

**A Qualitative Approach to Exploring the Experience of Mothers in Negotiating Their
Maternal Roles When They Return to
Work Outside of the Home**

By

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B.A. Simon Fraser University, 2007

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For the Degree of Master of Counselling

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City University of Seattle

Victoria, BC

June 2018

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of mothers in negotiating their maternal roles in the household after returning to work outside of the home. Three women between the ages of 25-39 who had returned to work for the first time since childbirth participated in semi-structured interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed and grouped into the following three over-arching themes: Multiple Demands and Trade-offs in Maternal Decision Making; The Negotiation of Roles and Responsibilities Within Partnerships; and Flexibility and Fluidity in Evolving Family Dynamics. The results indicate that the negotiation of maternal roles and responsibilities is unique to each individual and family, and decisions around family responsibilities and domestic work involve complex interactions between personal, interpersonal and sociocultural demands and expectations. A discussion of the results highlights the importance of qualitative research in studying family processes as well as the changing nature of family structures. This study concludes by exploring the limitations of this research as well as practical implications for individual and family counsellors, such as adopting an awareness of socially constructed gender expectations, and recognizing the influence of intensive parenting discourses on maternal decision making.

Keywords: phenomenology; phenomenological research; maternal roles; maternal identity; intensive parenting; dual-earner families

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
CHAPTER 1	1
State of the Question	2
Definitions	4
Summary	6
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review	7
Introduction	7
Dualistic Discourses in Motherhood	8
The Illusion of Choice	11
Maternal Gatekeeping, Gendered Parenting Roles and Maternal Identity	14
Summary	18
CHAPTER 3: Methodology	20
Research Approach and Rationale	20
Phenomenological Research Design	22
The Phenomenological Interview	25
Researcher Stance and Assumptions	26
Overview of Research Procedure	28
Selection of participants	28
Instrumentation	30
Data collection and storage	33

Procedure for data analysis.....	33
Summary	37
CHAPTER 4: Presentation of Research Findings	38
Participant Profiles.....	38
Presentation of Findings	39
Theme 1: Multiple demands and trade-offs in maternal decision making.....	39
<i>Quality time and trade-offs</i>	39
<i>Managing feelings of guilt</i>	42
Theme 2: The negotiation of roles and responsibilities within partnerships	45
<i>Identifying and adjusting maternal and paternal role expectations</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Childhood experience as a guide in the division of domestic work and childrearing</i>	48
<i>Asserting needs for self-care and personal time</i>	52
Theme 3: Flexibility and fluidity in evolving family dynamics	52
<i>Bridging the gap: Reducing the distance between ideals and reality</i>	54
<i>Flexibility in work and childcare arrangements</i>	57
CHAPTER 5: Discussion.....	60
Limitations	64
Implications for Counsellors.....	66
Concluding Thoughts.....	68
References.....	71
Appendix A.....	75
Appendix B.....	76

Appendix C 77

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been completed without the open and honest sharing of the three women who invited me to learn from their personal experiences as mothers. I would like to express my appreciation for their time and their stories. I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Breiddal, for her guidance and support throughout this process, as well as all of the instructors in the Master of Counselling program for sharing their vast knowledge and wisdom in the practice of counselling. And finally, thank you to my family and friends for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout this journey. I am forever grateful to all of you.

CHAPTER 1

According to Canadian statistics, in 2014, 69% of couples with children under the age of 16 were dual-earner families, up from 36% in 1976 (Uppal, 2015). This rise in dual-earner family structures, credited largely to women's increased participation in the workforce, has resulted in a fundamental change to traditional family structures most notably in terms of increased paternal involvement in childcare (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). In spite of this trend seen across North America, researchers and authors alike have noted that in heterosexual partnerships, mothers continue to assume more responsibility for their family than fathers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2013; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan, Altenburger, Lee, Bower & Kamp Dush, 2015) creating an imbalance between men and women when it comes to domestic tasks, childrearing and childcare. Several researchers have noted an incongruence between egalitarian gender beliefs and parental behaviours (Hauser, 2015; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) exploring constructs such as gender identity, role congruence, intensive parenting and maternal gatekeeping as possible explanations for this disparity (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015; Wall, 2010).

Other researchers have aimed to expose problematic discourses in parenting that contribute to the discrepancy between mothers' and fathers' responsibilities in the home (Boyd, 2005; Else, 2008; Muller, 2008; Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010). Specifically, these researchers point to the ways in which maternal scripts are both produced and sustained within families as well as in literature on motherhood and child development. These discourses are considered to

be part of pervasive cultural and sociopolitical scripts that uphold institutional policies pertaining to childrearing practices and workplace demands (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014) which have resulted in changes to the ways that families organize themselves in order to adapt to growing economic pressures and unrealistic workplace demands (Gerson, 2009).

State of the Question

One of the areas in which research on the unequal division of childcare between mothers and fathers is inconclusive pertains to the motivation behind observed behaviours and attitudes, in which it appears that the mother intentionally tries to control or limit a father's involvement with his children even after she has returned to work outside of the home (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Researchers have termed this phenomenon "maternal gatekeeping" and linked maternal gatekeeping attitudes and behaviours to role theory and a preservation of maternal identity. Amongst the first researchers to operationalize this set of observed behaviours, Allen & Hawkins (1999) hypothesized that, "mothers may gate keep the domain of home and family because they perceive paternal involvement as a threat to how they validate their irreplaceable identity as mother" (p. 204). Similarly, research on maternal identity has pointed to deeply rooted ideals of the mother-child relationship as a possible explanation for the dissonance between egalitarian maternal beliefs and gatekeeping behaviour (Hauser, 2015).

Amid these scholars, there is also an acknowledgement of the complexity of maternal identity formation and the multifarious ways in which family responsibilities are negotiated in heterosexual partnerships (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015; Puhlman & Paisley, 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) which makes the task of identifying predictive variables difficult. While some researchers believe that the link between

maternal identity and gatekeeping activities is inextricable (Hauser, 2015), research results do not confirm a causal relationship between gender identities and maternal gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015).

The inconclusiveness of the research on the unequal division of roles and responsibilities in dual-earner families may be an indication of a problematic framework linked to dualistic discourses in maternal identity, in which attitudes and behaviours are conceptualized as either/or (Boyd, 2005). Research results may also be varied as a result of hypotheses that attempt to look at categorizations of families that are static and bulky and “draw attention away from how families change in both form and functioning” as a response to internal and external influences (Gerson, 2009, p. 739). Furthermore, the title “maternal gatekeeping” in and of itself holds several implications for the ways in which we understand maternal motivations, identities and behaviours as dualistic or competing entities, for example as facilitative or inhibitory (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013) rather than complex, fluid and adaptive responses to personal experiences, cultural expectations, family contexts, and social discourses on motherhood.

In the present study, it is speculated that these dualistic discourses appear as limitations in quantitative research on the unequal division of family work, for example as modest correlations between gender identity and behaviour. Furthermore, inconsistencies in research results may reflect the inherent challenge in measuring latent constructs, such as maternal identity and differentiated family roles, through questionnaires. As such, it may be the case that what is being proposed as maternal gatekeeping in dual-earner families, based on observable, measurable and predictable attitudes and behaviours, is better conceptualized as a range of responses tied to the limited discourses on maternal identity.

This line of thinking forms the basis for the question to be addressed in this thesis: How can our understanding of the unequal division of family work be enhanced by exploring the complex range of responses that women have to competing and potentially oppressive ideologies and social discourses in motherhood? More specifically, the present study will be looking to answer the question: What is the experience of mothers in heterosexual partnerships in negotiating their maternal roles within their families when they return to work outside the home?

Definitions

The following definitions of terms and conceptual frameworks are meant to offer clarity and ensure accurate interpretation of the terminology as it is intended in this research.

Maternal Identity: The subjective experience of the ways in which women's identities are incorporated into their self-identities when they become a mother; which is believed to be an achieved identity rather than an identity that is instantaneous upon childbirth (Hauser, 2015; Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015).

Maternal Gatekeeping: "A collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children" (Allen & Hawkins, 1999, p. 200).

Household Work/Domestic Tasks: These two terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper and refer to responsibilities within the home including meal preparation, cleaning, and other home maintenance tasks.

Intensive Parenting/Intensive Mothering: These terms are connected to discourse on attachment parenting and are described in the literature as "the current cultural pattern of parenting that involves focusing on children's every need and ensuring that such needs come before any needs of parents" (Rippeyoung, 2013, p.1).

Attachment Parenting: This theory on child development rests on the assumption that children develop attachment patterns from birth based on their mother's ability to incorporate them into almost every moment of their lives, and posits that those who practice attachment parenting will raise securely attached children who are better behaved and less likely to adopt delinquent behaviours (Rippeyoung, 2013).

Neoliberalism: Societies that adopt a neoliberal ideology place value on free-market competition and sustained economic growth as a means towards achieving human progress (Smith, n.d.), Within the socio-political sphere, neo-liberalist policies emphasize minimal state intervention in both economic and social domains (Smith, n.d.). From a parenting perspective, neoliberalism relates to the priority that is placed on children's development in relation to parenting behaviours that promote both autonomy and the prevention of risks in order to establish children as responsible and successful future citizens (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014; Wall, 2010).

Traditional Gender Ideology: This term refers to individuals who believe that women should be focused on family and childrearing and that men should be focused on their careers and providing financial security to their families (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013).

Egalitarian Gender Ideology: This term refers to individuals who embrace a fluidity of gender roles with men and women participating equally in both work and family (Gerson, 2009; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013).

Gender-role Congruence Theory: The notion that well-being is enhanced when people behave in ways that align with their gender ideology, and well-being is reduced when they behave in ways that contradict those ideologies (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013).

Summary

Understanding the division of roles and responsibilities within the home in two-parent families is important to explore for several reasons. At the individual and familial level, gender role flexibility and collaboration in childrearing is linked to financial security, lasting marriages and increased support from family members and external family (Gerson, 2009). Moreover, awareness of the fluidity of family structures, as well as an understanding of systemic constraints placed on families, will help to inform family support services, family counselling practices, parenting programs, and institutional policies.

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the topic and the relevant literature, and to identify the rationale for conducting a study on the complexities of role negotiations within the home in dual-earner partnerships. The terms that will be utilized throughout the study were identified in order to offer the reader a clear understanding of their usage within the context of the present study. In an effort to provide a theoretical background and a critical review of the current research relating to the experience of mothers negotiating their maternal roles within their families when they return to work outside of the home, the subsequent chapter will present literature on the following topic areas: dualistic discourses in motherhood; choice and trade-offs in maternal decision making; maternal gatekeeping; maternal identity; and gendered parenting roles.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the past century motherhood has been influenced by a series of discursive shifts, each with the aim to delineate the behaviours and attitudes that distinguish “good mothers” from “other mothers” (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Else, 2008; Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014; Wall, 2010). These shifts are observed in the literature on maternal identity, maternal parenting behaviours, and child development, and have shaped cultural scripts of motherhood, structural policies, and individual parenting attitudes and behaviours (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Boyd, 2005; Else, 2008; Hauser, 2015; Muller, 2008; Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010). From a cultural perspective, it is argued that the neoliberal policies that govern today’s western societies have influenced parenting discourses in the form of a social-investment model of parenting. Within this model, the aim of parenting becomes centred on the successful development and autonomy of the child and as a result, parenting is seen as an entrepreneurial pursuit with an end goal of producing successful, stable and responsible future citizens (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014; Wall, 2010).

At the individual level, neoliberal discourse has led to implicit attitudes, opinions and knowledge of “good” parenting practices that are masked as choices and explored in the research and literature on intensive parenting (Wall, 2010; Rippeyoung, 2013), maternal identity (Hauser, 2015) and gender roles as they pertain to childrearing attitudes and behaviours (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Furthermore, at the cultural level, drastic economic shifts in the 21st century are forcing a change to the structure of families, requiring mothers and fathers to adopt a more egalitarian division of family work (Gerson, 2009). In the following sections,

these topics will be explored in relation to their impact on maternal identity formation, gender ideologies in the home, and the negotiation of both family work and work outside of the home in two-parent families.

Dualistic Discourses in Motherhood

The conceptualization of maternal expertise as the presence or absence of individual and relational characteristics has led to a number of dualistic discourses in maternal behaviours and attitudes (Boyd, 2005). Of particular interest in this study is that of the “working mother” and the “stay-at-home mother” and the dualistic discourses that are upheld when “one kind of mothering is viewed as good, the other bad, one natural, one unnatural, and so on” (p. 199). Boyd notes that dualisms are present when we make A/not A and either/or distinctions, and are characteristically different from dichotomies which can be conceptualized as A/B. In conceptual dichotomies, each category has a possibility for a positive outcome, whereas dualisms impose an interpretive order on the world that presumes positive and negative realities and fights to privilege one position over the other; as is the case in many discourses on parenting, especially for mothers (Boyd, 2005; Else, 2008).

