

**A NARRATIVE STUDY OF
‘LIVED EXPERIENCES’ OF WORKING MOTHERS
IN IRELAND**

**A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award
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by

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ABSTRACT

Choice or Constraint ideas have dominated theoretical approaches to the study of women’s lives. *Preference theory*, postulated by Hakim (1996; 2000) contrasts with the ‘constraints ideology’ evident in the work of Walby (1990) and Crompton (1997; 2006). This study revisits this dichotomy with the purpose of a thematic exploration of the stories of a group of working mothers in Ireland. The lived experiences of working mothers are thematically explored using a sample of 11 mothers who work in paid employment outside the home. Significant themes illuminate the role of maternal grandmothers and husbands/partners in the mothers’ search for balance between their home and work lives

A biographical narrative approach is adopted within this study within an interpretive phenomenological epistemology where, through in-depth interviews, working mothers explore their experiences of work and home domains. Data presented is evidenced from two qualitative interviews with each participant; one in Spring 2009 and interview two in Autumn 2009. The creative use of second interviews creates a conversational space in which the mothers reflected on their daily lives as they cope with ‘competing devotions’ (Blair-Loy 2003) of work and home.

This study highlights that while working mothers make choices with regard to paid work outside the home they do so *within* constraints. Given the competing devotions (Blair-Loy 2003) of home and work domains faced by working mothers, many of the working mothers in this study did take up formal work-life balance initiatives, while others relied on informal work-life balance supports from line managers and colleagues in particular. Despite these work-life supports the working mothers in this study not only faced the responsibilities of ‘the second shift’ (Hochschild 1989) but also evidenced the presence of ‘the third shift’ (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) in their daily negotiations between choice or constraint across work and home domains.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

In accordance with the University of Leicester Regulations for Research Students I hereby certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis and that the original work is my own. Neither this thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a higher degree.

Signed:

Date:

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

WOMEN, WORK AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the experiences of working mothers in paid work outside the home.

This focus is important in view of the current media attention paid to the role of women in society and in particular in the government and leadership of states (Kelleher 2010; Waterfield 2010). Devlin (2010) discusses the role of gender quotas and the possibilities of allowing women to be equal partners in the The Irish Parliament (The Dáil) in a bid to fashion ‘a fairer Ireland’. The present study of working mothers is essential to the continued research focus on women and work against the key conceptualisations of Preference Theory (Hakim 1996; 2000) and the ‘constraints ideology’ supported by Walby (1990) and Crompton (1997; 2006).

While acknowledging the diverse nature of women lives the focus for the study will be on women who are mothers. This focus does not refer exclusively to biological motherhood.

My professional interests in this study have emerged from reading studies in

organisational behaviour and dynamics ranging from the work of Schein (1973; 1975) Fagenson (1990) and Long (1990) on manager characteristics to the works of Hochschild (1989; 1997; 2003) and psychoanalytic studies of organisations (De Board 2002; Hirschhorn 1990; Hinshelwood and Skogstad 2000; Gabriel 2004). In particular, research by Gutek (1993) and Walby (1990) on women working outside the home, to the work of Hakim (1996; 2000) on working mothers have been instrumental in my motivation to undertake this study.

From a reflexive position, my own life story has been equally influential in the choice of study; in that I work in paid employment outside the home in parallel with my role as mother of three children. As a social researcher, a woman, and a mother I am clearly positioned from the outset as I approach this area of study. This is an important phenomenon to which I will return later in discussions of self in the research process in the summary of my research journal in Appendix 9.

This chapter will begin with an outline of the objectives of the study. For the purposes of an introduction to the literature pertaining to the study, some of the themes evident in the literature on women, mothers and work will be presented as have been explored by the author.

Discussion will move to the reasons why this study needed to be undertaken. This section makes a justification for a focus on working mothers and highlights the need to

expand upon existing research dialogues pertaining to women and mothers in particular. The key conceptual ideas relevant to this research, namely the concept of 'lived experience' (Carr 1986) and the 'third shift' (Hochschild 1989) are introduced within the context of phenomenology and sense making (Ashworth 2008).

Consideration is given to the methodological approach within this study that link specifically to the phenomenology of experience and sense making in people's lives. The introduction serves further to outline the criteria for selection of the study sample and considers the context against which the study is carried out.

The layout of the study will be outlined with a brief summation of the focus of each of the proceeding chapters within this exploration of the 'lived experiences' of working mothers in Ireland.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Central to the study is the development of a narrative account of lived experiences of a small scale sample of working mothers in Ireland. Lived experiences as a concept will be explored in a later section of this introductory chapter once the study objectives have been outlined. However, the use of the concept of lived experience will serve to illuminate the often taken-for-granted daily life experience of working motherhood. The study will explore participants' lived experiences in their daily routines and schedules pertaining to work and home. The overriding aim of the study, therefore, and the distinctive contribution of this work will be the generation of themes pertaining to the

lived experiences of a group of mothers (N = 11) who work outside the home in Ireland in 2009. In doing so, the research will build upon existing knowledge of experiences of working mothers. It will endeavour to go beyond existing knowledge by facilitating the participating mothers to reflect on their own biographies and narratives of lived experiences to enhance insight into the interpersonal aspects of balancing work and home domains. Research centering on women, mothers and work has been characterised by considerations of role conflict, super mums, dual shifts and perceived inequitable roles in the home and in work (Hays 1996; Hochschild 1989, 1997). The study undertaken here will explore lived experiences through a number of significant research questions/themes gleaned as relevant from an analysis of the literature on women, mothers and work. Included in this are explorations of work and home schedules to ascertain the interpersonal dynamics behind busy working mothers and the supermom ideas that Hays (1996) and Hochschild's (1989, 1997) work explores. This study will explore the reality of when work and motherhood domains meet, collide or intersect. The study will also explore issues of work-life balance through the literature and explore coping mechanisms adopted by the participant working mothers.

The use of the reflexive methodological tool of returning transcripts to participants and exploring their experience of such in second meetings sought to facilitate a reflective exercise. This is perceived as an opportunity to go beyond previous research findings and present rich qualitative data of lived experiences for participants. While cognisant that the themes of dual shifts and super mums are significant in the experiences of working mothers, it is important to point out that working mothers are seldom given the opportunities to reflect on their daily experiences. This study can offer such a reflective

opportunity and provide this sample of working mothers with opportunities to tell the stories of their lives and subsequently reflect on their biographies. It is therefore, envisaged that a significant contribution to the practice of sociological research and in particular in relation to the concept of the reflexive turn (Bourdieu 1968; Giddens 1991) will be achieved through the use of this methodology. A narrative approach is adopted in this study. This narrative approach draws on Kohler Riessman's (1993: 2) idea that "human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization", where stories are constructed in "personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives". The study will explore how mothers narrate their lived experiences of work and motherhood in contemporary Ireland. Contemporary post modern Ireland is different in form and influence to either traditional or modern Ireland (Inglis 2008). The shift from the traditional to modern paralleled the shift broadly from the collective to the individual (Foster 2007). This is referred to as an increased focus on the agency of the individual; a move to individualism and a decline in confidence and reliance on the collective (Elias 1956). This is reiterated by Giddens (1991) and Beck (2000). With reference to Ireland in particular, Inglis (2008) describes the shift in values and practices in Ireland through the decrease in participation in organised religious practices. The influence of the Celtic Tiger resulted in more individualisation and agency particularly in terms of purchasing power (Erikson 2007). This power has ironically now left post Celtic Tiger Ireland in a state of debt and recession with unprecedented unemployment rates and personal lives being literally uprooted with increased repossession of homes throughout the country (McBride 2007; Carolan 2010). It is noteworthy to reiterate that women and mothers have always worked and a useful starting point is to consider the various themes emerging in the literature pertaining to the lives of women and mothers

in particular. Within the Irish context in particular, the role and influence of the Catholic Church over generations on women's lives will be explored in Chapter 2.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENT THEMES IN RELATION TO MOTHERS AND WORK:

A number of themes exist in the research that are unique to the sample of working mothers in particular. The following will be explored below: organisational goals and working mothers; changing dynamics in relationships with partner, family and family of origin and the relevance of maternity and related services.

ORGANISATIONAL GOALS AND WORKING MOTHERS:

Specifically these themes relate to positions of working mothers in relation to organisational goals, structure and hierarchies (Fagenson 1990; Johnson 1996; Cook and Waters 1998). Historically, working mothers have not filled senior management positions within organisations (Probert 1999; Blair-Loy 2003).

It must be noted, however, that increased numbers of mothers now contribute to profit-making in organisations (Mahon 1998; Thair and Risdon 1999; Crittenden 2001). However, European figures still remain higher than the figures for Ireland, where "women's employment as a percentage of the working age population" lie at 71% in Sweden, 60% in Britain and only 38% in Ireland (Blossfeld and Hakim 1997: 5). Part time female work constitutes 21% of female employment for Ireland (Blossfeld and Hakim 1997). This research and the work of Fine-Davis et al (2004) continue to point to low support for working mothers in Ireland. Fine-Davis et al (2004) point out the lack of

state provided child care for children of working parents. Child care costs are a private matter for families to address with no recourse to tax relief. In short Scott (1999) points to the lack of structural support in public policies throughout Europe in support of maternal employment.

CHANGING DYNAMICS IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNER, FAMILY AND FAMILY OF ORIGIN: Relationships with partners and spouses have changed considerably with the increased movement of more mothers into the workforce (Hochschild 1989; Crompton 1997). Changes include both parents out working and returning at the end of the day facing responsibilities of the home domain (Hochschild 1997). There also exists the phenomenon of shift parenting (La Valle et al 2002) where one parent goes out to work when the other returns from their working day, thereby changing relationship dynamics away from the traditional father breadwinner and stay-at-home mother model. The traditional breadwinner-carer model of working and family relationships has expanded to include dual earner couples, single headed families with one earner and stay at home husbands and partners. These variations of models invariably change relationships both inside and outside home and work domains (Gutek 1993; Delamont 2001). This has been facilitated to a small degree by the association of policy decisions and changes in maternal care provision. Child care policies in Ireland, however, continue to be lacking in terms of substantial support for mothers working outside the private sphere of the home (Fine-Davis et al 2004). Barry (1998: 364) vehemently states that “despite the image Ireland cultivates as a child and family oriented society, there is an abysmally low level of support in terms of back up services for families where women wish to secure and maintain paid employment”. The movement of mothers back into the workforce due

to career choices, labour demands, greater financial commitments on parents and a growing economy has increasingly been facilitated by the availability of extended family situations which have resulted in changes in the ways in which mothers relate to their present family and their family of origin.

RELEVANCE OF MATERNITY SERVICES AND RELATED SERVICES:

As a direct result of increasing numbers of mothers in the labour force, the provision of maternity services are of relevance to the lives of women. These can be analysed at a number of levels. Firstly, women and mothers are supported more in terms of the provision of good maternal care at both pre and post partum stages in the form of extended and unpaid leave available. The Maternity Protection Act (1994) and (amendment in 2004) in Ireland were revised in order to address the context of Budgets 2006 and 2007 in conjunction with the needs of women as they were increasingly moving into paid jobs outside the home in larger numbers (Maternity Protection Act 1994). This led to adjustment upwards to 26 consecutive weeks paid maternity leave available to women (Equality Authority of Ireland 2010). Employers are not obliged to pay but there is entitlement to apply for Maternity Benefit offered by The Department of Social and Family Affairs provided PRSI (pay related social insurance) contributions qualify the women for maternity benefit (Department of Social and Family Affairs 2010). However, in most cases employers supplement the Maternity Benefit payment and most women are paid in full during their maternity leave. Inherent in this assumption are requirements of contract of employment as per The Maternity Protection Act 1994 and the willingness of employers to pay full pay.

Secondly, the relevance of maternity services refers to a greater realisation of the importance of positive mental health for mothers working in paid employment outside the home because the maternity leave scheme outlined above allows appropriate time for adjustment to parenthood prior to a return to work outside the home. This refers for example, to the impact of postnatal depression on women, babies and families (Lee 1998). The availability of support groups locally plays an important role in encouraging positive health for mothers. These organisations include La Leche League Ireland (La Leche League of Ireland 2010) for breastfeeding support to women or Cuidiú; The Irish Childbirth Trust (Cuidiú 2010) to highlight two such supports.

A third level of analysis of the relevance of maternity services refers to the availability of schemes under the umbrella of work–life balance. Within some organisations support is available to working mothers who are experiencing explicit and implicit health issues; both physical and mental strain in the maintenance of their careers and paid work in addition to the pursuit of leadership positions and management opportunities in organisations (Sharpe 1984; Korabik et al 1993; Colwill 1993; Hays 1996). These schemes refer to opportunities for job share, term time and parental leave arrangements open to employees (Grady et al 2008). Table 1 in Chapter 2 presents a summary of Irish legislation relating to work-life balance policy.

The above summary serves to highlight the presence of mothers in the context of work. This signals a positive expansion of research into the contribution and lives of women and mothers who are active in the labour force. In the past, both stay at home mothers

and mothers who work outside the home in paid employment have earned much prominence and focus in the following areas. For example, psychologists and early childhood professionals have traditionally focused on deficits in mother-child relationships as a direct result of maternal employment; attachment and maternal deprivation in particular have come to the fore in researching mothers and working mothers (Bowlby 1953, 1989). Loss of relationships as a result of role conflict (Hochschild 1989; 1997), adverse effects of changing relationships and family dynamics with dual career households (Gutek 1993) and research pertaining to the study of adverse effects on women's health (Lee 1998) have contributed to the debate on working mothers. While these research areas have been vital, more recent research foci have looked at the lack of career progression and barriers to professional promotion and lack of advancement in mothers' working lives (Hirsham 2006). Having presented the above summary it is pertinent at this stage to focus on the reasons why the present study needs to be undertaken, followed by consideration of a core concept within the study, namely the idea of '*erlebnis*' or a 'lived experience' (Carr 1986).

REASONS FOR UNDERTAKING THE STUDY

Work plays a significant role in facilitating a sense of self and identity (Strangleman and Warren 2008). The function of work includes the provision of a structure and schedule to a working day, the provision of a group of colleagues, a focus for career development and the attainment of personal and professional goals (Jahoda 1982; Brenner and Bartell 1983; Fryer 1985; McKeown 1998; Goodwin 1999). Work also provides a function within society. A study that considers the lived experiences of mothers in paid employment will add to existing knowledge on the value of work in the lives of women

and mothers. Tom (1993) highlights that while women's lives are more complex in nature than the dualistic model of breadwinner-carer suggests, there is also an inherent assumption in the literature that maternal employment brings to the surface, conflict, anxiety and stress regarding work and mother roles. Therefore, this doctoral study will facilitate qualitative study of complex lived experiences where maternal employment is not experienced as a single dimension but a multilayered lived experience with, psychological and social affects. People make sense of their worlds through their lived experiences (Gergen 1985; Carr 1986). Not only does this entail the cognitive element of sense making but by virtue of the use of the term 'lived', there is a sense of social and indeed psychological adaptation in terms of coping and managing their social and psychological world through processes in 'the third shift' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) including self talk, stress management and negotiation with spouses and children to highlight a few.

Over the past ten years the study of professional women has been central to the agenda on women and work. This has included the works and studies of Crittenden (2001) and Hirsham (2006). Subsequently, in the last five to ten years there has been a resurgence of interest in the lives of working women in academia in particular. These studies include past and prospective work of Canadian researchers (ARM 2008) and the work of UK based studies including Raddon (2002) on women and mothers in academic life. The study samples in these works represent those educated to post graduate and doctorate level in their professionalisms. This present study does not aim to target professional women and mothers only. This research aims to study the richness of lived experiences expressed by a sample of working mothers, included are those educated to graduate or

post graduate levels and women who have gained experience and position working through the ranks within their organisation who are fulfilling both motherhood and employee status in their everyday lived experiences. The researcher aims to ascertain how these mothers work in paid employment and fulfill their roles as mothers in parallel. Additionally, the research will explore the existence if any of structures and supports in work and home domains which may facilitate the pursuit of employment outside the home with the responsibilities of parenthood, specifically motherhood.

LIVED EXPERIENCES: LIFE WORLDS AND MEANING

Erlebnis, Erlebnisse (Carr 1986) from the German verb *erleben*, which means ‘to live to see’, are the basic units of conscious life relevant to phenomenology as explored by Husserl (1970). Additionally, by virtue of the experience as being lived, there entails a reflexive element of recognition and evaluation of the experience as lived and significant. A focus on lived experiences in this study brings to the fore the significance of daily routines and the often mundane daily life activities that are so important to peoples’ lives (Chamberlayne 2002). This in essence is the ontological backdrop to this qualitative inquiry and it locates phenomenology at the centre of experiences and sense making which contrasts with the positivist lack of focus on the interpretive individual (Bryman 1988).

In highlighting the world of everyday experiences as significant, Husserl (1970) links the temporality of experience with past, present and future as a life and a life world is lived through consciousness. ‘Retention’ (belonging to all experiences) and expectations

for the future which Husserl (1970) calls ‘protention’, co-exist much like figure and ground in spatial perception. The individual experiences life as lived in the present, the just past and the future. Experience is not just a singular percept but is based on connectedness to a whole life. Husserl’s term ‘lifeworld’ (*lebenswelt*) goes some way to describe *Erlebnis* (lived experience).

PHENOMENOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE AND SENSE MAKING

Phenomenology is concerned with an individual’s subjective experience (Ashworth 2008). Hermeneutic inquiry is central to understanding the phenomenological world of the individual, thereby making it an idiographic process (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Ashworth 2008). This refers to the use of cases and the specifics of a number of cases in comparison to the large numbers of random subjects used predominantly by researchers using quantitative methodologies (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). The individual is the beginning and ending point of phenomenological investigations which is core to Husserl’s (1970) philosophical phenomenology. In researching the phenomenological world of the individual or the subject, social researchers partake in the interpretative activity and a relationship with the individual, where the researcher’s “participants are trying to make sense of their world: the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith and Osborn 2008: 53). This is a dual interpretative process or double hermeneutic (Giddens 1987; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Kvale 2007). This is addressed in this study by asking participants to revisit and read their interview transcripts. By asking participants to partake in the reflexive process it facilitates the dual interpretative process and the participants are further collaborators in the research process. The importance of sense making is also

outlined by Giddens (1991) and Beck (2000) as an important practice in changing modern societies. Reflexivity is outlined by Giddens (1991) as an important form of self practice, as are sense making and self monitoring against changing cultural scripts of risk, modernity and critical self reflection. The lived experiences of working mothers epitomises a rich source of self reflection, self monitoring and negotiations in the daily expectations, actions, reactions and renegotiations of working mothers' lives.

Inherently connected with making sense of and reflecting on life experiences is the concept of 'the third shift' which was initially explored by Hochschild (1989) in her book *The Second Shift*. This work explored the phenomenon of the second shift through the exploration of experiences of women and mothers increased participation in paid work outside the home. Women increasingly worked the 'first shift' in paid work then faced the 'second shift' of domestic work within the home including responsibility for child care. Hochschild (1989) described the mental and emotional activities of organising the second shift while trying to fulfill the demands of paid employment as activities in the 'third shift'. In the context of this study I adopt the idea of 'the third shift' as the level of coping and managing utilised by working mothers in their experiences of paid work outside the home.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA

"The aim of qualitative research is to illuminate and clarify the meaning of social actions and situations" (McLeod 2003: 75). Qualitative research refers to the work of researchers who "construct versions of the world through their activities as social and

political subjects, and do not merely reflect facts with a self-evident objective reality; this position is known as epistemological 'constructionism' or epistemological 'constructivism'" (Henwood 1996: 27). Within this epistemology there is recognition of multiple subjectivities, multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations of these by qualitative researchers (Pidgeon 1996). The constructionist approach assumes that there is no standard external reality to which we need apply theories of natural science, deduction and objectivity (Gergen 1999). The approach embodies researchers who seek explanations of the fluidity of social and lived experience. These social and lived experiences exist in a complex social reality where participants construct, deconstruct and co-construct meaningful pictures of their social reality and life experiences. Meaning in these contexts is constructed as we relate in the world and as we interpret social relations.

