay-at-home mother:

> He'd love it if we were making more money because you know at the moment we are not really saving, we're paying off our mortgage and we are paying into kiwisaver and um financially if I start working part time that money can just be saved, you know.. and that would be great....but there are so many years for that you know so it's not, you're only little once. *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

She talks of the financial sacrifices required by staying at home to focus on her young children, however, these challenges are negated by the construction of children being "only little once". There are "so many years" for financial gains, constructing this focus as being less urgent than the finite amount of time when children are young. The good mother discourse therefore, reinforces the importance of the time mothers spend with their children by emphasising the limited amount of this time required for mothers to spend with their young children.

Taking part in personally fulfilling activities is another difficulty for respondents, which is managed by constructing the large amount of time spent with children as impermanent. Mary outlines the circumstances which meant that she could not go rowing:

> Trisha: Well once again its back to putting their needs ahead of yours.
>
> Mary: And also Grant's. I wanted to go rowing but it was early in the morning and he was on shift work and he couldn't get up at eight o clock to look after him while I went rowing for two hours.
> Trisha: Right
>
> Mary: Yeah, it's probably a temporary thing and I can get back to it though. *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

The challenge of taking time away from her childcare responsibilities is managed through Mary constructing this difficulty as "probably a temporary thing". However, in using the word "probably" she leaves room for these difficulties to be long term and ongoing. Through positioning herself as the best caregiver for her child within the good mother discourse, Mary does not have any other childcare options apart from her husband who is unable to provide childcare at an appropriate time. Similarly, Lisa manages the difficulty of having very little time to herself by constructing this time as "coming" in the future:

> On a Saturday morning there'll be times when he will take the kids out so that I can wash the floors and things like that, that counts in his eyes as me having some down time and it isn't, I just manage to accomplish tasks without the children underfoot. But he, he's getting better at understanding that but me time….. it's coming as Charlotte is getting older, it's coming...ummm *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3).*

"Down time" is currently constructed by Lisa's husband as time Lisa has without her children, however when Lisa's husband takes on board childcare responsibilities she uses this time to

accomplish domestic chores. He is “getting better at understanding” her need for time away from children to engage in other activities, however, Lisa also highlights her time out as “coming as Charlotte is getting older”. This reinforces the good mother requirements as being temporary, and concentrated into a short time span when children most require their mothers. Natalie also manages the difficulties of being at home with her first child through constructing them as of a short duration:

> Trisha: Yep
> Natalie: And you know, once you’ve had a life in terms of a career and work wise ahhhh being stuck at home all the time is a bit of a shock.
> Trisha: Yeap
> Natalie Yeap but because I knew it was only for eight months I was quite happy to just kick back and enjoy it. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie discussed the time frame of eight months off work with her first child as a way in which she managed the “shock” of staying at home. The working world in terms of career is constructed as having “had a life”, while her time caring for children is constructed as being “stuck” at home all the time”. In this way she draws on the good mother discourse and its requirement for her to prioritise spending large amounts of time with her children. Natalie constructs the time she spends with her first child as relaxed, and her enjoyment of this time is a direct result of the short time span. This suggests greater difficulties in drawing on the good mother discourse if there is a long or permanent time span.

In summary, time with young children is constructed as ‘special’ and ‘important’ in that the small time frame when they are babies can never be regained. It is therefore of great importance that mothers spend time with their children during this time to watch them grow and develop. The constraints of finance, lack of personal fulfilment and career gains are all sacrifices which are managed by constructing time with young children as precious and irreplaceable. The constraints of the good mother discourse can therefore be constructed as time dependent, becoming lessened as children become older.

Constructions of the working and stay-at-home mother

Participants construct the stay-at-home mother in multiple and contradictory ways, and often in contrast to constructions of the working mother. This chapter will outline the way in which the working mother is constructed as a responsible and valued financial contributor to the family unit. Working mothers are positioned as materialistic, prioritising financial resources, in conflict with stay-at-home mother discourses which value time with children above money. Finally, in terms of finance, this chapter will outline the way in which stay-at-home mothers are financially dependent on their husbands and the tension that participant's negotiate when resisting the working mother discourse that values financial resources.

This chapter will also discuss the way in which working mothers are constructed as juggling both paid work and domestic responsibilities, being time pressured and overworked. In contrast, stay-at - home mothers are constructed as focusing on the domestic sphere, in order have time with their children. This focus on the domestic sphere also resists the juggling of both paid work and domestic responsibilities of working mothers and means there are clear divisions of labour between husband and wife.

Finally, this chapter will highlight stay-at-home mothers position as outsiders from the working sphere. This privileging of the work sphere isolates and marginalises the domestic work of the stay-at-home mother. People in the working sphere therefore, are constructed as having no comprehension of the work of stay-at-home mothers. Some participants will also discuss how working discourses construct stay-at-home mothers as stupid and disconnected from the mentally stimulating paid workforce. As a result, stay-at-home mothers maintain and develop important social connections within their own social group.

Working mothers as valued financial contributors

Working mothers are constructed as responsibly contributing to the family unit through gaining valuable financial resources. Stay-at-home mothers are positioned as resisting this working mother discourse through valuing time to build relationships with their young children rather than gaining financial resources. Many participants describe "society" as judging them negatively for staying at

home and not providing financial resources suggesting that the working mother discourse is highly prevalent. Rose explains how her brother draws on the first construction of working mothers as responsible financial contributors' to the family:

> you know my brother, his wife you know has worked all the way through, not full time but she works full time now they are all at school and he's very much you know go out and get a job, make money for the family. So when I am in his presence I do feel like I've failed, I feel a bit like a..you know I just feel him judging me a little bit and I struggle with that. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose describes feeling judged by her brother, and that she has "failed", by staying at home and depriving her family of financial resources. Through this construction of working mothers who contribute financially, stay-at-home mothers are constructed as failing or not meeting their financial responsibilities to the family. In this way, stay-at-home mothers contribute to the financial hardship of raising a family by depending on their husband's income. Molly also indicates that she is aware of the working mother discourse which emphasises the need for mothers to work to support their families financially. Molly responds to a question about her ideals as a mother by outlining the financial cost of childcare which she 'saves' by caring for her children at home:

> I feel a little bit sometimes a feel a little bit guilty for being a stay-at-home mum if you know what I mean, just a little bit mmmm probably should be earning some money, you know, because you are not paying for childcare, so you're earning that money at least. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly discusses her guilt as a result of not gaining financial resources which suggests she is aware of the high value of financial resources and the working mother discourse which positions mothers as being responsible for financial contribution. Through adhering to the role of stay-at-home mother she can be positioned as financially irresponsible and reliant on her husband for support. However, her guilt is partially dismissed through highlighting the high cost of childcare, further reinforcing the importance of financial resources.

In contrast, Mary draws on a positive discourse with regards to stay-at-home mothers who resist prioritising financial resources and value time with their children:

Trisha: so is it hard to see the rewards?

Mary: yeah it is and obviously a smile and a cuddle and watching your kids do something new is obviously very rewarding and you do get it back in that sense but ummm yeah I think people look down on, I think society looks down on stay-at-home women raising kids at home. I think there's a lot of pressure for women to be going back to work really and because we live in such a fast society everyone wants nice cars, nice houses which puts a lot of financial pressure onto people yeah *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary outlines the rewards for being a stay-at-home mother which are constructed in relational terms as a smile or a cuddle in contrast to the tangible rewards of objects such as "nice cars and "nice houses". The dominance of this working mother discourse is reinforced through attributing it to "everyone" and the use of the pronoun "we" to attribute valuing financial resources to all of society. Lisa also draws on a positive construction of stay-at-home mothers who value time with their children and prioritise this relationship above working for financial resources:

Trisha: yeap. Now that leads me onto my next question. In your opinion how is a stay-at-home mother different from being a mother in paid work do you think?

Lisa: Well I haven't experienced being a mother in paid work so I can't comment on that

Trisha: No but from your outside perspective

Lisa: I certainly think...are you going to be alright with her singing through this? Yeah alright OK

Trisha: yes

Lisa: I think that .....we are regarded as....maybe a little bit spoilt that that, we've got it cushy because we can being being a stay-at-home mum. But we make a choice and so we give up stuff so that we can stay-at-home. I think both Pat and I understand the value of having a parent at home um and its not that we are wealthy enough to do this, yeah...absolutely not wealthy um but we made a choice not to do the flash holidays and cars so that giving up one wage is worth it for this but I do think that society doesn't value stay-at-home mothers enough. Um and I think they make it very difficult to get back into the workforce afterwards, especially because children still require care after school hours and ummm...the lack of

> pensions for the amount of time we've taken out of the workforce, all these things, I think that there is'nt enough value placed on the role which we are doing. *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa points out that stay-at-home mothers are constructed as "spoilt" and "got it cushy" in that they are not required to take on the responsibilities for working outside the home, and are financially supported. However, she resists this construction through highlighting the financial sacrifices she and her husband make in order for her to stay-at-home. Rose also points out that these sacrifices are not valued or recognised by society which prioritises financial resources. Stay-at-home mothers may draw on this construction of working mothers to make them feel virtuous, responsible and that they provide better mothering for their children. In terms of working mothers, Lisa initially refuses to comment as she has not experienced this role, however, this may reflect a reluctance to present herself as judgmental, particularly with regards to working mothers. She does continue to discuss the financial resources her family sacrifices in order for her to stay-at-home, and in doing so, suggests that mothers going back to paid work to earn more money prioritise 'flash holidays and cars' above important time with their children.

Rose constructs stay-at-home mothers as "lucky" to be able to stay-at-home when she responds to a question regarding the decision to stay-at-home:

> Trisha: So just to be able to spend time with them and watch them grow.
>
> Rose: Yeah, I mean when you are working you miss out on so much and I guess I am so lucky because I get to see everything.
>
> Trisha: Yeah, but you have made that choice.
>
> Rose: Yeah I have made that choice but for some people that isn't a choice is it, they have to work. I am really lucky that I am able to stay and see that stuff.Yeah I have made that choice but for some people that isn't a choice is it, they have to work. I am really lucky that I am able to stay and see that stuff. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose constructs working outside the home as an activity mothers are forced into doing to financially support their family. Staying at home is constructed as a 'choice' that only some people are able to have due to the requirement for financial resources. In this way, stay-at-home mothers are required to be appreciative of their privileged financial position in society. The ability to prioritise time with

one's children is constructed as a luxury, that only people with a certain amount of financial resources are "lucky" enough to have.

Financial power: Stay-at-home mothers as financially dependent

The working mother discourse gives power to those who are earning money and in this way, husbands or partners of stay-at-home mothers are accredited importance and value for their ability to provide economically for the family. This in turn, devalues the work of the stay-at-home mothers and prioritises finance in terms of contribution to the family. The ownership of money or financial resources varied between participants, however, the change in financial circumstances from having a job and their own money to shared financial resources is difficult for many participants. Rose outlines her position of financial dependence on her husband as one of the 'weirdest feelings' about the first year of new motherhood:

> I wasn't earning any money and you know I was dependent on Sam going out and making money to pay the rent at the time, when we were renting it was that whole oh I'm just floating and I'm not making any money and I've got this baby. I think of all my years of motherhood that was the hardest year by far. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Losing control of the power to pay the rent and not making any money is constructed as "floating", not moving forward, nor making financial or career gains. This sense of loss, can be associated with not making money, leaving Rose dependent on her husband and lacking in direction. Financial gain is also strongly linked to rewards and value in society as evidenced by Lily who describes working mothers:

> But then I think they would feel quite valued I'd say as well yeah you know earning money and bringing money into the household yeah I know I'm going to feel a bit more empowered I guess yeah by by being able to have some of my own money, instead of spending all my husband's. *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

Working outside the home as something that is Lily is "going" to do, constructing stay-at-home motherhood as impermanent and working outside the home as inevitable. She associates working with feeling valued and empowered through having her "own" money. In this way, stay-at-home mothers are constructed as lacking in power as a result of their financial

dependence on their husband. She constructs the money that her husband earns as “my husband’s” giving him ownership over the financial resources and this possession of the family income gives him financial power. Natalie also constructs staying at home with losing her independence and associates this with not earning money:

> Trisha: Um you have obviously had a little bit of experience with this but how do you think being a stay-at-home mother is different from being a mother in paid work?
> Natalie: Difference, you lose your sense of independence, your sense of worth I don’t know...there’s sometimes frustrations that you are not earning the money and that you’re spending it and um because I was on a pretty good wage so you sort of feel a bit....what’s the word..
> Trisha: Identity?
>
> Natalie: It’s sort of independence or worthiness, cause for so long you have been in the paid work force you get used to that money coming in and you’re valued in that way.
>
> Trisha: Absolutely.
>
> Natalie: And I don’t think motherhood is valued at all in our society. I think it’s very undervalued *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie associates money with being valued, and because the work that mothers do is not rewarded through money, motherhood is undervalued. She also associates this financial reward with independence or “worthiness” indicating that financial reward can also be linked to self worth and a sense of identity.