The limiting description of a mother as selfless, putting her children’s needs ahead of her own, is one with which we have become familiar (Else, 2008; Muller, 2008; Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010), highlighting what Muller refers to as an “intractable and narrow paradigm of the good mother who exists selflessly and uncomplainingly for her child and for others” (p. 41). Based on a dualistic framework, the alternative is a mother who selfishly attends to her own needs over those of her children. While some contend that we have moved beyond these traditional views of motherhood, Else argues that “currently, dominant discourses rarely engage

in overt, value laden representations of maternal subjectivities, but they continue implicitly to divide good mothers from other mothers” (p. 55).

An example of the dominant discourses in motherhood that embody the idea of maternal devotion, can be found in pop culture literature on children’s brain development and attachment parenting (Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010). These scripts for maternal roles and responsibilities highlight the importance of ample stimulation and steadfast maternal nurturance from infancy into the preschool years in order to promote secure attachment and stimulate cognitive development. Wall uses the analogy of a computer programmer to emphasize the pressure placed on parents, and more specifically mothers, to make the correct cognitive and emotional inputs from infancy onward, in order to maximize their child’s future potential. Similarly, Rippeyoung highlights the individual and social consequences of attachment parenting discourse, noting maternal advice that prioritizes control over children’s behaviour and places the responsibility for negative developmental outcomes, such as poor psychological functioning and bad behaviour, on mothers. This reflects another dualism in the discourse on children’s behaviour whereby children are labeled by “experts” as good or bad/normal or abnormal (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014); terms that are upheld and reinforced when parents adopt and reproduce these same categorical definitions for their own children (Boyd, 2005).

The idea of risk reduction based on appropriate planning and control of inputs is largely associated with the maternal role, given that maternal behaviours and attitudes are the primary focus of inquiry when a child’s behaviour or development is delayed or evaluated as deficient in some aspect (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014; Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010). As a response to this pervasive pressure to create securely attached children with adequate, or better yet advanced cognitive skills, mothers have become fastidious in their attempts to enhance their

children's abilities through constant physical and emotional connection, careful selection of toys and caregivers, and enrolment in socially and physically enriching activities (Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010). This particular set of behaviours, labelled "intensive parenting," is inextricably linked to neoliberalism (Hauser, 2015; Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010) and influences the ways in which maternal identities and maternal roles are acquired and subsequently negotiated within each family.

As a framework for organizing parental roles and responsibilities, neoliberal ideology both informs and upholds the rhetoric of intensive parenting practices and makes it difficult for mothers to accurately pinpoint the rationale behind their beliefs and behaviours (Wall, 2010). It is suggested that while parents are positioned as "passive objects of intervention" (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014, p. 489), a more accurate description is that of an active agent who upholds the status quo as both a consumer and producer of ideology; engaging in discourses that continue to "reinvent and reinforce these dualisms and divisions" (Boyd, 2005, p. 201). These ideologies shift the parental lens toward the construction of "the good child" and away from social structures that undermine good parenting practices (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014). Additionally, this de-contextualization of parenting ignores such things as poverty, social networks, and public services, and places an increased amount of pressure on mothers to parent intensively regardless of structural supports to do so (Rippeyoung, 2013; Wall, 2010).

For many mothers intensive parenting is not an option, as their focus is on providing material needs for their families. In a qualitative study on mothers' experiences with intensive parenting as it relates to brain development discourse, Wall (2010), noted that the participants of her study had above-average incomes and posits that for less advantaged mothers, the consequences of intensive parenting discourses may be more extreme. Alternatively, based on

observations in mandated parenting classes for low income mothers, Rippeyoung (2013) contends that “as a result of their inability to parent intensively, [low-income mothers] were more likely to resist such exhortations and eschew the guilt that middle-class mothers feel, in order to maintain their identities as good mothers” (p. 8). These observations reveal the complex interaction between cultural scripts, social structures, and maternal realities that will be explored in the following sections.

The Illusion of Choice

Despite the cultural and structural shifts that appear on the surface to offer mothers more choice and agency in their decision to work outside of the home, implicit messages indicate that for many mothers, there is a high cost associated with combining paid work and family life (Cartwright, 2008; Rippeyoung, 2013). The notion of intensive parenting adds to the complexity of maternal roles by implying that regardless of structural constraints, mothers have the ability and responsibility to shape all facets of their children’s lives, and that their child’s future success rests on their ability to do so. Implied in this framework are choices made in regards to the allocation of time and resources, coupled with a mother’s level of desire in making her children’s needs a priority. Whether mothers decide to return to work or not, and in what capacity, they pay the highest costs in terms of interrupted employment, lost wages and experience, reduced income, reduced amounts of free time, added responsibilities at home as compared to their partners, as well as increased dependence on another for financial stability (Cartwright, 2008; Rippeyoung, 2013).

Countless women do not have the luxury of choosing whether or not to work outside of the home; once their maternal employment insurance concludes they have to return to work in some capacity (Rippeyoung, 2013). The result is a complex decision tree based on trade-offs

between lifestyle (learning to live with less versus maintaining the status quo), job flexibility, adequacy of childcare, as well as maximizing employment hours to receive benefits for subsequent children. From a systemic perspective there is very little support for childrearing endeavors. On the job, women with young children are expected to work at the same intensity as male colleagues and female colleagues without young children, and at home mothers are tasked with ensuring their child's optimal levels of physical and mental health (Gerson, 2009). Meanwhile, government institutions uphold these unrealistic ideals by producing literature on attachment parenting and optimal development (Wall, 2010), while at the same time offering little in the way of support to parents beyond one-year (Rippeyoung, 2013).

In Wall's (2010), study on the intensive mothering practices of Canadian women, all of the participants she interviewed were employed, many with demanding jobs, and all of them sacrificed personal time, sleep and self-care in order to meet the perceived needs of their children. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees reported feeling some level of guilt for wanting time to themselves and feared that they were not doing enough for their children due to limited amounts of quality time with them. In other qualitative research looking at mothers' experiences with paid work after childbirth, Cartwright (2008) identified several themes around choice in the responses from her participants. The women included in her study, agreed that "choice" was not the correct terminology in describing the organization of family life, but rather the notion of "decisions" was more accurate in taking into account the constraints in the options that were available in combining paid employment with motherhood. One participant had the following to say about the term "choices":

In calling it "choices" it portrays what I think is a bit of a falsehood, in that women have freedom to choose from a broad range of options thus assigning the responsibility for the

choices to the women themselves rather than making visible the wider influences on their choice – quite convenient for policy makers (p. 141).

This type of rational choice model relied on by policy makers is based on assumptions of self-interest embodied in economic ideologies that place higher value on autonomy and ignore competing values in supporting collective interests, such as the needs of family members (Cartwright, 2008; Geinger, Vandenbroeck & Roets, 2014). Once unraveled, these competing interests reveal the truth about women's options when it comes to family work and outside employment, and draw attention to the complexities and constraints involved in decisions around childcare and paid work. Cartwright (2008) argues that it is impossible to understand these decisions from a rational choice perspective and states that doing so

undermines the ways in which women negotiate their paid work and family life from the “ground up” (in other words, ‘practice’ at an individual lived-experience level) and in a context of a variety of complex practices and interactions in the workplace and household which are highly gendered (p. 138).

This “ground-up” perspective has also been studied in an attempt to understand the processes that uphold uneven distributions of family work between men and women despite the increase in dual-earner households in western families. Asking questions such as “why do women continue to do the majority of the work in the home,” has led to the formation of concepts such as maternal gatekeeping and the exploration of maternal identity and gender role theories as possible explanations (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). These problematic theoretical concepts used to describe observed maternal behaviour are explored below.

Maternal Gatekeeping, Gendered Parenting Roles and Maternal Identity

Despite the feminist movement of the 1960's and a dramatic change to women's political rights and economic privileges, there has been little change to women's responsibilities at home (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). In an attempt to uncover the possible explanations for this frequently documented occurrence in heterosexual, two-parent family structures, researchers have coined the term "maternal gatekeeping" to describe maternal behaviours and attitudes that uphold the status quo in terms of division of labour within the home (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; McBride, et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte, & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Allen & Hawkins were among the first researchers to attempt to operationalize maternal gatekeeping and defined this phenomenon as "a collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children" (p. 200). The implication of maternal choice and culpability in this definition seems to stand in stark contrast to these same researchers' assertions that there are several individual, structural and cultural factors that contribute to paternal involvement in housework and childcare.

Historically speaking, it is posited that the social construction of gender roles and the "natural" disposition of women to care for home and family led to the appointment of women as experts in the realm caregiving and elevated them to new levels of authority and expertise within the homestead (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Fathers' roles on the other hand, were linked to economic security, and as the "breadwinners" they were not encouraged to become more involved in parental roles and responsibilities (McBride et al., 2005). It is from this platform that researchers began to study the dissolution of traditional family structures as a response to

economic pressures and changes in maternal ideologies as a result of growing feminist discourse. The conflict that arises from these competing ideals has pointed researchers toward gender role congruence theory and identity theories (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014) to explain the division of labour in two-parent homes. These theories have become synonymous with quantitative research on marital satisfaction, family-to-work conflicts, and the division of childcare, childrearing and domestic tasks in dual-earner partnerships.

Gender role congruence theory as it pertains to maternal and paternal roles, is defined in the literature as an enhancement of well-being when mothers and/or fathers behave in ways that are congruent with their gender ideologies (for example, egalitarian ideologies versus traditional role organization within the home), and is marked by a reduction in satisfaction when behaviour violates those gender beliefs (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013). While gender ideologies are thought to exist on a continuum, Allen & Hawkins (1999) alternatively suggest that some mothers may experience ambivalence in relation to collaborative family work as a result of being “simultaneously attracted to the idea of fathers’ involvement and repelled by the notion of sharing their domain” (p. 202). Similarly, in interviews with heterosexual partners raising young children together, Hauser (2015) noted that many of the women’s responses indicated a sense of biological determinism in relation to their parenting capabilities, resulting in “mother-knows-best” attitudes and beliefs, even for women who claimed to hold more egalitarian views of parenting. Researchers posit that in some cases, the unequal distribution of family work is the result of maternal identity confirmation in which a mother’s irreplaceable position within the family is threatened by paternal involvement and collaborative parenting agreements (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014). Hauser describes this as a symbolic

loss for women not only in terms of their domestic power, but also in regards to their perceptions of capability and skill in their maternal role.

A focus on maternal efficacy as a result of maternal expectations was also a factor in research looking to identify the determinants of maternal gatekeeping, specifically with new mothers and fathers in the initial transition to parenthood (Shoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). A mother's confidence in her parenting abilities was predicted to be associated with both gate-opening and gate-closing behaviours as well as higher levels of gate-closing attitudes.

Recognizing that maternal attitudes and behaviours do not develop in a vacuum, Shoppe-Sullivan et al. noted that most previous research on maternal gatekeeping failed to consider aspects of the couple's relationship as a predictor of maternal gatekeeping, and thus aimed to detect both individual and relational aspects of this phenomenon by also looking at relationship stability as well as fathers' beliefs that may elicit gatekeeping behaviours and attitudes from mothers. As such, they predicted instability in a partnership, as well as a father's traditional beliefs, poor psychological functioning and lower self-efficacy, would directly affect gatekeeping in mothers.

Their results supported some of their hypotheses, notably that traditional gender attitudes were not linked to gatekeeping. They also concluded that maternal expectations in the form of parenting perfectionism and perceptions of relationship instability were correlated with higher levels of gatekeeping attitudes and behaviours in mothers (Shoppe-Sullivan et al, 2015). These findings are noteworthy as they point to relational responses in both men and women in dual-earner partnerships in terms of organizing parental roles and responsibilities after childbirth, and imply at least a bi-directional relationship in which parents of young children are continuously responding to one another's attitudes and behaviours (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013).