It is the task of the qualitative researcher, therefore, to build upon these localised meanings to contribute to epistemological debate. Epistemology per se is concerned with the philosophical basis for deciding what is valid and useful knowledge in the world (Henwood 1996), what is considered significant for social researchers to pursue in their descriptions of the existence and the generation of theoretical understandings about such existence. Phenomenological interpretivist epistemologies build theories about the social and personal worlds in which people live and gain meaning from on the basis of their phenomenological understandings (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008). Ontology on the other hand, is concerned with what the world is like; existence per se (Willig 2008). It is unavoidable and it impacts on how we define ourselves (Willig 2008). Epistemology is more concerned with what we call knowledge, theories and philosophies of human

existence and the theories of the perceived truth about the ontological world of mere existence (Bryman 1988; Henwood 1996). Living in and through experience, interpretations and meaning making are the keys to representativeness and the generalisability of research findings. Generalisations based on researching lived experiences are the product of interpretative work. This work tends to be qualitative in nature and taps into individual phenomenologies and how these phenomenologies relate to others for example the work of both philosopher Husserl (1970) and social constructionist Kenneth Gergen (1985).

Methodological considerations, therefore, for this study are based on the significance of individuals as self interpreting. People make sense of their lived worlds through sense making and reflection of their everyday lives and daily routines. Their lived experiences provide them with the units of reflection and planning and this sense of lived experience is best captured using the narrative inquiry paradigm. This study will achieve two things; firstly, it will explore working mothers' lived experiences; the everyday experiences Husserl (1970) defines as significant and secondly, it will provide analyses of how this sample reflects on their stories of lived experiences as working mothers.

STUDY SAMPLE

A purposive sample of 11 mothers participate in the study. The participant mothers are all employed in paid work outside the home either on full time, shift work or part time bases. The sample is drawn from the south eastern region of Ireland, incorporating Waterford City and its rural hinterland for a number of important reasons. Logistically,

this is the area in which I work and therefore is very accessible for me given constraints of work and family domains. More importantly, are issues pertaining to the economic downturn in Ireland and specifically the closing down of a number of well established companies in Waterford city in particular. These included Waterford-Wedgewood Crystal and Teva Pharmaceuticals (Roche 2009; 2009a). Three specific groups of working mothers are identified therein, namely, those mothers working full time outside the home, those working part time (15 hours or less) outside the home and those working in shift work situations outside the family home. It is possible but not an absolute that the participating women working in paid employment may have a college degree. The level of education of the participant mothers is not an important factor to the study. I note for example that the idea of ‘professional working mothers’ is significant to the work of Grady and McCarthy (2008). By ‘professional working mothers’ Grady and McCarthy define these mothers as those “who have remained in employment through the period of rearing their family while also developing and investing in their career” (2008: 600). This does not specifically refer to graduate and post graduate education but work by Hirsham (2006) refers to highly educated women. Additionally I do not seek out high earning women and mothers because I feel that these women may fall into the category described by Crompton (1997) and Gatrell (2005) as women who outsource household work. These women may employ other women to clean the house and cook and care for children or alternatively outsource this work in terms of external childcare, afterschool services, cleaning and home maintenance. I feel that these women and mothers can potentially afford to outsource this work but paradoxically are tied into the ‘long hours’ culture of the male definition of work outside the home and end up tied to the apron strings of this performative culture. The motivation for seeking three groups of working

mothers stems from my position as a working mother who clearly stepped back from full time paid work to a part time alternative because of the intrusive nature of full time work into family and personal life. Having never worked in any type of shift work situation I perceived the impact of this type of work to be equally if not more intrusive on the personal lives of working mothers and their personal family lives.

LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

This first chapter presented an introduction to the research topic of interest and the position from which the study is being undertaken. The objectives of the research study are outlined followed by a trajectory of research to date pertaining to women and specifically mothers and work. Justification for this investigation considers the role of work in women and mothers' lives and the complex nature of understanding the significance of work in our lives. This is explored through the introduction of the concepts of lived experience and the phenomenology of the individual as relevant to the research undertaken. Prior to presentation of the layout of the study, a discussion is presented on the methodology and sources of data utilised in undertaking this narrative study of 'lived experiences' of working mothers in Ireland in 2009.

Chapter two locates women and mothers in work by expanding on the themes highlighted in the first chapter. The concept of work is defined in the context of the study and reference is made to the pervasive breadwinner-carer dichotomy as it impacts on the working lives of mothers. Contextually, this chapter introduces the reader to the Irish context within which The Irish Constitution *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Article 41)

pivots mother simultaneously in a powerful and constraining position as the primary carer of her children. The chapter will highlight a discussion of Ireland in the context of socio cultural influences. Later sections of this chapter move to consideration of organisation culture and its impact on the lives of working mothers specifically in relation to the work-life balance concept, policies and procedures.

Chapter three will explore the methodological approach adopted in the study and position the importance of social constructionism to this research. It will begin with an exploration of epistemology and interpretivism and move to consider the link between social construction and social worlds. Having outlined the meaning of 'lived experience' in chapter one, this chapter will expand on how and why a narrative biographical approach is adopted by the researcher to explore the lived experiences of working mothers' social and personal worlds. The discussion will outline methodologically how this qualitative study is carried out using in-depth interviewing on two occasions approximately six months apart with a sample of 11 mothers. Ethical procedures are discussed with reference to the appropriate consent forms in the relevant appendices. The chapter explores the choice of thematic analysis to approach the qualitative data from 21 in-depth interviews. Chapter three also supports a discussion of the reflective processes of researcher and participant mothers. This is warranted given that study participants are given their interview transcripts to read following their initial interviews in Spring 2009 and prior to their second interviews in Autumn 2009. Chapter three concludes with consideration of the issues of generalisability and the study limitations.

The fourth chapter will extrapolate a number of analytical themes emerging from the qualitative data gleaned from the biographical narrative methodology used in the study. This chapter begins with an analysis of the significance of their own mothers or mother figures in the lives of the working mothers in this study. Significant to this chapter will be the narratives of the participant mothers as they explore their lived experiences of paid employment outside the home in Ireland in 2009. Experiences of childcare issues pertaining to their work is explored in parallel with experiences of paid work; including the impact of work schedules on their daily lives as mothers.

Chapter five continues to explore significant themes impacting on working mothers in their pursuit of working lives. Work-life balance issues form the central theme of this chapter. Different work schedules discussed in chapter four call for different coping mechanisms for each of the study participants. ‘Third shift’ processes are explored that highlight the processes of negotiating balance between home and work domains. These ‘third shift’ processes include renegotiating roles across work and home relationships including children. The presence of children allows working mothers prioritise and manage their time in and out of paid work yet leisure activities are centred on family. This is in contrast to investing time on themselves or on couple time for these working mothers and their partners.

Chapter six brings together the themes explored through the narratives of the working mothers in this study. This is achieved through a reflection on and a summary of the

literature reviewed in chapter two relevant to women, mothers and work. The themes explored in chapters four and five will be revisited in the context not only of the literature reviewed herein but also in relation to the methodological approach adopted in this narrative exploration of ‘lived experiences’ of working mothers in Ireland.

CHAPTER 2

A MOTHER'S WORK IS NEVER DONE

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The chapter will begin with a discussion of the nature of research pertaining to women, mothers and work. This is important because it highlights the interdisciplinary nature of research on women in relation to paid employment. The significance of women as role models is explored firstly, through a discussion of women's roles. Secondly, the lack of accessible female role models in corporate life is discussed against the hegemonic ideas of management and leadership.

The review also considers the concept of work and argues that women and mothers have been somewhat ignored in research agendas. This is reflected in the leadership and management literature given the dearth of research into women's work lives (Probert 1999; Weyer 2007). This is justified herein with a focus on the polarisation of women and mothers' work. However, the recent focus of research into women and mothers' lives has highlighted the work scheduling of maternal employment and this serves to point to a research focus on either work or home domains. The missing element is a direct focus on the cross over between work and home. This calls for consideration, therefore, of work-life balance debates against the global idea of culture, notwithstanding the Irish context against which the study is positioned.

The process of finding a balance, described in chapter one as ‘the third shift’ facilitates a discussion of balance and the reflective process as it impacts on the lives of women and mothers who work in paid employment outside the home.

RESEARCH DISCOURSES ON WOMEN AND WORK

Globally, the location of women within research discourses pertaining to employment and work has had a gender bias where women’s positions have invariably been secondary to those of men (Walby 1990). These research agendas relate specifically to the study of power in some form or other, for example the lack of power and powerful positions undertaken by women in organisations (Kanter 1977, 1979; Cassell and Walsh 1991). In support of this contention Strangleman and Warren (2008: 26) highlight that “women’s voices were rendered largely invisible in early sociology and women’s lives were ignored on the whole by its founders”. Research undertaken by the Department of Women’s Studies at Trinity College Dublin Ireland reported, that senior women civil servants in Ireland are less likely to marry and have children (O’Brien 2008). O’Brien (2008) and Holmquist (2008) report further on the work of Trinity College’s Centre for Gender and Women’s Studies, where, based on responses from 2000 civil servants in Ireland, results show that 60% of men who have ambitions towards the grades of assistant secretary or secretary general are fathers. Of the women who responded with regard to their aspirations for these grade posts, only 31% are mothers. The themes discussed at this conference on “Women and Ambition” still appear to reinforce the notion that motherhood and a career are incompatible where invariably “women are expected to choose work which conflicts least with being a mother” (Richardson 1993:

19) or select work patterns such as part time working (Halrynjo and Lyng 2009). The study of women and work has also focused on the gendered nature of work and the disparity of pay and conditions experienced by women in comparison to their male counterparts (Cook and Waters 1998; Smithson et al 2004). Research through the lens of inequitable pay calls for the breakdown of pervasive dichotomies like the breadwinner-carer dichotomy so often referred to in the literature on women and work (Crompton 1997; Smithson et al 2004). This breadwinner-carer dichotomy will be further explored in the literature review as it is pertinent to the lives of working women and working mothers in particular.

WHERE HAVE WOMEN AND MOTHERS BEEN RESEARCHED IN THE CONTEXT OF WORK AND EMPLOYMENT?

Firstly, it is important to explore a number of perspectives concerned with women and work dialogues. The discussion will begin by highlighting those from within the psychological literature, moving to look at the literature on organisation theory and finally to sociological debates. This guide through a sample of research approaches is important, given the interdisciplinary nature of any study of women and mothers in an applied context.

From psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives, the study of women and work has taken up the study of power and conflict issues. Psychoanalytic writings have supported the experiences of conflict evident in women's experiences of organisations (Reciniello 1996; Huffington 2004). However, psychoanalytic theories appear limited to studies of the negative aspects of power, change and growth (Hirschhorn 1990, 1990a; Willcocks

and Rees 1995; Obholzer 1996; Kersten 2001; Gabriel and Carr 2002) within the constraints of organisations and organisational cultures as opposed to the positive ramifications of women and mothers being in organisations. Of particular significance is the study of women leaders and company directors (Huse and Grethe Solberg 2006; Elliot and Stead 2008; Bond et al 2008).

Moving on to organisational theories, it is evident that women and mothers in particular have rarely been studied as the central performers in organisations. Management research from the mid 1970's into the 1980's pointed consistently to the male model of management, the personification of masculine traits equalled the successful manager (Schein 1973; 1975; Brenner et al 1989). This is because women and mothers have predominantly been located in roles that are outside the realm of public and paid work (Jalland 1986; Todd 2004). This highlights once again the dichotomised nature of discussions of work and home domains in women's lives and a phenomenon which will be discussed at a later point in this review.

From a sociological perspective Walby (1990), for example, highlights the connection between women's work and the human capital theory and in doing so states that women do not attach as high a value to their human capital as do men. The value of women is addressed towards the family rather than towards employers. This is reflective of the patriarchal view of paid work and the historical developments of paid work outside the confines of the home. Others writers including Raddon (2002) emphasise the importance of work for mothers and their sense of self beyond motherhood. Crompton (1997) in her

discussions of *Women and Work in Modern Britain* contributes to this debate through her discussions of the emergence of the dichotomised ideology. This dichotomy consists of women in the home in charge of the domestic sphere and family life while men move out of the home to take up paid contracts within organisations; from assembly line factory work of the early industrialised society to the continued long hours culture of 'presentism' in employment today (Wharton and Blair-Loy 2006). Crompton (1997) goes further to highlight that women are both having fewer children and deferring having their children until a career has been established. This offers women longer and more continuous work trajectories prior to having children. There is evidence to support this contention in a recently published report on '*Family dynamics and family types in Ireland, 1986-2006*' (Lunn et al 2009). The researchers' analyses of the Census of Population pointed to increased delays in women having children.

This has been reinforced in sociological theory, in particular, by locating the capacity to care with women. This has been drawn out previously by Gilligan (1982) and more recently by Hollway (2006) in analyses of women's personal lives as influenced by care and interpersonal relations. Walby's (1990) work is pertinent to the present study particularly in light of the recent recession to hit the global economy. The Irish experience of the present global recession points to nearly 50,000 redundancies in the months between January and August 2009, nearly 10,000 more job losses than through the entire year 2008 (Walsh 2009). Women accounted for almost one in three of the redundancies (Walsh 2009). Walby (1990) found that in the United Kingdom during the recession times of the 1980's women's work increased and redundancies impacted more particularly on men (Sharpe 1984). A similar pattern is mirroring this phenomenon in

Ireland over the last eight months with the construction industry being particularly hit by increased unemployment.

Having outlined briefly a trajectory of research pertaining to women and work it is important to look specifically at the significant role of women and mothers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S ROLES

In her writing on women's work, Gatrell (2005, 2008) notes that issues of mothers' work/home decisions are inextricably linked with 'family practices' and protocols, notwithstanding the social expectations of how families, men, women, mothers and fathers ought to operate. This points to how the behaviour and expectations of men and women are socially constructed within social contexts and relationships. What is not explicitly considered is the influence of role models on women. On mothers in particular, it is envisaged that mothers have a considerable influence on their daughters' lives. Research pertaining to the lack of mothers' presence in daughters' lives is borne out by Tracey (2008). Tracey documents the experiences of twenty six Irish women who were bereaved of their mothers at a young age. This experience had a profound impact on the daughters in every aspect of their lives. Losing a mother at a young age impacted greatly on pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing experiences for the women in Tracey's study. These experiences were not just connected with women who became mothers. Schooling and formal education were also perceived as adversely interrupted and impacted upon for early bereaved daughters whose mother was not part of their growing up (Tracey 2008).

The importance of mothers as role models is pertinent to any exploration of the lived experiences of women and particularly mothers in relation to paid work, child care and household responsibilities. This present study aims to address the lack of focus on role models. While the influence of intergenerational factors may invariably have a limited effect because of the temporal differences, the exploration of role models with the participant mothers will serve to locate their experience in time and history. This study will also serve to acknowledge the biographical narrative of mothers and mother figures while participants live their own biography in a different temporal space or different time.

This intergenerational factor is gleaned as significant in the work of Hayghe and Bianchi (1994). They highlight in their analyses of married mothers' work patterns that the experiences of working mothers have an impact on the younger generation. In particular, they impact on career, family and marriage choices for younger generations. While this work is based on analysis of secondary data it is, however, relevant because it locates the study on work experience in one calendar year, that being 1992. What emerged as particularly interesting was the significance of age of dependent children on mother's work patterns or whether she worked at all. This is still reflected for example in the Irish figures where in 2008 the employment rate was 56.9% for women with children aged 0-3 years of age. This percentage increases somewhat with the increased age of children to 60.0% for women with children age 4-5 years. The percentage figure of 64.6% corresponds to women with children 6 years and over (Central Statistics Office 2009).

CEILINGS TO THE CORPORATE LIFE

On the importance of time and history, it must be highlighted that recent studies in Ireland have explored women and mothers in higher management roles (Grady and McCarthy 2008; Drew and Murtagh 2005). The contributions of this research continue to highlight the lack of female role models available to women in the higher echelons of organisational life. The last thirty years have catalogued volumes of research into the absence of women and mothers in corporate positions not only in business but also in engineering and law (Smithson et al 2004; Cook and Waters 1988). These volumes have identified not only the glass ceiling but the ‘glass cliff’ where Ryan and Haslam (2005: 81) point to evidence that women are over represented in leadership positions that are “risky or precarious”. Regardless of the constituent make up of the ceiling, however, a barrier still remains, that is, the lack of appropriate role models for women in management (Weyer 2007). Career women and especially mothers with careers outside the home have few available models upon which to assimilate their behaviour or aspirations. Therefore, an important concept to explore with these working mothers is if their mothers or mother figures worked outside the home.

The model of management and leadership as ‘male’ has tended to be reinforced within the literature outlined under organisational and general psychoanalytic studies outlined above. The work of Goleman (1995) however, on emotional intelligence and the work of Peter Senge (1990) began to point to a less masculine hegemony in leadership and management per se and has moved some way to addressing the dominant socially constructed model of management. Hochschild’s (2003) work on *‘The Managed Heart’* points to the relevance of supposedly feminine characteristics and embodied practices

like ‘the capacity to care’ (Hollway 2006) to organisations seeking competitive advantage. This may have pointed the way to more women-friendly routes into management yet the power differentials remained intact as did the glass ceiling (Kanter 1977; Casell and Walsh 1991). It could be argued that in order to stimulate top down change in the gender composition of organisations women needed to reach the top. Considerably few women have done so, however, Elliot and Stead (2008) highlight the paradox within the literature on the practice of leadership. The theory purports to the value of the feminine intelligence while the practice of leadership remains loyal to the male model. Elliot and Stead (2008: 162) note that women “while making up 45 percent of the workforce hold fewer than 1 in 10 of the most senior positions in UK business”.

The present study of working mothers does not aim to target career mothers (after Gatrell 2005) in managerial positions per se. The study does not place specific criteria on participants. The study seeks to explore lived experiences of work for a sample of mothers employed in paid work outside the home in Ireland. An exploration of the concept of work and an exploration of how work is conceptualised in research is therefore essential.

THE CONCEPT OF WORK AND THE MEANING OF WORK

The interdisciplinary research explored above in the short journey through research studies on women and work are all set against a context of a socially constructed definition of work and employment that is most often associated with the dualistic nature of public/private sphere of the breadwinner-carer duality. Socially constructed in this

context refers to the idea that “people’s accounts of themselves are constructed” in their relationships with the world they live in and these constructions manifest as stories (Burr 1995: 8). Work in the context of the present study refers to paid employment occurring outside the home. This study will not include analyses of entrepreneurial women and mothers who work from home. This is influenced by two factors. Firstly, consideration is given to the contention that the dynamics of going out to work differ somewhat from entrepreneurial work and from working from home (Berke 2004; Thompson et al 2009). The second reason refers to previous research on work and society. Studies of work and paid employment have invariably been about men at work. In the past, paid work has traditionally been associated with men and fathers in breadwinner and provider roles (Willis 1977; Furlong and Cartmel 1997). This has had a number of consequences including the exclusion of women from the world of work (Carney 2009). In relation to men, confining them in these roles was a way of avoiding the inclusion of men and fathers from participation within the private sphere of the home traditionally conceived as the remit of women and mothers (Hochschild 1997). Men and fathers have grown into socially defined roles that on the one end of the dichotomy ignored men but also empowered them. This materialised in men being socialised into breadwinner and provider roles at the expense of time with family and involvement in parenting. Goodwin (1999) investigates *Men’s Work and Men’s Lives* while highlighting the dearth of research understanding men experiences of work. In addition, McKeown et al’s (1998) Irish based study found that fathers work longer than non fathers. Fathers were more likely to work unsociable hours and they tended not to be associated with childcare responsibilities. Goodwin (1999) contends that men have in fact been ignored through many of the research discourses on work and experiences of work.

A similar justification for the present research on the lived experiences of working mothers is evident given that the link between identity and work is not explicitly researched with women and particularly mothers. More often the focus of research is on the exploration of experiences of non working and or stay at home experiences of mothers. The concept of work has evolved over generations as an experience that brings a sense of meaning to life. Work as highlighted in chapter one provides the individual with certain latent functions (Jahoda 1982) that are essential for positive mental health and well being. Work may be construed as a symbol of position in social and personal life (Jahoda 1982). In parallel, work may also be perceived as a stressor and a contributor to ill health and unhappiness and a positive part of an individual's life. In her study of time use with American couples Hochschild (1997) highlighted the role of work as a release from the demands of home life and responsibilities. Interpretations of experiences of work role and identity are multifaceted where identity is not simply linked to the formation of a work identity. Work permeates into all aspects of our social and personal interactions with the social world not least the experiences of working mothers.