Many participants discussed their husband’s willingness for them to re-enter the paid workforce in order to gain financial resources. Although most husbands are constructed as being supportive of the stay-at-home mother role, they also drew on a working mother discourse which values financial resources. Husbands or partners of stay-at-home mothers may utilise different discursive repertoires in different discursive contexts in order to achieve or pursue different social objectives (Willig, 2001). Many participants and their husbands highlight the difficulty negotiating the competing discourses of being a good, relational mother and a financial contributor to the family. Molly exemplifies this tension when she responds to a question about whether she felt her role was supported by family and friends:

> Greg (husband) has always said you know oh you don't have to work you know I said I might apply for this job he was like ooh his eyes lit up at the thought of potential income which is yeah, fair enough *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Greg's positive reaction to the potential income she will earn in the workplace is described as something which is "fair enough". Through this language device, Molly suggests that there is something unfair in their current situation, and that by working for financial gain, she will make things fairer for her husband. This positions Greg as being burdened by the responsibility for financially supporting his family, and in turn positions Rose as the person burdening him with this responsibility. Rose also responded that her husband would 'love' the financial gain of her working outside the home:

> Trisha: Yep, so you've sort of answered this question but your husband is supportive of your stay-at-home role as well?
>
> Rose: Yeap definitely, he'd love it if we were making more money because you know at the moment we are not really saving, we're paying off our mortgage and we are paying into kiwisaver and um financially if I start working part time that money can just be saved, you know.. and that would be great....but there are so many years for that you know so it's not, you're only little once.(*Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

She begins this excerpt by describing what her husband would "love" in terms of financial gain, however, when discussing decisions about finances she uses the pronoun, "we" indicating that the money her husband earns is partly owned by herself. She agrees with her husband that the financial gains "would be great" but as discussed in the good mother discourse, she negates these gains through constructing children as being "only little once", ascribing the time with young children as of a short duration and therefore precious. She does not include her husband in this construction of young children as being precious however, and it is unclear whether he also uses this construction.

The scope of this research meant that the construction of finance and the power relations inherent in the multiple constructions of both the working mother and the stay-at-home mother were not explored in detail. However, the transition of financial dependence from having personal money to having shared financial resources created challenges for both participants and their husbands. These

challenges have also been noted by feminist scholars who argue that women's work in childcare and in the home is devalued because it is unpaid (Schultheiss,2013)

Working mother as overloaded

Working mothers are constructed as overloaded with having responsibility for a multitude of tasks including paid work, childcare and housework. Three participants explained that entering the paid workforce meant doubling their workload as they would be required to do all the work they currently did in addition to the work outside the home. This double workload for women is highlighted by Rose, with childcare and domestic work assumed to be tasks for which working mothers are solely responsible. In response to a question about the differences between stay-at-home mothers and mothers who worked, Rose describes a woman who had gone from being a stay-at-home mother to a working mother and the demands that had been placed on her time and energy:

> Trisha: Yeap, and in your opinion, this is an opinion obviously since you haven't experienced both, how do you think it is different being a stay-at-home mum and a mother in paid work?
>
> Rose: Hmmm well I've got so many friends you work or who have part time work, well um one of my friends has just gone from two days of work to full time work and she is a wreck, you know it's only the first few weeks and I am sure it will all smooth out but you know she's having to get up at you know 5.30 , 6.00 to get everyone ready, she's going to bed a lot lot later because she's got to do all the meals and all the washing when she gets home and she gets home about six o'clock at night, sometimes later and she's got to try and get homework done, I mean, I've got two boys at school doing their homework takes um an hour if you want to do it properly, it takes a long time, so she's doing all those things outside her work hours um she's a special woman, I've got so much respect for her, how can she possibly be surviving you know and that's why you need to get a balance otherwise all you're doing is rushing and zooming and rushing so that's a huge difference. I'm lucky, I get to do all that stuff throughout the day, look after myself a little more mentally obviously, I've got more 'me time', in saying that though I suffer the whole as I said earlier, I suffer the whole, ohh am I doing enough to you know, to, oh I don't know. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

The working mother is constructed as lacking in time to complete her responsibilities by "rushing and zooming and rushing". In contrast, the stay-at-home mother is constructed as less rushed and overwhelming with time to complete responsibilities. In doing so, she suggests that "rushing" is detrimental to doing things "properly" such as doing homework with her children. The working mother is positioned in opposition to the relational mother discourse which prioritises time for developing relationships and supporting children in such activities as homework. Rose also constructs stay-at-home mothers as able to look after themselves mentally and to have more "me time" than working mothers. This is in contrast to the relational and intensive mother discourse where "me time" is a challenge created through the requirements of constant time with children. This variation reflects the contradictory nature of discourse and demonstrates that the discursive resources that people draw on are inherently dilemmatic (Billig, 1991).

Molly echoes this construction of working mothers as overworked and time pressured as they engage in juggling a multitude of responsibilities. She responds to a question about the difference between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers:

> Financially, it was just too hard, and you've got to weigh it up is it worth getting up at six o'clock in the morning so you can get up, get the kid to daycare before eight so you get to work at 8:20 and then you pick them up at 4.30, pick your husband up at five and get home and your kids having a tantie because its' just too frickin a long a day *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Working outside the home is constructed negatively, in terms of children's wellbeing, with children having a "tantie" or tantrum because they too are tired from the long day at childcare. In turn, staying at home is constructed positively, giving children the best care by reducing the rushing around and giving mothers more time to spend on both themselves and on their children's needs. Molly also constructs working mothers as trapped in the role of both paid worker and domestic labourer when she is questioned about the difference between working in the paid workforce and staying at home:

> I think with women's liberation we've kind of been allowed to um work and continue doing the role of mother and cleaner and all those things whilst still going to work and I know that when I did go to work full time I still did the majority of the housework and did the groceries and everything…….. I mean my husband has never said that you must do the housework but

> he doesn't do it so, you know and it's just that kind of assumption that you stay-at-home so you're stay-at-home mum and cleaner and cook whereas if I was working somehow those jobs would still have to be done you know so I think that's a bit of a trap. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

The working mother is constructed as "a bit of a trap" where she is responsible for both paid work and the stay-at-home mother responsibilities. She suggests that the responsibilities for the domestic sphere are hers whether she works or not, as she indicates she has always been responsible for them. She draws on a powerful discourse within the context of gender, that positions women as housewife, responsible for domestic work and childcare construction. The women's liberation movement is constructed negatively by Molly, as an authority that legitimises and validates women working in the paid workforce. Molly suggests that this authority has doubled women's workload as women continue to being responsible for housekeeping and childcare. The repositioning of men into the domestic sphere is not considered in this construction.

Stay-at-home mother as focused on domestic sphere

Staying at home is constructed as a way of removing a responsibility so that mothers can focus on the sphere of home and family. In this way, stay-at-home mothers, have the opportunity to focus on their children in contrast to working mothers. Molly constructs staying at home as providing the opportunity to be spontaneous with her children and to focus completely on one sphere of her life rather than juggling her mothering role with the demands of paid work:

> You don't have that nagging feeling that you should be at work or you should be doing or you've got something else you've got to sort, you've got a lot of freedom just to spend your time with your kids, and I really enjoy it. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly constructs stay-at-home mothers as having the time and freedom to be focused on one sphere. This can be contrasted with the good mother discourse which constrains mothers freedom by requiring them to spend constant time engaged in child centered conversation and activities. However, Molly does draw on a relational mother discourse by highlighting the importance of spending time focused on her children, from which, she derives pleasure. Mary also discusses enjoyment through her focus on home which provides her with a different option from paid work. In this excerpt she talks about how she made the decision to stay-at-home despite having a highly paid

job as a doctor:

> I just wanted to be there for him and enjoyed, yeah just enjoy being at home something different, I've worked full time for the rest of my life....I think that's the part about being older is that you've had such a long experience of working and it's actually really nice to think that there is a different option. *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary highlights her age and the length of time she has had in the paid workforce as reasons why she is now enjoying her time focusing on a different "option"; staying at home to care for children. In this way, suggests that the paid workforce may be unsatisfying or that she has fulfilled her paid work aspirations and constructs staying at home as a complete change of purpose and direction in her life.

Working mothers are constructed as juggling paid work with domestic work, and as a result of this juggling, they compromise the quality of these separate responsibilities. Paid work, outside the home is constructed as not complimentary to domestic work performed inside the home with not enough time to perform work in both spheres to a high standard. Molly highlights this difficulty juggling paid work with domestic work when she discusses her short experience of employment:

> You are kind of torn when I was a mother that worked and I remember talking to another mother about this she had just and her second child and she was giving up teaching because she said she did neither job particularly well so I think that's the tricky one, you feel like actually you're not you're not really committed to your job because you're always thinking about your kids and you're don't really have the time to go into work after, in the evenings or the weekends that much and actually get on top of things um and you're not then really spending much time with your kids except for the weekends when you've got to try and cram you know all that stuff in *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

In this extract, Molly points out that there is not enough time to be committed to both paid work and mothering. She highlights the way her work as a mother is compromised by the lack of time she has with her children when she is working in the paid workforce meaning she has to try and "cram" all the activities she wants to do with her children into the weekend. Her paid work is also compromised through spending time at work "thinking about your kids" and she doesn't have any extra time outside of work hours to "get on top of things".

Similarly, Natalie echoes Molly's comments about time which is constructed as finite requiring participants' to prioritise activities which they value as important. She describes the short stint of work she did between her first and second child being born:

> I'd walk in and my whole time in the office would be people instead of the work I needed to get done it would be people wanting to see me physically rather than talking on the phone or whatever and then I would have to do my work after hours...and I always made a point of not doing it with the kids around yeah so at one am in the morning I realised oh this is not worth it…… Yeah well I would have but it didn't come down to the money it came down to happiness. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie constructs being a working mother as having less time to complete her paid work, particularly due to her time outside of work hours being almost completely devoted to her family. Natalie's time with her children is constructed as precious and incompatible with the activities of paid work and she makes a "point of not doing it with the kids around". In this context, she draws on the relational mother discourse, prioritising time with her children as highly important to build relationships and focus completely on her children's needs. Money is the obvious reward for working in the paid workforce however the rewards for staying at home to focus on her children are constructed positively in broad emotional terms, as giving her "happiness".

Staying at home is also constructed positively by Amelia as a way in which mothers have time for children and domestic duties rather than the frustration of working and the conflict this creates in terms of the renegotiation of household duties. In the following excerpt Amelia explains how the current roles and responsibilities of her partnership 'work' for their family:

> Trisha: Yeah definitely, um you have kind of answered this a little bit but how do you think a stay-at-home mother is different from a mother in paid work. And you have talked about obviously being busy so um that time factor and not having enough time for the family and having enough time for yourself, anything else you can think of that would be completely different for you if you went back to work, to paid work.
> Amelia: Ummm I think I would be a lot more assertive with Stan, it would have to be a much more even role in doing household duties, and I see that with my friends too like them getting really frustrated with their husbands. The husbands are like I worked all day, I'm tired and the

> wife is like I worked all day too and I did the grocery shopping so..you want to cook, I need you to cook tonight and that kind of thing...Stan is really fantastic but I know that if I was working I would have to tell him to do things and I would prefer not to, I like he does whatever he wants to do, I like how that works for us right now. Yeah I think that would be the major thing, yeah it would just be more, I don't really want to say equal.
> *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

Amelia constructs working mothers as engaged in conflict with their husbands over the responsibility for household tasks such as cooking. The working family with both mother and father in the paid workforce is further constructed as tiring for both people involved. However, she associates working mothers with being "frustrated' with their husbands for not taking responsibility for household tasks. Her role as stay-at-home mother allows her husband to focus on paid work and her to focus on household tasks and childcare responsibilities. In this way, they are able to maintain a clear division in expectations in terms of duties, and Amelia does not have to be "assertive" with Stan in order to get him to take responsibility for domestic work.

Stay-at-home mothers separation from the working sphere

As a result of the lack of financial reward and value ascribed to stay-at-home mothering, many participants discuss a separation between themselves and people engaged in the paid workforce. This separation is reinforced through people in the working sphere being ignorant of the work that stay-at-home mothers do. As a result, stay-at-home mothers are positioned as outsiders from the working sphere, and form close social connections with each other to cope with this isolation. Molly explains how "society" marginalises stay-at-home mothers:

> Molly: Which is a shame...Not financially that doesn't...but just society doesn't value motherhood I don't think anymore....you're looked at as old fashioned if you're staying at home to be a mum with your children, as a mum with your children.
>
> Trisha: Yes.
>
> Molly: They say what do you do? I say 'oh I stay-at-home with my kid" oh. Conversation stopper. Yeah and that's all they see they don't get past that so yeah it's really *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly uses “they” to denote “society”, who are assumed to be people in the dominant working sphere, separating stay-at-home mothers from being part of “society”. These people in “society” are constructed as being somewhat shocked by Molly’s statement about her role as a stay-at-home mother. No further socialisation or communication is performed after this statement, further emphasising the isolation of stay-at-home mothers from the rest of “society”. Natalie expands on the negative discourse that the ‘working’ group of people drew on to construct stay-at-home mothers:

> Yeap, when I go along to corporate things with Sam, and I’m meeting people and they ask me what I do, and I tell them, they don’t know how to talk to me, it’s like I’ve just walked in with a dead raccoon on my head, they think I am a stupid person with nothing interesting to say, and it doesn’t always happen like that but there will always be a few people that don’t know how to talk to me because I’m a stay-at-home mum, I’ve got nothing interesting to say, how could I have any stories or anything yeah *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie describes her husband’s colleagues’ reaction to her role as stay-at-home mother. She constructs them as drawing on a construction of stay-at-home mothers as stupid, but also different, strange and repulsive, exemplified by the metaphor she uses; “a dead raccoon on my head”. In the context of meeting people at “corporate things”, Natalie ascribes this construction of stay-at-home mothers to people in the paid workforce. In this way, staying at home to care for children resists working discourses which value paid work not only for finance but also the mental stimulation of pursuing a career. Research argues, that working discourses construct two main priorities for women; to pursue a fulfilling career outside the home, and to make money to contribute to the family unit (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). These working discourses conflict with the good mother discourse which requires mothers to be fulfilled by their children and to value time and energy engaging in child centered activities. As previously discussed, a constraint of the good mother discourse is a lack of mental stimulation, in contrast to the paid workforce. This construction of the paid workforce suggests that in choosing to stay-at-home, mothers may also choose to avoid mental stimulation, or be unable to meet the intellectual expectations of paid work. Similarly, Rose outlines a stereotype of stay-at-home mothers as “stupid” for not working:

> Yeah incredibly different from them and I’m not in the big busy business world where people make important decisions even though I feel like I make important decisions all the time, but

> you know it's that, it's that stereotype um, if you're not working then you are stupid. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose constructs herself as different and separated from people in the working sphere who she constructs as making "important decisions", although she also associates herself with this responsibility. Through using the word "stereotype" she suggests that the construction of stay-at - home mothers as stupid, is incorrect and serves the purpose of making people in the working sphere feel important, intelligent and superior to stay-at-home mothers.