The relationship between maternal and paternal behaviours and attitudes has also been explored in the literature on maternal gatekeeping as it relates to paternal identity and involvement in childrearing (McBride et al., 2005), as well as the ways in which individual gender ideologies moderate family-to-work or work-to-family conflicts in heterosexual partnerships (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014). Family-to-work and work-to-family conflicts have been identified as a form of role conflict in which responsibilities in one domain make it difficult to meet responsibilities in another (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013). Gender ideology, for example traditional versus egalitarian gender roles, is linked to role conflict as it informs how men and women prefer to organize their familial responsibilities based on their beliefs about men's and women's roles within the realm of work outside of the home, childcare and domestic tasks. While Allen & Hawkins (1999) focused on maternal role-congruence in their conceptualization of maternal gatekeeping, more recent research underscores the complex interaction of gender ideologies that takes place within dual-earner partnerships as parents negotiate and re-negotiate their roles within the family (Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013).

Despite indications of the reciprocal nature of interactions, role differentiation discourse continues to be implicitly tied to women as the managers of children's care and family relationships (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al., 2005; Minnotte, Minnotte & Pedersen, 2013; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014). Even in research that appears (on the surface) to acknowledge the collaboration between men and women in defining, shaping and upholding family roles, maternal attitudes and behaviours are still considered to be one of the primary moderators of men's involvement in family work. For example, in looking at paternal identity, McBride et al. (2005) hypothesized that the link between men's investment and involvement in childrearing was

dependant on the mother's beliefs and appraisals, and not the father's own beliefs about his role. While these researchers did find a correlation between maternal beliefs and paternal involvement, the limitations of their research in terms of using a model that fails to acknowledge other important dimensions of parenting such as financial provisions, safety, and cognitive monitoring, make it difficult to fully capture paternal involvement in a quantifiably meaningful way (McBride et al., 2005). Furthermore, these researchers also recognize the limitations in drawing causal conclusions given the reciprocal nature of family interactions and the plausibility of a woman basing her beliefs off of her partner's patterns of behaviour. All in all, this body of research on maternal gatekeeping demonstrates the challenges in interpreting the complexity of parental roles using a snapshot approach (Gerson, 2009; Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014).

Summary

Quantitative research in maternal gatekeeping appears to be driven by a desire to uncover the right "recipe" of maternal attitudes and behaviours combined with any number of external and relational factors, as a way to explain the unequal division of family work in dual-earner partnerships. In spite of some recognition that family processes are a complex response to a number of historical and systemic discourses and barriers, research pointing to maternal culpability to account for the disparity between maternal and paternal roles within the home, persists. Research on maternal gatekeeping thus far appears to be inconclusive, perhaps as a result of its terminology and conceptualization, which decontextualizes attitudes and behaviours and inadvertently supports discourses in "choice" as it pertains to maternal characteristics and motivations. Additionally, in relation to family therapy and family support services, the notion of maternal gatekeeping may prevent practitioners from developing collaborative strategies that recognize systemic pressures and honour individual and relational attempts to reduce tensions

and inequality in both household and family work. In adopting an exploratory framework, this study represents an attempt to bridge the gap between “ground up” experiences and the theoretical frameworks that are used to categorize and define unique family contexts.

The aim of the current chapter was to present ideas in the literature and research that pertain to the unequal division of family work and to explore these concepts in relation to one another. The complexity of the topic was introduced, followed by evidence of the ways in which it spans across individual, interpersonal, systemic and cultural spheres. The research question presented in chapter one provides the basis for the following chapter in which the methodology of the current study will be presented.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter will provide a comprehensive description of the methodology used in the present study, including a description of the approach as well as the rationale for using a phenomenological design. Following that, it will describe the process of participant selection and recruitment, as well as a description of the interview process. Finally, this chapter will provide a detailed account of the process used to collect data, as well as the procedures used for data interpretation and analysis.

Research Approach and Rationale

Philosophically speaking, quantitative research is linked to a positivist worldview in which a researcher begins with a theory and then collects data to either support or refute that theory (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative researchers adopt a deductive approach in research design; reducing ideas to small, testable items (variables) in order to protect against bias, control for alternative explanations, identify relationships among variables, and locate possible causes that influence outcomes (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research on the other hand, uses an inductive approach, beginning with small data items and from those, building themes that explicate the meaning of a particular problem or phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014). Theory therefore is treated differently in quantitative and qualitative research, with the former adopting a theoretical framework with which to guide the study, and the latter adopting a theoretical framework as a result of analysis, if at all.

In his description of the qualitative research interview, Kvale (1983) likens the rigid processes employed by quantitative researchers to a “methodological straight-jacket” (p. 180), underscoring the challenges in accessing true meaning and lived experience using a deductive approach. This description is linked to the differentiation between natural science research and

its attempts at objectivity through control and prediction, and phenomenological research, which aims to elucidate the meaning of lived experience from an individual's point of view (Osborne, 1990). Wertz (2011) argues that the foundations upon which qualitative research rests – as a way to investigate a topic without taking a position on its existence – allows for the field of investigation to open up.

A phenomenological research design was chosen for the present study because it offers the researcher an opportunity to explore topics in more depth without the constraint of adhering to specific theoretical elements. Osborne (1990) states that, “descriptive methodologies, such as phenomenology, allow [the researcher] to investigate aspects of human experience which were previously neglected because they were not amenable to quantification...” (p. 88). Additionally, because individual parental roles, gender identities, and dual-earner partnerships have been explored in quantitative research with mixed results, it may be that qualitative research can offer supplementary information or provide footing for new hypotheses or conceptual frameworks in research investigating maternal and paternal roles and identities. An additional consideration in the present study is that phenomenology, and more specifically the phenomenological interview, are considered to be a good fit for those either already part of, or entering into, the counselling profession. Kvale (1983) highlights the transferability of skills from one to the other in terms of personal characteristics of the counsellor, including interpersonal skills and empathic stance, as well as the ability to reflect on presuppositions, personal experiences and biases throughout the analytic and interpretive processes.

Finally, the most important determinant in selecting a research method is the question that the researcher is attempting to answer (Creswell, 2014; Osborne, 1990). According to Creswell (2014), quantitative approaches are best suited to problems that call for understanding

the predictors of an outcome, the efficacy of a treatment or intervention, or the factors that influence an outcome. Contrarily, if a researcher seeks to explore meaning and lived-experiences, qualitative designs are best suited satisfy those aims (Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990; Wertz, 2011).

Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenology has its roots in philosophy and began with the recognition that a true understanding of human experience can only be accessed through an understanding of consciousness (Aagaard, 2017; Osborne, 1990). In phenomenological literature this understanding is referred to as “the structures of consciousness” (Wertz, 2011, p.126). This approach to studying human science is discovery oriented (Evers & Boer, 2012; van Manen, 1990), and insights into the structures of consciousness are gleaned by asking the question, “what is the nature or essence of [this experience]” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10), rather than searching for how a phenomenon comes to be.

While traditional scientific research aims to access objective truth by controlling for subjective experience and interpretations, the constructivist philosophies that underscore phenomenological approaches recognize that people directly perceive and interpret events and circumstances in their lifeworld, and as such, reality is observed and constructed in unity with the environment (Aagaard, 2017; Osborne, 1990; van Manen, 1990). The implication of this view is that researchers cannot compartmentalize and study a person as separate from their environment, or vice-versa, in order to generate explanatory laws. Instead, phenomenology is concerned with generating empathic understanding of human experience through exploration and description (Osborne, 1990). According to van Manen (1990), the chosen research method

should be in harmony with the researcher's deeper interest and "contribute to pedagogic thoughtfulness" (p. 2).

Generally speaking, phenomenological inquiry begins with a personal interest and experience in the phenomenon the researcher is trying to illuminate (Kvale, 1983; Osbourne, 1990; van Manen, 1990). Prior knowledge and personal familiarity with a topic is taken into consideration at all levels of phenomenological inquiry from the development of the question, to the collection of data, and through to the analysis phase (Aagaard, 2017; Kvale, 1983; Osbourne, 1990). Qualitative researchers past and present recognize the importance of acknowledging, clarifying, and in some cases, putting aside assumptions and presuppositions based on personal experiences. Osbourne (1990) suggests that considerable thought and reflection must go in to the research question, as well as exploration of personal biases and interpretations which may unintentionally obscure the data. While the researcher aims to interpret only the information and knowledge of the phenomenon that is provided by the participants, subjectivity cannot, and should not, be entirely eliminated (Aagaard, 2017; van Manen, 1990).

Within a phenomenological framework, there are two schools of thought regarding the ways in which prior knowledge and presuppositions should be handled by the researcher. The first, described as descriptive phenomenology, attempts to put aside prior knowledge: a technique that is referred to as "bracketing" (Aagaard, 2017; Kvale, 1990; Osbourne, 1990; Wertz, 2011). Bracketing is best described as a form of scrupulous self-reflection in which the researcher carefully considers and sets aside their own presuppositions and biases in relation to the phenomenon with the aim of perceiving the phenomenon from a fresh perspective (Aagaard, 2017; Osbourne 1990). Bracketing also allows the researcher to set aside theoretical and practical knowledge to "arrive at the essence of a phenomenon" (Kvale, 1983, p. 184).

Hermeneutic phenomenology on the other hand, acknowledges that human experience is always interpretive, which signifies that interpretation is an inescapable part of qualitative research (Aagaard, 2017). Hermeneutics as a philosophy is more interested in language as the fundamental mode of both the construction and description of lived experiences (Aagaard, 2017; Seidman, 2013), and may be considered more a form of art which draws from a number of sources and “focuses on the performative aspects of language” (Aagaard, 2017, p. 524) in contrast to the stages of data analysis found in descriptive phenomenology and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). van Manen (1990) recognizes that the interpretation through text and discourse found in qualitative research can lead to multiple and conflicting interpretations, and acknowledges both the complexity and simplicity of hermeneutics in the following description: “If all the world is like a text then everyone becomes a reader (and an author). And the question arises, whose reading, whose interpretation is the correct one?” (p. 37). On a pragmatic level, these two orientations to phenomenology have methodological implications for approaching the interpretation and analysis of data.

The methodology that I chose for the present study most closely resembles a hermeneutic phenomenological approach which acknowledges that the task of understanding is always interpretive (Aagaard, 2017). Where descriptive phenomenological research is concerned with rationality and distinguishing data that represent “a stable and singular core” of the phenomenon in question (Aagaard, 2017, p. 522), hermeneutic phenomenologists believe that there is no singular description of a phenomenon, but rather the task of the researcher is to understand and report on the complexity of lived experiences by way of thoughtful conversation and the exploration of a range of meanings (van Manen, 1990). In hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher is tasked with invoking deeper interpretations that do not take a participant’s description at face

value, but rather seeking to understand the latent meaning (Aagaard, 2017; van Manen, 1990).

van Manen notes that

the end result of hermeneutic inquiry is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of a text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful; a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience (p. 36).

In recognition of the interpretive nature of hermeneutics, the following sections will address the interpretive elements of the present study including my assumptions and experience with the topic in question, as well as decisions that I made in respect to data analysis and the identification and selection of themes within the data.

The Phenomenological Interview

The phenomenological interview is one of many approaches used in phenomenological research, and its popularity as a method of inquiry draws from its ability to offer the researcher meaningful descriptions of the lived world (Kvale, 1983). However, while there are universal aspects of the interview process that can be explicated, there are few, if any, binding rules of interview methodology (Kvale, 1983; Seidman, 2013). As a starting point, prior knowledge and experience are regarded as advantageous for researchers opting to conduct interviews as part of their research methodology, as they allow the researcher to observe nuances that might otherwise be overlooked by someone with little experience or understanding of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). Sensitivity toward nuances in the interview process is also achieved by probing initial literal responses and “reading between the lines” to explore implicit messages and meanings (Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990; Seidman, 2013).

An important structural aspect of the interview are the questions posed by the researcher. Because the research interview is neither a free flowing conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire, the researcher generally uses a select few open ended questions or probes to guide the process and hone in on contexts and themes relevant to the research question (Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990). These questions should also be formulated in such a way that they create room for emotional and perceptual aspects of an experience (Evers & Boer, 2012), while being mindful of presuppositions and ensuring that the questions and probes are not designed to substantiate the researcher's hunches (Kvale, 1983). Of equal importance in accessing these implicit aspects of an experience is the relational connection between the interviewer and the interviewee (Evers & Boer, 2012; Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990; Seidman, 2013). According to Osborne, it is helpful to conceptualize phenomenological research participants as "co-researchers sharing an interest in the exploration and illumination of the topic in question" (p. 82). When one approaches research this way, there is more opportunity to build rapport with the interviewee (Kvale, 1983; Osbourne, 1990) and generate mutuality (Evers & Boer, 2012), much the same way that a counsellor builds rapport with his/her client.