THE POLARISATION OF WOMEN AND MOTHERS' WORK

Women and mothers in particular have historically been described in caring and nurturing roles (Crompton 1997; Crompton 2006). In her historical description of the productive years of women through the nineteenth century Gatrell (2008) highlights the choices that were available to women at the time. My use of the word choice is interesting in this context because any choice appeared constraining and powerless against the dominant patriarchy. Roles of governess, wet nurses, companions and

seamstresses notwithstanding that of wife and mother all seemed to confine women and mothers to the private sphere of the homes and the household. Contextualising this against the dominant social backdrop could explain the lack of position of women and mothers in public life in terms of politics, business and education. Gatrell (2008: 115) states that “women’s bodies in the context of leading, well paid and influential roles are in the minority –if indeed, they are represented at all”. This echoes Kanter’s (1977; 1979) findings of the lack of female role models in the higher echelons of business in relation to power and its use.

The breadwinner-carer dichotomy is an important socially constructed backdrop against which the pervasive impact of socio-cultural scripts can be highlighted. Script in this context refers to a type of story line. This idea of a story line is borrowed from the work of Miller (2005). Miller’s study of transitions into motherhood brings to light the reality of the socially constructed nature of motherhood in her study on pregnancy and childbirth across different cultures in the form of authoritative knowledge relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Since post World War II in Britain the socially constructed good mother script equalled that of the stay at home mother/housewife.

In 1950’s Britain in particular, the influence of Dr. John Bowlby, psychoanalyst and psychiatrist was immense, particularly with regard to the role of mother in the healthy growth of babies and young children. His publication *Childcare and the Growth of Love* stressed the importance of mother-child bonds with the culturally accepted place of women in the family as nurturer and carer. Authoritative knowledge on motherhood and

childcare was borne out by then current and politically tempered research from John Bowlby (1953) in particular. This work in particular was instrumental in the movement of women, mothers in particular back into the home to be ‘good mothers’ and provide good enough mothering (Winnicott 1957). Writings by psychologists like Bowlby and Winnicott have therefore positioned mothers’ identities against a set of culturally determined scripts that are home centred and child centred resulting in women and mothers being firmly placed and maintained within the private sphere of the home. Cultural scripts are often associated with or labelled the “good mother” script and this has also been influential in the United States particularly in relation to the script of “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996). In contrast to the good mother/ stay at home mother recommended by the work of Bowlby (1953) on behalf of the World Health Organisation, the intensive mother script presents a complex myriad of interrelated factors.

Intensive mothers are described as those with dual demands of work and home responsibilities in addition to the changing demands of busy children (Hays 1996). The polarisation of women’s and mothers’ locations, physically in the home or in the workplace is still dichotomised. Women are socially constructed as full time mothers or working mothers with little in between. This is the socio cultural agenda against which cultural scripts are learned and against which the perceived full time working mothers partake in intensive mothering. These women and mothers try to meet the demands of two “spatial locations”: home and work (Dillaway and Paré 2008: 438).

The intensive mother script discussed by Hays (1996), however, has been taken up by women and mothers as they continue to move into the labour force, continue their working careers and contribute to the economic state of home and country. In an analysis of Hays' (1996) ideology of intensive mothering, Dillaway and Paré (2008) equate the good mother ideology in the United States with that of intensive mothering. The latter implies women's and mothers' intense immersion in their children's lives at the expense of any avenues into a publicly paid working life outside the home. The intensive mothering ideology of Hays (1996) very much mirrors the maternal deprivation theory postulated by Bowlby in the 1950's and 1960's and it appears as still somewhat limiting to both personal and career development of women and mothers. This is borne out if one considers the new phenomena of opting out by women who decide to leave or break their careers in paid work outside the home to take up full time mothering (Mason and Ekman 2007; Hirshman 2006). It is vital, however to precisely contextualise this phenomenon against increased competition for college places, increased testing in Education (Berliner 2007) and increased competition nationally both for the United States and for many European countries in terms of increasingly competitive organisational leadership. This has been achieved against the backdrop of a blurring of the breadwinner-carer dichotomy as strictly that of male breadwinner-female carer.

It is perhaps possible to analyse the traditional breadwinner-carer dichotomy as a type of story line or cultural script to which men and women; mothers and fathers speak and performed to. There were few alternatives to this model of socialisation because the traditional idea of family was based on the security of a stay at home mother and the

performance of the father as breadwinner and provider.

WOMEN AND MOTHERS GOING OUT TO WORK

The stories of motherland and fatherland (Kearney 2002) impact on the history and biography of people. In particular the historical, cultural and religious stories of Irish mothers play a role in defining our lives as Irish mothers. Yet the (craft) science of describing work and the organisation of work seldom posits women or mothers in primary character roles or leading roles. In recent decades however, mothers have been studied within the context of work and employment (McRae 1993, 1998; Lewis 1997, 2001; Kremen Bolton 2000; Fine-Davis et al 2004; Gatrell 2005). These studies point out clear discontinuities in the working lives of mothers simply because they need to take time out of work to have their children. The agenda has been one of negativity not least for the women themselves in terms of disjointed career paths but organisations have reported negatively on the disjointed nature of working mothers' employment trajectories (Metz 2005; Valentova 2006).

The subject of motherhood and employment has featured in many public arenas throughout Australia, America and Canada and in Europe including Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland. The focus of these works has centred on experiences of part time work, work and the family and women's experiences of returning to work after childbirth (Blossfeld and Hakim 1997; Drew et al 1998; Vlasblom and Schippers 2006; Warren et al 2009). *The Celtic Tiger* era in Ireland fostered academic interest in the study of women and work given that nearly 300,000 women joined the Irish labour market in the

nine year period between 1998 and 2007 (Russell et al 2009). This included a focus on issues of work-life balance and career orientation in management circles in particular (Drew and Murtagh 2005).

In the United States writers including Crittenden (2001), Stone and Lovejoy (2004) and Hirsham (2006) are interested in the experiences of working mothers who have pursued college and post graduate degrees but reach a stage when they decide to leave their careers to pursue their family lives. The work of Mason and Mason Ekman (2007) entitled '*Mothers on the fast track*' points to this phenomenon with a focus on two major themes. Firstly, fewer women with children, than those without children, were successful in attaining both a career and motherhood by their late thirties. Success was measured in various ways including continuity of careers for women and mothers and attainment of specialisms within careers like science and medicine for example. The number of women and mothers on boards of directors was considered and the subjective experiences of working motherhood. Secondly, women were finding it so difficult to combine both mother and employee roles that many working mothers opted out of paid work outside the home (Cook and Waters 1998; Smithson et al 2004; Mason and Mason Ekman 2007). Blair-Loy (2009: 281) in her qualitative study of stockbrokers and experiences of work family conflict states "that the relationship between scheduling flexibility and work-to-family conflict depends on the occupational and organizational context".

Also based within the United States, Kremen Bolton's (2000) study of 117 working women and mothers is important because it not only analysed managerial women but the

sample included community workers and stay at home mothers. These analyses were qualitative in nature and sought to understand the nature of women's psychological commute from work to home life both in the literal sense and the emotional crossover between different domains. Kremen Bolton (2000) highlighted the need for breakaway time as a survival tool and coping technique for working women and mothers. This process of time away allows the reflective process to occur, which is perceived as vital to the lives of working women. That is to say, the reflective process is the key to increased awareness of the patterns, practices and protocols of life. The routines of daily life and practices become so automatic that time for reflection and reassessment is very often overlooked.

It is ironic that the term routine is used above in such a casual way given the wealth of information and advice passed to mothers from professionals including doctors and midwives following the birth of their children (Miller 2005). This advice reverts most often to the following: "get them into a routine". It is unfortunate however, that homes become so rigid around routines, as Hochschild (1997) points out that there is little time to reflect upon whether the same said routines are still working or becoming unhelpful or as Hochschild (1997) highlights in her time use study, more like work.

The "breakaway" time discussed by Kremen Bolton (2000) is uniquely individual to every woman. It has many forms depending on psychological, economic and logistical reasons but without this time the routine pattern and pace will continue to the detriment of the physical and psychological health of working women and working mothers in

particular (Gatrell and Cooper 2008). The reflective process highlighted above will be discussed later in this chapter particularly in relation to the concept of work-life balance. Further contributions to understanding work-life domains come from the work of Fine-Davis et al (2004) on work and family in Europe. These researchers moved from studying the particular experiences of women and men to more inclusive analyses of experiences of mothers and fathers. Shifting the focus from women and men to mothers and fathers has focused attention on some important variables contributing to the dual lives of mothers and fathers in their pursuit of careers and employment outside the home. This leads to the significance of trying to understand work schedules and their impact specifically in this study on maternal employment.

WORK SCHEDULING OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

In her study of time use and parenting with American couples, Hochschild (1997) brings to the fore the impact of work schedules on family time. Family time included activities from childcare to home maintenance and pet care to ‘couple time’ and relationships. Both mothers and fathers in the study on non standard contracts, including shift work schedules, experienced work schedules that were intrusive on the one hand but also a source of escape on the other. The latter finding in Hochschild’s (1997) study gave credence to the adage that work can become a source of homage and therapy from a busy home life. A work schedule, therefore, can have an effect on how a family functions from day to day in terms of its impact on home and school schedules.

In view also of the powerful influence of social constructions of families and particularly motherhood, the premise of intensive mothering implies that children partake in varied after school activities and clubs for their social and psychological development needs. Shift work schedules in particular, whether they are full time or part time, intrude on family life. Root and Wooten (2008) highlight that one in six employees on both hourly and salary contracts work on shift schedules that fall outside of the norm, that being between 6am and 6pm. While their study refers specifically to how fathers deal with shift work demands, little research focuses on the experiences of mothers on shift work contracts. The inclusion of the experiences of working mothers who deal with shift work schedules is not only essential to any debate on work-life balance but it has further implications for family lives and more specifically the formative years of children and teenagers (Wierda-Boer and Rönkä 2004). The research by Root and Wooten (2008) specifically targets organised sports for children that most often happen in the afternoon and early evening time slots and which clash with some shift schedules. With a sample of 59 manufacturing workers, 30% were female which leaves a substantial gap in understanding how working mothers actually navigate between work and home domains. Root and Wooten (2008) point out that research appears to steer towards work family conflict as an issue affecting mothers more so than fathers. However, it is also important to point out that the impact of shift work schedules on women and mothers per se have not been explored in the same way that research has focused on men, albeit excluding fathers. With reference to men's lives there has been a particular focus on how working schedules impact on men's leisure time as opposed to women's (Lewis 2003).

Hosking and Western (2008: 8) highlight from their research that “jobs scheduled in the evenings or on the weekends potentially allow parents in dual-earner families to arrange non-overlapping work hours, allowing all childcare to be undertaken by a parent within the home”. This however, contrasts with many of the findings of Hochschild (1997) in her study of parenting and time in a large United States based company. In reality, and factoring in long commutes and overtime, non standard maternal employment or part time work was as demanding as full time working schedules. Others factors included times and duration of shifts, sick children or over demanding projects to be completed (Hochschild 1997).

Webber and Williams (2008) conducted a qualitative study on mothers in part time jobs. Within this study, participants chose to work on a part time basis. This work serves to highlight the prevalence of choosing part time options as part of the emerging process of finding balance between work and non work lives for women and mothers in particular. As has been pointed out throughout the literature review, a clear focus persists in the study of “professional and executive women” (Webber and Williams 2008: 754) at the expense of looking at women across the occupational spectrum. The aforementioned researchers address this bias using in depth interviews with 41 mothers in retention jobs and 19 in secondary jobs. The retention jobs defined above refer to predominantly professional jobs that are highly salaried. Employees are employed on a full time basis and by virtue of this, part time schedules are more often negotiated once employment is entered into. At the other end of the trajectory lies secondary work which is characterised by low wages and high turnover and is predominantly part time in nature. Pertinent themes within this research highlight differences across the occupational

spectrum in relation to experiences of the ideal worker, career penalties and strategies utilised to address these. Webber and Williams (2008: 773) conclude their study on the experiences of mothers in retention and secondary jobs by pointing to the use of the “language of choice to explain their situation”. In doing so it is perceived as diverting responsibility from employers and in a sense highlighting what Hakim (2000) refers to as Preference Theory. Contextually, it is significant that this is a United States based study and the researchers acknowledge the movements of the European Union in creating more family friendly policies to address structural issues. There is an obvious gap inherent here which is addressed in the present research study. The gap relates to the predominant focus on separate domains of home and work as had been the focus for centuries (Crompton 1997). Despite the introduction of the concept of work-life balance there has been little or no focus by social theorists on the process of attaining balance in the lives of working mothers with the exception of the work of Halrynjo and Lyng (2009). In the recent interest in the personal and social lives of individuals (Hollway 2006; Smart 2007) the concept of work-life balance is clearly significant but it has seldom been a focus of study apart from the work in particular of Hays (1996) and Kremen Bolton (2000) and more recently Halrynjo and Lyng (2009). The present study goes some way to addressing the perceived gap in understanding the process of attaining balance in the experiences of working mothers. In doing so, this work has the potential to signify both conscious and unconscious aspects, psychological and social aspects to attaining balance between work and home domains for working mothers. Prior to consideration of the literature on work-life balance it is imperative to locate the present study against relevant Irish social contexts.

RESEARCHING IN AN IRISH CONTEXT

An outline of the socio cultural context, against which this study is set, is important to explore in the midst of this review. The proceeding section will serve to contextualise the study. In 1950' and 60's Britain and the United States, the socially constructed image of the stay at home mother was overtly promoted by the political and media forum. In Ireland, the dominant hold of the Roman Catholic Church was more influential than either political or media influences. The Roman Catholic Church remained a strong presence and influential factor in politics and media so perhaps they were simply not distinct as such.

Inglis (2008) in his publication *Global Ireland*, brings pertinent issues surrounding the interaction of the global, local and personal to the fore. In his analyses he highlights the influences of a particular habitus or an "unquestioned predisposed way of being in the world that produce a collective identity and sense of belonging" (Inglis 2008: 2). Inglis draws on the theme of historical and religious influence in Ireland and how Ireland has emerged as a strong global strength where people feel different yet the same. By this he is referring to people having different choices in relation to, for example communication media, lifestyles and travel while pointing out the sameness of people's lives around the world as "more at the level of the material practices of everyday life, literally the patterns of sleeping, eating, working, commuting and consuming" (Inglis 2008: 164).

The establishment of the Irish state had kept Ireland very much under the conservative umbrella, whereby the church and the family were given special status within the

Constitution. Historically, structures and institutions like the church, education and government services have not afforded mothers any place in economic and political roles (Kiely 1999). This was reflected in the persistence of the 1929 marriage bar for example where married women could not be employed in the public and civil services. Related to this was also the lack of “access to contraception, access to information about abortion and the legalization of divorce” (Murphy-Lawless and McCarthy 1999: 71). The marriage bar was lifted in 1973 as Ireland joined the European Union (EU). While changes occurred in parallel with entry to the EU, the work of activist groups also played a role in looking for change in the way women were treated. For example from the early 1970’s the women of Ireland began campaigns of behavioural change which directly clashed with the strict prohibition laws on access to information on contraception and contraception per se. The most noted demonstration of this was in 1971; ‘the contraceptive train’ organised by the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement. In this campaign, women defied the laws of the land and voluntarily purchased contraceptives in Northern Ireland to bring back over the borders to the Republic (Conroy 2004).

In their discussions of social policy and fertility change in Ireland, Murphy-Lawless and McCarthy (1999) refer to socio historical change that affected the lives of women in Ireland from Famine times, where the population of Ireland dropped annually between the years 1851 and 1961. Free secondary school education became available to all in 1968 and this had an impact on the lives of women (Coolahan 1981). The past fifteen to twenty years have seen dramatic change in the role women have played in economic responsibilities and in paid employment in particular. Reduced unemployment in Ireland during the 1990’s resulted from increases in male and female employment rates as a

result of the successful boom of the Celtic Tiger (McGinnity et al 2007). Women's labour force participation in the 1990's showed an increase of over 6% and in 2001 46.4% of women were active in the labour force (Fine-Davis et al 2004; Collins and Wickham 2001). Further analyses highlight, among the women employed, the 20-44 aged group who had no children were most likely to be in paid employment while those with children, in particular of preschool age were less likely to participate in the labour force (Central Statistics Office 2005). Overall, the employment rate for women between the ages of 20 and 44 was 68.6% (Central Statistics Office 2005). Broken down further this referred to 84.3% for women with no children down to 55.3% for women with children aged 3 and younger (Central Statistics Office 2005).

Over the last few decades, working mothers have been at the centre of debate on welfare and policy provisions worldwide (Morgan 2006) particularly as the changing nature of mothers roles have emerged. While working class women and mothers have always worked, it took the movement of the middle classes of women and mothers into the labour force to highlight the increased disparity not just between men and women but also within groups of women. In parallel with these movements Crittenden (2001: 47) states "as women's family labor lost status as 'work', it was increasingly sentimentalized as 'labor of love'", that is to say the unrequited labour of nurturing, loving and being a good mother. The economic boom years of the 1990's in Ireland resulted in increased opportunities for men and women to join an active and economically healthy workforce (Fahey et al 2007). Increased numbers of female labour force participation have had the domino effect of increasing demand for childcare, preschool and after-school care of children. In Ireland, the social impact of the boom years of the Celtic Tiger have

changed the very nature of lived experiences not only for women and mothers but also for whole families, including husbands, partners, children and grandparents alike (Fahey and Layte 2007; Smyth et al 2007). In the last 15 years Ireland has moved away from the singular influence of the traditional male breadwinner ideology as upheld by Bunreacht na hÉireann 1937 (The Constitution of Ireland). Therein, Article 41(2) states:

“...in particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”

The move to more varied forms of family and households point out, therefore, that Irish women and mothers in particular are partaking increasingly in a juggling of roles between home and work responsibilities. This phenomenon has been at the centre of much research in the US, Canada and Australia including the work of Mason (1988); Hochschild (1989); Richardson (1993); Hays (1996); Crittenden (2001); Hirshman (2006) and Mason and Mason Ekman (2007). In particular Hays (1996) has postulated the ideology of “intensive mothering” as the accolade of working mothers who juggle a number of roles and responsibilities. In their concluding notes on a discussion paper on the impact of Irish mothers entering the labour force on the childcare issue, Collins and Wickham (2001: 11) highlight that “it has been said many times that the Celtic Tiger should really be called the Celtic Tigress. Maybe we should go one further and call it the Celtic Lioness: the lioness goes out and hunts but also rears her cubs with the help of her

extended family”.

THE REALITY AND INFLUENCE OF ORGANISATION CULTURE

Organisation cultures globally face a number of challenges, regardless of gender per se.

These challenges include the pursuit of the learning organisation (Senge 1990), greater industrial relations, the maintenance of workforces in view of the global recession and work-life balance issues. Organisational culture and work-life balance issues for example are embedded both within and in experiences of femininity and masculinity and emergent experiences as parents; mothers and fathers. This brings to the fore once again the pervasive use of dichotomies in social and behavioural sciences and they become ever more pervasive when applied to organisational culture, structures and practices. Womanhood, motherhood and mothering as emotional states of being require analysis and interpretation in particular when considering organisational cultures. The traditional male breadwinner-female carer model has been a particular reality within the Irish context as highlighted in the previous section of this review.