Some participants suggest that through the separation of the working sphere from the domestic sphere, people in the working sphere remain ignorant of the responsibilities and challenges of stay-at-home mothers do. Lily exemplifies this when she explains that no one understands how difficult staying at home is except for full time parents:

> But still don't think they really ever, unless they are a full time parent themselves, really get what how difficult and tough it is raising children at home yeah full time. *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

Lily constructs staying at home as challenging and difficult, with only full time parents being able to understand these challenges. In this way she positions her work as a stay-at-home mother as unknowable, separating herself from people who are not full time parents. Lisa discusses her daily routine and the contrast between what her husband thinks of her work and how she constructs her own work:

> I think James thinks I just go to endless coffee mornings and that's not the reality. I mean you know you might go and have a coffee but you're still entertaining children. *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa suggests that her husband constructs stay-at-home motherhood as relaxing and social by describing it as "endless coffee mornings", however, she resists this construction. In contrast to her husband, she constructs staying at home to care for children as constant work, "entertaining children" which her husband does not comprehend.

As a result of positioning themselves outside the paid work force, many participants outline the support and friendship they receive from other stay-at-home mothers. As previously discussed, the constraints of the good mother discourse, include social isolation and a lack of mental stimulation as mothers are confined to spaces and activities that are child centered. This support network of other stay-at-home mothers is a way in which participants manage the social isolation of being outside the paid work sphere. Lisa discusses how she socialises with mainly stay-at-home mothers when she responds to a question about how her friends see her role as a stay-at-home mother:

> Well my friends are all stay-at-home mothers too because that's socially, you kind of cull the people...without meaning to but you know you tend to be friends with the people who are in the same kind of situation as yourself um and I do find that we have kind of ..not lost friends but friendships have died where their circumstances have changed and I know that I am one of the only one of my friends from New Plymouth who has gone on to have a third child, everyone else has gone back to work with only two…. so our friendships have changed because of that, umm. But the good friends I have are the ones in the same situation and understand and get it *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa discusses how she only socialises with stay-at-home mothers due to 'circumstance', but also, that this group of people 'get it'. This suggests that stay-at-home mothers engage in particular social practices and discourses that separate them from other people in different "situations". This makes the social connections between stay-at-home mothers vital for mothers to maintain, in order to have relationships with other adults.

In summary, stay-at-home mothers are often constructed negatively in comparison with the current dominant working mother discourse that values financial resources and positions mothers who provide money for their family as responsible. Stay-at-home mothers, in contrast, position themselves as financially dependent on their husband, creating guilt for some participants. Positive constructions of stay-at-home mothers focus on valuing time with children, with the freedom to focus on one sphere of their life and maintain clear divisions of labour between husband and wife. This contrasts with the construction of the working mother who juggles the responsibility for both domestic labour and paid work. This 'double shift' of work means she is time rushed, compromising her ability to do either job to a high standard. Finally, the stay-at-home mother is constructed as a role that is clearly separated from the paid workforce in that only people who are full time parents

are able to comprehend the work they do. This separation means that social relationships between stay-at-home mothers are vitally important to maintain in order to avoid social isolation.

The good enough mother: A resistant discourse to idealised constructions of the 'good mother'.

In this chapter, I will highlight the good enough mother discourse which constructs motherhood as a learning process, only comprehended through the experience of motherhood. This learning process requires mistakes to be made, and in doing so, motherhood is constructed as challenging and stressful. In order to manage these challenges, mothers are required to be adaptable and able to relax their expectations. Through drawing on the construction of motherhood as challenging, good enough mothers are able to discuss difficulties with other mothers and position themselves as supportive and communal. In highlighting their difficulties, mothers are constructed as 'imperfect' and in turn, children are constructed as psychologically resilient and adaptable in order to cope.

This chapter will also outline the way in which the good enough mother discourse resists many of the idealistic constructions of the overall 'good mother' discourse. In particular, the good mother requirement to effortlessly perform 'natural' motherhood responsibilities and be completely child focused (Hayes, 1996). This analysis will describe how mothers are often unable to meet expectations of the 'good mother', and as a result, some mothers position themselves as failures. However, the good enough mother resists these idealised good mother constructions as negative, unrealistic and isolating. In this way, good enough mothers are able to resist the feeling of failure and position themselves in a more positive way. Finally, this chapter will discuss how the good enough mother discourse provides mothers with the opportunity to take a break from serious 'good mother' responsibilities.

The challenge of preparing for motherhood

Many participants discuss difficulty in preparing for being a mother, as positive expectations of motherhood are often unable to be met once they become mothers. Being a mother is therefore constructed as unknowable and a transition that is unable to be communicated through other people or information. It is only the experience of motherhood that is able to teach women how to be mothers, and this experience is often very different from expectations prior to having children. Amelia highlights the difficulty communicating the experience of motherhood when she discusses her friends advising her about motherhood:

> Amelia: Yeah and just the uhh, everyone when I was pregnant was like you have no idea how much work it's going to be, you have no idea how tired you'll be, and I was like I want to be excited to have this baby you know? And then it happened and I was like yeah, how can you really try to tell someone what it will be like (laughs).
> Trisha: So it is an experience you have to go through.
>
> Amelia: And you can see friends go through it and you still have no idea really. *(Amelia, 43 years, 2 children aged 8 and 6 months old)*

Amelia constructs motherhood as a transition that is impossible to comprehend unless you have experienced it yourself. Mothering is therefore difficult to communicate to those who are not mothers, even by observing friends go "through it". Amelia reinforces this construction by stating that "everyone" told her that motherhood was large amounts of work and very tiring, which she will not understand until she is a mother herself. Prior to having children, Amelia resists this negative construction of motherhood. However, after having children she constructs herself as naïve and her idealised construction of motherhood is challenged. She aligns herself with "everyone" in constructing motherhood as tiring and challenging, unable to be communicated unless through personal experience. Lisa echoes this transition in the way she constructs motherhood:

> Um yeah because we do all have ideas about what motherhood is going to be and what staying at home is going to be. I thought I'd be barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen surrounded by lots of preserving that I'd be standing there at the kitchen bench being industrious and creating things and life is not like that you know. If the house gets vacuumed once a week I am insanely grateful um but that's not because I am not doing stuff it's because I'm choosing to do other stuff. Um but yeah *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa constructs stay-at-home motherhood prior to children, in terms of traditional domestic duties, and this is exemplified by her description of motherhood being "barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen". This 'good mother' ideal, constructs women as being fulfilled through her children and domestic service in the kitchen. This construction opens up opportunities to be industrious and creative, however, after having children this idealised construction of motherhood is resisted; "life is not like that". Lisa also constructs herself as being naive prior to becoming a mother with the

experience of motherhood now being described in more mundane terms such as vacuuming getting done once a week, and a lack of time for creative activities.

Motherhood as relaxing expectations

Prior to motherhood many participant's discuss expectations aligned with constructions of the good mother. However, after being a mother for a period of time, many participant's discuss motherhood as a learning process, which requires adaptability in order for mothers to cope. Mothering is constructed as unpredictable and at times difficult to manage requiring mothers to relax their good mother idealistic expectations. These good mother ideals are often associated with domestic expectations of mothers maintaining effortlessly beautiful houses. These idealistic constructions of 'good' motherhood are not only resisted but in some cases ridiculed as totally unrealistic expectations. An example of resisting the idealistic discourse of motherhood is outlined by Mary, who did all the housework when her child was asleep. However, she now ridicules her previous expectations:

> I think that, it's probably taken me a while to get to realise that it's alright to...I was kind of doing everything when he was asleep so kind of tidying up when he was asleep but now I've been involving him and so it's okay for him to be involved with the laundry and it all doesn't have to be done in the background by the fairies (laughs) *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

She initially draws on an idealistic discourse where domestic work such as the laundry, is work that is invisible, and done in the "background by the fairies". By invoking an image of a fantastical creature, Mary highlights the absurd and unrealistic nature of her actions. Through laughing after this metaphor, she also uses humour to resist this discourse and draw on a good enough discourse of mothering enabling her child to be involved in domestic duties. Lisa echoes this resistance to domestic ideals when responding to a question about the skills a stay-at-home mother needs to have:

> Lisa: an appreciation or understanding that things aren't always going to go the way you expect them to that, oh my goodness, you may have aspirations for a clean tidy beautiful house but it just because you're a stay-at-home mother does not mean that's going to

happen. Ummm yeah

Trisha: that's great

Lisa: yeah. Just to go with the flow a bit
(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)

Lisa resists the domestic ideal of a "clean, tidy beautiful house" through constructing stay-at-home motherhood as requiring adaptability and the ability to cope with the unexpected. Lisa asserts that relaxing expectations about 'perfect' housekeeping is important for mothers to appreciate. In this way, motherhood is constructed as chaotic and unpredictable, with mothers needing to adapt their expectations about domestic ideals in order to cope.

Failing to meet good mother expectations

Idealised constructions of the 'good mother' create difficulties for participants, who position themselves as failures when they are unable to meet these expectations. Mary discusses difficulty in meeting the requirements of idealised 'good mother' constructions associated with being a mother, wife and domestic labourer.

Mary: We've kind of said it was a practical thing rather than a and I think trying to acknowledge that a cleaner might not be a bad thing
Trisha: Yeah so getting some help because you're tired.
Mary: My Dad might come out earlier than he planned to do as well and he loves granddad so that will be a really good thing. But that's been quite a big thing I have to say really. I've only got one child and I can't keep my house clean and I should be able to do that..
Trisha: Yeah, I think especially when you have had a career and you have managed a lot of other things in your life and then to get to that stage in your life where as you say people and society don't think of it as much but really, it is.
Mary: Yeah I feel like I should have a tidy house, happy baby, a decent meal and a happy husband..
Trisha: Yeah but why do you think that though?
Mary: Well it would be nice (laughs) and lots of people do so it's not out of the realms of possibility...or they portray that they do

> Trisha: Hmmm that might be the key..
> Mary: Yeah but it's not all a Hollywood film is it *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary draws on an idealised construction of stay-at-home motherhood which she describes as a "tidy house, happy baby, a decent meal and a happy husband". This construction is legitimised through her assertion that "lots of people do" achieve this. However, she then qualifies this with "or they portray that they do" indicating that she is aware some mothers may be 'pretending' and conveying an 'image' of meeting these expectations. Mary constructs herself as a failure for not meeting the expectations of the good mother and this failure is exacerbated for her by only having one child. The construction of the idealised mother, cook, cleaner and wife which Mary "feels like I should have" can be aligned with many aspects of the good mother discourse which requires mothers to strive for perfection (Hayes, 1996). Through striving for domestic ideals such as a clean house, Mary may also be striving to be a "good woman, mother and wife". She finally resists this idealised construction of motherhood by comparing it to a Hollywood film which is an unrealistic fantasy world that mothers can never replicate. Rose also speaks at length about the way in which other mothers portray an 'image' of idealised motherhood. In this excerpt Rose discusses how her antenatal group adhered to an idealised construction of motherhood until she emailed them constructing motherhood as challenging and difficult:

> Rose: I was having such a tough time he was just screaming all the time and he was hardly breastfed and he was just an angry little so and so. And I remember sending an email out blurting everything out and I couldn't do this and this is hard and daladaa. And everything up to that point had been daffodils and lambs and this baby is beautiful. And suddenly the other mums were like oh yeah I find it hard and such and such never burps and all this kind of stuff came out. And I was like oh thank goodness, and straight away you start feeling better because you know we like to put, some of us like to put forward that they're this amazing mother and we've all met those kind of people who are amazing and they look great and look fit and their children are well behaved and daladadaa. But when you get down to it every mother is going through something at any one stage and if we all talk about it then you are not so alone.
>
> Trisha: And not so judged either. And not having to put up that perfect image?

> Rose: Yes, and not so judged you know because we're all, we're all imperfect mothers. We all do things where you're like oh my goodness have I just completely stuffed up his psychological future (laughs). Luckily they're resilient things and you can go forth and try not to make the same mistake twice *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2).*

As Mary indicates in the previous section, Rose asserts that some mothers seem to legitimise and support idealised constructions of motherhood, by describing motherhood as "daffodils and lambs and this baby is beautiful". This romanticised construction of motherhood is challenged by Rose, who communicates her difficulties to other mothers in her antenatal group through an email. Rose constructs motherhood as challenging in contrast with the romanticised construction of mothering which her group of antenatal mothers adheres to. In this way, Rose opens up a space for other discourses of motherhood which highlight the difficulties of motherhood such as not being able to burp babies. Through other mothers drawing on a more challenging discourse of motherhood, idealised constructions of motherhood are marginalised and dismissed as ridiculous. Rose also indicates that by being exposed to this idealised construction of motherhood, she is isolated and lonely, while drawing on the more challenging construction of motherhood, she feels less alone and more able to connect with other mothers. This may reflect the tension mothers feel when they are unable to meet the expectations of the romanticised construction of motherhood, and as a result position themselves as failures. This failure is isolating if idealistic and romanticised constructions of effortless motherhood dominate other mothers' talk. Mothers may therefore identify themselves as different, exacerbating the feeling of failure and isolation.