Researcher Stance and Assumptions

While complete objectivity is not required in qualitative research, it is important that researchers are aware of their own experiences and interpretations throughout the process (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990). This reflexivity provides the foundation for generating rich and descriptive data from participants that can then be interpreted to create new understandings and further exploration into a topic. As a way to explore my personal experience with the phenomenon in question as well as presuppositions based on those experiences, I engaged in a journaling process to identify assumptions prior to beginning the interviews. The

following is a list of personally generated assumptions about a mother's experience upon returning to work outside of the home after childbirth:

1. Most mother's feel as though their role in the home is central in terms of organizing children's physical and emotional well-being;
2. The relationship that develops between a mother and a child in the first year after childbirth is more emotionally intense for both the mother and the child, than the relationship between a father and a child;
3. In general, mothers continue to take on more of the household and family work when they first return to work outside of the home because these responsibilities were previously established within their partnerships;
4. Parental roles and responsibilities vary from family to family;
5. Mothers struggle with external expectations and pressure to engage in intensive mothering more so now than in past generations due to increased exposure to images, blogs and articles via social media and the internet;
6. Mothers feel a loss of connection with their children when they first return to work, but the initial intensity subsides over time as they move through this transition if they feel as though their child is well cared for while they are at work.

Identifying and reflecting upon these assumptions was an important part of the research process, specifically in ensuring that the interview questions were not leading and not used as a means to substantiate my personal assumptions. In the data analysis process, it was important to reflect on my presuppositions in order to determine that any themes that bore similarity were a result of the participant's direction in the interview. In order to assess the relevance of a particular data item to a theme, the data sets were reviewed as a whole in order to rule out the

possibility that my questions and prompts were reflective of my own assumptions rather than the participants' experiences.

Overview of Research Procedure

Selection of participants.

The number of participants needed for qualitative research varies, although it generally requires fewer participants than quantitative research as the goal is to get rich and varied descriptions of a phenomenon (Osborne, 1990; *Qualitative Research*, n.d.). According to Aagaard (2017), a phenomenological approach generally requires detailed descriptions from at least three participants who have experienced situations in which the phenomenon occurs, while other authors state that the most important factor in participant selection is illumination of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990). The number of participants reflects the researcher's judgement in determining when saturation of a topic is reached and occurs when a researcher notes that no new patterns or themes are emerging in the participants' descriptions (Osborne, 1990; *Qualitative Research*, n.d.). Once a researcher observes that the data yields adequate information for identifying structures, they can move on to the analysis phase. In the present study, semi-structured interviews were completed with three women who had recently returned to work for the first time since becoming a mother. All of the participants were between the age of 25-39, living with a male partner, with children under the age of 6 at home. Participants for this study were recruited in person, through social media, and through the snowball sampling technique in which they came to know of the research through people known to the researcher. Qualitative research designs often use purposeful or criterion-based sampling in order to identify homogenous group of participants that have characteristics or experience that is relevant to the research question (*Qualitative Research*, n.d.), and who will best help the researcher to

understand the phenomenon or problem posed in the research question (Creswell, 2014). For the present study, a mixed purposeful sampling method was used, including criterion and snowball sampling.

In order to connect with mothers who were interested in contributing to this body of research, a social media outlet was utilized to send messages to my friends and family who were then encouraged to share the message within their network of friends (see Appendix A). Participants who were interested in taking part in the study were asked to contact me by telephone. At this time, the potential participants were asked questions based upon the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see below) in order to determine eligibility for participation. In addition, I directly informed the participants of the nature of the research interview and the risks involved, such as experiencing strong emotions. I also asked them about their comfort with the research topic and their available support and external resources (see Appendix B).

There were six criteria that were identified to determine eligibility for this study. The first criterion was age. According to a report from Statistics Canada, the average age of a woman having her first child is 30.2 years (*Statistics Canada, 2017*). Recognizing the age variations in first time mothers, the range for this sample was defined as mothers between the ages of 25 and 39.

The second criterion includes the age of the children. In looking at the negotiation of household duties and childcare (family work), there is considerable difference in the needs of young children versus the needs of older school aged children. As such, for the purpose of this study, only mothers with children under the age of 6 were included.

The third criteria that was established pertains to the experience of each woman in relation to work outside of the home. In order to gain a rich description of the complexities of

maternal identity and how it relates to a mother's experience returning to work outside the home, only mothers who had returned to work within the past 24 months were included. This reflects previous research that indicates that initial changes and transitions from one family structure to another are more intense within the first 24 months (Hauser, 2015; Schoppe-Sullivan et al, 2015; Wall, 2010).

In recognizing that there are differences between the experiences of single parent families, same sex couple families, and heterosexual couple families, this research only extended to heterosexual married couples, or those living with a common-law opposite-sex partner. In British Columbia, common law couples include partners who have lived in a marriage-like relationship for two or more years, or have children together (*Government of British Columbia*, n.d.). The final criterion pertained to male partners or husbands. In order to address challenges in the division of household and childrearing duties as a result of having both parents working, male partners and spouses were also required to be employed.

After ensuring that potential participants met the inclusion criteria, a time was arranged to meet for the first interview. For participants that were unable to meet in person due to time or location constraints, the interviews were conducted via telephone and the consent forms were signed and sent electronically prior to the first interview. This was the case in only one of the three interviews, with the remaining two taking place in-person. Before beginning the interview, each participant was given the consent form (see Appendix C) for review and at that time was encouraged to ask any questions or share any concerns they may have. The interview process did not commence until the participant felt comfortable with the process and was ready to sign the consent form. None of the participants in this study expressed any concerns before signing the consent form.

Instrumentation.

Interviewing in qualitative research approaches is generally conducted using open-ended questions that build upon and explore a participant's responses with the goal of having the participant "reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). Evers & Boer (2012) differentiate between two types of interviews; thematic interviews and cultural interviews. Cultural interviews are designed to explore the everyday lives of participants including habits and cultural norms that are thought to develop through socialization processes. These types of interviews are considered exploratory in nature and as such, there are few questions formulated by the researcher in advance (Evers & Boer, 2012). Thematic interviews on the other hand, are considered narrower in focus and are used when the interviewer is interested in understanding "everything there is to know about a specific event, the what, how, why and when" (p. 62). This type of interview focus is relevant for researchers investigating a given time period or a specific-decision making process. The research question posed in this project would thus be considered narrow in focus as it asks the participant to recall a specific time period and specific events of the experience.

Osborne (1990) identifies three phases in the interview process. The first phase involves establishing rapport and orienting the co-researcher to the nature of the research. In the present study, this process began in the initial conversation regarding participant eligibility, and was reviewed at the start of each interview, at which time the participants were reminded of the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits. The second phase of the interview process is for gathering data typically via the use of open-ended questions (Osborne 1990). The interviews conducted in the present study were on average 60 minutes in length and consisted of

six open-ended questions intended to guide the interviews, while still allowing time for curiosity and exploration of experience.

The questions posed to each participant were as follows:

1. In what ways have your expectations of motherhood changed since becoming a mother?
2. What has it been like for you to go through the transition from a couple with no children, to a couple with a child/children?
3. What factors influenced your decisions to return to paid employment outside of the home?
4. How have yours and your partner's roles changed within the home since you returned to work?
5. How are domestic tasks (for example food preparation, children's bedtime, laundry, home maintenance, etc.) divided between you and your partner and how were those decisions made?
6. When you reflect on this part of your life in regards to the changes that having a child brings, what stands out to you most?

These questions were designed to explore the various aspects of the lived experience of mothers as they relate to their maternal identities, their interactions with their partners, and their roles within the family, while also providing an opportunity to investigate the complexities inherent to a changing family structure.

The final phase of the interview process involves determining if more than one data-gathering session is needed which provides the participant with the opportunity to reflect on their responses and add any additional information that may have come into their awareness since the

initial interview (Osbourne, 1990; Seidman, 2013). Due to the participant's busy schedules and time constraints, I decided that this final phase would be adapted by way of including a reflective question at the end of the first interview (see question #6), and encouraging participants to email me if they felt that they wanted to add to their description. None of the participants contacted me to revise or add to their initial interview responses.

Data collection and storage.

Any forms or data that contain information about a participant's identity were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office which only I have access. Data was filed under an assigned code number and the participant's names were coded on all data sources. Any identifying information, such as the key to the coded names, signed consent forms, and participant contact information was securely stored separately from any data.

The interviews were recorded using QuickTime audio software on my personal computer. Reviewing the interviews for transcription was also done using my personal computer. Once completed, the transcriptions were coded and stored in a password protected document and moved to separate external drives (one per participant). All print and electronic data pertaining to this study will be disposed of after 5-years.

Procedure for Data Analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method of organizing qualitative research and is compatible with a number of psychological research paradigms, including phenomenological interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis is used to report patterns within data, but "does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches [and can] offer a more accessible form of analysis [than less detailed methods of qualitative data analysis], particularly for those early in a qualitative research career" (p. 81). Key to this type of analysis is the

researcher's transparency in the decision making process including the selection of methods as well as choices in identifying what counts as a theme.

In phenomenological data analysis and thematic analysis descriptions, the analyses of data and identification of themes is divided into phases or steps (Aagaard, 2107; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Wertz, 2011). The first objective of the researcher is to read over all of the transcribed data prior to coding. Some researchers suggest reading the data without any agenda and then re-reading it a second time (Wertz, 2011), while others promote taking notes during the first reading and beginning to identify patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the methodology outlined in thematic analysis, I made notes in the margins of the transcripts during the first reading in order to get a sense of repeating terms and ideas, as well as similarities between the descriptions.

The next phase of analysis outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), involves generating codes and identifying patterns within the data. Following the first reading, I read through the transcripts in their entirety a second and third time and generated initial codes for each data item. Once I had completed coding each of the transcripts, I created a preliminary list of the codes. In total there were 14 codes identified that were relevant to the phenomenon in question. From there, I manually matched each data extract to the code(s) that it represented and collated them together under that code. In some cases, data was representative of multiple codes and there was overlap in terms of assigning more than one code to a data item. Braun & Clark note that data extracts can be coded under more than one topic and that contradictions and inconsistencies that arise from assigning a data item to multiple codes is an important part of the analytic process in terms of capturing a final thematic map.

Braun & Clarke (2006) also observe the distinction between coding, which organizes data into meaningful groups, and the process of identifying themes in which the interpretive process

of data analysis begins. Once I had coded and grouped the data, I began to organize the codes into potential themes. For this phase of data analysis, I shifted my attention back to the research question and began sorting the codes into potential themes and sub-themes using a visual web diagram. Braun & Clarke note that codes can be combined to form a theme, or may in fact become a theme on their own. Initially I had identified six main themes as follows: Roles and Responsibilities Within the Relationship; Managing Multiple Roles; Loss of Connection with Child; Flexibility and Fluidity of Roles and Expectations; Maternal Identity; and Strength of the Relationship. Following the initial identification of themes, Braun & Clarke recommend that they be reviewed to ensure that they are relevant to the research question. They also suggest that some themes may need to be discarded, combined and/or broken down into separate themes.

In reviewing my initial identification of themes, I noted that several of the data extracts were coded to both Managing Multiple Roles and Loss of Connection with the Child. When I reviewed these extracts I also noticed that there was a strong emphasis on feelings of guilt and I was unsure at first if this should be added as a sub-theme or if it was a theme of its own. I also observed that there were larger patterns that represented interactional components that were unique to each couple and that represented the processes of transition and negotiation between couples. From there, I decided to review the original codes, and began to rearrange them in terms of processes and described feelings about those processes, rather than static descriptions.

Descriptions that had been placed under the theme Maternal Identity were further divided in terms of processes and transitions and placed within the remaining themes. For example, statements about maternal identity that appeared to influence interactions between a couple were placed under Roles and Responsibilities Within the Relationship, and descriptions of maternal identity that represented internal adjustment processes and transitions were coded to the theme

Flexibility and Fluidity. From there, I decided that Managing Multiples Roles would remain a theme and that the Loss of Connection with the Child was better represented as a process of trade-offs in relation to time and feelings of guilt and as such, managing feelings of guilt and the concept of trade-offs were incorporated as sub-themes into the main theme Managing Multiple Roles.

Qualitative data analysis is considered a circular method rather than a linear one (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, once I had refined and collapsed the themes and had a thematic map that I felt was representative of each participant's described experience, I reviewed the codes one last time to ensure that they were representative of the themes and sub-themes. Finally, I decided to change some of the titles of the themes in order to accurately represent the latent meanings, patterns and processes that I had extrapolated from the data extracts. The final main themes for this research were identified as follows: Multiple Demands and Trade-offs in Maternal Decision Making; The Negotiation of Roles and Responsibilities Within Partnerships; and Flexibility and Fluidity in Evolving Family Dynamics.