In 2008 only 13% of ministers (referred to as Teachta Dála) in Dáil Éirinn (Government of Ireland) were women (National Women’s Council of Ireland 2009; Joint Committee on the Constitution 2010). This serves to highlight the lack of women evident in leadership and decision making positions in Ireland. Additionally, in 2008 women’s income was two thirds of men’s income (Central Statistics Office 2009). According to Hall (1999) internal organisation culture acts as a context within which structures form and emerge. Culture is an emergent, proactive process within which lived realities are co constructed, thereby highlighting the socially constructed nature of lives and lived

experiences. It is imperative to stress that if social and personal lives are socially constructed, then the lives of working mothers need to be considered against the backdrop of organisational culture. According to Alvesson (2002: 14) “culture refers to complex, inaccessible, fuzzy, holistic phenomena”. However, Alvesson (2002) further highlights that within cultural discourses there exists deep seated symbols with various and varied meanings for different groups. This, therefore, emphasises the importance of multiple perspectives, outlooks, agenda and constructions of reality. This is significant to the sample of mothers in the present study given their varied experiences of work from full time to shift work and part time schedules and given that participants have both home and work responsibilities. It is important to discuss this as a core element of organisation culture. It is of particular importance to the lived reality of balancing a working life with children and partners or husbands for the working mothers who participated in this study. The following section will focus specifically on work-life balance debates pertinent to the lives of women and mothers in particular.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE DEFINITIONS AND DIVIDES

Having highlighted the economic, political and sociopolitical backdrop against which the study is located, the discussion will proceed with an exploration of the concept of work-life balance. The context for the location of women and mothers working in Ireland has been influenced not only by the marriage bar against married women working in public services as discussed previously but other changes happening in parallel, including entry into the European Economic Community in 1973. As a result of the latter, the legislative procedures pertaining to the citizens of Ireland were now required to address the relevant European Union directives (O’Connor and Dunne 2006).

It is imperative to begin, however, by looking at some key theoretical concepts relevant to work-life balance debates. Specifically, attention is given firstly to the concept of breadwinning, followed by consideration of the concept of work-life balance.

THE PROBLEM WITH BREADWINNING AS A CONCEPT

Warren (2007) has pointed to the difficulty of the term breadwinning within sociology and the ever present assumptions about the role of the breadwinner within a family unit. This argument relates back to the core of what men and women do and how we are socialised to fulfill certain behavioural roles. It relates also to the role of our development as men and women and perhaps Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982) were correct in their beliefs that women and mothers relate differently, that women and mothers are more adept to consider the nature of care and relatedness. This is immensely important to the exploration of lived experiences with working mothers who both earn to 'provide' in paid work outside the home and who provide care to their family. In the same way that Warren (2007) argues about the use of the breadwinning term, the concept of work-life balance also invokes a taken-for-granted and equally problematic element.

CONCEPT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance (WLB) "refers to the sense of balance and satisfaction employees experience between their work/professional and personal lives. When the demands of work and life exist in harmony with each other, then work-life balance is achieved" (Grady et al 2008: 3). Lewis et al (2003) highlight a number of difficulties with the work-life balance concept. They point to the implication that within this concept work

may be construed as not being part of life per se. They go further to state that the term “ignores the distinction between paid and unpaid care work and suggests unpaid care work is just part of the non-work area of life” (Lewis et al 2003: 829). Work-life balance is often described as something that organisations do and very often the role of the individual is minimised. Joshi et al (2002: 2) define work-life balance as a “two prong approach” involving the individual and the organisation. They highlight that social responsibility plays a role in work-life balance. In particular Joshi et al (2002) point to the reality of European Union work-life balance origins in social responsibility in comparison to the United States experience of putting forward the business case. Work-life balance initiatives are put in place primarily for competitive gain through good recruitment and retention practices. While this is also quoted as the motivation for such programmes in the European Union the business case is perceived by Joshi et al (2002) as less of an incentive than the need for employers to adhere to equal opportunities legislation and health and safety directives from the European Commission. These researchers propose that the business case for work-life balance would simultaneously support employees while adhering to the various legislative directives governing the employment contract. Diversity prevails, however, when considering Europe as a whole, for example, employees in the United Kingdom perceive themselves to work a longer week (Bonney 2005). The social responsibility aspect of work-life balance is perceived as more active in the Nordic countries of Europe where support is given to schemes including paternity leave that support families in their negotiations across work and family borders.

Theoretically, a number of models make up the views towards work-life balance which Guest (2001) outlines in a conference paper on perspectives of study in work-life balance. Clark's (2000) model is particularly relevant here. The Border Theory (Clark 2000) definition of work-life balance emphasises satisfaction, good functioning and minimum conflict. Border Theory proposes that organisations can adjust domains and borders to contribute to increased work-life balance specifically through the supportive roles of line managers, supervisors and colleagues. While the introduction of flexible work practices addresses the issues of borders to a degree it is far more difficult to change organisation cultures. For organisations, cultures can be very pervasive (Morgan 1986). This point is reinforced by Brainne's (2003: 63) research of 55 National Health Service Trusts in the United Kingdom. This study of part time work and job share in the National Health Service revealed "no managers or doctors working part time". The pervasive working hours culture was experienced by those employees availing of the part time or job share initiatives as contributing to their dissatisfaction in their job and feelings of frustration "by the lack of respect that they received from their full-time colleagues and managers" (Brainne 2003: 66).

According to Clark (2000: 748) "people are border crossers who make daily transitions between two worlds – the world of work and the world of family". What the present study also addresses in terms of methodological approach are the "spatial, temporal, social and behavioural connections between work and family" (Clark 2000: 750) elements which Clark sees as essential to the predictive value of the model. Clark refers to Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualisation of border crossers as those who are either central or peripheral in their participation in relevant domains. To some degree

one could relate these concepts of central or peripheral participation to Hakim's (1996; 2000) Preference Theory and her classification of women into home centred, adaptive or work centred. If according to Hakim (2000) preferences towards work are determinants of women's labour market participation, then this will impact on whether they are involved in border crossing which in turn impacts on the level of balance or imbalance perceived and experienced by women and specifically mothers in work. In critique of Hakim (1996) are conceptualisations of ideological, cultural and organisational constraints (Walby 1990; Crompton 1997) towards explaining the position of women and mothers in the labour market. This reinforces the point made earlier that domain cultures are difficult to change but perhaps the interim solution of looking at border keepers like supervisors may be a step to addressing issues of work-life balance in the lives of working individuals. Flexible policies, however, have not escaped the critical eye of theorists. Lewis (2003: 352) found in her study of 50 accountants that few men took advantage of flexible arrangements and those who did, took them for leisure purposes. In fact "for men, modifying work for leisure was more acceptable than doing so for family, while the reverse was felt to be true for women". The latter can be explained with reference to the works of Gilligan (1982) and Holloway (2006) in particular who highlight the capacity to care in women and mothers and the inherent cultural interpretation of this. This also reinforces the idea explored by Gutek (1993) that the father who pursues his career is to be praised for providing for this family but the mother who pursues her career is criticised for the neglect of her offspring.

Further research on work-life balance issues point to the work of Doherty (2004) who looked at 29 in-depth case studies of women in hospitality. Her study explored the

business case for the introduction of such work-life balance initiatives using interviews and focus groups with manager/owners and employees across the United Kingdom hospitality sector. Her findings concur with other research including Lewis (2003) and Smithson (2005) who quote the long hours culture of work commitment that still pervades in accounting and legal professions in particular. This is also supported by research from the United States by Blair-Loy (2009), Wharton and Blair-Loy (2002) and Blair-Loy and Jacobs (2003). Doherty (2004) found few women at senior levels of their industry with flexible working practices available to them. In the eight case study industries studies, Doherty (2004) located some women in senior management confined to head office project work and not in senior operational management on the ground because flexibility and senior management are not perceived as paired together. Doherty (2004) points to the exclusion of the hospitality industry from the founder organisations in the UK for the work-life balance campaign. This is important since it serves to highlight and reinforce the diversity and disparity not only within sectors but between sectors of industry. Different sectors of industry may expect different work practices and constitute different work structures, for example, the differences between shift work practices and the nine to five model of work structure. While Doherty's (2004) sample is not representative of the hospitality industry as a whole, her study still points to the trend of greater uptake of flexible practices by women and mothers rather than men and fathers.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE UPTAKE OF WORK-LIFE INITIATIVES

Remery et al (2003) highlight that women tend to make their own efforts at work-life balance, specifically, through the option of part-time working arrangements.

Aside from operationally defining the work-life balance concept per se, other important considerations include for example quality of life and marital and partner satisfaction which are beyond the scope of the present study but are borne out as increasingly important for parents particularly in the work of Fine-Davis et al (2004).

Significant also is consideration of how the concept of 'family friendly' is utilised within the literature on work-life balance. Lewis' (1997) critique of the construct of 'family friendly' points to the lack of adequate consideration of what constitutes family and the changing nature and face of family life in contemporary society (Morgan 1999). In debating that gender issues and equal opportunities are pertinent issues, Lewis (1997) found gender differences in how men and women perceived family friendly policies. In her case findings Lewis noted that work appeared to be modeled on the male model of a continuous career span indicative of the male breadwinner, as opposed to the discontinuous trajectory associated with the careers of women and mothers. Issues of equal opportunities therefore come to the fore (Lewis 1997; 2001) in addition to issues pertaining to the business and organisational needs of the workplace.

Robinson et al (2003) report on general nurses' experiences of returning to work post maternity leave/s. The provision of an onsite childcare facility was under utilised by

men. For women, both the cost of this service and the hours of business were incompatible with working hours of day and night shift rotations. The researchers report that research on experiences of combining work and family for nurses is sparse. Through the survey method Robinson et al (2003) describe the percentages of respondents (N=620) in their study as 94 per cent female and six per cent male. The researchers note that none of these male respondents had taken a break in their career to the same degree as the female respondents had following their qualification as general nurses. This serves to highlight the reluctance of men to take a break throughout their careers. The research conducted by Robinson et al (2003) details the number of maternity breaks and the nature of the break in terms of the inclusion of extended paid leave or unpaid leave. This research also addresses the grade taken up on return from maternity leave. Additionally, the survey results considered respondents' choice of hours on return, 73 percent of the sample attained their choice of hours; "65 per cent part-time and 8 per cent full-time" (Robinson et al 2003: 430). Despite the methodological differences between this work and the research undertaken in the present study, it is significant that themes relating to hours of work, grade of job on return from leave and availability of childcare provision are all explored by Robinson et al (2003) as pertinent to the lives of working mothers in particular. The questionnaire method is useful for gathering large quantities of information on trends in a sample (Langdridge 2004). However, it does clearly point to the need for in depth explorations of the reflective processes involved in negotiating multiple roles and work-family cross over.

In attempting to contribute to research on the above, Hilbrecht et al (2008) in their qualitative work in financial organisations in Canada, point to the difficulty in assessing

work-life balance because of the complexity of the concept itself. They explore issues of work-life balance with 18 mothers employed on a teleworking basis or working from home. While the participants are working physically from their home using telecommunication systems, they are bound by an employment contract with an employer. Time comes to the fore as an important construct within this research, which reflects conceptual ideas of Fagan (2001) on work time arrangements. While hours of employment, structure of work and the availability of flexible programmes could be used as an objective measure of work-life balance, there is a major shortcoming with this. While practices and procedures may be available to employees under the banner of work-life balance initiatives, the uptake of these is not always at its highest and often done so at an informal level (Anderson et al 2002; Dex and Scheibl 2002). This, therefore, points to the importance of individual lived experiences in how work-life balance practices are utilised in pursuit of work-life balance and cohesion. The work of Tomlinson (2004) has contributed to the exploration of how women and mothers negotiate and manage multiple domains. Tomlinson's contribution to the work-life balance literature is of a qualitative nature encompassing in-depth interviews with 62 working mothers. The study sample consists of 28 full time and 34 part time working mothers at different levels or grades of occupational progression. In addition to the above, two managers, consisting of the human resource and first line manager were also interviewed. A business case for work-life balance initiatives exists when organisations are faced with the task of replacing working mothers including those who have reached senior levels of management. The findings of Tomlinson's work point to the pattern of women working full time to gain experience and seniority and ultimately the position and respect required to negotiate flexible working schedules to suit their personal and

family needs. She also highlights that some managers' responses in her research supported Hakim's (2000) Preference Theory.

Hyman et al (2005) studied both call centres and software companies. In the call centres, shift work patterns were experienced as intrusive. In these cases employees experienced little employee focused flexibility, only that set by management to achieve management and organisational goals. Hyman et al (2005) engaged in a discussion of work based and home based coping strategies in relation to the issue of work-life balance. Home based strategies include support outside the workplace and incorporated partners, family and extended family situations. In their study they highlight the significant role of employee's mother as a key support. Most notably these study participants point to their experiences of shift work time and the lack of formal childcare available to employees on shift work patterns. Grady and McCarthy (2008: 600) use a sample of "mid career professional working mothers" and speak of the challenge of sharing roles for working women of childbearing years. While speaking of the above challenge, Grady et al (2008) have contributed significantly to the debate in Ireland with their publication of a best management practice guide to work-life balance policies. They discuss a number of factors which they argue have contributed to an increased impetus on work-life balance initiatives being available to employees and their families. These factors include changes in the nature and structure of work in addition to changes in the make-up of the labour market. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of women actively partaking in paid work outside the home. Internal factors refer to those factors internal to an organisation and include all of the issues relating to productivity and the management of this. These include competitiveness, culture and the management of human capital.

Connected with this are individual internal factors which employees bring to the work-life balance dyad. They include the increased intensification of work into the personal lives of employees through, for example, information and communication technology and the influence of the old adage of the long hours work culture (Kanter 1977). Employee expectations play a huge role in these factors but it must be noted that the broad organisational culture plays a significant part in influencing these expectations.

Table 1: Irish legislation relating to work-life balance policy

Maternity Protection Act 1994 and The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004
Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001.
Parental Leave Act 1998 and Parental Leave (Amendment) Act 2006
force majeure Leave
Carer's Leave Act 2001
Adoptive Parents Leave Act 1995 and Adoptive Leave Act 2005
Organisation of Working Time Act 1997

The literature on work-life balanced is vast. It addresses all strata of industries and levels of management and seniority. This chapter has explored some of this data and empirical research but by no means can this be considered a complete review of the work-life balance literature. Table 1 above, however, summarises Irish legislation in relation to work-life balance policies. In particular this chapter is concerned with research pertaining to working women as working mothers, specifically in relation to if and how a perceived balance is attained and maintained across work and home borders. The following section will further this exploration.

THE PROCESS OF FINDING A BALANCE

Halrynjo and Lyng (2009) explore the processes preceding working mothers' withdrawal from the workplace. They highlight the inadequacy of looking at experiences of working

mothers from the dichotomised model of Preference Theory (Hakim 1996; 2000; 2006) versus structural 'constraints ideology' (Walby 1990; Crompton 1997). Halrynjo and Lyng's work (2009) is significant given the impact of dual roles on women. It brings to the fore the significance of being a mother and an employee in women's lives. Research looking at working women and especially mothers has also highlighted the activity of housework per se (Crompton et al 2005). Hirsham (2006) divides her argument between the choices women make when they have their first child or more specifically their second child and the percentage of time spent on housework. While the activity of housework is an important variant in the equation of family life regardless of the presence of children, focus on this variable can be dismissive of the deeper feeling level of working mothers' experience. However, conflict over the completion of household responsibilities can be a catalyst for many emotional processes (Hochschild 1997). While Hirsham (2006: 68) refers to the "blindness to justice in the family" as crossing many political ideologies, agendas and portfolios these ideas omit a level of discussion that touch closer to the concept of coping, in understanding how maternal employment is managed. The totality of Hirsham's (2006) work lies in her postulating that research needs to move from using the language of 'choice' to the language of 'values' and 'morals'. In doing so she challenges men and women, mothers, fathers, and key actors in the various socio political and economic systems pertaining to the quality of work and family life to consider the morals of the work divide in the home and to question the reasoning why mothers take time out from work to raise children (and subsequently do housework).

The phenomenon of coping and managing is described by Hochschild (1997) and Kremen Bolton (2000) as the 'third shift'. The third shift refers to the psychological dialogue women partake in with themselves. They question their motives and choices between their personal lives, home lives and work lives. This work points to a deeper level of negotiation that exists for women and mothers in particular in their overt negotiations through the multiple roles they play out in their lives. It is possible, therefore, that if analyses are carried out at a deeper level it will point to important sources of affirmation, identity formation and meaning making in addition to sources of role stress and conflict and less positive experiences as a whole. Such explorations and findings would contribute significantly to work-life balance debates. The form of these explorations highlights the lives and experiences for women and mothers on all levels of involvement in work-life balance conceptualisations. Questions of coping and management will help ascertain how working mothers cope in times of stress where their mothering roles and employee roles collide and spill over.

BALANCE AND THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS

If one is in search of balance, there is almost an implicit assumption that the reflective process was and continues to be entered into. This observation has been a key factor in the choice of methodological approach to the present study. The literature on work-life balance cited throughout this review does not take on board the ripple effects of decisions in balancing work and life. The choice for full time or part time work, formal or informal childcare has ramifications for family life, family operations and relationships. It still remains, however, that mothers primarily take the responsibility of such decisions and this is supported by Crompton et al (2003) and Crompton (2006).

Ordinarily the option of choosing childcare or not is dependent not only on whether a mother is in employment but also on their ability to access childcare in the formal care setting. Shift work per se does not lend itself to the regular basis of formal childcare. It could possibly be argued that women have a heightened capacity to understand the dynamics of the work-life dyad because of their capacity to care and their capacity to relatedness so often referred to in the literature by Gilligan (1982), Hollway (2006) and Silva and Smart (2004). The research to date has neglected this important aspect of connection and relatedness in women especially in relation to self reflective practices on their own lives. Byrne (2003) points out that in the context of Irish women and mothers the single woman is left on the margins of social science research because of her peripheral location against the family. While not specifically discussing single women in the present study the research piece by Byrne (2003) serves to highlight how woman as 'mother' continues to be reinforced in the Irish psyche. The research studies analysed in this chapter to date, while qualitative in nature have omitted an exploration of self reflective processes in connection with achieving balance or the feeling of balance across work and family life spheres. An exploration of how women view their own representations of themselves would contribute to previous knowledge, particularly, if reflective methodologies are utilised. Delamont (2003) points to the predominance of male sociologists who have theorised for decades on women. Social constructions of women and mothers in particular present mirrors upon which women can view their lives but allow little space for the expression of self reflections. This leaves room for the development of a model of researching women using imaginative methodologies that reduce the impact of the role of the researcher, for example reflecting on one's own presentation of oneself. While this concept can be criticised as illusionary; the researcher

always plays an influential role in the research process, it is my contention that adopting a methodology that returns to participants asking them to reflect on their responses and experiences of the process is a valid reflective model. This is significant given Strangleman and Warren's (2008: 8) contention that "no one method, theory, approach or set of evidence can capture the dynamic of work".

CONCLUSION

Analyses of the literature relating to maternal employment and work-life balance throughout this chapter have brought to the fore the complexities of understanding women and work. This was explored in a number of ways. It began with an exploration of the multidisciplinary research debates on women and work. The concept of work was then explored with emphasis on dominant cultural scripts like that of 'intensive mothering' and ceilings to career advancement like the 'glass ceiling'. Consideration of working schedules taken up within organisations highlighted the impact of organisation culture on work and work-life balance practices therein. Issues of work-life balance were further explored through analysis of the breadwinning concept and concept of work-life balance per se. These debates all pointed to the difficulty within the study of women and work to address the epistemological challenge of studying lived experiences. This challenge is addressed within the present study by adopting a reflective methodological tool within the biographical narrative methodological approach.

CHAPTER 3

“IT’S ALL IN THE TELLING”: A NARRATIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

Having considered the aims and objectives of this study within the previous introduction and literature review chapters, this chapter is concerned with methodological questions relating to the study of working mothers, the ethical considerations pertaining to my research and my research tool. Specifically, the discussion will highlight the significance of social constructionist theory (Gergen 1999) to my approach as a social researcher. From the outset the discussion will highlight the importance of interpretivism as a significant paradigm from which the research is positioned.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND INTERPRETIVISM

The Interpretivist paradigm as an alternative to positivism refers to a belief that meaning is constructed by individuals pertaining to their personal and social worlds. The construction of ‘paradigms’ was postulated by Kuhn (1970) and loosely refers to a group or community, who share an idea on the nature of existence, phenomena and beliefs about the world (Kuhn 1970). The interpretive paradigm therefore moves to understand

the human subject as more than an object of natural science. Within this paradigm there are a number of methodological approaches; phenomenology is one such approach. Ultimately phenomenological interpretivists build theories on the basis of the phenomenological experiences of people in their lives: their lived experience. On the basis of this it is clear that interpretivists would “maintain that rather than making empirical generalisations they are making theoretical inferences, that is, they draw conclusions from their data about the necessary relationships that exist amongst categories of phenomena” (Williams 2000: 218). This approach is rooted in the philosophical ideas of Husserl (1970) and focuses “on individuals’ interpretation of their experiences and the ways in which they express them” (Parahoo 1997: 43).