In addition to mothering, Rose also points out 'perfect' expectations in physical terms of looking great and fit. She attempts to draw the interviewer into agreement and recognition of the legitimacy of her statement through the use of the word "we" in "we've all met those kind of people". This idealised construction of the beautiful, fit mother with well behaved children is resisted by Rose, through constructing motherhood as challenging for everyone. In this way, mothers as a social group are connected through their challenges and their difficulties, and these are what build social connections. Drawing on idealised constructions of motherhood is therefore constructed negatively by Rose, as a way in which mothers are isolated and separated, engaged in a silent striving to be perfect. This striving also suggests competition, in that the purpose for mothers to draw on the idealised discourse is to be better than other mothers. In constructing all mothers as 'imperfect'

Rose suggests that mothers are more able to be engaged in supporting one another rather than competing.

In drawing on the good enough mother discourse, Rose constructs children as resilient, and able to endure mothers making mistakes without psychological harm. This resists the 'good mother' construction of children as fragile and psychologically vulnerable, requiring mothers to be constantly adhering to 'good mother' ideals. Rose laughs at the 'good mother' construction of mothers who stuff up their children's future by making mistakes, suggesting this construction of children is silly or ridiculous. Rose constructs motherhood as a learning process, and through making mistakes mothers learn how to improve their skills for the future.

Many participants discuss challenges in adapting to motherhood with their first child. Subsequent children are constructed as less stressful and talk centers on an increase in confidence and relaxation about meeting 'good mother' expectations regarding mothering. Molly discusses resisting idealised expectations about breastfeeding with her second child:

> It was interesting my midwife was really good actually and when Sara, my second baby didn't put on weight she said how do you feel about just getting a bottle into her and I was, I was like actually really good about that. I did it with Clara and I'm fine with it now you know. It was a real no brainer with Sara, yep she's losing weight let's just do it. Yeah yeah you know and it's such a small period of their life, it doesn't need to be hell. (*Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly's first experience of motherhood with Clara is constructed as difficult, and she suggests it was "hell", part of these difficulties are connected to breastfeeding. With the decision to bottle feed her second child, she is "fine with it now" indicating she has changed her expectations and is now drawing on a good enough discourse of mothering. In the context of mothering her first child, Molly draws on a 'good mother' discourse, by having an expectation of effortless breastfeeding, suggesting that she was trying to position herself as a 'good' mother doing the best for her child. In mothering her second child she draws on a 'good enough' mother discourse where she is able to discuss the challenges of breastfeeding and decide not to breastfeed in order to provide a less stressful time for both her and her child. In this way she highlights the variability of discourse where different constructions of motherhood are drawn on in different contexts, at different times for

different purposes.

The good enough mother as able to relax and take a break

The good enough mother discourse positions mothers as imperfect, resisting the high standards of perfection in the construction of the idealistic and in particular selfless good mother. For many participants, positioning themselves in this way opened up opportunities for greater personal freedom and taking a break from their serious good mother responsibilities. Children are in turn, positioned as resilient and able to withstand mothers taking time for themselves to relax from their responsibilities. 'Taking a break' is also described in terms of providing mothers with positive affirmation, as a period of time to reflect on themselves and the good work they do as mothers. These actions resist the silent self sacrifice and anxiety associated with the construction of the good mother. Rose discusses the challenges of being a stay-at-home mother and the limited recognition and positive affirmation associated with parenting. In order to manage this, she gives herself permission to take a break from some of her expectations and reminds herself that she is doing a good job:

> and I just think you need to give yourself a break, not always you know take things so seriously, you don't have anyone except perhaps your husband and your mother turning around and saying to you hey you're doing really well..... So you've got to try and give yourself a bit of a pat on the back and you know give yourself some kudos that you know, you are bringing up people into the world *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose constructs motherhood as lacking in tangible reward, although she does get verbal affirmation for her work by her husband and mother. She resists the idealised 'good mother' construction which requires silent sacrifice and selflessness by highlighting her desire for recognition and reward. She indicates, however, that it is difficult to resist idealised constructions of motherhood, "you've got to try" to reward yourself as this is not an easy thing to do. Rose asserts that mothers should not be taking "things so seriously", associating mothering with grave importance. In order to manage these serious requirements of mothering, Rose asserts that mothers need to relax their expectations by giving themselves a break. She goes further in arguing that mothers also need to reflect on, and reward their work in "bringing up people into the world". Molly also discusses giving herself a 'break', specifically by turning on television and resting when her child is asleep:

> Yeah yeah and to realise especially if you are a stay-at-home mum, if you get up in the night it doesn't matter when they have a nap, have a sleep or do something quietly. Put fricken peppa pig on and just chillax yourself for five minutes instead of ...and you know when you're in your fifties they will sleep through the night again (laughs) But that was the big one for me was um yeah and with Clara I learnt it, I learnt that if you didn't worry about it you were more likely to go back to sleep for starter and it actually didn't matter. There's nothing you can do about it. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly strives for her first child to sleep through the night, however, she has relaxed this expectation with her second child and in doing so, she is able to give herself a break from worrying . This opens up the opportunity to sleep at times when her child is sleeping and to use television to relax. She uses linguistic devices such as humour and informal language exemplified in the word "chillax" to highlight the relaxed informality associated with the good enough discourse and contrast it with the serious worrying she did with her first child. Natasha resists the 'good mother' ideal of devoting large amounts of time with children doing planned activities. In doing so, she opens up the opportunity for mothers to have greater freedom:

> Not going crazy yeah. I do think people go a little bit OTT, they are just kids and really they are just about as happy playing with Barbie dolls as doing anything fancy or becoming a squash champion or something. *(Natasha, 40 years, 1 child aged 5)*

Natasha asserts that some parents go over the top, or are excessive with providing activities and opportunities for children. Natasha constructs these parents as 'going crazy' by providing too many activities and opportunities for their children. In this way she positions herself as realistic and practical in contrast to the unrealistic expectations of other parents. To justify her position, children are constructed as being emotionally resilient and just about as "happy" with simple, uncomplicated activities such as dolls, which require much less parental effort than striving for excellence in an organised sport. This construction of children allows parents to relax with regards to rushing their children around to organised activities.

In summary, prior to becoming a mother, and often with their first children, participants' adhere to idealised good mother constructions of motherhood that create tension. This tension arises from the difficulty that mothers have in meeting these good mother constructions and the feeling of failure that this engenders. In order to resist these good mother constructions, the good enough mother discourse constructs motherhood as a learning process with adaptability, making mistakes and failure as part of the experience of mothering. Children are positioned as resilient and able to psychologically withstand mothers who are imperfect. This position allows mothers to relax their expectations of good mothering, take a break from child centered activities and reward themselves.

Constructions of motherhood over thirty

In this chapter I will illustrate three particular constructions of mothers who have their first child over the age of thirty, and the way in which they draw on aspects of the good enough mother. Firstly, being over thirty is constructed by participants in terms of preparing to be the 'best mother'. This preparation requires mothers over thirty to search for information through books and the internet. Preparation extends to finance and mothers constructed being over thirty as being more financially secure and able to provide for their children. However, aligning themselves with good enough mother discourse, this preparation in terms of searching for advice is resisted and ridiculed once participants become mothers. In this way participants construct motherhood as a learning process requiring adaptability and making mistakes.

Secondly, this chapter will discuss how time spent as an adult prior to motherhood is constructed as building independence, developing career and personal identity. This development of personal identity meant that mothers over thirty constructed the transition to as motherhood challenging. These challenges are linked to adhering to good mother ideals of motherhood requiring mothers to sacrifice their independence and personal needs, in order to provide for their children. In this way, participants experience a loss of identity as they struggle to construct a new sense of self after becoming a mother. However, some participants construct the transition to motherhood positively, in that they "had their time" to focus on themselves and they are now ready to focus their time and energy on their children. Becoming a mother over the age of thirty is also constructed as having a greater self awareness with which to deal with the challenges of motherhood.

Finally, this chapter will highlight the way in which participants constructed being over thirty as being tired. This exhaustion cannot be linked to physical exertion or mental stimulation so is associated with being over thirty. This tiredness provided frustration, resentment and participants often noted their exhaustion in comparison to younger mothers who were constructed as having more energy and resilience.

Mothers over thirty preparing to be 'good' mothers

Being a mother over thirty is constructed as having expectations of being a 'good mother' requiring mothers to prepare for the birth of children by searching for information. This search for information often reinforces and validates 'good mothering' requirements which are then resisted once children are born. Rose outlined this search for information and the idealistic expectations she had about

motherhood:

> Trisha: So expectations, do you think they are different when you are older?
> Rose: I mean I think when you are older I think you have more of an expectation that you're going to be, I'm not sure if this is what you mean but, you have an expectation that you are going to be a great mother because you have read all the books and you have bought all the right things so that must mean that you are going to be really good because you have read up on it and for me that was the case for sure. I read all the books and I remember um, I read all the books and I had this journal and I have still got, it it's hilarious, it's a journal full of my notes which I made when I was pregnant about breastfeeding, how to wrap, you know, how to deal with moving onto solids, just everything, I had this massive note thing and it's just ridiculous because it's all just, you just learn on the go and you make mistakes and you can't study to become a mum. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose suggests that as a result of her age, she spent time preparing to be a "great" mother. Her intensive time spent preparing to be a great mother can be considered a social practice associated with the good mother discourse. However, Rose ridicules her previous idealistic expectations of motherhood, and learning through books as a way of comprehending or preparing for motherhood. In doing so, she suggests that her previous expectations are unrealistic and dismisses them as completely different from the experience of motherhood. In doing this, she draws on the good enough mother discourse through her construction of mothering as a learning process which requires mistakes that are made "on the go". Molly echoes the construction of older women as mothers who search out information about how to do what's 'best' for their babies.

> Yeah I think its kind of problem with women of my education and my age, want to do what's best and they read all the literature and they look on the internet and they go to their, they go to their antenatal classes and they get told, not only is natural childbirth the only way to go and don't ask for drugs but the other thing is breastfed you know and yes you should it's cheaper, I would have, if I could have, you don't have to do anything, I mean you don't have to steralize anything I don't think anyone would do it, not many people would avoid it because, but some people would, it's still a duty to breastfeed but if it doesn't work it is really stressful and you feel like you're a failure and you're not. *(Molly, 38 years, 2 children aged 5 and 2)*

Molly associates her search for information as a problem for women of her age and education (she is

a tertiary qualified teacher). She argues that this particular group of well educated, older women search for information from legitimate authorities on motherhood, such as antenatal groups and internet information, to find the 'right' ways of being a mother in order to "do what's best". It is interesting to note that all the participants refer to written sources of information or medical authorities in the form of Plunket nurses, however at no point do they mention consulting their own mothers or the previous generation of mothers as authoritative sources for information. Written and authoritative sources of information provide various good mother discourses for mothers to draw on such as the importance of natural childbirth, negative constructions of the use of drugs during birth and the importance of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is constructed as something that is desirable to achieve because it is financially cheaper, there is no sterilizing, but also, it is a "duty" as a mother. This breast as best discourse emphasises the importance of breastfeeding, which Molly resists as she finds breastfeeding difficult to manage. Mothers that don't breastfeed are positioned negatively through this discourse, as failing in their duty. Molly resists the possibility of breastfeeding through saying "if it doesn't work", blaming the breastfeeding itself as failing instead of herself as a mother. In this way the construction of breastfeeding as a mother's duty is resisted and the good enough mother discourse of mothering as a learning process which requires adaptability is reinforced. In doing this, Molly is therefore able to position herself through the good enough mother discourse more positively, rather than a failure.

Mothers over thirty as financially prepared

Participants construct being over thirty as being more financially stable, which is important in that it allows participants to focus on their children instead of paying off mortgages or working to build a career. In this way, participants prepare to have children by saving financial resources in order to provide the 'best' care for their children. Natalie discusses the financial benefits of being older:

> Trisha: Yeap well that's great, and so you think that age affected your experience of being a stay-at-home mum if at all?
> Natalie: Well it probably did because well I'd worked and we'd done some travel, we'd set ourselves up in our house and perhaps if you were a younger parent you hadn't had the working years to get some money behind you and the house bought and all that kind of stuff so you know, so we were lucky.... no we worked hard we worked hard. *(Natalie, 40 years, 2 children aged 7 and 3)*

Natalie also points out that she and her husband had done some travel, implying that they had had time to spend on themselves and the freedom to engage in personally fulfilling activities. This kind of preparation is constructed positively, in contrast to the preparation discussed in the previous section in terms of the search for sources of information. Traveling, a house and money are all constructed as positive aspects of being over thirty suggesting that they are aspects of life that make motherhood easier. Discursively, Natalie attributes their financial position to luck, then resists this construction with "no, we worked hard" attributing their financial security to hard work, presenting herself and her husband as responsible parents. In doing so, she suggests that younger parents are less financially prepared and as a result this could be problematic. Mary also constructs the financial security she has as a result of being older as being important:

> Trisha: Do you think ah, do you feel your age affected your experience of being a stay-at-home mother, if at all?
> Mary: Uhmmm it probably affected, yeah a few things, being a mum, don't know if it is particularly stay-at-home or not but I think financially I was in a better position than if I had had it early on which is a big deal, and yeah I think you are a bit more energetic in your twenties than your forties... *(Mary, 43 years, 1 child aged 2, 7 months pregnant)*

Mary constructs herself as a mother over thirty positively, positions herself positively due to her better financial position. However, she also reinforces a negative construction of mothers over thirty as having less energy than younger mothers. This constraint of older motherhood is discussed later in this section.