According to Braun & Clark (2006), thematic analysis as a method for analyzing phenomenological data outlines procedures that adhere to the theoretical and methodological rigor that is more often attributed to quantitative research. This approach to data analysis is also compatible with hermeneutic inquiry which recognizes the interpretive dynamics at play in all levels of qualitative research from the development of the research question, to the selection of methodology and through to the data analysis phase. When done correctly, this process yields a comprehensive analysis that is "characterized by meticulous and thorough description that achieves fidelity to psychological life by clarifying its processes, meanings, and general (eidetic) structures" (Wertz, 2011, p. 133).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to outline the methodology used in the present study and to provide the reader with a comprehensive description of the processes that were utilized in recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the data. The previous chapters have presented a detailed overview of the phenomenon under study and the relevant literature, and the following chapters will introduce and present the themes that were identified in the participants' interviews, followed by a discussion of the results as well as the limitations of the present research.

CHAPTER 4: Presentation of Research Findings

Participant Profiles

The following names have all been changed to protect the identity of the participants and their families. The participants were each assigned pseudonyms by the researcher.

Emily was 37 years old at the time of the interview. She and her husband John had been living together for 9 years in total and had been married for 7 years. They have one daughter named Ava who was 18 months old and attended daycare full-time during the weekdays. Emily had returned to work full-time in September of 2017 after one year of maternity leave. John worked full time during the week as well, and both parents had the same work schedule of Monday-Friday daytime.

Taylor was 32 years old at the time of the interview. She and her husband Michael had been living together for 14 years in total and had been married for 7 years. They have two children: a daughter named Sarah who was 5 years old and in kindergarten five days a week, and a son named Sam who was 3 years old and attended pre-school two days per week. Taylor returned to school in September of 2015 and returned to work part-time in September of 2017 after staying home as primary caregiver of her children for five years. Michael worked full time during the week, during the day from Monday to Friday.

Amy was 32 years old at the time of the interview. She and her partner Tom had been living together for 2 years and have one daughter named Olivia who was 2 years old. Amy returned to full-time work in April of 2016 after a 10-month maternity leave. Tom worked full-time alternating days and nights after having been off work due to an injury for the first year after Olivia was born.

Presentation of Findings

Overall, there were three main themes identified in the interview data: Multiple Demands and Trade-offs in Maternal Decision Making; The Negotiation of Roles and Responsibilities within Partnerships; and Flexibility and Fluidity in Evolving Family Dynamics. Each theme will be explored below in relation to the research question and following that there will be a summary of the described experience of negotiating maternal roles in relation to the topics presented in the literature review.

Theme 1: Multiple demands and trade-offs in maternal decision making.

In all of three of the interviews conducted, the participants spoke about their efforts to meet the needs of their child/children, while at the same time, balancing personal needs, family needs and obligations at work and at home. This led to steadfast and complex negotiations and strategies in balancing demanding roles, making difficult decisions, and managing countless tasks. This theme has been divided into two sub-themes, described below.

Quality time and trade-offs.

For all of the participants interviewed, quality time with children was seen as a priority regardless of their work schedules. Recent scholarly literature on parenting practices has begun to distinguish quality time with children from time spent in routine caregiving activities. More specifically, quality time is defined in terms of interaction between a parent and a child in which the child is the primary focus, and includes activities such as eating together, playing, helping with homework and reading (Heiland, Price & Wilson, 2017). The significance of this term for the present study rests on assumptions that mother-child quality time is frequently investigated alongside measurements of a child's cognitive and emotional development (see Delonis, Beeghly & Irwin, 2017; Fomby & Musick, 2018), placing an increased responsibility on working

mother's to prioritize quality time with their children when they are at home (Heiland, Price & Wilson, 2017).

In describing the physical and emotional strain that she felt after returning to work full-time, Emily expressed the difficulties she experienced in managing the demands on her time with the time available for her daughter in the evenings after work:

Life is so busy it makes you feel like...how am I going to get this all? Like how am I going to get this all – so I just try to slow down and take time. And the dishes can wait because right now I have half an hour so we're going to play before I have to get ready for dinner and get ready for bed. I am just trying to be more mindful of that because it's not the things I do, it's the time and I think that's hard to balance.

In reviewing all three interviews, it became apparent that amongst a multitude of other influences, quality time was one of the main factors in the participant's decision making processes around work schedules and how their time was organized at home when the number of demands on their time surpassed the number of hours available to accomplish all of their tasks and meet the needs of their families. For Emily, balancing the pressure of a full-time work schedule with her need to remain connected to Ava after returning to work was challenging and required daily planning and decision making about what would get accomplished in order to ensure that she had quality time with her daughter, as well as some time for herself within the week.

For Taylor, quality time was a main factor in her decision to remain at home with her children when her paid maternity leave concluded. Recognizing that there would be financial strain on the family, quality time with her children was considered a higher priority and so she and her partner had to make financial sacrifices in order to balance her desire to spend time with

her children throughout their development years. In describing her decision making process, Taylor explained the financial sacrifices that her family had to make in order for her to remain a stay-at-home parent:

Um, yeah, I mean I didn't have to go to work. We could make the payments of everything and cover stuff financially. But yeah, it's definitely been a stress, and you know there are times when it's just like whatever! Having to make those decisions [about] the extra stuff. I mean we are still able to get food on the table and all of that but it's like you can't just go out and buy something as soon as you need it.... So it's kind of, being okay with being in a bit of debt and realizing that it's only going to be a few years, and it's more important that we -- that I have that time with the kids and that like they're not having to go to daycare and all the other extra stress of that.

Amy's family had also made financial sacrifices during her maternity leave as a result of her partner's inability to work for several months due to an injury. While her return to work two months before her maternity leave ended relieved the financial pressure they were under, the strains that it placed on her time meant that spending all of her free time with her daughter at this young age was a priority over other relationships in her life, including her relationship with her partner. In discussing the differences in priority, Amy stated:

...I'm more about like everything is about Olivia in my life. Like so we used to go out and do a lot of things and be more social, but like I said, I would rather stay home and spend time with her.

Within each of these descriptions it appears that time constraints and decisions around maternal priorities also come with trade-offs. For Emily the trade-off meant that quality time with her daughter resulted in constant pressure to stay organized and on schedule, whereas for

Amy, quality time with her daughter when she was not at work meant a loss of connection to her partner. For Taylor, this meant that she had to weigh her desire to remain the primary caregiver for her children with the financial constraints that were placed on the family as a result. On the surface, these decisions are described in terms of balance and prioritizing certain needs over others, however the descriptions provided by the interviewees reflect the illusion of the idea that women have “choice” while also revealing the constraints of their choices based on implicit cultural scripts of motherhood. The choices they made in regards to organizing their time at home might also be reflective of their adopted ideologies of motherhood and fear of judgement from others.

Managing feelings of guilt.

Juggling the demands of multiple roles was also associated with feelings of guilt in having to place work obligations ahead of children’s needs. For two of the three participants, Emily and Amy, the decision to return to work full-time was primarily motivated by the family’s financial need, whereas for Taylor, the decision to return to school at first, and then work, was based on personal career goals and strategies in terms of the type of paid work she wanted to do when her children were older and in school full time during the day. Regardless of the timing of their return to work outside of the home, each participant expressed feelings of guilt around taking time away from their children.

Amy, who returned to work before the end of her maternity leave due to financial strain on the family, acknowledged her own feelings of guilt in returning to work as it related to missing out on important milestones, as well as feeling the loss of connection with her daughter:

Yeah, well like I said, I was with her pretty much 24 hours a day, 7 days a week since she was born so it was tough to leave her. She was with my mom who I fully trusted but still

there was that “mom guilt” of going back to work and not being with my kid and missing out on those moments. Like she’s been going to Highland dancing for a couple of weeks and my mom took her to some ballet dancing and I haven’t seen any of those because I’m working.

Despite having found trustworthy childcare and expressing a desire to return to work in some capacity, Amy still struggled to reconcile her desire to be a constant presence in her daughter’s life with personal and practical reasons for returning to work.

For Amy, time spent with Olivia in the first few months was especially intense due to her daughter’s medical needs right after childbirth, however each woman interviewed alluded to the quick transition and intensity of connection that marks the first few months after childbirth. This intense period is recognized in research on maternal identities as a time in which mothers come to face the juxtaposition between the reality of motherhood and their maternal ideals (Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015). This period is also marked by a mother’s recognition of the indispensable role they play in their children’s lives and with that, the shift in thinking about and anticipating the needs of their children on a consistent basis (Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015). Emily noticed this shift in her thinking and the changes that came with it as she described experiencing feelings of guilt in periodically leaving her daughter in order to have some time to herself:

...the hardest thing when you have a kid is yeah, that freedom and not being able to just leave and be like ‘okay, I’ll see ya later’ kind of thing. Yeah, it’s a lot of ‘okay I’m going to go out and do this but I’m going to check in while I’m out too,’ just checking in to make sure that I’m not needed at home.... You’re like always thinking of that other little person.

Similarly, Taylor also struggled to find balance between her family's needs and her workload at school and described feelings of guilt in going downstairs to complete homework while her husband stayed upstairs with the kids and put them to bed. In spite of efforts to balance her role in the home with her role as a student by ensuring that most of her family's needs were met before she left (for example, making dinner and cleaning up), she described the first few weeks of this transition as difficult and felt guilty about taking time to focus on her work when she could hear her children and husband struggling upstairs:

Yeah, he didn't have a lot of patience for the kids at first, especially because they were so young. Like my son was a year and then Sarah was just three and a half, so there's a lot of like managing just [the] toddlers' crazy behaviour right? Just the chaos of having two young kids, so there were lots of times when I would come upstairs at the end of the night and he was just like 'that was crazy!' Or I could hear him kind of losing his patience with the kids and stuff and I'd just be like, like I wanted to go upstairs and fix everything....

Feelings of guilt for working mothers have been explored in qualitative research and linked to cultural scripts in intensive mothering (Guendouzi, 2006; Wall, 2010). Guendouzi notes that regardless of the adequacy of childcare arrangements, mother's lives are "always constricted by the social demands of being engaged in intensive mothering" (p. 904). This socially constructed, gendered response to childrearing, in which mothers are expected to place their children's and family's needs ahead their own, exemplifies the ways in which dualistic discourses tied to characteristics of the "working-mom" and the "stay-at-home-mom," create internal tension resulting in feelings of guilt when mothers feel that they are not able to meet the needs of their children. None of the participants in this study reported that their partners

experienced stress or guilt as a response to fulfilling their paternal obligations. Further, there appears to be no equivalent research devoted to “paternal guilt” which highlights another way in which maternal expectations are socially constructed and, consequently, adopted as parenting truths.

Theme 2: The negotiation of roles and responsibilities within partnerships.

In addition to perpetual attention directed toward their children’s needs, all three participants also described demands on their time and attention in regards to domestic work. Each woman expressed acceptance of their household and family responsibilities while also protesting the amount of responsibility that they had acquired. Domestic tasks were accepted as part of their contribution to the family, however upon reflection, each participant expressed mixed feelings about their roles and responsibilities in the home as well as similarities with one another in how they conceptualized their maternal roles.

Identifying and adjusting maternal and paternal role expectations.

For both Amy and Taylor, their maternal roles and responsibilities appeared to originate from their views around family organization which corresponded to cultural scripts for motherhood such as “intensive mothering” and secure attachments (Rippeyoung, 2013). In addition to referring to “maternal instinct” as a way to explain the imbalance of caregiving in the home, Amy also described her desire to manage all aspects of her daughter’s daily routine in terms of her implicit knowledge as a result of her uninterrupted time with her daughter during the first few months of Olivia’s life. In describing the shift when she returned to work and left her daughter in the care of her husband some of the time, she said that the initial transition was challenging because she wanted to continue to have “control” over her daughter’s schedule while she was at work:

It was tough because he's good but he doesn't handle things the same way as I do, but I'm a control freak, so I was like 'make sure you put her down by this time.' She's a schedule girl, well I'm a 'schedule person' as well, so I had her on nap schedules and stuff which he has no time for...."

Despite her frustrations with her husband's perceived priorities in relation to his paternal role, Amy was quick to comment on his growing capabilities with their daughter and appeared to be pleased when she reflected on the ways in their father-daughter bond was growing:

She loves her dad and as 'daddy's little girl' she just like adores him, so yeah they love their time together. And he's super 'outdoorsy' and she loves being outside so that's like their time to go for wanders on our big field and get all muddy and jump in puddles.