Reducing the individual and the subsequent systems in which individuals live to measureable units is an incomplete science as it does not account for the subjective lives of people and their life stories. I am, therefore, drawn to Kuhn’s (1970) idea of how science proceeds. He defines a number of stages to describe how scientific knowledge develops within paradigms. These stages include firstly, pre-paradigm research and secondly normal science. Then what follows is a period of questioning or revolution which Kuhn names as stage three: crisis. Stage four, Kuhn defines as revolution, where a paradigm shift has occurred. The key to the essence of shift lies within the body of professional scientists, theorists, philosophers and the like. The real shift occurs once these people have tested the bases of the new. This makes the processes of the pursuit of knowledge very elitist and narrow and less reflective of social movements and inherent changes in reality experienced by individual people and groups. Such stage-like understanding does not take into account the notion of overlap and boundary in locating

where an alternative paradigm emerges. The liquidity of knowledge formation and its emergent properties including co-construction of shared meaning are equally addressed by social constructionist theorist: Gergen (1999). Before discussing social constructionism it is important to highlight that new paradigms, therefore, emerge from within old paradigms, highlighting the embedded nature of social experience. If the construct of paradigm was defined earlier as a community or group who share ideas, then it is imperative to acknowledge that new understandings of social and personal lives emerge, evolve and emanate from within community, groups and society in a co-constructed manner.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AS RELATIVIST ONTOLOGY

Gergen (1985) puts forward an approach within social psychology that moved away from a realist ontology or view of the world. Realism stresses that “the world is made up of structures and objects that have cause and effect relationships with one another” (Willig 2008: 13). Materialism, for example purports to a realist ontology. Burr (1995) in her book “*An Introduction to Social Constructionism*” stresses that this ideology of one version or truth is contrary to social constructionism which adopts a relativist ontology. Gergen (1999: 54) in his *Invitation to Social Constructionism* suggests that “once you enter the halls of social construction, there is no material world in itself, that is, what we call the material world is itself a construction”. With no universal truth, different views, interpretations, perspectives and lived experiences can be considered relative to the next view (Anderson 1997).

Social constructionism, therefore, purports to a relativist ontology and suggests the following tenets:

1. “What we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood.”
2. “The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, productions of historically situated interchanges among people.”
3. “The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., Communication, negotiation, conflict rhetoric).”
4. “Forms of negotiated understanding are of central significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage” (Gergen 1985: 266-268).

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND SOCIAL WORLDS

Social constructionist theory acknowledges shared meanings, interactive subjects, space, boundaries and inter-subjectivities in real life contexts. Constructionist ideas recognise that truth is understood and constructed by subjective individuals rather than belief in the recognition of one single objective truth (Gergen 1989; Gergen 1999). This approach assumes that there is no standard external reality to which we need apply theories of natural science, deduction and objectivity. This construction of meaning takes place in contexts; be they personal, social, historical, socio-historical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. From a constructionist viewpoint, meaning and context are intertwined in

a circular (hermeneutic) relationship of definition and influence. The constructionist approach embodies researchers who seek explanations of the nature of social and lived experience such as Miller (2005) in her study of motherhood, Crossley's (2000) analyses of self and trauma and the work of McLeod (1997). These social experiences exist in a complex social reality.

Suggesting a narrative phenomenological-interpretive approach in the biographical narrative approach in this study brings to the fore the importance of the subjectivity of lived experiences. Smith and Osborn (2004: 233) highlight the need on the part of the qualitative researcher to enter into "as far as is possible the psychological and social world of the respondent". On entering this world the researcher needs to be aware of the phenomena of "inter-subjective lived experience" (Finlay 2003: 106). This is reflected in existential-phenomenological approaches where relationships are intermeshed not just between the psychodynamic and/or the psychosocial world of the research participant but also in the time and space between the participants and the researcher throughout each interview experience. Additionally, the phenomenological world of the researcher is evidence of another layer; both in the richness of data directly produced and indirectly impacting on the qualitative research process. This is of clear relevance to this study particularly because I am a working mother myself. It highlights a multi layering of phenomenological concerns particularly when one is cognisant of the role of the researcher in reflective processes prior to and throughout the research process. This layering process within the research relationship permeates through every step of the research process/journey (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). Therefore, when adopting

qualitative methodologies, in pursuit of an understanding of social psychological phenomena the relational aspect of the research process is dynamic and influential.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) point further to the significance of Gergen's (1985: 266) idea of "communal interchange" as a valid route to the construction of stories of personal lives. With reference to the present narrative study of working mothers, significance is made of the personal lives of the participant mothers from a social constructionist perspective. The importance of language is crucial in this and social constructionist ideas locate conversation as a medium through which stories are relayed about meanings individuals attach to their experiences. Hoffman (1992) relates from a social constructionist viewpoint that knowledge, reality and stories are created in the "space between people". The role of narrative language, therefore, is crucial to the creation of meaning in the lived experiences of people in "communal interchange" (Gergen 1985: 266) throughout their lived social and personal experiences.

COMMUNAL INTERCHANGE AND REAL LIVES

Exploring subjective meanings of real lives is strongly influenced by phenomenology and the phenomenological-humanistic movement in psychology heralded by Maslow (1970) Rogers (1961) and Kelly (1955) to name a few. These theorists placed clear emphasis on the subjectivity/subjectivities of the individual as the starting point for psychological investigations. Phenomenology is concerned therefore with subjective experience and has its roots in Husserl's philosophical phenomenology (Husserl 1970). Phenomenological approaches to research are concerned with finding meaning in human

experiences and focus on the participants' own view of their social and personal worlds. Participants, therefore, are seen as narrator and interpreters of their own experience (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008; Smith and Osborn 2008; Willig 2008). This does not necessarily point to reality as objective truth but one person's story or representation of their experienced reality in their real life world. Research based on phenomenology is concerned primarily with "discovery rather than hypothesis proving or theory testing" (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008: 47). The role of the researcher in terms of the phenomenological approach is one of interpreter of participant experiences. Accounts of these experiences are produced in the narratives and conversations between the participant and the researcher and in data analysis; the researcher takes on an interpretive role. Inherent in the interpretive reflexive process is the hermeneutic cycle where firstly the participants try to make sense of their social and personal world and secondly, the researcher tries to make sense of the participants making sense of their worlds (Finlay 2003; Smith and Osborn 2008). This is referred to as the double hermeneutic or circle.

I feel very privileged to have listened to/with my participants, especially when I read Les Back's (2007) *"The Art of Listening"*. In his prologue Back (2007: 3) states "it is an inspiration to hold the experience of others in your arms while recognizing that what we touch is always moving, unpredictable, irreducible and mysteriously opaque". This brings home to me the fluid nature of our existence, the liquidity of our knowledge of this and our constantly emergent reflections of these in relation to our identities (Gergen 1999; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Bauman 2000). On a reflective note this study of working mothers is a very cathartic exercise for me where in my reality I may have been

seeking affirmation of my own lived experience of the busy-ness of both motherhood and being a working mother.

The previous paragraph brings to the fore the pertinent influence of Back (2007) to my study. This is even more significant to my decision as the researcher, to conduct two interviews with my study participants from the outset of the research. This research design constitutes a core element in my methodological approach to this study in order to investigate the existence of ‘the third shift’ (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) within the narratives of the sample of working mothers in this study.

The study participants are asked to partake in an initial interview relating to their experiences as working mothers engaged in paid employment outside the home. Appendix 5 details the specifics of the interview schedule for the first round interviews with the working mothers. Furthermore, the question of the existence of ‘third shift’ processes adopted by mothers engaged in paid employment outside the home is the catalyst for my decision to return to participants. I return to my participants to explore their experiences of reading their transcripts and reflecting on this experience. Within this framework, the written interview transcript is returned to each participant. Further discussion on page 81 herein details the process of how transcripts were returned to my study participants. In turn, each participant was invited to partake in a second interview where they were provided with the opportunity to reflect on their own biography (their interview transcript). This design explicitly engages the study participants in the process of reflecting on the narratives they explored in their initial interview, six months prior to

our second research interview within this study. This research design clearly facilitates my participants in their roles as both narrators and interpreters of their lives, as discussed previously in this chapter (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008).

NARRATIVE APPROACH

In this study I make use of a narrative approach within the narrative inquiry paradigm to understand the lived experiences of working mothers in Ireland. This narrative approach emphasises stories of personal and social lives (McLeod 1997; Crossley 2000). Kohler Riessman (1993) points to personal narratives as ways to claim a sense of identity and construct one's life. I feel that my methodological approach to this study is a working model of the reflexive turn written about by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* and so often eluded to in the social sciences in the last ten to fifteen years. (Mills 1959; Giddens 1991; Smith 1996; Finlay 2003; Gough 2003). This approach presents an opportunity as a social researcher to ask participants to reflect on two levels. Firstly, in the course of my interviews I explore a number of themes with the mothers about their experiences and secondly, participants are given the opportunity to read and reflect on their own narratives; their own biographies. Additionally I am drawn to qualitative narrative methods because they present a unique opportunity to give something back to the participant mothers in the form of a second meeting and conversation on their reflections of their biographies and indeed the research process itself. This will be documented in Chapter 5 in a discussion of the value of returning to participants with their transcripts. The narrative approach provides an opportunity for the study participants to tell and read their stories. This would not have been possible using purely quantitative measures from a positive epistemology as this would not support the

perceived reality of the possibility of multiple realities supported by the constructionist epistemology.

NARRATIVE AND NARRATIVE REFLECTIONS

The narrative approach particularly is relevant to the study in view of my professional training as a counselling psychologist and in particular how I transpose these skills to my practice as a social researcher; a novice one it must be stated. Specifically, in the field of counselling psychology reference is often made to the skill of reflecting back to the client what the client talks about in sessions (Egan 2007). This is referred to as empathy and entails many skills. As a counselling psychologist the part I play in a counselling session is that of an active empathic listener. My role in a counselling relationship is to facilitate the clients to tell their story and subsequently help clients reframe their story in order that they see how they can live more healthy lives; physically and psychologically. With reference to this study of working mothers, the participants are given an opportunity to read their own transcripts and partake in the reflective process similar, in theory, to the counselling avenue explored above. Study participants can reflect on their own narrative and equally so reflect on reading my responses again to their narrative. This gives me a sense of social responsibility in giving something back to my study participants. This giving may take the form of clarification from the participants' perspective, a greater insight into their own narrative, a discussion of ideas around support for participants in continuing to work outside the home. By taking a narrative approach the study explores how mothers narrate their lived experiences of work and motherhood in contemporary Ireland.

LEVELS OF NARRATIVE RELEVANT TO STUDYING WORKING MOTHERS

Narratives exist on a number of levels and this has relevance for this study. The literature review has pointed to a number of cultural scripts against which women define their personal narratives, for example the good mother script or the intensive mother script (Bowlby 1953; Hays 1996). Narratives, therefore, exist at the level of culture and dominant discourse. So too do narratives emerge within groups as collective stories of various communities (Polkinghorne 1988). More specifically, biographical and personal narratives are individualised stories of social, personal and lived realities (McLeod 1997; Crossley 2000; Miller 2005; Kohler Riessman 2008; Murray 2008). Personal stories and narratives are therefore useful and valid in identifying how mothers feel about their lives, provided the researcher adheres to efforts to carry out ethical research using relevant literature, “thorough data collection, methodological competence, coherence and transparency” (Yardley 2008: 244). In adopting a narrative approach, the study participants will reflect more readily when they are reading their own transcripts. Additionally, a narrative approach facilitates the process of sense making, through story telling (White and Epston 1990) rather than using quantitative survey methods or semi structured interviews. Narrative, according to Miller (2005) can aid in our understanding of social life and practices. Miller states further that our storytelling is guided by various broader cultural scripts, giving rise to interpersonal narratives that are “interactionally constructed” (Miller 2005: 10). Stories are constructed out of the social networks and systems we function and act in. While we take on different roles in our lives as social actors, the personal life or impact of role on the person is often regarded as invalid and unworthy of study in and of itself. Narrative ideas attempt to understand people as storied selves, creating identities through narrative. Personal life stories are, therefore, simultaneously “told in being lived and lived in being told” (Carr 1986: 61). It is clear

therefore, that the constructive power of the stories people use and tell through and about their lives is of huge significance to mental, emotional and social health.

CONSTRUCTIVE POWER OF NARRATIVES

McLeod (1997: 31) defines narrative as “a story-based account of happenings” which “contains within it other forms of communication in addition to stories”. This is important to the study because adopting a narrative approach gives permission to participants to tell me about their experiences as mothers while also telling me stories about what they believe is important, for example, parenting values and practices; philosophies on life; ideas on employment and work practices and the importance of children to their lives, to mention a few. Paradoxically, stories can allow an individual tell, simply to reveal paradoxes and constraints that may still emerge both in their personal life experiences and in wider social contexts. Stories therefore can be in the form of personal narratives or life stories. Stories belong to the participants and the job of the researcher is to represent them. In this study, stories of working mothers’ lived experience are collected using a biographical narrative method and subsequently analysed using narrative thematic analysis (Kohler Riessman 2008). Just as social constructionism challenges the existence of one true reality, a narrative methodology gives permission to participants and researchers to narrate experiences of social, personal and interpersonal selves. In storied form the experiences, practices and nuances of individuals including research participants and researchers alike are exposed, analysed and interpreted as windows to identity and selves. Narratives are in general, shared and co-constructed between people. As a social researcher I use the narratives of

my participants to both analyse the stories, events, experiences and the related themes across the sample and how these are constructed and co constructed.

QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING AS METHODOLOGICAL TOOL

The use of a narrative constructionist approach is best served by using a qualitative in-depth interviewing tool. A structured or semi structured interview would hinder the participants telling their stories given the inclusion of closed questions within very structured interviews. The interviews for this study are based loosely on the BNIM Biographical Narrative Interview Method (Wengraf 2006). This is an approach to narrative interviewing used for both the individual and the collective. The biographical narrative interview is an example of one such in-depth interview and the choice of this tool is clearly linked to consideration of ontological and epistemological debates. This relates to the importance of subjective phenomenology and the real lives of working mothers within the present study. The use of a biographical narrative tool is important given the centrality of stories to all of our lives (Kearney 2002) and also in relation to the decision within this study to return the transcripts to the participants to read.

The Biographical Narrative Interview Method (Wengraf 2006) assumes that conscious and unconscious concerns make up narrative expressions and these occur at cultural, societal and individual levels. This is particularly useful when studying the lived and real lives of subjects and in particular working women who are mothers. The myriad of socio historical influences on motherhood particularly impact considerably on psycho social and psycho dynamic temporalities of lives and subjective experiences. The remit of this

study, that is the time constraints and ethical considerations do not easily allow for the exploration of the deeper unconscious psychodynamic psychic relations that would require perhaps the use of the FANI; the Free Association Narrative Interview (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). This tool is used by researchers who primarily use psychoanalytic perspectives to inform their research questions, data collection and analysis. Hollway and Jefferson (2001: 19) highlight that the unconscious is particularly relevant to the researcher and the reluctant participant or “defended subject” and the use of free associations within the interviewing process are of significance when using the Free Association Narrative Interview. There are important ethical considerations to be taken on board in exploring potentially deeper psycho-social issues and time constraints for this study do not allow for an exploration of deeper psychodynamic processes.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The study sample consists of eleven participant mothers who work outside the home in paid employment, either full time, part-time or on a shift work basis. I met the mothers for our first interviews in Spring/Summer 2009 and again in Autumn 2009 for phase two. The selection process included an intensive period of advertising and social networking on my part to recruit study participants. In accordance with the selection criteria for part time/ shift work and full time work schedules, visits were made to child care centres and crèche facilities in Waterford city. A number of hotels, large supermarkets and doctor surgeries were visited in the city, and a short meeting was facilitated by either the personnel manager or the duty manager at the time or receptionist at the doctor surgeries explaining the research study and the profile of participants sought. Contact mail and email was made with a number of organisations

including An Garda Síochána (The Irish Police Service). However, these contacts were not fruitful in recruiting participants for the study. The snowball technique however, proved to be the most fruitful and on reflection the most success was gleaned through social and professional networks particularly through the school network where one volunteer mother agreed to participate. Regardless of how the participants were recruited significant steps ensured confidentiality including the use of a separate mobile phone for research purposes. The importance of choice for the interview setting was significant as some participants gave up break time and lunch time slots to volunteer their time to be interviewed. Therefore, interview locations varied from participants' place of work, to participants' home to an office in my place of work available for my use. The latter presented an ideal location as the busy working thoroughfare ensured a sense of anonymity for both participants and researcher.

The participant mothers lie between the ages of 30 and 50. All participants have at least one child. The table overleaf outlines a summary of the participating working mothers.

CAREER PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING MOTHERS

It is important to describe briefly the career profiles of the participating mothers. This will act as an important point of reference as I explore themes throughout the interview conversations.

Three of the participants are employed in the primary education sector. They are employed in primary schools working with children up to the ages of twelve. It is of

particular importance to note that all three teachers are in specialist roles within their schools which means they are not at the moment teaching in a full classroom situation on a daily basis. Their areas of expertise lie in special education or as support teachers in their respective educational establishments. They work with smaller groups of children within their schools who need resource or remedial work. This background is crucial to the context of their narratives because they have moved into these areas of expertise after many years of classroom teaching within their schools. It is also a coincidence that these participants share these experiences. It was not a criteria set out in the study and the recruitment processes did not overlap.

The sample also consists of two working mothers employed in an area of third level education. A further two mothers work in administration, one on a full time contract while the other works on a part time basis. The participating mothers who experience shift work arrangements consist of two mothers working full time and two on part time contracts. While it must be pointed out that the study is relatively small, mothers working in full time, part time and on a shift work basis are represented.

Table 2: Summary of Participating Working Mothers

Summary of Participating Working Mothers					
Name	Marital Status	Age	No. Of Children	Children's Ages	Nature Of Work
Alison	Married	40-45	2	13-16	FT Administration
Caroline	Married	45-50	4	7-21	FT in primary education sector
Cathy	Married	45-50	1	9	FT in third level education sector
Deirdre	Married	35-40	2	1-3	FT in primary education sector
Frances	Partner	35-50	3	7-15	PT Administration
Jane	Married	40-45	4	12-21	FT in primary education sector
Kirsten	Married	35-40	2	6-10	PT Horticulture
Martha	Married	40-45	1	4	FT Shift Retail
Mary	Married	35-40	3	2-10	PT Shift Factory
Mary Jo	Married	35-40	1	4	FT in third level education sector
Paula	Married	40-45	4	3-10	FT Shift Hospitality

FIRST ROUND INTERVIEWS, SPRING 2009

First round interviews lasted from 1 hour to 1 hour and 20 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transferred to personal computer using Digital Wave Player software. Interviews were later transcribed, filed and stored in password safe files, hard copies and sound recordings stored on P.C. and on USB devices which were locked in a secure office.

These were methodically transcribed and edited by cross referencing between the transcriptions and the recorded audio files. Approximately four editing hours per participant were utilised at this stage of the process. This was to ensure that the final transcripts were correct, before returning a bound copy to each participant to read. From June to September, participants received their written transcripts supported by a covering letter (Refer to Appendix 6) and presented in a sealed brown envelope. The transcripts were either hand delivered or posted to each participant mother who consented to partake in a second interview for the study. One mother was not approached for second stage interviews as she stated clearly at the end of our first meeting that she did not want to read her transcript as this would be *“too much like looking at herself on dvd”*. I felt it was important to respect this decision given important ethical considerations. It is important to highlight in relation to this participant that she clearly engaged in reflexive processes in choosing not to engage in the second stage meetings.