Mothers over thirty as resisting the good mother

Mothers over thirty construct time spent prior to having children as developing independence, personal interests, and possibly a career. This time prior to children is also constructed as developing a sense of self, and making life meaningful. Many participants construct the transition from their pre-maternal role to the mother role as harder to manage due to their age. One of the constraints of drawing on the various subject positions available to the good mother discourse is the experience of a loss of identity and independence. Through discourse there are multiple self constructions and these function in particular social and interpersonal ways. However, the self construction of a 'good mother' draws on the interpersonal function between mother and child as of primary importance. In

doing so, the construction of self becomes dependent on the specific needs of the child, confining the good mother to the context of the home. Many other prior constructions of her 'self' may be lost in order to construct a new 'self' which encompasses the relationship with their children. In this way, participants struggle with their new construction of themselves as good mothers, which contrasts in terms of both interpersonal and social function when compared to their pre-maternal constructions of self.

However, this time spent prior to having children, building a pre-maternal self is also constructed positively in that mothers gain greater self awareness. Time can also be constructed as being allocated to two periods: time prior to children to fulfill personal needs, and time to be a mother and provide for children's needs. This time prior to children is therefore used to indulge in personally fulfilling activities, thereby satisfying personal needs before motherhood 'takes over'. Rose discusses the difficulty she had in adjusting her sense of self with motherhood in the following excerpt:

> Trisha: Um do you think your age affected your experience of being a stay-at-home mother, if at all?
>
> Rose: Yeah I think so, well I reckon the older you are, I could be wrong but I think the older you are the more tired you are as a mother um and the harder it is to come to peace with the huge change that you have to put yourself completely aside most of the time and put this other person first. I think it's harder when you're older, it really rocks you because you have spent so much time building your career or building yourself as a person and having independence you know I think really when you were much younger, back in the old days, cos I've got friends who have got babies I have a friend and she is nineteen, yeah I think it is different, I think you go with the flow a little bit more. You roll with the punches. *(Rose, 40 years, 3 children aged 6, 4, and 2)*

Rose draws on the good mother discourse by assuming that mothers are required to put their children's needs as the top priority and subordinate their own needs. She does this discursively when she says "You have to put yourself completely aside most of the time". She constructs herself prior to motherhood as being independent, building a career and identity, implying that motherhood requires total selflessness and dependence on children's needs. Rose also constructs younger mothers as more able to adapt to the challenges of motherhood, compared to older mothers who are less able to cope with the changes that motherhood brings. Lisa echoes this construction of

older mothers having difficulty adjusting to motherhood when she responds to a question about the challenges of being a stay-at-home mother:

> And you know for older mothers they are used to being independent and they've had a life of their own and a career and their own identity that suddenly making that adjustment to being at home and not having that career and identity is really difficult *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Lisa constructs her time prior to motherhood as being independent, building a career and an identity. She contrasts this with the requirements of the good mother discourse which she constructs as "not having that career and identity". This contrast in discourses is difficult for her to negotiate. Like Rose, Lisa also draws particularly on the selfless mother discourse by constructing motherhood as requiring total selflessness, dependence on children's needs and a readjustment in terms of identity. Natasha also discusses the difficulty in adhering to the selfless and all encompassing aspect of good mothering after having had time to develop an identity prior to motherhood.

> Yeah. Also, age, I don't know if it is just personality. Because its a double sided coin, part of it is I have had my own life to myself for so long where yeah there is this underlying resentment at having to hand over to being a mother um but also with that because I have had a good chunk of time to myself I'm also happy to give this time to them um so you know what I mean? It's kind of yeah. I'm kind of contradicting myself a little bit but then it depends on how much sleep I've had which way, which side of the coin I fall in the morning, I think yeah. *(Natasha, 40 years, 1 child aged 5)*

Natasha draws on the good mother discourse through constructing motherhood as "having to hand over", implying that it requires an all encompassing commitment to motherhood. However, she resists this good mother discourse by discussing her "underlying resentment" at having to devote so much of her time and energy to her children after having time prior to motherhood to fulfil her own personal needs. This complete hand over to the mother role is constructed in the previous excerpts by all three participants as being more difficult due to the time prior to being a mother. However, Natasha also highlights the positive construction of being an older mother as having had time as an adult prior to having children, in that she has had her "time to myself". This time she has had focusing on her own needs and personally fulfilling activities enables her to give time and energy to her children with less difficulty and greater acceptance of the sacrifices she is required to make.

Anne echoes this positive construction of having had time prior to children by drawing on the good enough mother discourse:

> Anne: Yeah. I think being an older parent, as frustrating as it is as an older women to press pause on your career, you have the luxury of knowing yourself so much more, sooo kids are hard work and you know you get to breaking point. Well I get to breaking point any number of times any day of the week, so just allowing and knowing that every day and every moment doesn't have to be perfect is ahhhm well it's quite useful, and I think that is, perhaps I'd had kids at say twenty five I wouldn't have that self awareness. I would try and be the perfect mother and for me (laughs) not going to happen today and that would have been difficult.
>
> Trisha: Yeah
>
> Anne: So every failure would have been magnified but you know failure being that your child throws a tantrum because you got the wrong icecream or something hugely important in the world scale. *(Anne, 40 years, 3 children aged 4 and twins 10 months old)*

Anne constructs being over thirty as having more difficulty with leaving her career, however her age is also constructed positively with greater acceptance of being a good enough mother. In this way, she manages the challenges of being a "perfect mother" and allows herself to make mistakes. In particular, she links her age with being able to reflect on her actions and have a greater self awareness in order to cope with 'failure'. Anne constructs younger mothers as having greater difficulty adapting to motherhood through their adherence to an idealistic mother discourse of trying to be 'perfect' .

Mothers over thirty as exhausted

Participants construct being over thirty as having less energy than younger mothers. This exhaustion is highlighted by most participants in the context of being questioned about how their age has affected their mothering. This tiredness creates other challenges for participants such as frustration, resentment and a limit on the number of children they can manage.

Some participants compared themselves to younger energetic mothers or gave accounts of how they would have been as a younger mother. Lily constructs older mothers as tired by comparing her low energy levels with younger people who are “more energetic”:

> Yeah people I know who have been younger and having children they are more energetic obviously, I think um being older and having children it’s um you know you naturally feel tireder as you get older so umm a few people I know that are younger they seem to be having bigger families *(Lily, 38 years, 2 children aged 4 and 1)*

Lily constructs tiredness as a ‘natural’ aspect of aging providing a powerful legitimisation of this biological construction of ageing. In turn, Lily suggests that having more energy is a requirement of having multiple children. Through constructing younger mothers as having more energy, Lily also suggests they have a greater resilience and the capability of coping with the challenges of mothering. When questioned about how age has affected her mothering, Lisa also felt that she had less energy than a younger mother. She explains how her fatigue leads her to be more stressed and less resilient:

> I thought I would be cruisier and far more relaxed than I perhaps …and I think had I had children younger I would have been a bit cruisier. I’m perhaps a little more...stressed and uptight just because I’m a bit older and my energy levels are different...ummm yeah *(Lisa, 46 years, 3 children aged 10, 7, and 3)*

Being an older mother is constructed negatively as it is associated with being tired and this in turn creates other difficulties for Lisa, which she outlines as being more stressed and uptight. Conversely, being a younger mother is constructed in a positive way in terms of being more relaxed, and she implies that this is due to energy levels being higher as a younger mother. Anne also constructs being over thirty with exhaustion and constructs being a younger mother positively in that she wishes she had her children at twenty five:

> Trisha: Yeap yeap ummm so do you feel that um there is any difference?
>
> Anne: Ahh well um that question, gee I wish I had kids when I was twenty five, I don’t know if its the fact that I am not a particularly fit person anyway or the fact that we have three little

> ones or the fact that I am over thirty five but I am so tired at the end of every single day. And it's not because I have run a marathon, or done anything, most days I don't even manage to do my twenty to thirty minutes of active exercise, I'm just wiped out. My brain hasn't been used, not to make any real decision anyway. Um yeah so, I guess it's probably a combination but certainly being over thirty five is hard yakka

Anne suggests that her exhaustion may be associated with her fitness levels, her three young children or her age. However, she emphasises that being over thirty five is difficult and wishes she had her children ten years earlier, implying that being older creates more difficulties in terms of energy levels. This tiredness is not associated with being physically or intellectually active, and therefore, in the absence of any other factors, has been constructed as a result of age.

In summary mothers over thirty adhere to three constructions of mothering which include preparing to be the best mother prior to having children by seeking out information. This preparation also encompassed being financially prepared for having children. However, being over thirty was constructed as giving mothers the ability to be good enough mothers once children were born and resist the good mother ideals of trying to be 'perfect' or the 'best'. Secondly, mothers over thirty adhered to good mother ideals that required an all encompassing commitment to mothering. Participants' drew on a working discourse prior to motherhood which constructed their time before children as having freedom, independence and the ability to pursue career goals. Hence, after having children, mothers drew on a good mother discourse and constructed motherhood as challenging in comparison to their time prior to having children. Finally, being a mother over thirty is constructed as being exhausting. This tiredness is contrasted with younger mothers who are constructed as being more energetic and resilient in managing the challenges of motherhood.

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study in relation to the wider literature. Research shows a persistent and resilient adherence in Western white middle class mothers to the good mother discourse (Cannold, 2005; Hattery, 2001; Hays, 1996; Maher & Saugeres, 2007). I will argue that participants drew on four discourses which are overarched by the larger 'good mother' discourse. Firstly, the relational mother discourse will be discussed and located within a wider discourse that positions women as responsible for maintaining and developing relationships. The relational discourse will be discussed in terms of the intensive mother discourse which constructs mothering as time consuming, requiring large amounts of time and effort from mothers to provide for their children's every need. Secondly, I will discuss the way in which the selfless mother discourse is positioned as a 'good mother'. The final good mother discourse that will be discussed is the mother as best caregiver discourse which positions mothers as the 'natural' caregiver for their children, requiring mothers to resist other forms of childcare. Following this discussion of good mother discourses, I will explore the way in which these discourses work together to create powerful constraints on mothers' lives. These are discussed in terms of time away from children, monotony and a lack of stimulation. I will also show how research perpetuates the construction of these constraints as being applied to young children only. Hence, as children grow, these constraints of the good mother discourse are constructed as being lessened.

The following part of this chapter will focus on how working and stay-at-home mothers are contrasted by participants and constructed in multiple and complex ways through the wider research in this area. These constructions will link working mothers to a discourse highlighting the value of financial resources and paid work as a means of personal fulfillment. In turn, stay-at-home mothers will be associated with good mother discourses highlighting time with children as important and critical to children's wellbeing. In contrast, research will be used to discuss the way in which the stay-at-home mother is positioned as a devalued outsider from the paid work sphere, and the implications of isolation for this group in society.

I will also discuss the constructions surrounding mothers over thirty and the way in which research illuminates this particular group's transition to motherhood. This will be explained with

regards to the way in which mothers negotiate and manage their identity during this transition. Finally, in terms of discourse, the resistance of the idealised 'good mother' will be discussed in light of the good enough mother discourse and the link this discourse has to theory put forward by Donald Winnicott (1956).

Finally, I will reflect on the research process and how as a researcher, I have impacted this process at every stage. This will include the way in which my own history, social status and experiences affect the research in multiple and sometimes invisible ways. I will particularly outline how this research is affected by the setting of the researcher's own home, and the way in which the participants were recruited and chosen.

The good mother discourse

The good mother discourse in this study is a wide discourse that encompasses the relational mother discourse. This relational discourse is constructed as responsible for spending large amounts of time developing quality relationships with her children that are warm, caring and sensitive. The responsibility of developing relationships is associated with a wider discourse that constructs women as relational beings, who naturally develop and sustain meaningful connections with others (Thomas, 2014). Research asserts that this wider relational discourse is typically associated with women, who are required to support and encourage family members, facilitate and maintain interpersonal relationships, be empathetic, and nurturing (Fletcher, 1999; Hochschilds, 1989; Mitchell & Black, 1995). Some researchers go further and assert that "women reflect their sense of identity primarily in terms of their connection to others" (Forrest & Mikolaitis, 1986, p. 80). In this way, mothers that prioritise their relationship with their children are drawing on a wider relational discourse adhered to by women in Western society.

Most participants in this study constructed large amounts of time with their young children as particularly important and this is strongly linked to the 'good mother' who prioritises time with their children above time spent in the paid workforce or time spent on personally fulfilling activities. This discourse is legitimised and perpetuated through science, with some research suggesting that time between mother and child is particularly important, even irreplaceable, for the well-being of children (Hays, 1996; Warner, 2006). Current research also shows that this construction is creating pressure and guilt for parents with between forty to sixty percent of parents feeling that they don't spend enough time with their children (Milkie, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2015). Other research

challenges this construction of parents not spending enough time with their children by showing that working mothers today are spending as much time with their children as stay-at-home mothers did in the early 1970s (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). This research has powerful implications for mothers as it reinforces the requirement for 'good' mothers to spend large amounts of time with their young children in order to provide for their wellbeing.

A large body of research supports the prevalence of the good mother discourse in society, with time spent building relationships and creating and sustaining quality moments of connection shown to be an important aspect for both parent and child well-being (Milkie et al., 2015). Research also perpetuates the importance of relational mothers being able to physically access children by associating this access with physical affection, reassurance, and immediate answers to questions. In this way, "being there" has been identified by research as a key aspect of good mothering (Garey, 1999) and mothers are constructed as being able to provide a particular type of security (Hays, 1996; Kurz, 2000, 2006; Snyder, 2007). Social control theory argues that mothers' accessibility provides them with the ability to closely supervise their children, which is critical for protecting children from risk-taking behaviours (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Longmore, Eng, Giordano, & Manning, 2009) and promoting children's academic achievement (Amato & Fowler, 2002). In this way, research perpetuates the social practice of spending large amounts of quality time with children by emphasising the benefits to children.