Taylor also referred to maternal instincts in caregiving and the father's primary role in supporting the mother to be able to focus on taking care of her children especially in the first year. In reflecting on how decisions around childrearing have been made and how family responsibilities have been divided amongst her and her husband, she stated that:

In a maternal role [the mother] usually takes the lead on taking care of the kids and making decisions. It's not like the "be all and end all," but as the mom, you kind of guide the way.... I would say the maternal role is a bit more um, yeah, taking the lead in raising your children.

As a result of this ideology, Taylor described the ways in which she approached her time away from the children for school work in the evenings by supporting her husband in gaining confidence in his parenting role. This strategy appeared to entail balancing her requests with an understanding of his personal needs and work obligations. While she expressed some frustration in having her own needs met in regards to having the necessary time to complete her work, her

overall perception of the maternal role as a coach or a consultant to her partner, meant that she also felt that it was important to determine the best ways to support her husband in establishing a more central role as caregiver:

He just, sort of had to develop his own confidence and routine with the kids. Before I went to school we shared most of the kids' bed time routine and he could rely on me to be supportive [in helping] to manage the kids if they started going into crazy tantrums or whatever. Like generally I've had more patience and he's quick to just walk away or get mad. And so yeah, I wanted him to be able to do that like, 'you're the dad, you've gotta figure out how to take care of your kids,' sort of thing, so [he] can't just keep relying on me to mediate everything.... And for him to realize that he's capable of doing it. 'You do have patience and you have to learn to use it and [it was important for him] to develop his own skills or ways of taking care of the kids.

This idea of supporting interactions and decision making as a way to assert personal needs for more equality in family work was also expressed by Emily in relation to stepping back in areas that she had previously taken a leadership role. For example, Emily had said that during the first year of Ava's life she had become the "sleep expert," and in order to create a sleep schedule that provided her family with more structure, she had carefully worked on sleep training her daughter. After she returned to work full-time, she described the imbalance she felt in being solely responsible for Ava's sleep routines on the weekends, as well as the attempts to increase her husband's involvement in this aspect of childcare:

So we make decisions together about Ava for the big stuff, but I think the small things, like nap schedules and bedtime -- I think he definitely turns to me to ask [about] that because I've become like the 'sleep specialist.' He asks like 'okay when should she be going for a

nap based on where she's at in her milestones?' and 'how long should she be awake?' And so that's I think fallen on my plate which sometimes is frustrating because I'll say like, 'well what do you think?' Like, you know, say for example, if her nap's not going well. So [I'll say] 'what should we do?' and he'll say 'I don't know.' And so I'll say 'well I don't know either!' So that's been a moment of like, well we have to figure this out together because why should I just be the only one to figure it out?

Based on these descriptions, it is understandable that certain maternal behaviours when reviewed on their own, appear to be inhibitory toward a father's involvement. However, with the addition of context and exploration of the transitory nature of family systems, it becomes clear that most of these observed behaviours are representative of larger processes of adjustment for parents.

Childhood experience as a guide in the division of domestic work and childrearing.

The participants' views on maternal roles and responsibilities in relation to the division of labour in the home and assertion of needs for personal time were portrayed in the interviews as stemming from childhood experiences. In relation to the division of domestic tasks and childcare, Amy described her partner's contributions as mainly "outdoor stuff," attributing his interest in this aspect of domesticity to his personal hobbies. She described her own role as the "delegator," primarily in charge of managing the rest of the house and family work, and recognized that this was how she perceived her parents' roles growing up. She also shared an understanding that her husband's family of origin was organized differently than hers and, as a result, she felt responsible for both modelling and delegating domestic responsibilities and parental roles:

Yeah his mom died when he was really young and he was raised by his father who was a full blown alcoholic.... So I understand that he didn't really have that parental figure

growing up so like I try and understand that, [but also] just because you were raised like that, this isn't the way you're supposed to be as a parent. I had a really supportive and loving mother and dad, ...and again, my mom kind of did everything while my dad was there financially.... And my mom was always 'the mom,' she did all the 'mom stuff.'

Within this framework, the transition to work in terms of negotiating roles was difficult at first as Amy felt the need to remain in control and delegate tasks not only to ensure that her daughter's needs were met, but also to relieve some of the burden of the household tasks. The shift that took place in balancing out responsibilities was slow and seemed to require a certain level of confidence in her partner's capabilities as well as relaxing around her concerns about her daughter's care. While the role of "delegator" represented Amy's sense of responsibility, it also allowed her to directly assert her needs when she returned to work in requesting that her partner assist with domestic tasks such as cooking and laundry. In the interview, she described how the responsibilities at home were beginning to shift, "He's been a lot better recently about doing more ...(of) the cooking and stuff... because I am working."

Taylor also attributed the division of family care and domestic responsibilities to her and her husband's childhood experiences. In reflecting on the ways in which domestic and childrearing tasks were allocated in her home, she noted that her husband's contributions to domestic and family work were substantially less than her own and attributed this to his experience of his own mother's role:

...he's like generally taking care of the yard and working on projects outside, um, and I've been inside [doing the] domestic stuff, other than, you know, he might clean up the kitchen once in a while.... He never had to do any of that at home. It was always just outside chores. Even when he moved out of the house he never had to do a load of laundry or

clean his bathroom because his mom would come over and do it. So that part I'm like, ugh.

For Taylor, having her husband contribute to childcare in the evenings so that she could attend to her work and personal needs seemed to be more of a priority than having him "help" with domestic tasks in the home and this also seemed to connect to her memories of her mother during childhood:

...knowing that even though I enjoy being a mom and being at home, there – you can still do more and that's okay. Like I've never had any guilt about that. And I don't know if it's like – I mean we grew up with a mom at home. She was at home, she worked - well she worked a little bit but like she was pretty much at home all of the time. But she always had something else that she was doing. Like she had her own little sewing business, she always -- even if she wasn't employed -- she always had personal interests.

While Taylor and Amy shared a similar unequal division of domestic labour in their partnerships both before and after children, in comparison, Emily and her husband held more egalitarian roles in terms of managing house work and family tasks. Both Emily and John had grown up in families in which they were required to be more independent than the other participants as a result of living in single-parent homes. In the interview Emily reported higher levels of communication between her and her husband when it came to sharing household work and organizing childcare when she returned to work outside of the home:

I think it was that our lifestyle before was that you have so much time for yourself. Then even when I was on mat leave there was always time because I wasn't working. So I think it definitely changed when I went to work and it's like okay now we're actually going to have to have a bit of a schedule here because I don't have all this time. Not that I had time

when I was on mat leave it's just that time is a bit more flexible when you're on mat leave and then, now that I'm at work, it was like okay... well how can we figure this out? So yeah, we did have a conversation about, okay like what seems kind of fair, um and we kind of talk at the end of the week like, okay what are your days like, what are mine, and we kind of stick to the same ... routine and we like routine so it just works better when you try and -- when you know your day is a pick up day, for example. Um yeah, definitely a conversation we had and just knew what was important for ourselves for our ... own mental well-being.... To make sure that not just one person is pulling all the weight but to make sure that it's a shared kind of task.

In relation to the pressure that Emily felt to make the most of the time that she had with her daughter in the evenings after work, she also felt pressure to live up to her childhood memories of her late mother, who passed away when she was 16 years old:

I would get notes in my lunch bag from my mom and like sticky notes in the morning on the mirror so there's that expectation that I put on myself to live up to my childhood ... I thought my mom was amazing.

Despite describing her and her husband's roles as more equal than the other participants, Emily's memories of her mother and the desire to ensure that her daughter knew she was loved was a responsibility that she both accepted and questioned at times:

...no one ever told me I had to do all that stuff. It's just like in my head. I've had moments where I feel like oh these are all my jobs. Well no one ever told me those were all my jobs....

Emily's responses to questions about the division of family work and domestic tasks were different in some respects compared to the other participants, perhaps due to her less

traditional upbringing as a result of the transitions that she had to go through at an earlier age after her mother's death. Contradictions in relation to role expectations and the division of domestic labour were evident in each participant's interview answers, however Emily was the only participant to openly question how certain responsibilities ended up belonging to her and how her maternal expectations were developed and maintained. This final reflection reveals the complexity of the intersection of past and present experience, individual identities, and cultural scripts which serve to inform maternal experiences and expectations.

Asserting needs for self-care and personal time.

The egalitarian ideals enacted by Emily and John and their mutual understanding of equal responsibility in relation to family work appeared to be linked to having more confidence in asserting needs for personal time. In regards to balancing time as a family and as a couple with personal time Emily stated:

...we've tried to like make sure that we each have our own independent time. So you know discussing ... having set days where we take turns for pick up at daycare for example, so that we each have time ... say, to go to the gym during the week or something else that we want to do for ourselves.

For Amy and Taylor, a more gendered division of childcare appeared to create challenges in terms of asserting needs for self-care after returning to work outside of the home. At her busiest time with school and practicum work, Taylor described being "burnt out" and struggled to fulfill all of her responsibilities and obligations at home and at school. Taylor described eventually finding a self-care routine without adding more household responsibilities on to her husband:

Well I think if you talk about, you know, guilt or whatever, part of my thing was you know all of the domestic responsibilities at home. But it was just like being okay with not doing it. It's going to be a mess, feel free to step in. I wasn't like 'okay I'm not doing the dishes tonight, you can do them,' but I'd just leave it. I don't care if the kitchen is a mess or there's laundry all over the couch, I'm going to go have a nap right now instead ... or go for a run.... It was really like budgeting my time and ... checking in: 'what do I need right now?' Because I'd been giving to everyone else and it's like I gotta really realize ... where am I at today and what do I need.

For Amy, while separating from her daughter when she first returned to work outside the home was difficult, she also expressed finding some relief from the intensity and loneliness that she felt in those first few months at home after childbirth:

...I had a little bit of depression after I had her and ... so you just like don't – again we were not as social as I had planned so that was something as well.... but I think getting back into work helped with that because I was out and about and being myself more, rather than just being at home in my disaster of a house [with] stuff everywhere.

In response to social scripts in motherhood and relationship dynamics that serve to uphold cultural norms in the division of family work, mothers often feel as though they must forgo meeting their personal and emotional needs in order to meet the needs of their families (Guendouzi, 2006). Based on the descriptions above, it appears that the participants in this study employ different strategies for having their personal needs met within the parameters (or perhaps constraints) of their partnerships, and alongside constant pressure to put their children's needs ahead of their own. While Emily's focus was on maintaining balance through planning and scheduling time away from her daughter and partner, both Amy and Taylor reported that they

became emotionally strained and depressed and only at that time did they seek ways to have their personal needs met.

Theme 3: Flexibility and fluidity in evolving family dynamics.

Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected on the transitory nature of the stages of childrearing in relation to their maternal role and their partner's contribution to childcare. They expressed understanding in their own responses to change, as well as their partner's responses in adjusting to changing family dynamics. This final theme explores the participants' descriptions of the transitions and continuity in their life paths and in their relationships with their partners.

Bridging the gap: Reducing the distance between ideals and reality.

Each mother described with ease the gap between her expectations of becoming a mother and the realities of motherhood while at the same time, balancing the expectations that they had of themselves and their partners with their actual experiences. In reflecting on their actual lived experience versus how they had imagined life with a child, all three participants indicated that there were elements of the transition that they did not expect. Balance between their expectations and their reality appeared to be important in making adjustments at home with their children and their partners.

Emily described herself as falling somewhere in the middle in terms of her expectations and the realities of motherhood, however in her descriptions Emily expressed the lingering pressure that she placed on herself to ensure that things were perfect for her daughter:

There's probably a part of me that's ... 'everything has to be perfect,' and ... as she gets older, 'don't forget to celebrate all the little holidays' and like extra little like – I would get

notes in my lunch bag from my mom and like sticky notes in the morning on the mirror ...
so there's that expectation that I put on myself to live up to my childhood...

While Emily realized that these expectations were unrealistic given that she was balancing her role as a mother with a full-time job, she also acknowledged that this may continue to be a struggle at times for her:

I think that as she gets older I'll need to be reminded of that more, but I can totally see ... that I (don't) have to go above and beyond, but I just want her to know that she is loved and that I'm there for her which is how I felt growing up.