SECOND ROUND INTERVIEWS, AUTUMN 2009

The second round of interviews began when the participants had a least three weeks to read their transcripts. Scheduled from September to November 2009, these interviews were shorter in duration than first round interviews. Each interview began with one question: *What was it like for you to read your transcript?*

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FIRST ROUND INTERVIEWS

The interview schedule consists of three phases (Refer to Appendix 5). In phase one, early influences of mother figures are explored in relation to work outside the home. The impact of this is explored on a number of levels, namely, impact on play, education and family time and subsequently on career choices and employment.

Phase two of my schedule explores participants' experiences both as mothers and as working mothers. Within this phase I explore what paid work means to my participants by asking questions like*"Could you tell me about what work means to you? Do you identify yourself with the working role?"*

This phase also allows exploration of how employment outside the home impacts on the mother role and vice versaby asking *"How does being a mother impact on your role as an employee outside the home?"*

Phase three consists of an exploration of the impact of dual roles on the participating mothers. Of particular interest are how working mothers organise and manage their lives, what impact dual roles are having on their personal lives and relationships and what supports working mothers draw on. Once these have been explored the following question is explored... *“Where do you identify most; as a mother who works or as a working mother?”* This is perhaps the most significant example throughout the interviews of my own process and transference which heralds consideration of the essence of reflexivity within the research process.

THE INTERPRETIVE REFLEXIVE TURN

Smith (1996) points to the inevitability of reflexivity in the research process and further outlines that the focus of reflexivity may be directed at participant, researcher or both. In the present study I am very aware of my motivations to study this sample of women because I too am a working mother. In spite of this, however, this study can contribute to existing knowledge particularly in relation to the methodological tool adopted herein; giving back interview transcripts to participant mothers and re interviewing them once they have had time to read their stories. In doing so I am cognisant of how Etherington (2007: 601) defines reflexivity. That is to say reflexivity is a “tool which allows us (researchers) to make transparent the values and beliefs we hold in coming to the research process”. According to Finlay and Gough (2003) the importance of increased reflexivity is of central significance to the research process as it points to greater consideration of ethical issues impacting on the research process and more importantly considers the role of the researcher throughout the process. It is important, therefore, to justify the use of the methodological tool in relation to the concept of reflexivity.

CHOICE OF METHODOLOGICAL TOOL AND THE REFLEXIVE PROCESS

The significance of ‘lived experiences’ to the epistemological frame within this study has been described in Chapter one. The following paragraph will explain further the connection between lived experiences (*erlebnis*) and the reflexive process within this piece of social science research.

It is important to highlight from the outset the reflexive processes involved in my choice of interview tool. More specifically they relate to the decision not to use Wengraf’s (2006) biographical narrative interview method (BNIM) in its pure form. Wengraf (2006) talks about the use of one question posed to interviewees to elicit their story. While I recognise the value of one key open question I feel I am not experienced enough as a social researcher to just pose one question. For this doctorate study I perceive that risk as too high. This clearly relates to my lack of confidence in my role as a social researcher but it also stems from my training as a counselling psychologist. While cognisant that the research interview is different in essence to the counselling interview I felt that my training in the counselling psychology profession has equipped me with knowledge of and experience using important skills. Therefore I felt that one question would not suffice to gain an insight into the lived experiences of an individual. It is a starting point. I find it interesting, however, that as I began planning my second interviews I seemed to revert to one pertinent question: “*What was it like for you to read your transcript?*” This is the question I used to open the second round interviews. Given my lack of confidence in using just one question in the first phase of interviews I feel I was able to take this risk in the second round. However, this question does not facilitate the participant in reflecting on all aspects of their told story. I feel that my input and

prompting also plays a significant role in the reflexive processes engaged in throughout the second interviews. In playing my part I feel I reflected back to the participants in a unique way for each mother. This is a clear example of constructionist ideas of the co-construction of reality in our interactions and interpersonal interchanges. It also highlights the role of the researcher in the process of eliciting stories (Kohler Riessman 1993; 2008).

While engaging in the reflexive process I was very much drawn to *The Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) and the following paragraph:

“.... you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work. To say that you ‘have experience’, means for one thing, that your past plays into and affects your present, and that it defines your capacity for future experience. As a social scientist, you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflection, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman” (Mills 1959: 196).

While my personal experience is a strong impetus for my engagement in this particular study both at a conscious and unconscious level, I am drawn to the reflexive turn in particular and in doing so feel that this study has the potential to contribute to the social sciences in the way Mills refers to in the above quote. Mills further states that the

reflexive journal is in a sense a necessity since “the sociologist’s need to systematic reflection demands it” (Mills 1959: 196).

The writing of Mills (1959) provides impetus for instilling imaginative processes into the methodological approach within this study of working mothers. In an effort to address issues of validity within qualitative research it is important to highlight a cautionary note on reflexive practices within research. It is important to point out the potential harm of any reflexive practices undertaken. The reflexive component of any undertaking in qualitative research is potentially harmful to the research process per se. Qualitative research refers to the work of researchers who “construct versions of the world through their activities as social and political subjects” (Henwood 1996: 27). Similarly as a social researcher I am not only engaging in a socio-political relationship through this research study but so also in a personal navigation through the research process in a relational context. Therefore, my motivations are of relevance. In addition to this, I have a powerful role as researcher. Within interview processes including research interviews the research participant and the researcher must negotiate some conscious and unconscious psycho-social dynamics through the interview processes (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). This can be a source of influence, power and in some cases powerlessness and discomfort on the part of the participant. The researcher who adopts a reflexive approach is, it must be stated more aware of such inter relational dynamics. Adopting a reflexive tool within the research increases transparency and reduces the potential for harm to research participants and researchers alike.

DATA ANALYSIS

Pseudonyms were chosen to protect the identity of the study participants and all identifying information relating to place of work, children's names and associated information have been removed from sample transcripts in the Appendices section.

Data for the study are drawn from a small qualitative sample of working mothers in Ireland. 21 in-depth interviews are subject to thematic analysis. 11 of these interviews fall into phase one of the study discussed in an earlier section of the chapter.

One of the ways of looking at analysis lies in the social construction of versions of events and experiences. These are purported not to be real or true per se but are one person's or group's construction of an event or experience. This is based on the ideas of the interpretative phenomenological approach and more specific to the study; social constructionism (Gergen 1985: 1999). Use of the narrative approach in the study re-emphasises the significance of stories in the personal and social lives of people. As highlighted previously in this methods chapter, narrative work embodies a broad term where the essence of the work captures personal experiences of relational interchange (Etherington 2007). By using narrative techniques researchers can challenge objective views of one true reality by presenting and re-presenting the stories of peoples' lives (Kohler-Riessman 1993). Narratives are storied versions of experienced truth and definitions of narratives often differ across disciplines. For many qualitative researchers in the social and behavioural science disciplines subtle differences in the understanding of narratives emerge (Polkinghorne 1988). For example, in the behavioural and social

science disciplines, personal narratives are significantly important and the inherent accounts of life and experience can lie in personal stories, for example the use of narrative in psychology in relation to trauma (Crossley 2000). Participants' stories in the present study are analysed by using theoretical concepts and constructs derived from the research explored in chapter two. The interview schedule guide emerges from the systematic analysis and critique of this literature. The emergent stories from this sample of working mothers are open to analysis as socially constructed, layered and multifaceted in content and meaning and reflective of the lived experiences of the study participants (Polkinghorne 1988). In saying the above, it is evident that data collection and analysis proceed in parallel. One is influential upon the other (Etherington 2004). This is further influenced by my use of a reflexive technique in this work. By returning the interview transcripts to participants in the present study they are engaged in a reflexive process.

THEMATIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis focuses on what is said; on the content of the narratives as they emerge in the research process (Kohler Riessman 1993, 2008). Thematic analysis was chosen in order to develop a theoretical account of lived experiences of the participating working mothers. The mothers reveal their sense of their lives as working mothers through the narratives they relay and the language they use. Kohler Reissman (2008: 730) points to the contribution of thematic narrative analysis as encompassing "what a narrative communicates rather than precisely how a narrative is structured". Choice of thematic analysis over structural analysis is significant for the methodological approach undertaken in the study. By re-presenting (Etherington 2007) participants with their

transcripts they are exposed to the emergent themes in their own stories. Participants read their 'told' stories. The content of the narratives gathered is analysed using a number of concepts including prevailing themes evidenced in the participants' stories, narrative tone and imagery through the stories. As a social researcher I am aware that I "do not have direct access to another's experience" (Kohler Riessman 1993: 8), however, I have access to the telling of these experiences. In the research process, using a narrative approach I work through the levels of representation in the research process outlined by Kohler Riessman (1993). Providing my participants the opportunities to read their told stories in the form of the transcript illustrates "meaning in experiences" and by "expressing this meaning in words, the speaker enables the community to think about experience and not just live it" (Polkinghorne 1988: 30). The written transcripts, however, are merely one re-presentation of my participants. This is significant to the epistemological undertakings of this study; the socially constructed nature of lived experiences and the life world.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR UNDERTAKING THIS STUDY

As a registered counselling psychologist, it is essential that the code of ethics and professional conduct of the body/bodies to which I am affiliated be adhered to, therefore, issues of consent, confidentiality, harm, deception and privacy are appropriately addressed (Psychological Society of Ireland 2003). As a Doctoral student of the University of Leicester it was necessary to access a number of gatekeepers including research supervisors, course board committees, postgraduate committees, and ethics committees in the proposal stages of my research study (Bloor 1997; Prior 1997).

Another reason for the importance of consideration of ethics lies in the need to “sell” the project to the voluntary participants in an open and honest way. Discussion of my study sample in an earlier section highlights the recruitment process adopted within the study.

An important question I asked myself referred to whether the research is sexist in focus. This stemmed from reading Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) work *Doing qualitative research differently* where they speak about the dynamics of interviewing and the effects of a male or female researcher. Subsequent questions followed for example “Is it good ethical practice that a female researcher plans to complete the research?”

Given my positioning from the outset with regard to this study I am cognisant that errors of attribution may seep into the research because the researcher is female and may be perceived as able to identify with maternal employment. It could be argued that ethical and professional questions of influence and deception are inherent here.

Howarth (2002) highlights that little agreement exists on whether researchers need to be members of the groups they study. Within analysis of the target group the question of impact on respondents has come to the fore. It is feasible to recognise the myriad of components and complexities of a personal experience of maternal employment.

While rights of study participants are a clear focus, there is a moral dilemma involving "professional self interest" and morality (Bryman 2001: 486). This is significant to the present study because of the potential to elicit information regarding the care of minors, those under the age of 18 or the elderly that may indicate unsafe or unethical treatment of vulnerable individuals. The nature of this study gleans information on how childcare arrangements are put in place for working mothers. It was essential, therefore that the consent forms used clearly outline the procedures that must be adhered to on the part of the researcher if there are disclosures that may need investigation (Refer to Appendices 1 and 2).

The question of power relations influencing the research process at both a conscious and an unconscious level has been previously highlighted in the section on the reflexive nature of the research process above. It is important to reiterate this and point to the role of the researcher in ensuring that ethical and professional practices are adhered to at every juncture in the research process (Punch 1998). In the context of this study I was guided by my professional membership of The Psychological Society of Ireland. I ensured that I adhered to the Society's code of practice throughout the research process.

As a novice social researcher I assumed that the biographical interview would elicit stories that have significance outside of the interview conversation and exchange. The interview therefore is a snapshot or window into the participants' lived personal and social experiences and their lived reality/realities. Inherent in my assumptions, however, were both an epistemological assumption and an ethical one. I assumed that the participants were open and honest in their interaction with me as the researcher. Just as ontology and epistemologies are versions of the truth, I then have to accept the participants' versions as true and honest. Reflection on the epistemological stance adopted within this study from the outset has in turn helped address the previously mentioned concerns. Adopting a social constructionist approach as I do in this study serves to honour the various representations that participants make of themselves in sharing their stories of their lived experiences. Regardless of whether they are telling the truth per se, they are telling their stories. With regard to consideration of ethical issues it is, therefore, the job of the researcher to re-present these stories through ethical and responsible research practices.

THE ISSUE OF GENERALISABILITY

Robson (2002: 93) defines generalisability as "the extent to which findings of the enquiry are more generally applicable outside the specifics of the situation studied". This concept of generalisability warrants discussion at this juncture for a number of reasons: Firstly, the significance of generalisable research is important within any research paradigm (Bryman 1988; Mason 2004). Secondly, my study sample size of 11 participants is not representative of all working mothers. Thirdly, my role as a working mother and the sole researcher in this study serves two purposes. It acts as a point of

critique against the generalisability of my work but also serves to enhance the role played by the reflective researcher in a piece of qualitative work where participants are asked to engage in a reflective process.

In a discussion of the issue of generalisability in research, Black (1993: 55) comments that “without generalizability of results social science research in general will tend to limp along, not benefiting from the efforts of others, collecting results on a piecemeal basis”. While this is a significant issue that impacts on epistemological questions, Hammersley (1995) highlights the reality of different cultures representing different realities. There is recognition of multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations of these within qualitative research (Pidgeon 1996). Myres (2000: 3) contributes to the debate on generalisability by pointing out that qualitative research “aims to discover meaning and understanding, rather than verify or predict outcomes”. This reiterates McLeod’s (2003: 75) contention that the qualitative researcher can “illuminate and clarify meaning” to “build meaningful local knowledge”.

Generalisability is an important element pertaining to the quality of research. However, it is important for me to reiterate the aim of the current research as being the development of a narrative account of maternal employment from the lived experiences of a purposive sample of mothers living and working in Ireland.

Before analysis of the pertinent themes emerging in this study are explored in Chapter 4 and 5, it is important to discuss how I plan to present these themes. It is essential that I map as Kohler Riessman (2008: 57) terms it “the contours of the interpretive process”. Because I locate this study against the premises of social constructionism it is therefore unhelpful to isolate the narrative entirely from the conversation. Subsequently, my approach to representing the narrative will include snippets of the two way conversation depending on the story-line. Kohler Riessman (2008) contends that many narrative investigators are not explicitly concerned with how a narrative develops in conversation per se. It is clear that in research interviewing, the question asked is as significant as the answer in return

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Small scale qualitative studies like the present research have a number of limitations with regard to scope and depth. However, the cited aims of this work do not claim to generalise findings to the broad population of women and working mothers. Reference made earlier to McLeod (2003) on the aim of qualitative research serves to place the present study in a significant position to understand a small sample of lives as experienced by the present sample of mothers working outside the home. While large quantitative work encompassing survey and questionnaire data contribute to expansive debates on women, mothers and work, this study sought to explore a microcosm of that population to create a picture of lived experiences of working mothers in Ireland in 2009.

Revisiting study participants presents a huge learning incident for me as a researcher. While I set out to ensure that my participants had their transcripts for at least three weeks, I did not foresee the difficulty in making arrangements to re-interview mothers over the summer months in 2009. This can be particularly difficult with children on school holidays and the demands of work and childcare commitments.

However, it is clear that the sample is not representative of some groups of women. These include single working mothers from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups. The sample also excludes married women or women in partnerships from a diversity of social groups. Excluded also are separated or divorced women. In considering these points on generalisability and the above discussion on this issue, there is consolation in Williams' (2000: 215) argument that "outside of the axiomatic laws of nature specified in physics, chemistry and their cognate disciplines, total generalisations are impossible".

In addition to the above, the entrepreneurial woman is clearly excluded from this study, including those who work from home on varied work contracts. This was not an oversight on the part of the researcher but a definite strategy to include those working mothers in paid employment outside the home. The dynamics of 'going out' to work is of particular interest given the history of women being so often associated with the private sphere of home and less with the public arena of work (Crompton 1997). Within this lies the advantage of studying working mothers on full time, part time and shift work employment contracts. These shortcomings are partly explained by the scope and

time frame of the research undertaken but not wholly. Future research will see the expansion of the sample to include any categories omitted from the present research.

Given the qualitative nature of this work and the expanse of data gleaned, future research will include consideration of family size in the study. The number of children and the expanse of ages have proven a very significant finding for some of the participating mothers in this research. This is clearly a significant variable worthy of further study.

CONCLUSION

This methodology chapter has discussed the methodological processes undertaken in this study of working mothers. In doing so the relevance of a narrative constructionist approach is presented as appropriate to the study group. Epistemologically, the interpretivist-phenomenological paradigm provides an ‘ideal’ backdrop to this study. One implication of the interpretivist position is that qualitative researchers do not seek to generate scientific laws and truths but rather to generate rich, “meaningful local knowledge” (McLeod 2003: 75). The development of such bodies of knowledge is very relevant because it pertains to the lived experiences of personal life worlds. This is of immense significance to the study because the nature of qualitative research lies in the depth and richness of data produced, from relatively smaller groups than one would envisage using with a more quantitative study.

CHAPTER 4

“TELL ME A STORY MAMMY”: STORIES OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to develop a narrative account of the lived experiences of working mothers in Ireland. It has been highlighted in Chapter 3 how stories emerge and are constructed out of the social networks, groups and systems in which we function. Analysis of stories and personal narrative trajectories is therefore important to understanding the lived experiences of individuals' personal lives. In this study the lives of working mothers in Ireland are the focus of analysis. I am drawn, therefore, to the responsibility of the researcher in this process and in particular how “experience is created in the social texts written by researchers” (Adkins 2002: 333). This chapter seeks to thematically analyse the narratives of the participants by “building on prior theoretical work” (Kohler Riessman 2008: 55) previously explored in Chapter 2. A number of pertinent themes will be analysed beginning with the experiences of paid work in the lives of the mothers. Discussion will then follow of the significance of intergenerational issues and in particular the significance of own mothers to the lives of working mothers. This will be followed by a discussion of the importance of partners and spouses in the narratives. Analysis of experiences of childcare is pivotal to the lived experiences of working mothers in addition to the exploration of what work means to this sample of women.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PAID WORK AS A MOTHER

All of the study participants convey a strong work ethic as they speak about their experiences of work. References to being more organised with daily tasks highlighted the pull on time and effort experienced by mothers working outside the home. The importance of work and the pull of work are clearly evident throughout Paula's narrative when she explains how daily activities and routines have to be adjusted if work shifts demand it. This reflects the "intensive mothering" ideology (Hays 1996) explored in the literature and the demands on working mothers to meet the commitments of home and work domains (Dillaway and Paré 2008).

"You now have to prepare dinner in the morning, ready for the evening. Or you have to prepare your lunch the night before, to be ready for the morning. And I suppose, my shopping habits are different. I would always go shopping on Saturday morning or a Sunday morning. Now I have to do it on a Wednesday, if I'm off on the Wednesday. My washing habits – I have to wash their clothes now on a Wednesday and be prepared for next week, Wednesday or Thursday, as opposed to leaving everything for the weekend. 'Cause if I'm working at the weekends, I don't get a chance to do it. So that stuff changes but that's more for... that's like... just like managing the household has changed to midweek as opposed to weekends. That's it really".

(Paula, married, working full time shift in hospitality work with four children)

Paula and her husband work together in the same establishment and in terms of the logistical arrangements for both home and work, Paula refers to the need to work together as working parents both on home and work rotas. Research pertaining to 'The Time Bind' (Hochschild 1997) illuminates a scenario where parents engaging in paid

work outside the home need to work together to meet childcare and work demands. La Valle et al (2002) refer to this as ‘shift parenting’.

Additionally the experiences of Mary who works on a part time shift basis in a factory outside the home also speaks to the reality of different routines and in particular different activities to those socially established norms of down time at the weekend and certain family routines, for example the Sunday dinner. In the context of understanding work-life decisions for low waged women in the United Kingdom, Warren et al (2009: 127) point out that “it is mothers, rather than fathers, who bend their jobs to meet family needs”. While Mary endeavors to do this she also highlights how important paid work outside the home is for her;

“I think it’s important for me, it’s important for the children and I think it’s important for my husband, that we all have, you know, the different... I think it’s important for him to have to look after the children to see what’s involved. It’s important for them to be looked after by both and have interaction with both”.

(Mary, married, working part time weekend shifts on factory floor has three children)

In Mary’s first interview in Spring/Summer 2009, she speaks about her experiences of working at the weekend. She also describes her experience of being the sole care giver to her children throughout the week given that her husband works full time in paid employment in addition to managing the farm they live on in his part time hours. Mary’s

husband experiences week time work commitments that reflect the long hours culture referred to in the literature (Blair-Loy 2009) as one that impacts on many professions. The following narrative is led in by my observation and self disclosure of my childhood experiences of the Sunday dinner as an important family event. Mary responds by highlighting that this was also her own experience.