This practice of mothers spending large periods of time with children has recently been challenged by longitudinal research showing that for children over the age of three, the amount of time mothers spent with their children has no effect on children's behavior, emotions or academic success (Milkie et al., 2015). Instead, the study shows that parent time can be particularly harmful to children when mothers, in particular, are stressed, sleep-deprived, guilty and anxious. These researchers suggest that current good mothering discourses have pressured mothers to subscribe to the idea that their time with children is "irreplaceable" and "sacred". Milkie and colleagues also suggest that in order to meet these requirements of time with their children, mothers cut back on sleep and time to themselves in order to spend more time and attention on their children. They note that these activities further stress mothers and in turn lead to disruptions to children's wellbeing.

Research also reinforces the importance of this time spent developing relationships with children under three years. Bowlby's (1969) pivotal work on attachment theory suggests that the absence of a close and sustained relationship with a mother (or mother figure) has irreversible mental health consequences on the child. Current research by Fowles and Horowitz (2006) also shows that infant development is particularly sensitive to the quality of mother–child interaction in the first year of life.

The selfless mother discourse is highlighted in this study as one of the discourses that comprise the powerful good mother discourse. Research exploring the selflessness of motherhood and prioritising children's needs found these behaviours are strongly aligned with 'good' mothering (Bilkin & Wisner, 2013).. In turn, mothers who resist these behaviours are 'bad mothers', constructed through research as a women who is not selfless, communal and does not stay-at-home to care for children (Chrisler, 2008). The 'bad mother' is clearly not positioned as desirable either by participants in this study or in previous research which states that this is one of the worst things that can be said about a woman, it is a clear loss of status, and an indication that she is not a "real" woman (Chrisler, 2008).

The mother as best caregiver discourse constructs mothers as having a 'natural' place beside her children, and in doing so, they are constructed as solely responsible for their safety, development and emotional security of their children. This study affirms previous research in finding that women rarely question the gendered nature of their 'natural' responsibilities as a good mother and they often assume these as 'natural' parts of their lives (Armstrong, 2006; Hayes, 1996). This was evidenced by the difficulty many participants had in removing themselves from the position of best caregiver for their child and the inherent responsibility this engendered. The use of 'naturalisation' works as a powerful ideological weapon which reinforces the social and cultural convention of women taking full responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks as an immutable dictate (Daston, 1992). In this way, powerful ideologies such as the 'good mother' are often accepted without question as feminine, and motherhood is constructed as a "natural" part of women's identity (Butler, 1999; Walkerdine, 1998). Research therefore reinforces the construction of mother's being responsible for the care of children and as an extension of this, the household where children spend their time.

The mother as best caregiver discourse places importance on the mother as the best and only caregiver for their children, with other adults such as fathers having little responsibility for children.

This constructs mothers as having unique abilities and powers that enhance child development and wellbeing (Hays, 1996). Some research reinforces this construction by suggesting that children's time with mothers is the most important in comparison to time spent with any other adult (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996; Liss, Schiffrin, Mackintosh, Miles-McLean, & Erchull, 2013). However, some researchers have also disputed this construction of mothers as unique by suggesting that father involvement is related to better child outcomes, controlling for mother involvement (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Kandel, 1990; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994; Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994). Using data from the National Survey of Children, Harris, Furstenberg, and Marmer (1998) found that father involvement, but not mother involvement, in childhood was associated with adult children's higher educational achievement, lower delinquency, and lower psychological distress. In the current study, many participants resisted the use of childcare, and husbands were constructed by some mothers as "not coping" with children for long periods of time. Participants in this study almost never mentioned father involvement with their children, or constructed father time with children as important in any particular way. However, this may be due to the lack of questions regarding fatherhood and research into father's care of children may be able to explore these complexities further.

Professional childcare was influenced by both financial constraints and the mother as best caregiver discourse. The financial requirements of childcare reinforced the construction of mother as best caregiver for young children. These childcare costs were a justification in the decision for many participants to keep young children out of childcare. Research by Barrows also notes that financial considerations pertaining to childcare significantly influence mothers decisions in this area. Research into professional childcare and its effect on children rather than mothers, has also received much media attention, reinforcing particular discourses pertaining to working and stay–at-home mothers (Akass, 2012). Research into the outcomes for children in professional childcare has found that wellbeing generally depends on the quality and quantity of the childcare (Podesta, 2014). Some research reinforces the findings from the current study, which constructs long periods of time in childcare as negative in terms of children's wellbeing (Crosnoe, Prickett, Smith, & Cavanagh, 2014). This research shows that even with high quality care, larger amounts of time in childcare follows a pattern of declining benefits for children (Crosnoe et al, 2014).

Participants in this study were particularly aware of the prevalence of working mother constructions of childcare as being necessary and positive. Feminism and working mother discourses reinforce the

benefits of professional childcare in order for mothers to continue to participate in both the public and private sphere (Campo, 2009). With the use of childcare, working mothers are able to continue to provide for their families financially and pursue career goals. Research also perpetuates working mother discourses by focusing on the importance of quality time with children rather than quantity of time (Campo, 2009). This positive construction of working mothers is also reinforced through research highlighting children's need for 'socialisation' through childcare (Campo, 2009).

Constraints of the good mother: Lack of time out, monotony and lack of mental stimulation

Time away from children was a constraint of the good mother discourse and may be constructed as resisting the good mother requirement to be completely fulfilled through serving children's every need. Previous studies have also found that stay-at-home mothers construct 'me time' as not meeting mothering responsibilities and that decisions around time for oneself are strongly influenced by desires to be a 'good mother' (Brown, Small, & Lumley, 1997; Lois, 2010; Richards, 1997). Participant's frustration with this lack of time out is also highlighted in research which suggests that the pressure from good mothering discourses, to spend constant time with their children makes many mothers feel strained (Milkie et al., 2004; Snyder, 2007). Further research also links this strain to negative consequences for mothers' general well-being (Fox, 2009; Lois, 2010; Milkie et al., 2015).

However, this study found that participant's desire for time out was constrained by multiple and complex factors. Mothers pointed out that they had limited access to time for themselves and childcare was often unavailable or inappropriate. Similarly, previous studies on mothers found that 'time' was constructed as being organised around the unpredictable demands of children and out of mother's control (Lo Cascio, Thomas, Conolly, Finney, Lamb, & Sainsbury, 1999). Further research into time away from children also found that mothers had to manage challenges such as time, limited resources and that they had difficulty in accepting help and setting boundaries (Barkin & Wisner, 2013). Research by Barkin & Wisner (2013) found that the demands of family life often left little time for mothers to engage in restorative activities and mothers reported having given up exercise and socialising due to a lack of time (Barkin & Wisner, 2013).

The positive construction of mother's self care is also prevalent in current research however, studies often highlight the benefits that children gain from a healthy mother (Barkin & Wisner, 2013). This

focus on the wellbeing of children rather than mothers is prevalent throughout research on mothering (Vejar et al, 2006). This research focus may reflect the strength of the selfless mother discourse which constructs mothers as prioritising children's needs above their own. In this way, mothers are positioned as subordinate, their needs constructed as unimportant and not required to be the focus of exploration through research.

The good mother discourse also constrained participants in terms of the monotony of the tasks they engaged in child centered activities and this constrains mothers' in terms of the activities and spaces they inhabit. The monotony of participant's activities was exemplified by the outline of their day which emphasized simple domestic tasks that were repeated all day, every day. This monotony has been noted in previous research by Hochschild (2003), who suggested that many of the responsibilities that mothers complete are of a daily, monotonous and immovable nature such as dinner, bathing children, washing clothes and doing dishes. She found that these tasks were immediate, time dependent and of a repetitive nature meaning there is little time for delay or freedom to do tasks outside the routine.

However, there is limited research outlining how the work of stay-at-home mothers is monotonous or has a lack of stimulation. Rosenfield (1989) has noted that home work, associated with the 'housewife' role, tends to be more routine and demanding than paid work, and Lennon (1994) found that home work was associated with being more autonomous, physically demanding and routine than paid work. Most research into the workplace has focused on the paid workforce and concurs with the findings in this study showing that monotony is associated with elevated distress (Matthews & Power, 2002).

Previous research on worker stress has also concentrated on male workers and, as such, has constructed the home as a 'favourable environment', and the caring role which discourses construct as 'natural' for women as 'free from undue stress'(Rout et al, 1997). In this way, the monotony and lack of stimulation discussed in this study cannot be discussed in the light of a body of research as most studies have overlooked the potential stress caused by women's role of carer in the home. However, findings from this research may also reflect the nature of the participants in this study who are mostly tertiary educated and as such, may have had intellectually stimulating and professional careers. The change in situation from the workplace to the home environment may therefore be a more significant change in mental stimulation for these participants than for women in different

careers.

Finally, monotony and lack of stimulation may also be as a result of participants being aware of working mother discourses which highlight the paid workforce as a way in which women construct their identities and gain personal and social fulfillment. Further research into the specific nature of the unpaid work of a stay-at-home mother would provide valuable insight into understanding this type of work and the transition women make as they enter the home to care for children full time.

Childhood as temporary

Participants in this study consistently referred to the limited amount of time when children were young as important and precious. In this way, the good mother discourse is reinforced and participants' are able to manage the associated constraints. In particular, time for themselves was constructed as "coming" once children were older and more independent. This construction of the good mother as intricately tied to the culturally accepted milestones of children's physical, social, and emotional development is perpetuated by research (Garey 1999). A large body of literature reinforces the prevalence of the construction of younger children as being more vulnerable and requiring more intensive care and supervision than school-aged children (Bowlby 1969; Drago 2009; Shonkoff et al. 2009; Walker et al. 2011). Thus, as children became older and more independent, childcare becomes more acceptable, marginalising the position of mother as best caregiver.. Previous research shows that formal advice to mothers and mothers themselves, construct mothering as exclusive to dependent-aged children (see Bobel 2002; Garey 1999; Hays 1996). Women's identities as mothers' may be constructed as time dependent and the constraints of the good mother discourse such as lack of time out, monotony and lack of mental stimulation may be suppressed (Lois, 2010). In this way, the good mother discourse has an expiration date, reinforced by the lack of literature regarding the mothering of adult children.

Recent research contradicts the benefits of this construction of young children requiring more time with parents. Milkie et al found that a greater amount of engaged time between parents and adolescents was related to fewer delinquent behaviors, and better emotional and social outcomes (2015). This time spent together during adolescence was highlighted specifically as the only period of a child's life where outcomes were changed for the better. This research does exclude children below the age of three however, and the importance of this period of time under the age of three is

discussed in more detail with regards to the relational and intensive mother discourse.

Working mothers as financial providers and fulfilled by career

The participants in this study were aware of the dominant working mother discourses prevalent in today's society and these shaped their own lives in multiple and often dichotomous ways. These position working and stay-at-home mothers within competing narratives such as: production/reproduction; selfishness/selflessness; independence/dependence; career-orientation/mothering instinct (Raddon, 2002). Research shows that these two discourses of working mother and stay-at-home mother have increased conflict for contemporary mothers torn between the ideal mother role and the ideal worker role (Blair-Loy 2005; Lewis 1997). When making decisions about family, pressures from these contradictory discourses are weighed by participants in this study and research shows that it is from these two contradictory discourses that many women attempt to weave a unified sense of self (Kahu & Morgan, 2007).

Participants constructed working mothers as being valued through engaging in paid work to financially support the family unit. In this way, financial resources are constructed as a crucial, important and valued commodity that mothers have a responsibility for attaining. Research shows that these capitalist ideals are disseminated and reinforced through formal structures such as government policy. Research in New Zealand by Kahu and Morgan found that government policy around women consistently valued paid work over 'other work'(2007). Their research demonstrated that although government policy drew on feminist discourses and ideals, ultimately, it was driven by capitalist goals of increased productivity and economic growth. This lack of value is also reinforced in a study by Zimmerman who reported a lack of societal support for stay-at-home mothers, he states: "Stay-at-home parents have to work harder to feel good about their choice because they receive little validation from society for the work they are doing "(2000, p.349). Hochschild also argues that financial gain is a competing discourse to the stay-at-home mother position, "in a sense, capitalism isn't competing with itself, one company against another, but with the family, and particularly with the role of the wife and mother" (2003, p. 37).

This resistance to the working mother discourse prioritising financial gain was constraining for participants and they highlighted the challenge of the transition from earning money to having no money of their own. This positioned stay-at-home mothers as completely dependent on their husbands for financial resources. This dependence was exemplified by the language the mothers in

this study used to describe their husbands as having 'earnt' the money and them 'spending' the money. The word 'earnt' implies that their husbands are working hard and deserve these financial resources while stay-at-home mothers have not worked hard and spend financial resources that are not their own. In this way, husbands can be seen as maintaining financial power over their wives and although research from the sixties suggests this was once the case (Friedan, 1963), there seems to be very little current research engaged in how families and parents in particular, share financial resources. This area of research may shed light on some of the constructions of paid and unpaid work and how each area of work is negotiated and valued.