For Taylor, the most difficult realization after having her first child was described as "finding balance, in being a mom and still being yourself, and being a wife, ... finding balance within all those roles." Despite acknowledging that the experience of becoming a mother was more complex than she had anticipated, in reflecting on what she had learned about herself and her husband during this transition in their life, she remarked:

...you know there are parts of Michael that I have seen since having kids that I have been very surprised by, that I thought I'd never – I was just like wow, who is this person, and also for myself.... [It's not] just the bad, but also the good parts and seeing what you're really capable of and, on an individual basis and as a couple, how much you can grow together by having kids.

The acceptance of change and growth on an individual as well as an interpersonal level appeared to be helpful in bridging the gap and adjusting to increased demands and changes to the family structure, specifically in relation to the transition to work outside of the home and the increase in shared childrearing tasks. This flexibility was demonstrated in the words of encouragement and the positive reflections that the interviewees shared in relation to their

partner's adjustment to more fluid roles. In recounting her husband's growing confidence and acceptance of the centrality of his paternal role, Taylor remarked:

I think ... as the kids have gotten older ... he [feels comfortable] in more of an active father role than he's been before. He's like fully in that, so then he's been more confident in where he ... stands in the family....

Increased gender flexibility in childrearing practices are considered beneficial not only for managing economic pressures and financial need, but are also thought to be a key component in mothers' and children's overall mental health and well-being (Gerson, 2009). Because these roles exist on a continuum, maintaining flexibility in relation to ideals and change seems to be an important aspect of this process.

Similarly, Amy reported that while she had anticipated some difficulties in the initial adjustment to motherhood, she had also imagined a more social life with her daughter which she described as being "out and about more, and ... doing this and doing that and visiting everyone." For Amy however, the first few months after childbirth were challenging as a result of her daughter's "rough start" and an unanticipated surgery for her husband which left him unable to work or assist with most of the childcare and household tasks. In describing her resilience during this period, Amy said:

Well it was tough at first when Olivia first was born I had to hold it together for [those first few weeks] because Tom went for his knee surgery eight days after we got home from the hospital.

While the emotional intensity of this experience for Amy was challenging, as she reflected on how she and her husband responded to these unanticipated events she commented on the adjustments they made in responding to less than ideal circumstances:

I think I handled it pretty good, like I said I probably should have – I did get depressed later on ... but at first I just had to do what I had to do.... And it was nice to have Tom home too, ... because he appreciated having that bonding time with her ... that he might not have had ... not being there all day every day.

Throughout the interviews, complementary and encouraging descriptions of the participants' partners were combined with frustration around the division of labour and childcare tasks. These descriptions however provide context in which the contradictions become more understandable. Taking into consideration the multitude of influences on parental attitudes and behaviours, yields a more comprehensive picture of the complex negotiations and considerations that exist within a partnership.

Flexibility in work and childcare arrangements.

The transition into motherhood marks the beginning of an important process in redefining the self (Laney, Lewis Hall, Anderson & Willingham, 2015) which also seems to be linked to a continuous process of redefining and adjusting to changing family processes and paths. At a broader level, changes to family structures reflect both economic pressures as well as resistant-to-change institutions that reward workers who are able to provide unremitting commitment to their jobs. In response to these pressures, family paths are more fluid and unpredictable than they have been in the past (Gerson, 2009).

While gender role ideologies and maternal identities seemed to vary slightly between the interviewees, it was clear that each woman was reluctant to commit herself or her family to a particular way of living in the long-term. This recognition of fluidity was captured in response to decisions to return to work and school and reflects the complex and subtle variations in

individual family systems. In response to her decision to stay home with the children, and then eventually return to school, Taylor commented:

... it was more knowing that ... I don't want to be like a stay at home mom full time ... that was my choice. I wanted to be able to stay at home with the kids especially when they are really little, but um you know the monotony of domestic life just wasn't for me, I needed more of a challenge. So even though I wasn't working I would volunteer ... just to get out and then it was like 'oh well maybe I should go back to school,' because I needed a mental challenge, that was part of what I needed for myself

She also reflected on the possibility of returning to work if her family's financial needs could not be met on one income: "I guess because we'd come to that decision together and ... it was always an open conversation. Like if it got too bad then it was like, okay then I will go back to work." Taylor and her husband also discussed the possibility of him staying home or returning to school at some point in the future when she was in a position to support the family financially.

Emily also appreciated the flexibility that she and her partner shared in terms of work arrangements and felt comfortable knowing that even though she had chosen to return to work full-time, her partner understood and supported the fact that may change:

I was always going to go back to work I just - there was a little bit of me that like maybe I'll go back part-time ... but it was really hard to go back to work just after being with her for a year. That first month was just really hard and there were times where John said 'Okay like maybe you need - maybe you need to ask to go part-time? Like 'maybe this really isn't working' kind of thing.

Amy had also planned to return to work part-time and had looked forward to returning to school as well. While she ended up having to return to work full-time, in describing how she and

her partner had made the initial decision, it was clear that they factored in time for transition and adjustment:

... [the decision] was something we made together -- I was going to go [back to work] part time and see how our finances went ... and kind of ease my way back into being full time....

These descriptions align with what Gerson (2009) terms “the gender revolution” (p. 737) in which parents in today’s rapidly changing economies are slowly re-writing the scripts on parenting in response to decreased job security compared to previous generations. Gerson notes that the life course of adults in our current society has become more fluid and unpredictable and as a result, tensions between personal lives and institutional demands have enacted a shift in thinking when it comes to the ways in which families organize themselves. While the women in this study felt primarily responsible for the care of their children as compared to their husbands, it appeared that the ways in which these couples came to an initial decision about when and how the women would return to work, and navigated any resulting challenges together, set the stage for flexibility and growth in later transitions.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

For each woman interviewed in this study, personal beliefs about maternal and paternal roles were connected to their experiences with their own parents in childhood, which both directly and indirectly informed the ways in which they negotiated their maternal roles after returning to work outside of the home. For Amy and Taylor, traditional conceptualizations of their maternal roles and the language used in relation to their partner's "help" in completing domestic tasks, conveyed an attitude similar to the manager-helper dynamic explored in the research on maternal gatekeeping and maternal identity (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hauser, 2015; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). While traditionally this type of dynamic has been linked to maternal gatekeeping in terms of inhibiting a father's involvement in child care and childrearing (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), this research identifies the complexity of negotiations between partners which includes elements relating to individual experiences and beliefs as well as how those beliefs are expressed and adapted at the relational level. Furthermore, while research has indicated that the manager-helper dynamic can be explored by looking at maternal attitudes and motivations, the results of this study indicate that these attitudes are reciprocal in that they are upheld, negotiated and adjusted at the relational level as well as at the individual level.

For Amy, health challenges with her daughter after birth, as well as her and her partner's different experiences and views of parenting roles, created some challenges in the transition to work outside of the home. As a result of her husband's health condition in the first few months of their daughter's life, Amy had become accustomed to taking on the role of sole caregiver and decision maker in caring for Olivia. It appeared that the combination of her partner's physical inability to share in family and household work and the differences in their experiences and expectations of parental roles, created a broad gap at first in the division of responsibilities

within the home. As a result, Amy described concern about her partner's capabilities and engaged in behaviours that would be categorized as "gate closing" or inhibiting her partner's opportunities in childrearing and child care tasks.

Her reflection on this period of time and the ways in which she tried to remain in control of her daughter's needs after returning to work, corresponds with Puhlman & Pasley's (2013) refined definition of maternal gatekeeping in which the dimension of control is added to the original definition of maternal encouragement and discouragement. These researchers posit that control is linked to the intensity with which mothers oversee father-child interactions and are either encouraging or discouraging towards father's attempts at childcare and childrearing. What this model does not account for, however, is context, including paternal attitudes and behaviours, and the ways in which men and women attempt to bridge the gaps between theirs and their partner's needs following their return to work.

Paternal attitudes, motivation and behaviours are an important aspect of research on the negotiation of parenting roles and responsibilities within relationships (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). For Amy, there were a number of paternal assessments made in respect to her partner's parenting capabilities, notably in terms of his own personal and familial experiences with substance misuse, as well as noting the gradual changes that were made in response to the need for more collaborative parenting strategies when she returned to work outside of the home. Schoppe-Sullivan et al. have linked maternal gatekeeping to unrealistic expectations and assessments in relation to a father's suitability for parenting, once again emphasizing the inherent contradiction in the current definition of maternal gatekeeping which places the responsibility for ensuring the equal division of childrearing squarely on the shoulders of mothers, while simultaneously condemning them for holding those responsibilities in the first place. In

establishing context around the decisions that are negotiated, upheld, and re-negotiated between couples, it becomes clear that an inductive approach to studying family dynamics yields a more comprehensive, albeit complex, understanding of attitudes and behaviours that currently characterize maternal gatekeeping.

For Taylor, the most significant shifts in family responsibilities seemed to occur when she returned to school rather than when she returned to paid employment outside of the home, as evidenced by her responses to questions posed about her and her partner's transitional experiences. While it could be argued that furthering education is a means to an end in the same way that paid employment is considered to be, her reflection on negotiating roles upon her return to school highlights the important shifts that occur when maternal roles compete with external demands regardless of the nature of those demands. Throughout the interview, Taylor articulated the importance of time with her children as a central factor in her decision to stay home after her paid maternity leave had ended, however personal needs for mental stimulation and an identity separate from her maternal role fueled her decision to return to school.

As part of the expressed rationale for this decision, she pointed to memories of her own mother and the ways in which her mother had maintained a central role in the family while also fulfilling her needs for personal identity by way of part-time employment and generating income by establishing a "small" sewing business. The inherent minimization of her mother's employment as a means to fulfill personal interests rather than as a means to support the family financially, bears resemblance to her descriptions of her own decision process in returning to school and work, while continuing to uphold her maternal role within the family. While Taylor's decisions appear to reflect personal awareness and conscientiousness in family planning, they also reveal the subtle and nuanced ways in which discourse on maternal expectations and gender

roles within the home are simultaneously constructed and upheld by the populations that they continue to oppress (Geinger, Vandebroek & Roets, 2014).

Similar to Taylor's pursuit in personal interests after becoming a mother, Amy and Emily also described excitement in their return to work as a way to satisfy their self-interests. Based on the interviewees responses, it appears that education and employment are considered more acceptable ways in which to assert personal needs and interests. This can be linked to neoliberal ideologies and discourses in power and oppression which value employment structures over social interests, and highlights the ways in which "work is valued over care, production over reproduction" (Boyd, 2005, p. 200). In other words, some mothers may be more comfortable reclaiming their personal identities and asserting their personal needs within the context of work and economic conscientiousness.

The negotiation of roles within partnerships after returning to work outside of the home was also linked to the participant's confidence in their partner's capabilities as well as the perceived needs of their partner in terms of building capacity in their paternal role. For Taylor, this meant providing support to her husband in much the same way as a coach or consultant might work to consider and build upon the skills of their team. According to Puhlman and Pasley (2013), the difference between a project manager and consultant stance in maternal gatekeeping behaviours reflects the continuum upon which maternal control is measured. In the present study however, these concrete definitions of control give way to a myriad of other factors, including adopting a supportive stance as a means for having personal needs met. In Emily's responses, it appeared that adopting a more egalitarian stance in relation to family work, household work and having personal needs validated, was facilitated by childhood experiences as well as practices established within the partnership prior to having children.

Adopting some form of flexibility within partnerships and family arrangements seems to be important in terms of negotiating roles and responsibilities when both parents are required to attend to career pursuits and obligations that juxtapose with family work (Gerson, 2009). In this study, complex family negotiations were reflective of both internal and external expectations and discourses that were unique to each partnership. While fluidity, flexibility and adaptation to changing family roles and structures were sustained differently within each family, systemic constraints and cultural scripts in parenting appeared to provide a foundation from which all of the participants understood and negotiated their maternal roles.

Limitations

The aim of this study was to generate ideas and discussion around the experiences of mothers in dual-earner households as it pertains to their maternal role. In recognizing that family structures are complex and do not exist separately from social discourse and sociopolitical structures, this research is an attempt to gain insight on the various factors that impact decisions around childcare, childrearing and the division of roles and responsibilities within the home. This study focuses solely on the maternal experience as a point of origination for gaining a richer description of women's observed behaviours and attitudes about their role within the home.

Phenomenological researchers strive for empathic generalizability in the same way that quantitative researchers attempt to achieve statistical generalizability (Osborne, 1990). Moreover, phenomenological research is meaning based, context bound and centered around interpretation and intersubjective meaning. As such, limitations arise when researchers are not transparent in their decision making processes and when they fail to produce coherency in their rationale, references and discussion (Kvale, 1983). According to Osborne (1990), the primary objective of phenomenological researchers is to "argue a particular interpretation as persuasively

as possible, supported by references to the data, and leave the final judgement to the reader” (p. 87). This explanation also fits with hermeneutic phenomenology in which it is suggested that the researcher “pull the reader into the question” (van Manen, 1990, p. 44).