“Yeah, it was in mine as well actually. And if I’m there I do it, if I have a day off. If it’s a Sunday the factory is closed or I’m not working. Some Sundays we go out to dinner as well... we kinda... that can be nice as well. But yeah, I would... I suppose I do that during the week. I do roast chicken or I do like a fresh, as fresh dinner during the week usually so I suppose they’re used... so they don’t mind then on a Sunday if they get a MacDonalds or something you know”.

(Mary, married, working part time weekend shifts on factory floor has three children)

This narrative reflects Mary’s lived experience of her mother being at home and Mary refers in the interview to the role model she had in her own mother. Throughout my first meeting with Mary I was struck by the ease with which she spoke about the central role of mother in her life and how she sees her role as central to her own children. In her own family life now, the significance of the family meal is equally as strong as it was for Mary growing up except that now it is seldom or never on Sundays unless she has a day off work or if the factory is closed for some reason. The days have reversed as Mary herself works her full part time shift through every weekend. In the extract below Mary describes how she makes sense of her own home life as she tries to address the demands

of two ‘spatial locations’ referred to in the literature as ‘home and work’ (Dillaway and Paré 2008: 438).

“I think mothers are generally the ones that have to make all the decisions...There’s very few men, I think, take on decision making or the responsibility related to children. Still, even though things have changed a lot, I still think it’s the mother. But I think most mothers would want it that way anyway. They wouldn’t want, you know... you trust your own... and although you trust them, you trust yourself more, don’t you, with all the decisions about who’s going to look after them and making sure that, now you know they’re to be collected at such-and-such a time. You know, you kind of know yourself. I suppose it’s a mother’s trust as well”.

(Mary, married, working part time weekend shifts on factory floor has three children)

SIGNIFICANCE OF MOTHERS IN THESE MOTHERS LIVES

Analysis of the literature pertaining to women, mothers and work has not had a direct focus on the significance of mothers as role models in the lives of working mothers in particular. The literature does point to the perceived lack of women and mothers in positions of leadership and executive roles in organisations (Probert 1999; Doherty 2004). Within this sample of working mothers the significance of early role models in these mothers’ lives is of interest. It is important to explore this with the participant mothers because it could provide an insight into the motives behind their own career and work choices. According to Hakim (2000; 2002; 2006) women have choices in relation to their career choices but little discussion is made of the origins of these choices. Early psychosocial experiences must have an impact on decisions albeit at an unconscious

level perhaps. The structural influences of economic need in the form of mortgage requirements and car loans plus the increasing desire to provide both pre-school and afterschool activities place a visible impetus on mothers to seek work outside the home. It is important to highlight that over the last two decades in Ireland, the spacial location of family has drastically altered. This takes for granted the fact that family and families in Ireland have changed dramatically in the last twenty years where the traditional family is not the norm and single parent families headed by mothers in particular are becoming the norm in contemporary Irish society (Fahey and Layte 2007). This has been accompanied by an increase in the female workforce and in particular mothers with children (McGinnity et al 2007).

Intergenerational issues, therefore, come to prominence in analysis of the narratives. In particular, the influence of mothers is significant. This highlights the roles experienced by the participants in formative years as children and it brings to the fore the division of labour within households, not only in relation to roles and tasks but also in connection with guidance for future lives. There are two very significant levels for this theme which come to the fore in the interviews with the participant mothers. Firstly, the significance of their mothers in their lives and secondly the significance of them as mothers in the roles they are presently in.

Despite what has been described as the lack of role models for mothers particularly and that described by Gatrell (2008: 125) as “heteronormative” culture that still pervades about the role of women and mothers in society, mothers continue to work outside the

home. Mothers have always worked. In relation to study participants, Deirdre notes in her narrative that her mother always worked. She opens her narrative by saying “*I didn’t know any different*”. Deirdre then reflects on a story she recalls about her experiences and concludes with the following in relation her own working mother:

Deirdre: *Yeah, my own mum did. She was a teacher and she always worked from when I was very small. And eh, she eh, was a deputy principal in a primary school. And she had four children and I was the youngest. And... yeah, so she would have always have worked. Yeah, always.*

Deirdre’s recollection of her childhood memory has significance given the contributions of the work of Bowlby (1953; 1989) regarding an understanding of attachment issues in young children. When asked what this experience was like for her Deirdre tells this story.

Deirdre: *Em, well I suppose my earliest experience – it’s quite funny actually – is of em, our minder would eh, would come to our house to mind us and I was always... I always felt quite envious of my older two sisters ‘cause they would get to go off to school in the mornings with my mum and myself and my brother Donald would have to stay with the minder. And eh, I always thought that the minder didn’t like me. I thought she used to try to drown me in the bath. [Laughs] Now that speaks volumes, doesn’t it? No but she was a very nice lady and eh, she wasn’t trying to drown me, she was trying to wash us... (Deirdre, married, working full time, mother of two young children)*

Later in the interview Deirdre is asked how she feels about being a role model for her own children because in the course of the interview she praises her babysitter for being just that: a good role model for her children.

Jacinta: Yeah. You mentioned there that your babysitter is a great role model to your children, do you feel you're a good role model for your children?

***Deirdre:** Most of the time, yeah. I mean, of course there's times when... I don't think I'm a good role model then. I'm very, very conscious of being a role model for my kids. Because..., I mean, monkey see monkey do. You know, and I don't... I mean I want them to be good, solid, well-rounded, balanced people like you know, we all want for our kids. And I'm really aware that what they'll see is what they'll be, you know... And I do think it's good for them to see me going out to work, you know...*

(Deirdre, married working full time, mother of two young children)

This brings to the fore the significance of intergenerational issues (White 2010) which influence parenting and career choices albeit often at an unconscious level (Hollway 2006)

Four participant mothers did not experience their own mothers working outside the home in paid employment. This is very interesting because this impacted on the participant mothers in very different ways according to their self disclosures. Reactions

ranged from the desire to model their mothers' behaviour with the clear goal of becoming a housewife and setting up home independently. Mary shares her long time aspirations as being similar to her own mother when she states *"I didn't have any aspirations toward a big career but... from the time I was a child, I can remember all I wanted to do was get married and have a family..."*

When this is reflected back to Mary she expands on her narrative to illustrate an example of 'the third shift' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) that occurs in the minds of working mothers in particular. Clearly there exists the pull of the desire to give up work against the feeling of fear of being unfulfilled as a stay at home mother. Mary elaborates as follows:

"I think that's... that's the role model I had. My mother stayed at home, had family, stayed at home and looked after us and that was kind of the primary... now if it ever came that we won the lottery and I didn't need to work. I probably would give up work. I still don't know whether I'd be fulfilled then because, although I often say 'Oh, I wish I didn't have to be going into work?', and the nights are very, very hard, for 12 hours, but still I'm glad I do it because I think it's important for me, it's important for the children and I think it's important for my husband, that we all have, you know, the different... I think it's important for him to have to look after the children to see what's involved. It's important for them to be looked after by both and have interaction with both".

(Mary, married, working on part time shift work at weekends, has three children).

Mary's narrative above is a significant testament to how she has reconciled her desire to marry and have a family and her desire to create her own life while acknowledging the role model she had in her own mother. While Mary speaks about her strong feeling of responsibility to her children, she clearly makes a concerted effort to include her husband in the care and responsibility of their three children.

"Because maybe he [participant's husband] would just leave it to me if I was there. You know, maybe he'd find something else to do. Em, so it's important that he has to be there as well. And I think it's good for me to actually be out and doing some work as well".

(Mary, married, working on part time shift work at weekends, has three children).

The experiences of other participants whose mothers did not work in paid employment outside the home are relayed as fond memories of the smells of home baked bread and welcoming open fires on return from school.

"Em, let me see, now I suppose she was always there. She was at home when we got home from school, and the fire was lit and the dinner was cooking, you know that kind of way. And it was a nice... nice feeling".

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time in administration, has three children)

In parallel with the above, some of the participants reflect on the other side of this experience of the availability of their stay at home mothers. These reflections and recollections refer to a mother who may “*have relied on us as her outlet*”. Cathy is married with one child and works full time outside the home. Her reflection above highlights her experience of her own mother’s reliance on her and her siblings.

Alison also makes reference to her experience of her mother’s and perhaps those of her own mother’s generation who may have lived their lives through their children and husbands. This is an important contextual factor in the exploration of mother figures with the participating mothers which has been influenced by the ideas of Bowlby (1953) and Chodorow (1978). Bowlby (1953) put forward his theory of monotropy in understanding the attachment of babies to their mothers in particular. In parallel, Bowlby’s (1953) term of ‘maternal deprivation’ was often brought into prominent arguments against the idea of mothers seeking work outside the confines of the home. Chodorow (1978) influenced psychoanalytic ideas in particular through her theorising on the socialisation of daughters to care. These influences highlight that our early experiences of how we were mothered has both a conscious and unconscious impact on us throughout our lives. This is very pertinent particularly when Alison, who works full time and has two children, said in the course of her first interview “*the minute I had children I needed my mother*”. In addition to the above, these reflections highlight what Byrne (2003) refers to as ‘woman as mother’. Byrne (2003) asserts that this ideology is particularly strong in Ireland.

FROM MOTHER SUPPORT TO PARTNER/SPOUSE SUPPORT

Alison concludes the previous section with reference to her need for her own mother once she became a mother herself. This is explored by Tracey (2008) in her study of early loss of a mother when issues of attachment and loss become very significant with the transition to motherhood. Aside from the significance of a mother figure in relation to emotional needs, mothers are important for some of the participating mothers for very practical reasons. The role of mother as key support was highlighted by Hyman et al (2005) in their study of call centres and software companies. These experiences are directly related to being able to physically go out to work, to either begin a career or to maintain one and to maintain a work identity. Frances for example speaks about motherhood being an unplanned event at the age of 23, away from home with no family or other supports.

“Em, but I suppose my introduction to motherhood was kind of a surprise as well, you know that kind of way. It wasn’t eh, a planned event”.

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time in administration, has three children)

Frances explains further that her mother and her family as a unit were of immense support to her in her early career where she could go out to work with the knowledge that her child was safe with Frances’ parents. Frances describes this in the following narrative piece.

“... But I found I was very cut off with no family around me. Didn’t really know many people and decided to move back to Ireland, back to [name of home town] And I lived with my parents for a short while until I got on my feet and started part-time work when... then I was very lucky to be able to do that because my mother started to look after my eldest daughter. So I didn’t have to look for childcare outside of the family unit let’s say, you know, so... I was very lucky that way that you know, there was family contact, getting to know her grandparents and that. So there was peace of mind there. I didn’t have to worry about, you know, if she was sick and wasn’t able to go to the playschool, and as she got older, that there was someone there to look after her”.

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time in administration, has three children)

Martha also talks about the essential role her mother continues to play in her life on a practical level...

“... I mean, if my mother couldn’t mind Adrian, I couldn’t work. And that’s just the bones of it. If anything happened to my mother or my sister in the morning, I just couldn’t work because I’d have no... I’d have no childminder”.

(Martha, married, working full time on shift work basis with one child and caring for elder relative)

Martha works in the retail industry on a shift work basis. She has been employed with a large retail outlet for approximately 11 years and works a 37 and a half hour week over various shifts. For the most part Martha’s shifts begin at 7 am which is too early for formal child care arrangements, a phenomenon explored by Robinson et al (2003)

regarding shift work arrangements in the nursing profession in particular. Martha relies heavily on her mother for the care of her son and help with the care of her elderly relative in law. Martha and her husband are representative of families who are involved in both child care and elder care and their ability to work is facilitated and supported by the presence of Martha's own mother. It is important to include the extracts below because it brings to the fore a number of additional issues that impact on Martha's situation. Three issues in particular will be explored below.

Firstly, Martha does not drive a car and is therefore constrained by this in relation to access to childcare and accessibility to her work place. Equally there is no available car at her mother's house where her son is looked after when she is working. While it must be noted that Martha lives and works in a city, there is almost an assumption that all families possess cars and factor in the commuting times travelling to work, childcare and activities as a normal activity in every home (Fine-Davis et al 2004). This is not the case for Martha.

The findings by Robinson et al (2003) on returns after maternity leave for nurses and the intrusive impact of shift work arrangements explored by Root and Whooten (2008) on personal lives are mirrored in Martha's lived experiences of shift work. She goes on to highlight the logistics of how shift work and family care interact in response to the following question: *Which shift suits you better in terms of...?*

“Em... the child? Eh, none of them really. It depends on... it depends the way Larry is working. Because otherwise the child’s... like for instance like, last Friday I was at work ‘til half eight. I was back in at half seven. But Larry was on nights so Adrian had to stay out at Mammy’s. ‘Cause I don’t drive. So I’d have to get him up then at six o’clock and out to Mammy’s and then come back into town ‘cause my mother... they’ve no car at my mother’s house either so em... So then it’s the same thing on Sunday night, he has to go out and stay in Mammy’s. He had to leave at half six because Larry brought him out and he stayed there. So I didn’t see him... like sometimes I don’t see him like, for a good few hours in between. You know, so I didn’t see him until, you know, a quarter to four then on Monday, you know. And that’s what happens.....it’s terrible, it’s terrible”.

(Martha, married, working full time on shift work basis with one child and cares for elderly relative)

The second element of Martha’s narrative that is significant is her reference to her and her husband as older parents in her narrative below. This is a particularly interesting finding in the present study because so often in the literature reference is made to the fact that women choose to become mothers at an older age, particularly those who are in pursuit of a career. The Family Support Agency (FSA) in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in Ireland recently published a report on family dynamics and types over the years 1986 to 2006. In this report Lunn et al (2009) refer to a number of themes including the issue of delayed fertility. Martha points out that because she and her husband are older parents, they consciously try to plan ahead to ensure that their child will have a secure future consisting of the prospect of college life.

“I’d love to be able to work part-time. I’d love to be able to afford to work part-time. Em, but it’s not possible when you have a mortgage and that’s... that’s the killer like. You know. Then we wouldn’t be able to give him the lifestyle he had if we only had one income coming in. So you have to kind of think of that as well. ‘Cause we’re older parents. That’s... that’s why, you know... you work now because we’re getting older and if, like in a few year’s time... well I mean, a good few year’s time, if he wants to go to college or something like that, we’ll be nearing retirement age. You know we’ll be hitting... you know, Larry’ll be nearly late 50’s and I’ll be hitting coming up to 50’s you know as well, so we have to think that. We mightn’t be working so we have to kind of work now and put money away for him until he... You know, so. You have to kind of, think ahead as well. You can’t just think in the moment”.

(Martha, married, working full time on shift work basis, has one child and cares for elderly relative)

The above narrative brings to the fore again the phenomenon of choosing within the constraints against which one is living. Martha’s choice of working in fulltime shift work is clearly set against certain constraints in her life. Warren et al (2009: 127) state that “constraints are part of the context within which people make work and family decisions.”

The third issue impacting on the lived experience of Martha as a working mother relates to her involvement in the care of an elderly relative. Martha, mother of one works in a full time capacity in the retail services industry. When she married, Martha moved into her husband’s family home. This has entailed taking on responsibility for the care of her

father in law. In her first interview Martha explores the reality of this for her daily life in the following narrative:

“...it’s like having two children, you know. That’s the way it is, you know. Because it’s so... it’s very demanding because you have two... Before you had ocean’s of time but now there’s not enough time. ‘Cause you’re in work and out of the house for about ten hours. And you’re coming home and you have to fit in about another eight hours to have everything done, you know...”

(Martha, married, working full time on shift work basis with one child and caring for elder relative)

The authors of *Off the Treadmill: Achieving work/life balance*, (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2003: 112) describe some of the employees in their study under the term of a ‘*sandwich generation*’. In this context, the study participants had both childcare and eldercare responsibilities. This best describes Martha’s home experience. Martha’s case highlights the lack of time not just for herself but also for herself and her husband as a couple. While Martha’s own mother predominantly looks after her grandson, care of Martha’s father in law consists of a type of ‘shift parenting’ (La Valle et al 2002) referred to in the literature review.

It is also particularly pertinent that within this sample of mothers, two became mothers at an older age. However, the experiences of these two women are vastly different from each other. Martha, whose narrative is referred to above, left secondary education and explored various routes to employment. However, access to educational opportunities

was hampered. She describes this below. Martha is the eldest in her family and she is nine and a half years older than her youngest sibling. She recalls that she did not do her Leaving Cert *“because they couldn’t afford to keep me going on ‘cause there were so many younger, you know. So I left”*.

Family size and make up clearly had an impact on the opportunities that were available and open to Martha. In contrast to this, Cathy has two siblings and all were given access to various educational routes resulting in Cathy pursuing very high educational achievements. Cathy speaks with the following narrative when I asked her about her career choices and aspirations as a younger person growing up.

“Well I think there was an understanding that, you know, between my mother and father who wanted their children to go to college, wanted their children to... to do well. And you know, I feel very much, you know... I think finishing my PhD and everything I felt it was for them really, you know. Particularly for my father, I would have thought, but for my mother as well in a different way, yeah”.

(Cathy, married working full time, has one child).

Regardless of age in the transition to motherhood, similar issues arise with regard to the logistics of organising childcare to facilitate going out to paid employment and fulfilling responsibilities both at work and at home (Richardson 1993; Warren 2003; Warren et al 2009). In Frances’ narrative she speaks about her unplanned pregnancy and how she needed the support of her family and especially her own mother as she tried to establish

a work identity. The previous discussion of the role of own mothers in the lives of working mothers needs to be considered in parallel with a discussion of the role of partners and spouses in considering the lived experiences of these working mothers. This is important given the increased numbers of working parents involved in shift parenting arrangements (La Valle et al 2002), a phenomenon explored also by Hochschild (1997) in *'The Time Bind'*. Warren et al (2009) while speaking specifically about low waged women reinforce the need for more supportive policies to aid the choices women and mothers make in pursuit of work-life balance.

PARTNERS AND SPOUSES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WORKING MOTHERS

Spouses and partners feature significantly in the lives of this sample of working mothers.

All mothers are either married or have partners as the summary table 2 located in chapter 3 highlights. Out of the eleven partners or husbands, one of the eleven fathers is a stay at home Dad and another is unable to work due to disability. Four other spouses work from home primarily. The nature of work varies in type from farming to consultancy in various forms. The spouses of the remaining mothers work in paid employment on either full time or shift work contracts. In an interview with Deirdre whose husband works full time she describes their parenting as a *"shared responsibility"*. In her first interview, Deirdre discusses the contribution of both herself and her husband to the functioning of the household. She describes this as *"lovely family time"*. This is very interesting because it presents alternative lived experiences from those cited in the research where dominant themes focus on the breakdown of time and effort spent by men and women at household chores (Crompton et al 2005; Hirsham 2006; Yee Kan and Gershuny 2010: 170). While presenting pertinent longitudinal data on time use on

domestic activities, the research cited above points out that even though men increase their participation within the home domain “after partnership and after having a child”, day to day responsibilities for households still fall to women. While further research is needed into different types of family arrangements and responsibilities in the home, the present study goes some way towards highlighting the lived experiences of some working mothers. This is evident in Deidre’s experience of “*shared responsibility*” with her husband.

Mary Jo describes how she and her husband are part of a “*joint enterprise*”, when she reflects on her overall experience of working motherhood. In her initial interview she refers twice to the fact that she could not be in full time paid work outside the home were it not for her husband’s support and full time care of their young child.

In the previous section, reference is made to participants’ experiences of shared responsibility but it is important to focus on the experience of one mother in particular to highlight this phenomenon. This relates directly to how responsibilities and demands from home and work domains often become intertwined. These issues impact significantly on this participating mother, on her husband and her children. Paula works full time in the hospitality industry where predominantly she has to work varied shifts. Within Paula’s household there are two working parents, both on shift work primarily, where Paula highlights the impact that the economic recession has had on the industry in which she is employed. The services industry in particular has been affected by reduced tourism. This is explored with Paula including how the impact of reduced bookings

within the hospitality service has impacted on her life. Paula's experiences are reflective of the issues explored by Doherty (2004) within the hospitality industry. While Doherty points to the exclusion of the hospitality industry in work-life balance debates this is brought to life in Paula's reference to a recession hit tourist industry and in turn the hospitality sector where she is employed. She responds firstly from the viewpoint that she has had to work more shifts than her normal manager position because a number of employees have been made redundant. The question posed in this section addresses the impact on Paula's life over the last three months.