Participants also drew on a negative construction of working mothers as prioritising career and personal fulfillment above their child's welfare. In this way, working mothers resist the good mother discourse requiring mothers to sacrifice their time, energy and personal needs for their children. A wide range of research shows the prevalence of this construction of working mothers as less committed to their families and more focused on career (Etaugh & Study, 1989; McKinnon, 1995). Working mothers are further positioned by some research as bad mothers, damaging the mother-child relationship through maternal deprivation (Sharpe, 1994). The dominance of this construction of working mothers is also reinforced through research showing that employed mothers are devalued as being less communal than stay-at-home mothers (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Bridges & Orza, 1992, 1993; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Etaugh & Nekolny, 1990). One study by Bridges and Etaugh (1995) also found the continuously employed mother who worked for financial reasons was constructed as more communal than a mother who worked because it was personally fulfilling. In essence, research suggests a positive construction of mothers working for financial reasons, but mothers who work for personal fulfillment were constructed negatively. This research may reflect the prevalence of the overall good mother ideals requiring mothers to be fulfilled by staying at home and prioritising children's needs.

In contrast, participants also construct the working mother in a positive way, positioning them as able to access opportunities for women to be personally and socially fulfilled. Research reflects the prevalence of this construction and the OECD asserts that although paid work is considered economically desirable, it is also "the most important social activity of modern life" (2004, p. 3). Research also reinforces the prevalence of women in the paid workforce who choose to do so for personal fulfillment, intellectual stimulation, self worth and identity (Goldin, 2006). Some research also highlights female employment as a way to increase women's autonomy and bargaining power

within relationships. This gives women the chance to improve their buying power and break free of limiting lifestyles and routines (Torres 1995: 186; Torres 2004; Torres et al. 2001).

As a result of positive constructions of working mothers, many participants discussed guilt, for not contributing financially to the household or pursuing a 'fulfilling' career. The decision to stay-at-home was constructed as placing greater responsibility on their husbands financially and positioning them as 'lucky' in comparison to working mothers who had to work. One participant also specifically discussed the idea that she was 'wasting her life' rather than developing important workforce skills and fulfilling career aspirations. Some research concurs with the findings from this study, showing that stay-at-home mothers often experience a sense of guilt about resisting working mother discourses which construct them as neglecting their career and financial responsibilities. In this way, research suggests that stay-at-home mothers experience role conflict between the position of career women and their position as full time mother (Desimone, 2001).

Working mothers as overloaded from the 'double shift'

Findings from this study support the construction of working mothers having more work to do and this is associated with the dual responsibilities of both paid and domestic work. The participants in this study resisted the working mother discourse through constructing working outside the home as an overload of responsibilities resulting in time pressure and stress. Research by Milkie et al (2015) reinforces the prevalence of this construction of working mothers by showing that employed mothers in their study feel more time pressured that stay-at-home mothers. Hoschild (2003) also agrees with the findings of this research by asserting that with the advent of women working in the paid workforce the gendered nature of the responsibilities for childcare and housework remain most often with mothers. In this way, working mothers can be seen as adhering to the mother as best caregiver discourse that constructs childcare and domestic tasks as the sole responsibility or the 'natural' role of a woman. Hochschild (1989) described this childcare and domestic work as a 'second shift' that women performed when they got home from paid work (2003). This time spent caring for children and dealing with domestic tasks worked out to be an extra month of twenty four hour days worked a year compared with the majority of working fathers (Hochschild, 2003).

The findings from this research, align with previous studies showing that as women move into the public sphere, breaking down gender role expectations, men are resisting the responsibilities of the

domestic sphere (Patton, 2013). The discourse of greater egalitarian dynamics in terms of household and parenting has not opened up opportunities for more equal sharing of childcare and domestic responsibilities in many households, even for professional women. Some research argues that this is because as women have entered the public sphere they often face a "double bind" (Jamieson 1995). That is, women who venture out of the "domestic sphere" found that if they achieved professional success, then they were neglecting their responsibilities as a woman; if they failed professionally, then they were wrong to attempt entering the public domain in the first place. In essence, women are constantly judged by the good mother discourse that requires them to succeed primarily in the duties of a wife and mother (Patton, 2013). In this way, research suggests that women find it difficult to delegate their domestic and childcare responsibilities, as these are the responsibilities that are of the most importance in terms of being a successful woman.

Stay-at-home mothers as devalued outsiders

Stay-at-home mothers are constructed as being separated from the paid and public sphere of work which was evidenced by participant's discussion of their isolation from others in the paid workforce, and the negative reaction from people in the working sphere to their role as stay-at-home mother. . In order to manage this constraint, relationships with other stay-at-home mothers were outlined by participants as important to develop and maintain. These relationships were constructed as a way in which to alleviate the isolation inherent in the separation of stay-at-home mothers from the public world of work. Relationships with other stay-at-home mothers also provide access to people who occupy the same position and spaces in the private sphere, allowing participants to gain emotional support.

Research reinforces the negative implications for this separation of stay-at-home mothers from the private and public sphere in terms of isolation, identity, accomplishment and productivity levels (Marievejar, Madiscon-Colmore & TerMaat, 2006). Research also shows that being positioned outside the public sphere, and severing all physical and psychological links with this life can have enormous effects on wellbeing and self-perception. (Marievejar, Madiscon-Colmore & TerMaat, 2006). A wide range of research reinforces the importance of social support for new parents which has been linked to better maternal health, child outcomes, relationships satisfactions and parent-child interactions (Crnic, Greenberg, Robinson, & Ragozin, 1984; Meadows, 2011;Hrdy, 2009).

Research into public policy concurs with findings from this study that unpaid work remains 'invisible' to the public sphere of the paid workforce and therefore unvalued (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). Paid work is further constructed through research, as participating and being part of society, positioning the stay-at-home mother as lacking in her contribution to wider society . "There is a perception that women raising children (rather than undertaking paid work) are not participating in society" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2004b, p. 7). This language represents a recurrent theme: the privileging of the public sphere and the marginalisation of the private (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). This discourse privileging the public sphere of paid work has far reaching implications for stay-at-home mothers, reinforcing working mother discourses that emphasise re-entering the paid workforce for money, personal fulfillment and the good of society.

The voluminous research focussing on career has centered almost exclusively on paid work, not on the experiences, adjustment, or satisfaction associated with unpaid work, such as caregiving (Schultheiss, 2009). Feminists argue for the deconstruction of the public-private dichotomy of work (e.g., Daniels, 1987; Glen, 1994), yet this dichotomy persists, resulting in the invisibility of women's work in traditional theories of career development (e.g., Holland, 1997). As Schultheiss argues, many women define motherhood as a career, yet this remains absent from career development theories. This in turn makes aspects of women's work experiences invisible when compared to dominant discourses in the career field.

Some researchers have encouraged a broader definition of work in order to address gender, social class, family background and cultural characteristics. Richardson (1993) proposes that work is defined as a human activity that is initiated "for individual success and satisfaction, to express achievement and strivings, to earn a living... to further ambitions and self-assertions... and to link individuals to a larger social good" (p. 428). Within this framework, volunteer, unpaid work, and the childcare work of stay-at-home mothers are included in discourses of work and career. This broader definition positions the work that stay-at-home mothers do, as part of the dominant discourses of work. Providing alternative discourses of work may in turn, alleviate some of the separation between the public and private sphere and accord value to the work that stay-at-home mothers do.

Preparation for motherhood over thirty

Participants constructed being a mother over thirty as being idealistic in term of expectations about motherhood. Mothers over thirty are therefore required to prepare themselves in order to be the 'best' mother, and this preparation took the form of research through books, the internet and acquiring financial stability. Research supporting this practice for mothers over thirty is limited however, research by Bernhardt & Felter has shown that more mothers than ever before are using the internet to gain information, support and resources about parenting prior to birth (Bernhardt & Felter, 2004). In examining the changing practices toward seeking help, information, and support, Arendell (2000) showed that because many mothers no longer stay-at-home there has been a decrease in networks and time spent with other mothers raising young children. This has led some researchers to argue that there has been a loss in much of the informal support, advice, and interaction mothers have traditionally shared (Litt, 2000).

In terms of being older, participants constructed their age as being able to be financially prepared for children and therefore able to stay-at-home and provide for children's financial needs. This financial stability is reinforced by research showing that mothers over thirty are able to provide more material goods and a higher standard of living for their children than younger mothers (Bornstein et al, 2006; Sutcliffe, Barnes, Belsky, Gardiner, & Melhuish, 2012). This suggests that the financial cost of childcare is also less of a burden and for older mothers and some research shows that older women tend to use paid childcare more often than younger women (Kahu & Morgan, 2007). However, there has been little research examining how women use these greater financial resources as older mothers or the benefits these resources may provide for children or mothers.

A wide area of research reinforces the construction of motherhood at any age as a transition in terms of identity, with a range of challenges to a woman's notion of self concept (Block 1990; Golden 2001; Maushart 1999). Carolan (2005) reports that older mothers may take longer to adapt to motherhood, while Bornstein et al. (2006) found an association between older maternal age and a tendency to perceive infants as more difficult or to have more difficulty coping with the challenges of newborn behavior. Cusk argues that woman feel the loss of autonomy and free will as a result of the first moment of pregnancy where mothers are subject to forces over which she has no control. In this way she becomes subjected, she is her body's subject, her doctor's subject, her baby's subject and in a wider sense she becomes society and history's subject (Cusk, 2011). Research also constructs Western women in particular, as having to negotiate conflicting discourses once they become mothers. This conflict surrounds working discourses valuing individuality, finance and its

aims, and post children, the mother-child relationship requiring women to surrender this individuality and hence identity, to the 'mother' role. (Cusk,2011).

In contrast, some participants gave age as a factor in being able to be calm, and associated their age with lowered anxiety and the ability to resist idealised discourses of motherhood. This maturity was also linked to being more "self aware", and able to reflect on their experiences in order to prioritise important aspects of their life rather than striving for 'perfect' ideals of motherhood. Some research investigating mothers over thirty have reinforced this self awareness by suggesting generally positive adjustment for older women in pregnancy (Berryman & Windridge, 1996; Gottesman, 1992; Windridge & Berryman, 1996). More recently, psychological maturity associated with older age has also been found to be a benefit of motherhood (Camberis etc 2014). Research also reinforces the construction of mothers over thirty being 'better' parents by showing that parenting is more effective with increasing maternal age, and child health and developmental outcomes are more advantageous for children born to older mothers (Sutcliffe, Barnes, Belsky, Gardiner, & Melhuish, 2012).

Some researchers have also negated the previous conception of motherhood as restricting women in terms of identity and selfhood (Glenn, 1994). They argue that the transition to parenthood requires a woman to integrate the role of mother into her sense of self and form a relationship with her infant, with these developmental tasks beginning in pregnancy (Cranley, 1981; Leifer, 1980; Mercer, 2004). The early months following birth are constructed by some researchers as particularly challenging (Mercer, 1986). However research shows that many women at four to five months post partum renegotiate their identity through a greater sense of competence, achievement, rewarding interactions, and an acceptance of normal feelings of ambivalence about the baby and associated life changes (Carolan, 2005; Mercer, 1986).

In terms of psychological wellbeing, research is limited on stay-at-home mothers over thirty and recent research has highlighted the need to examine the psychological transition to motherhood for older women. (Brunton, Wiggins, Oakley, 2011). Research that does exist on psychological wellbeing and mothering, has found that stay-at-home mothers of all ages, experience more depressive symptoms and decreased psychological wellbeing than their working counterparts (Desimone, 2001; Des Rivieres-Pigeon, Seguin, Goulet, & Descarreis, 2001; Makri-Botsari, 2003). More recently, research compared working mothers with stay-at home mothers and found that stay-at-home

mothers are more likely to be depressed and experience state anger (expressing anger verbally and physically) (Meer, 2014). Further investigations into the psychological wellbeing of stay-at-home mothers over the age of thirty would illuminate the tensions surrounding the negotiation of discourses for this population of mothers.

The good enough mother: a resistant discourse to "good mother" ideals

The good enough mother discourse is constructed by participants as resisting many of the restrictive 'good mother' ideals by providing a 'counter' discourse. It is particularly useful to use a Foucaldian lens here, to highlight that while there is a strong adherence to the good mother discourse which positions women as the 'natural' caregivers for children, "it is the nature of language that alternative constructions are always possible"(Willig, 2001, p.107). In this way, mothers are active in the way they use some constructions and discard others. 'Counter' or 'reverse' discourses such as the good enough mother that oppose or resist the good mother constructions can and do emerge (Ramazanoglu, 1993; Willig, 2001).

It is apparent from the literature that idealised discourses surrounding mothering are powerful forces that are difficult for many mothers to resist. As previous authors have argued, the concept of the "ideal woman," is still with us today through film, advertisements and television shows that provide a discourse about the happier, simpler times that the 1950s supposedly held (Holt, 2006). These "ideal woman" discourses have traditionally provided strong messages that women should derive great pleasure and fulfillment from staying at home (Friedan,1963). Some research also suggests that the dominance of these idealistic discourses have had long lasting effects of the construction of the feminine gender role on women's identities, which is still having an impact on present discourses of women today (Holt, 2006, Maher & Saugeres, 2007).

These idealistic discourses are linked by research to the dominant 'good mother' discourse which has been found to be strongly adhered to by Western society (Maher & Saugeres, 2007). Some research has highlighted the difficulty mothers found in modifying these good mother constructions even when they are invalidated by experience (Abram, 2008). A body of research highlights this discrepancy between the idealised expectations of motherhood and the lived experience (Crittenden, 2001; Douglas & Micheals, 2004; Wolf, 2001). This difficulty has been echoed in further research which describes women being ill-prepared antenatally and postnatally for the birth of their child,

especially when expectations are not matched by experience (Brunton, Wiggins, Oakley, 2011).

This difficulty may also point to idealised constructions of motherhood being validated and maintained by powerful authorities such as midwives and doctors. As discussed in chapter one, research also highlights the way in which modern mothers are subject to surveillance from both formal organisations and interpersonal communication which reinforces particular dominant idealised discourses (Henderson, et al., 2010). The current study found some evidence of breastfeeding consultants and antenatal providers reinforcing good mother ideals but this was not apparent in many mothers talk which may reflect the lack of questioning in this area.