It is noted here however, that the interpretation of these interviews may be limited by my depth of knowledge as well as the scope of the research question. In the present study, the exploration of the experience of women negotiating their maternal roles when they return to work outside of the home was limited to the types of questions I prepared and based on areas of current research that reflect the social construction of maternal identity and the ways that maternal discourses are upheld at the individual, familial and cultural level. I chose to focus on the intersection of these ideologies at the point of the maternal experience and as a result, the present study was not intended to address other sociological, cultural and interpersonal factors that may yield alternative interpretations of this experience.

Future research in this area that considers cultural, interpersonal and socio-economic factors in maternal identity and decision making processes, may provide richer descriptions of the complexities inherent in partnerships and the negotiation of roles within the home. Similarly, research looking at same-sex partnerships, and families with a child with special needs would also be valuable for gaining an understanding of the systemic constraints that affect decision making processes and the division of family work between partners. Finally, the present study was not designed to assess historical or demographic information about the participants, such as adverse experiences in childhood, blended families, and previous marriages, however this could be an important feature of future qualitative research in this area in terms of delineating between the multitude of factors that influence a family’s organization.

Implications for Counsellors

The information gleaned in the present study has implications for both individual and family counsellors. In relation to the concept of maternal gatekeeping, it is important to keep in mind the limitations that arise when using a narrowly focused categorical definition of maternal behaviours and paternal responses in the division of family and domestic work. The research on maternal gatekeeping implies a cause and effect relationship which does not accurately represent the range of responses demonstrated in maternal and paternal behaviours. My research suggests that adherence to such strict and conceptually biased definitions of maternal motivations may inhibit exploration of the ways in which family patterns arise between partners, as well as the ways in which mother's may discourage a father's involvement as a result of safety concerns for themselves or the child or both. Moreover, it is important that practitioners acknowledge the complexities in how family tensions around the equal division of labour within the home are sustained between partners and within the barriers of social discourses in parenting. While the present study focuses primarily on maternal experience, it is evident that decisions made in respect to childrearing and the division of domestic responsibilities within heterosexual partnerships should be explored with clients on several levels.

In addition, counsellor's that are aware of the social construction of gender roles, may be better positioned to help individuals, couples and families understand the constraints imposed upon them by way of their implicit adoption of gender based expectations. Within the sphere of gender informed practice, Haddock, Zimmerman & MacPhee (2000) note the negative consequences of adhering to traditional gender expectations in counselling practice, specifically in terms of maintaining the status quo in gender based power differentials and upholding

discourses that continue to support intensive parenting practices, placing the responsibility for children's welfare on mothers. These authors posit that

gender-informed couple therapy might focus on facilitating fair division of labour and the placement of equal value on each partner's life goals and work, as well as on encouraging couples to share decision making, access to finances and responsibility for the well-being of the relationship (p. 154).

Counsellors that adopt a feminist informed framework can help guide their clients towards responses that are fluid and adaptable to changing family dynamics and increasing economic pressures.

The transition from being a couple with no children to a couple with a child comes with much uncertainty and negotiation. Counsellors working with parents as they navigate these inevitable transitions and resulting decision making processes might acknowledge uncertainty and parental worries as a part of parenting and not necessarily a problematic event (Geinger, Vandebroek, & Roets, 2014). Furthermore, Geinger, Vandebroek, & Roets assert that many parental worries arise as a response to "expert discourse" and the ideas around what is right and what is abnormal. Counsellors who have an understanding of the scripts on intensive parenting and the resulting impacts on parents (specifically mothers), may have more opportunity to bring these ideas to light within the session, allowing for further reflection and awareness from the client(s).

Similar to the nature of this study, counsellors working with individuals and families are tasked with finding the points of intersection between social and cultural ideologies that uphold unrealistic parenting expectations and individual experiences and beliefs, to reveal the points of tension that may be contributing to the uneven distribution of family work. A recognition of

these issues within the sociopolitical sphere also provides a basis for advocacy work and policy change at the institutional level. Moreover, working with clients to recognize the social and institutional constraints that may be inhibiting their ability to successfully navigate transitions and adjust to changing family roles, would provide them the opportunity to recognize the limits of their decision making capabilities and advocate for their own needs both within family relationships as well as within larger social spheres.

Concluding Thoughts

I began this research with the idea that maternal gatekeeping as an explanation for parental roles and responsibilities within the home was limited in focus and added to the pressure placed on mothers by assigning them sole responsibility for facilitating or inhibiting positive family relationships. As a working mother I have felt the pressures of motherhood exacerbated by internalizing the discourse on intensive mothering and noticed a contradiction within myself at times when it came to my egalitarian beliefs and my behaviours around childrearing practices. As a young mother, I unknowingly accepted the status quo when it came to my responsibility to ensure my children's optimal development and found it difficult to reconcile that with my own need for personal time and an identity beyond my role as a wife and mother. After much self-reflection on my journey and the steadfast negotiation of roles within my own partnership, I entered into this study with a curiosity for understanding how these processes unfolded in other women's lives.

Throughout the interviews I noted pauses as the participants began to respond to questions about the origin of their decisions and recognized that perhaps this was indicative of the fluidity in which family life comes to rest. At times it seemed difficult for each of the women to locate a starting point in a process that is complex and varied, and for me as a

researcher, to identify the parts of their experience that aligned with the discourses that uphold intensive mothering practices. In listening to the participant's responses and in exploring my own assumptions, I recognized that it is a difficult task to identify and reflect on the ways in which social scripts on motherhood have become internalized and transformed into personal beliefs.

Prior to beginning the interviews, I had speculated that some or all of the participants would mention that they felt social pressure to remain at home with their children rather than return to work and was surprised when none of the women mentioned feelings of judgement from others as being a concern in their decision to return to work. It could be argued that those judgements had been internalized and expressed through the participant's descriptions of guilt in relation to spending quality time with their children. It may also be that economic pressures and changing family structures are moving us beyond the debate of the stay-at-home versus the working mom and instead, have shifted our focus toward achieving the best combination of private childcare and intensive childrearing practices when a mother is at home with her children. This was the case with the participants in this study and was similar to the descriptions of the participants in analogous qualitative research in which time at home with children was devoted to quality time and enhancing children's social, emotional and cognitive well-being (Wall, 2010). Unfortunately, this leaves little time for mothers to ensure that their personal needs are also met and over time, it seems that this tension is one of the factors that leads to the negotiation of roles and responsibilities within the partnership.

I was surprised at the ways in which the interviewees were quick to recognize and describe the strengths of their partners and the strength within their partnerships, as well as the various ways in which the couples adjusted to changing family needs. Despite some expressed

tension regarding the division of domestic and childrearing responsibilities, for the most part, the women seemed to be more keen to focus on the ways in which they were supported within their partnerships, and the ways that they in turn supported their partner's growth in their paternal role. It was this observation that led me to focus on the processes within and between couples as a way to code and organize the data into themes.

For mother's returning to the workforce, there is much at stake in terms of their sense of maternal identity and this research identified the ways in which these transitions are experienced at a personal and interpersonal level within their partnerships. Moreover, the data revealed the extent to which cultural scripts and institutional barriers continue to operate implicitly as a way to divide and uphold discourses and categorical definitions tied to good and bad parenting practices, as well as normal and abnormal child development. From a feminist perspective, it appears as though there is a long way to go in terms of exposing the gender ideologies that continue to reinforce the gendered division for family work, however continued efforts by qualitative researchers to understand family dynamics from the ground-up, offers a way to assess both small and large changes from one generation of parents to the next, and provides counsellors with a broader context from which they can offer support and guidance to their clients.

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APPENDIX A

The following recruitment message will be posted on the researcher's personal Facebook page:

I am looking for participants to join my research study on the experience of mother's returning work outside the home for the first time since having a child. This research is being conducted as part of my master's thesis at City University.

As a participant, you will be requested to complete two interviews about your experiences as a mother and about your personal experiences in returning to work outside the home. Participation will require approximately 1.5-2 hours of your time. Your confidentiality will be strictly protected.

Women are needed for this study who:

- Would like to share their story in a study that may facilitate greater understanding of changes to family dynamics when a mother returns to paid employment outside the home
- Are between 25 and 39 years of age
- Are married or living common law with a heterosexual partner
- Have a child or children living at home under the age of 6
- Have recently returned to work outside of the home (paid employment)

If you have any questions, would like more information, or would like to arrange an interview appointment, please send me a private message on Facebook, or email me at hjmayconrad@gmail.com.

Please feel free to share this message with friends or family who may be interested.

APPENDIX B

Telephone Screening Questionnaire

Potential participants will voluntarily contact the researcher regarding participation. Participants will be selected using a criterion sampling technique, in which participants meet specified criteria set forth by the researcher. Potential participants will be asked if they meet the criteria for participation in the study.

Upon contacting the researcher, the participants will be asked questions such as the following:

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. The purpose of this research study is to understand the experience of mother's returning to paid work outside of the home for the first time since having a child/children.

- 1.) Are you between the ages of 25 and 39?
- 2.) Are your children/Is your child currently age 6 or under?
- 3.) Are you currently married or living common law with a heterosexual partner?
- 4.) Has your return to work occurred in the last 24 months?

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of the experience of women who have returned to work outside the home after having a child/children, I will be interviewing volunteers who feel comfortable discussing their experience of maternal identity as well as their experiences with childcare and domestic activities as they relate to their employment and partner. Participation will involve completing two audio-taped interviews.

- 5.) Do you feel comfortable discussing your experience of maternal loss and identity formation in a research interview?
- 6.) If you found that participation in this study stirred up some emotions for you, do you have some people you can talk to and who will support you?
- 7.) Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX C

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: When a Mother Returns to Work: Negotiating Domestic Roles

Name and Title of Researcher: Heather May-Conrad: Masters of Counselling Student

Faculty Supervisor and corresponding e-mail Dr. Breiddal: dr.breiddal@gmail.com

Program Coordinator: Dr. Allan Wade

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____ agree to participate in the following research project conducted by *Heather May-Conrad*, student in the Masters of Counselling Program. I understand this research study has been approved by the City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form, signed by all persons involved. I further acknowledge that I have been provided an overview of the research protocol as well as a detailed explanation of the informed consent process.

If you experience emotional or physical distress as a result of your participation in this study please contact the following crisis-support number and notify the researcher.

Crisis support Number: 1-800-784-2433

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and discuss women's experiences returning to work for the first time since becoming a mother, focusing on their maternal identity and how they have negotiated the division of domestic responsibilities, including childcare, with their partner.

Although the transition back to working outside the home can be challenging for both parents, it may be particularly challenging for mothers if they have been the primary caregiver in the home. Current statistics and research in dual earner families notes a disparity in domestic responsibilities, with women typically continuing to assume greater responsibility for childcare

and childrearing even after they have returned to work outside of the home.

Through a semi-structured interview process, participants will be asked questions about their experience at home with their children, their experience in first becoming a mother, their expectations of motherhood, and strengths and challenges within their partnerships. While each family structure is different, it is common that during transition periods, partners are continuously negotiating and renegotiating their roles within the family, particularly their maternal and paternal roles. These decisions do not exist within a vacuum: that is to say, external structures and pressures also factor into the decision making process.

Conducting in-depth interviews with participants will provide insight into the unique circumstances for each family, while also uncovering the complexities involved in the decision making process and the ways in which mothers may face challenges both internally and externally when they return to work outside of the home. Benefits to participating in this study include satisfaction in promoting an understanding of women's experience so that counsellors can help parents to navigate their roles within the family.

Research Participation

I understand that I am being asked to participate in this study by responding to in-person interview questions. I further understand that my involvement is voluntary and I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation at any time without negative consequences. I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand I may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the student researcher, her supervisor, and the Program Director will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means. If the student researcher's cooperating classroom teacher will also have access to raw data, the following box will be checked. All data (the questionnaires, informed consent forms, audio tapes, typed records of the interview, questions/concerns students may express during the study) are kept confidential by the researcher. The consent forms are kept stowed in a lockbox for 5

years (or more if required by local regulations) at which time they will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Name (please print): _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Allan Wade, Program Director, City University of Seattle, at 877 Goldstream Ave #305, Victoria, B.C, V9B 2X6, 250-391-7444