A resistance to good mother ideals however, is highlighted and reinforced, by both the media and the academic world (Sams, 2013; Eagan, 2008). The media in particular, has drawn on the discourse of an 'imperfect' mother with women rejecting the idea of conforming to one particular ideal (Sams, 2013; Eagan, 2008). Some academic research also suggests that the experience of mothering as a practice acts to demystify ideals of mothering (Maher & Saugeres, 2007) and in this way, mothers are able to resist good mother expectations which place high demands on mothers time and energy. Some research also argues that mothering is a complex learning process which is reciprocal and interactive (Rubin, 1967a, 1967b). Mercer (2004) describes the process of becoming a mother as dynamic and constantly evolving rather than a state that is attained. As a result, many researchers argue that mothers need training in all aspects of parenting including breastfeeding which they point out, does not occur 'naturally' (Volk, 2009).

In terms of theory, resisting idealised discourses associated with mothering can be linked in part to the 'good enough' mother theory which was first coined in 1953 by the English psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971). This theory describes mother behaviour as being on a continuum with the mother who subscribes to the idealised mothering ideal at one end of the spectrum, and on the other end the mother who maintains a large distance or separation between themselves and their child. Winnicott argues that in both cases, the failure to provide the appropriate amount of separation can disrupt the development of the child's self-concept, in turn affecting their ability to form meaningful relationships as adults (Coleman, 2009). In terms of separation, the current study highlighted a lack of separation between mother and child, leading to frustration and resentment from participants. This good enough mother theory argues that this lack of separation may harm the wellbeing of the child. As a result, the good enough mother theory

requires mothers to take time away from their children in order to provide for their wellbeing. It is interesting to note, that this construction of children as requiring time away from their mothers is never apparent in this study.

This good enough mother theory also negates the dichotomous nature of the discourses that surround motherhood; good versus bad, stay-at-home versus working, relational versus supermom which currently dominates the media (Akass, 2012). It provides a way of seeing each mother as an individual, who can hold conflicting positions about both separating herself from her children and providing intense and expert child supervision. Kunst (2012) has written about the way in which the "good enough mother" theory provides a discourse where woman are three dimensional human beings rather than perfect ideals which are inherent in both the good mother discourse and the working mother supermom discourse popular in the media. Through this theory woman are under pressure and strain, full of ambivalence about being a mother (Kunst, 2012).

Through this theory, motherhood is also constructed as contradictory in that mothers can be both selfless and self-interested, turning both towards and away from her child, capable of great dedication and in turn resentment. This construction of motherhood was reinforced by mothers in this study who often provided contradictory and conflicting accounts of motherhood. Mothers in this study drew on constructions of motherhood which created frustration and joy, pleasure and resentment, with this variation evidenced by Lisa stating: "it depends on which side of the coin I fall in the morning, whether I wake up snarling and resentful or happy to lie there and give myself freely to my children". The complexity of economic, career, family dynamics and personal characteristics also means that through this discourse, motherhood is constructed as multi-faceted, complex and specific to individual situations.

Summary

In summary, mothers in this study drew on multiple discourses to construct their role as a stay-at-home mother over thirty. This study highlighted an overarching 'good mother' discourse, comprised of four separate and interconnected discourses. The first of these discourses highlighted the relational mother, and this was interconnected with the intensive mother discourse which worked together to prioritising time between mother and child in order to develop close relationships. Constant time with children was found to be a strong requirement from the good mother discourse and this was discussed in the light of research reinforcing the importance of quality time between

mother and child by showing that young children in particular benefitted from a strong relationship with a mother figure, and quality time provided a wide range of positive outcomes for children's wellbeing. However, current research resisted the importance of large amounts of time with children as vital for children's wellbeing and highlighted adolescent years as an important period of time for parents to spend with their children.

Secondly, participants drew on a selfless mother discourse and this was strongly linked by research to good mothering practice. This discourse required participants to sacrifice their time, finances and at times health, in order to provide for their children. These requirements were resisted by participants and created frustration for them in terms of self care. This difficulty in prioritising self care was also reinforced by research showing that mothers struggle to put their own needs above their children and husband. Further exploration of the way in which stay-at-home mothers in particular, draw on both selfless mother discourses and self care discourses will illuminate these findings in more detail.

Thirdly, mothers in this study drew on a mother as best caregiver discourse which required mothers to be the sole caregiver for their children as a result of their 'natural' ability to mother. Research shows a strong adherence to constructions of mothers as the natural caregiver for their young children, and government policy also reinforces this construction by only providing financial support for childcare from the age of three.

These good mother discourses provided constraints on mothers' time, energy and the spaces they can inhabit with children's needs always prioritised. Current research aligns with findings from this study showing that contemporary mothers are constrained in terms of time away from their children to pursue personal activities. However, very little research exists that examines the stay-at-home mother's role as a career, or esteemed job title, so the challenges of monotony and lack of mental stimulation remain unexplored. The lack of time away from children has also been largely unexamined from the position of the stay-at-home mother, and the research that exists reinforces findings from this study showing negative effects on mothers' wellbeing.

Working mother discourses positioned stay-at-home mothers in different and contradictory ways. Research and public policy have been shown to reinforce dominant working mother discourses that value paid work as a way to gain financial resources, be fulfilled through a career and contribute to

society. This research also reinforces previous research findings that discourses surrounding working mothers require mothers to maintain both domestic and childcare responsibilities. This study also aligned with previous studies in finding that working mothers are constructed as time pressured, sacrificing their children's wellbeing by rushing to complete their dual responsibilities. However, participants highlighted the way in which stay-at-home mothers are constructed negatively by working discourses that position stay-at-home mothers as outside the paid work sphere and devalued through lack of financial reward. Research and public policy also reinforce the privileging of the paid work sphere, and of financial gain which makes domestic work both invisible and marginalised. This position as outsiders from the paid work sphere meant that stay-at-home mothers created strong social relationships with each other and research confirms that these relationships positively affect wellbeing by alleviating isolation and providing social support.

Constructions of mothers over thirty included preparing to be a good mother and then the resistance of these good mother ideals once children were born. Through comparing their pre-maternal life which drew on working discourses valuing freedom, independence and career, participants found difficulty in drawing on good mother discourses once they became a mother. A large body of research constructs the transition to motherhood as challenging, however research remains limited on the way in which mothers over thirty negotiate this transition. Research that does exist seems to be divided as to how mothers over thirty construct the transition to motherhood and whether they have more difficulty than younger mothers in adapting to motherhood.

Finally, the good enough mother discourse was compared with the good enough mother theory posited by Donald Winnicott (1957), which positions mothers as imperfect. In this way, motherhood is constructed as a complex and unique transition that encompasses a wide range of emotions. Mothering is also constructed as a journey, a process of making mistakes that requires children to be resilient and adaptable. These constructions resist good mother ideals which construct motherhood as a 'natural' state for women and restrict mothers in terms of time, space and adult focused activities. Research shows that good enough mother constructions of motherhood are becoming more prevalent in the media as more mothers experience motherhood as an individual and complex process that encompasses wide variations in employment, family dynamics, socio-economic and cultural expectations.

A reflection on the research process

The context of the discussion in this study is an informal interview between stay-at-home mothers over the age of thirty. My status as a thirty six year old female stay-at-home mother is likely to have affected the way that participants discussed their lives and the discourses they drew upon. This may have allowed a 'shared culture' between myself and the interviewee to develop, from which to explore each stay-at-home mother's understandings of motherhood. My age and gender may also have made it easier to relate to me, as I have personally experienced many of the age and gender related issues the participants discussed. In comparison, a male researcher may have attuned participants to think about their husbands and how their work affected their role as husband, financial provider and work in the public sphere. A younger researcher may have highlighted the difference that mothering age makes in terms of physicality and maturity levels. Finally, my experiences as a stay-at-home mother, expectations, thoughts and reading on the topic is likely to have affected my choice of questions and my reactions to participants

I also found that as I analysed the transcripts many of the accounts reflected my own experiences and this affected the discourses I initially chose to highlight. After being directed back to the transcripts by my supervisor, I paid closer attention to the discursive constructions. In doing so, the some of the identified discourses were abandoned and others reshaped.
It is also important to highlight, the research completed was a snapshot into the discussion of a small number of stay-at-home mothers in a particular area of New Zealand. Many of these issues need to be put into the context of stay-at-home mothering being done in a very small, isolated city surrounded by a large rural community. This may have affected the lack of diversity in the constructions of mothering found in this study. Rural communities may also construct stay-at-home mothering in different ways, with restricted access to formal channels of parenting authorities and activities meaning that informal channels of social support inform parenting practices. Mothering discourses seem particularly resilient to change however, it is clear that particularly in the media, discourses surrounding how to be a good mother and woman are fiercely debated. This research is only a small window into the increasingly complicated lives of women negotiating motherhood.

The participants were drawn from a range of services such as playgroups and Plunket rooms. This process of recruitment excludes mothers who do not access these formal services, however, it was difficult to access these stay-at-home mothers in other ways. As the research progressed, many participants volunteered friends who they contacted to participate in the study. This also provided a

link between many of the participants, who may access similar discourses of motherhood, meaning that less contrasting or competing discourses were drawn upon. Most research on stay-at-home mothers has been focused on white middle class mothers who draw on dominant discourses of the 'good mother' ideal, and this research further validates previous research findings. In contrast, mothers from more diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds may be more likely to draw on alternate discourses and critique dominant constructions. Future research which examines stay-at-home mothers from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds could be useful.

It was particularly relevant to reflect on the implications of setting the research in participants' own homes or at my home. At participants' homes I needed to be mindful of cultural and social rules, and these rules were communicated to me by participants who indicated where to sit, whether to take off shoes, and at times, how long the session could be. This may have influenced the way in which participants felt about the research as they held greater social power in their own home, and they may have felt comfortable discussing more difficult aspects of their lives. In contrast, participants coming to my home may have felt more nervous about entering a new environment and social setting, although all efforts were made to give them decision making power over the research. Most participants interviewed in either setting began their interview slowly, and continued long after the recorder was turned off. This may indicate that although some social power was inherent through the setting, most participants overcame their initial anxiety and discussed many of their ideas freely. Many participants also discussed interest and enjoyment from the interview, often giving me names of other stay-at-home mothers without me prompting or asking.

It is important to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in attempting to 'give voice' to stay-at-home mothers experiences. My position as a researcher is one of privilege and my voice is a dominant one throughout the research process, particularly as my assumptions as a stay-at-home mother are intertwined with all aspects of the research process. The stay-at-home mothers' voices are chosen and analysed through my own personal lens, and the quotes chosen to represent the structure of the research are shaped by my choices. This research is a partial representation of stay-at-home mothers' voices that is intertwined with my own presence as researcher and stay-at-home mother over the age of thirty.

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Appendix A

INFORMATION SHEET

Discourses of stay-at- home mothers over 30.

Who is doing this research?

My name is Trisha Stubbings and I am completing this research project under the supervision of Dr Rachael Pond as part of my Masters in Psychology through Massey University. I am a stay-at-home mother with twin boys who are almost three years old.

What is this study about?

My project involves interviewing ten stay-at-home mothers who had their first child over the age of 30. The interview will be reasonably informal and will ask about the transition to motherhood and the experience of being a stay-at-home mother. The interview will be recorded for sound and it will be transcribed and analysed to identify common themes. The research hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of stay-at-home mothers of this age group. It could also be used by individuals and community groups to better support stay-at-home mothers. I would like to invite you to participate in this research.

Who can take part in this research?

Participants will be volunteers who are recruited through playgroups, Plunket and Awarua. To participate, you need to be a stay-at-home mother exclusively and have had your first child over the age of 30

with your current partner. There are no anticipated risks or expected discomfort associated with being involved in this research.

What will you be asked to do?

The researcher will arrange an interview with you at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. Your recorded interview will be changed from sound into a written form with all names changed so that you and your family are unidentifiable. This transcript will be sent to you so that you can confirm this is an accurate representation and make any changes you would like. The data from all the interviews will then be analysed to find common themes. The data will be stored in a secure and confidential fashion and will only be used for the purpose of this research. The data will be disposed of in 2017 according to Massey University procedures. A summary of the findings of the data will also be sent to all participants on completion. Any information that you have contributed will not be personally identifiable in any summaries or reports.

What are my rights as a Participant?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (please contact me by the end of 2014);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

What do I do now?

If you feel you would like to participate in this study, please contact Trisha Stubbings using the phone or email details below to make a time to discuss this further. If you have any queries or would like to know more about the study, please feel free to contact Trisha Stubbings using the details below.

Researcher: Trisha Stubbings

Address: 60 Dunns Road, RD9, Otatara, 9879, Invercargill

Supervisor: Rachael Pond

Address: Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand

LOW RISK NOTIFICATIONS

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 350 5249

Appendix B

How did you find the process (or experience) of becoming a stay-at-home mother with your first child?

What were the factors that led to your decision to be a stay-at-home mother?

Do you feel age affected your experience of being a stay-at-home mother? (If at all)

What are your ideals in terms of motherhood? (ie: what sort of mother do you aspire to be?)

What skills do you think are important for a stay-at-home mother to have?

How do your friends and family (partner/husband) feel about your role as a stay-at-home mother?

In your opinion, how is being a stay-at-home mother different from being a mother in paid work?

Can you describe some of the tasks that take up the majority of your day?

What is the most difficult or challenging part of being a stay-at-home mother?

How do you manage this?

What is the most rewarding part of being a stay-at-home mother?

Can you give me an example?

Appendix C

Discourses of stay-at-home mothers over 30.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name – printed