"Em, it means more organising. You know when you're out the Monday to Friday, -nine to fiver, you can say to your babysminder, I need you for X, Y and Z days, em, and I should be home by half six at the latest. Now I'm saying, well I actually need you from two o'clock in the afternoon until 11 o'clock at night. Em, which is fine. They... you know the... my husband also works shifts...and we try and work... we will spend an hour this week... we'll spend an hour today looking at next week and seeing how best we can manage it. And more often than not we will only have a childminder with our children for 15 hours. And... so therefore we're with them the rest of the time. Do you know that kind of way? Now sometimes, if my husband has to work six days, it will go... we will have a baby minder for maybe 24 hours. But out of a seven day period that's not a long time. It just means you have to change the way you do things".

(Paula, married working full time shift work, has four children)

Paula's narrative illustrates the logistics of addressing childcare and household responsibilities particularly for working families. With both mother and father working shifts, there is a requirement for two cars from the outset given that Paula and her

husband both commute from a rural location to employment in a nearby city. Earlier in this chapter, Paula's narrative was presented highlighting the impact of her shift work on her daily activities at home and on housework tasks in particular. The above narrative highlights further the intrusive nature of shift working in particular. This is further exacerbated for Paula and her family because her husband also works various shifts albeit for the same employer. Partnership within spouse and partner relationships is taken a step further when Paula and her husband need to work in partnership both inside and outside the home.

IDENTIFICATION WITH WORK

An important question in the study lies in ascertaining where the participant working mothers identify themselves most. It is evident from the review of the literature that work provides a sense of identity, meaning and structure in one's life and serves to meet an economic function (Strangleman and Warren 2008; Goodwin 1999) I asked the question;

“Where do you identify most: as a working mother or a mother who works?”

Unreservedly six of the participant mothers identify themselves as mothers first. They see their role as working mothers as a central contributor to *“the family”*. Kirsten works part time is married and has two children. She highlights through her narrative the significance of her own role against the wider picture of working mothers. She explains that... *“things have changed. Between basic things and life, mortgages... A woman has*

to, so called, work. Even no matter what kind of work it is. Or what short hours, it's still contributing to the house".

Deirdre's narrative is representative of a number of responses which reflect the ideas that working mothers seldom reflect on their journeys and border-crossing behaviours (Clark 2000) in terms of work-life balance. Deirdre leads in her narrative with the following:

"Eh, I never really thought about it. Em, a working mum or a mum who works? I don't know. I've never really thought about it. I suppose I always think of myself as a mum first....Em, and then, I suppose, a working mum or... you know, second. Em, you know. And I always actually feel a bit, eh, guilty about calling myself a working mum because any of the... what I call real working mums, you know, who are the accountants or the whatever they are, or working in admin or whatever, you know working from nine 'til five with their 20 day holidays and you kind of feel, gosh that's... that's a real working mum. You know, so... yeah, you know."

(Deirdre, married working full time, mother of two young children)

This narrative illustrates the lived experience of Deirdre in relation to other working mothers. It brings to the fore the reality of differences for women and mothers in terms of their daily lives and their work schedules. This study has illuminated some differences for working mothers on varied work schedules but more importantly it illustrates some very pertinent differences between groups of working women and mothers' desire or

need to work outside the home in parallel with their desire to have a family. This relates to Hakim's (1996; 2000) Preference Theory ideology but also brings to the fore the diversity of such choices or even constraints (Crompton 1997) between groups of women.

The question "where do you identify most?" is explored with all of the study participants. Frances clearly states her identification as a mother first in the narrative section below:

"Oh definitely a mother first. I think the work is... purely pays the bills and it's a source of income, but I don't think it's em... it's not my long-term plan, I don't think, to stay within administration. I don't get the same satisfaction that I used to get out of it...It was a... it was a challenge for so long and I suppose because I've been in my current post for quite a number of years now, I've ... you know, there's no surprises, you know that kind of way. And that's good, from the point of view that there is no stress or anything to really worry about, you know to concern myself with and that means that when I come home I can leave the job behind me and I'm there and I'm available for the kids so... Certainly mother first, you know, employee second".

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time in administration, has three children)

Participant experiences also highlight the pull of work in the lives of working mothers and in particular the pull of responsibilities to work in terms of a strong work ethic. This chapter opened with reference to a strong work ethic and this is explored with Caroline

in her first interview in Spring 2009. Caroline works full time and explores her identification with work in the following narrative piece.

Jacinta: Where do you identify most?

Caroline: *“I have asked myself that question a lot of times over the years and, I did a course years ago – it was a school course – em, and that was one of the questions that came up. And I didn’t really know how to answer it. But the girl beside me, who I had been teaching with for a good few years, answered it up straight away, she said she was a mother first”.*

Jacinta: Right.

Caroline: *“But the guilt... the conscience at the back of my mind says ‘you’re paid to do a job. You have to be...’, you know so, the responsibility end of it, the commitment end of it kept pulling me back, you know. I wanted to be a mother. I wanted to put down mother first, but I couldn’t because I was being paid to do a job. So, I don’t really know. I have still... I still argue that in my head and em, you know when you asked about the interview, I knew this was going to be a question”.*

Jacinta: Right.

Caroline: *“I just knew in my heart and soul that this was going to be a question. And I said, how am I going to answer that? And again, I went back to the experience of the course, you know, can you with, you know eh, a heart and a half say that you’re a mother first and forget about the children in school? And I can’t. So, I mean I would love... I think that’s where there’s a bit of guilt probably. I would love to say I’m a mother first but I would also feel a huge responsibility to my children in school. Huge”.*

Caroline explored further her commitment to paid work and especially the children she works with in an education context. It is interesting that Caroline later refers to the mother as *“primary educator”* and she reasons that because mother and educator *“are so closely linked that they can’t be separated”*. She therefore avoids a clear answer to the question *where do you identify most?* Caroline’s narrative clearly points to the existence of ‘third shift’ thinking particularly as she prepared for her participation in this study.

In response to the question *where do you identify most?* Cathy characterises her natural style as deriving from work. Cathy works full time outside the home and has one child. The following interaction highlights how quickly Cathy responds to the question in the course of the interview. It also highlights how quickly she engages in ‘third shift’ (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) thinking once she answered the question.

Jacinta: Where do you identify most?

Cathy: *You mean my natural style?*

Jacinta: Yes.

Cathy: Work.

Jacinta: Yeah. Mm. And I suppose when you're...

Cathy: That's an awful thing to say, isn't it?

Jacinta: Oh, no. But still I'm thinking about how... if you're talking about how... after the first week in June you're going to pull back and all the things you're going to do, how do you feel...?

Cathy: It's just more time, it's just... it's a question of being so time-starved right now.

Jacinta: Okay. The demand on pulling your time, yeah.

Cathy: Yeah. But like, me time... me time is going to the hairdresser... And having two hours out, you know. That's... that's how... how small my life is at the moment so...

Cathy works full time outside the home. Her husband is very involved in the care of their child particularly in relation to school time collecting and after school arrangements. Cathy invests a considerable amount of time in her work and this is of

particular interest to me. I was particularly interested in how Cathy responded to my question in the previous narrative piece above and on reflection this motivated me to ask exactly what work means to her. The following narrative piece, therefore, opens when I ask Cathy what work means to her. Cathy had been influenced by a book written by an American Evangelist who spoke about approval addiction and this narrative illustrates why Cathy invests so much of herself in her paid work.

Jacinta: What does work mean to you? What's important about work?

Cathy: Approval.

Jacinta: Yeah. Approval from... higher up or self-approval or...?

Cathy: Everything like that... [I]a book which really amazed me, I think. It just blew me apart. It was called Approval Addiction. And she talks about eh, if you have parents who are unhappy in themselves, who've had a kind of abusive childhood, not sexually but, you know, a difficult childhood, they will repeat the cycle very often. And will, particularly if you're a girl, they'll withhold approval from you. So you will grow up looking for approval... And very often at work, you'll be the one carrying the can, em, looking for commendation and approval from your peers and from your superiors. And it's important that you... it's a very woman thing actually as well... Isn't it? But it's that whole notion of, you mustn't approve... you mustn't eh, praise your kids too much in case they get swelled heads. Well my attitude is the more swelled head Lola [Cathy's daughter] has, the better... If I raise her to be a confident woman well then I'll have done my duty.

Jacinta: Yes.

Cathy: But that's the total opposite, isn't it to... you know, so that she won't feel that she has to go to college and do brilliantly. She won't feel she has to be heading up something.

Jacinta: Mm hm. Like her mam.

The observation I make in this context is followed up with Cathy's reflection of her role as mother in the context of how she herself was 'mothered' (Chodorow 1978). She states ...*"In my own way, I'm just as driven as my mother was. My mother who pushed her three daughters to be professionals and now I'm pushing my daughter to... to do whatever makes her happy"*.

The above narrative illustrates a significant cross over in how Cathy talks about her work and her daughter but also how she feels she should be influencing her daughter. Inherent also in this is the powerful influence of Cathy's mother and Cathy's experience of her own mother. This serves to capture the richness of including the significance of intergenerational factors in trying to understand the lived experience of mothers. It serves also to point out how women and mothers think in the 'third shift' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored initial themes emerging from qualitative analyses of interviews with study participants. Themes inherent in this chapter relate to relationships and “communal interchange” (Gergen 1985: 266) between participants’ own mothers, spouses and partners and the working mothers themselves. Embedded also are experiences of role identifications both in work and home domains. Given that identification as a mother exerts a significant pull in the lives of working mothers, it will be important to explore if and how a sense of balance is achieved. The following chapter will explore the themes relevant to attaining and maintaining balance.

CHAPTER 5

‘MOTHERS’ REFLECTIONS OF THE ‘THIRD SHIFT’.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is introduced by referring back to the concept of ‘lived experience’ explored in Chapter 1. In the preceding chapter a number of themes are explored through the narratives of the participating mothers in this study. Subsequently the present discussion will explore the pull of both domains; home and work. This pull is clearly evident in Deirdre saying that since having her children she feels guilty about leaving them and yet also feeling “*out of the loop in terms of my job*” and feeling “*a bit bad feeling passed over*”. This in effect brings to the fore the essence of lived experiences of working motherhood and the paradox of feelings therein. The pull of various feelings that Deirdre alludes to serves to demonstrate the essence of *erlebnis* or the lived experience. In Chapter 1 reference was made to the importance of experiencing the lived experience but also being fully aware of what has just passed and exactly what is to come. This is described by Husserl (1970) in his phenomenology of experience. It best describes the experiences of working mothers as they partake in the ‘third shift’ thinking processes of organising, planning and foreseeing that are engaged with on a daily basis by working mothers. The conflicting experiences Deirdre refers to when she says she loves time with her children but yet she feels left out and passed over in work illustrate

this further. The intensity of these emotions is dealt with on daily basis through the lived experiences of working mothers like Deirdre in my study.

OLDER CHILDREN, TEENAGERS AND ADULT CHILDREN: MOTHER AS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

The summary table of participating working mothers located in Chapter 3 points to two mothers who work full time and have four children spanning in age from seven to twenty one years. Caroline has worked full time and continuously for twenty seven years while availing of four maternity leave periods. This is not the case for other participating mothers who found it necessary to formally or informally move from full time work in search of part time arrangements to facilitate balance between work and home domains. Caroline, therefore, is an example of a working mother who still has a young child in primary education and also adult children who are either in work or in college. Working continuously for twenty seven years aside from the maternity leave scheme provides a very interesting profile for experiences of working and balancing across two domains in Caroline's life to date. In Caroline's narrative she refers to the demands of older children, teenagers and adult children in organising her own life.

While the extract below refers specifically to parenting children of different ages, Caroline speaks about how the needs of children differ.

“Eh, one major difficulty that I found with that now, was that you're at the dinner table and you have a teenager going through all the angst of the teenage

years, maybe with language that you just wouldn't approve of for a three, four, five, six year old, you know. That I found very difficult. And I couldn't impress on the older boy, like, you know... I'd be giving out to this child for saying things like that – 'Please stop. Don't speak like that in front of him'. So that was a major difficulty, I found. That the teenage behaviour, the humours, the em, tantrums, and the younger one seeing this, you know, so".

(Caroline, married working full time, has four children)

Caroline refers to the wide span of children and the needs of each at the various developmental stages. She describes these as huge demands.

"Huge, huge demands. And one was doing the em, Junior Cert. I had the worries of MMR you know, on the other end, so. Yes there is quite a span all right. I just felt that, you know, the first two were close in age and eh, you know, I found it... there was two years between them and I just didn't think I would be able to cope because I wasn't getting the support at the time, and I didn't think I would be able to cope with having the children so closely together, you know. So there was a big gap of five years there and then a gap of six years".

(Caroline, married working full time, has four children)

The focus on Caroline above brings to the fore an important observation. This refers to the dearth of reference made in the literature to women, mothers and work and the care of older children. The work of Wierda-Boer and Rönkä (2004) is one exception. Caroline, who works full time refers to the demands of synchronising paid work with the needs of a number of children who span different ages. Throughout the first meeting

with Caroline, she highlights that she tries to instil in her children a level of independence.

“Maybe I do prioritise school [work] a little bit more from that point of view, than I would in making decisions... I’m inclined to give a little bit more independence to my children and say ‘You pack your bags and you get your stuff ready for swimming’, and em... which, I don’t know whether that suits... that’s suiting my ends or whether I am actually... am I consciously training them to be independent”.

(Caroline, married working full time, has four children)

The above extract is very interesting to analyse for Caroline and also for some of the other working mothers in this study because she points out during the course of the interview that it may not be possible to compare experiences of parenting with their own mothers’ generation. The psychoanalytic literature in particular posits the origins of our parenting abilities as stemming from our own experiences of being parented (Winnicott 1957; Bowlby 1953). It is clear from an analysis of Caroline’s narrative over the course of the research that the paradox of instilling a level of independence in children can often result in not being consulted on teenage and adult matters. Caroline addresses this in her second interview where she responds to a reflection made by the researcher regarding her instilling independence in her children;

“You know, you encourage it, you want your children to be able to stand up without you. You want your children to be able to be individuals in their own

right and not extensions of yourself. Because it's so suffocating if a child has to be an extension of their parent. And I think it stifles them and their talents and their abilities. Em, but I have to say the flip side is – and the flipside of that only comes when they are teenagers and they are making their own way and they won't take your advice and they disagree with, you know, opinions that you might think might be, you know, the best opinion at the time. So you've got that flipside to deal with as well".

(Caroline, married works full time, has four children)

Jane, also working full time with a wide age range of children ranging from 12 years to 21 supports the sentiments expressed by Caroline when she states the following as she reflects on her life six months after her initial interview for the research project:

"... I think as a mother you try and fix your kids. You try and... when they were small if they fell you sorted them out but as they get older, you still want to do that in a different way, and they don't want you to do it". (Jane, married works full time, has four children).

This reflects a situation in Jane's life where one of her children has changed course in the middle of a college year and another is contemplating her future. Jane reflects on the initial interview as a positive experience. She uses the analogy of breastfeeding to describe how she was feeling in her earlier interview.

"... you know the way they say when you're em, breastfeeding you're so... you're in a kind of a, like a woolly kind of a... I always thought it was like cotton wool

and you're sort of em, immune to the world in many ways 'cause you're so... and in fact when I look back and read that transcript, to me it was kind of em, like that cotton woolly kind of a feeling when I read it. And eh, I thought, Oh bloody hell that's not, you know, that's not me now" (Jane, married works full time, has four children).

However, reading and reflecting on her transcript from her first interview is not something Jane enjoyed doing. It could be said that Jane is engaging in Giddens's (1987) idea of the 'double hermeneutic' as she read and reflected on her biography. This may be connected with Jane's narrative about how she copes with attaining balance between her work and home domains. This coping is characterised by her as day to day when she says:

"So, you know, I think we spend a lot... well I've spent a lot of my time I'd say em, just coping with day to day and anything else that infiltrates the sub... that comes from the subconscious into the conscious is pushed back as quickly as it arrived. So something like that when you're given the freedom to talk and it's put on paper, it's not always what you want to read afterwards. 'Cause you can do nothing about it. That's the crux of the matter".

(Jane, married works full time, has four children).

The above extract is a very powerful example of how invasive 'the third shift' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) can be in the daily shift of work and home life. Jane in particular in the last six months since her first interview for the project is

experiencing not only spillover from one domain to another but she is juggling it all in her own mind with the following narrative:

“I’m going all day listening to people’s problems and people’s financial problems and they’re trying to pull me in every direction “Can you get me a tracksuit”, “Can you get me this. Can you get me...” And then you go home and you’re listening to other stuff and sometimes you feel how many more things can I take on and juggle in one 24 hours.[]... So it is, it is a very hard kind of balance, and to try and find time somewhere in all this for yourself”.

(Jane, married works full time, has four children)

FROM FULL TIME WORK TO PART TIME OPTIONS IN SEARCH OF BALANCE

In chapter two some discussions were presented on the dichotomised thinking that surrounds women’s work. Walby (1990) and Crompton (1997) have emphasised the constraints and structures that impede both the presence of women in paid work and the continuation of women who become mothers within paid employment outside the home. On the other extreme of the dichotomy lies the thesis postulated by Hakim (1996; 2000; 2006) who purports that women choose to prioritise the work or home domain giving rise to either ‘committed’ or ‘uncommitted’ workers. This dichotomy is of particular significance to a number of the study participants. In order to explore this, two cases of working mothers from the study sample will be outlined below.

Mary speaks in her first meeting about her different experience of working full time as a mother compared with the part time shift work pattern she has worked for five years.

With reference to her full time experience Mary says as follows:

“I found that very difficult and would have preferred not to but for financial reasons, had to [work]. And when she [Mary’s eldest daughter] was three I had my second child and when I would have been due to go back to work after I had him, I literally would have been paying out everything I earned on childcare. So I didn’t go back. And I took a summer job then em, a clerical summer job, and my daughter started school then and I didn’t have anyone to bring her to or from school so I had to give that up”.

(Mary, married working on part time shift basis, has three children)

Mary reiterates that she now has a good arrangement that works for her family experience.

“So it has been the best arrangement for me because I’m at home all week with the children. I can drop them to school and I just have a lady come into the house on Saturday and my husband is there on a Sunday. So, for me it’s the best arrangement at the moment, you know”.

(Mary, married working on part time shift basis, has three children)

It is evident from Mary’s narrative that the constraints of full time work dealt a double blow particularly with having more than one child. In her situation, Mary’s second child

was in full time child care and her eldest child, while of school-going age had to be facilitated regarding pick up times. The need to pay someone to collect her school-going child and provide after school care counteracted the financial gain Mary achieved by going out to work in the first place. This brings to the fore the phenomenon experienced by working mothers who make choices in their lives within the constraints of how paid work outside the home is structured referring to the long hours culture and ideas of ‘presentism’ (Blair-Loy 2009; Wharton and Blair-Loy 2006). While Hakim (1996; 2000) would describe the choice to be a stay at home mother as ‘uncommitted’ to career, it is clear that in reality Mary had to choose. These situations therefore called for consideration of how balance is attained in maintaining both a home and work life for working mothers in particular.

THE PROCESS OF ATTAINING AND MAINTAINING BALANCE

In her initial interview in Spring 2009 Frances spoke about her experience of moving from a part time working situation into full time work; nine-to-five, in parallel with her daughter beginning her pre-school experiences.

“It was the idea of going back in then full-time really excited me, I suppose, because I was working evenings, you know, for the 20 hours. Em, so I was happy that way as Sarah [Frances’ daughter] needed me during the daytime and I was at home, and then I would just go in in the evenings and my mother was kind of babysitting her then for the evening times. But I suppose in order to progress my career, I had to make the choice to go nine to five. So I kind of tried to pair that off then with her going into the playschool in the... the Irish school”.

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time, has three children)

Frances describes her experiences of paid employment while she was working nine to five with three young children; two in primary level school and a baby aged six months old.

“Worked my nine to five. Came back in the September of the year as well which would be the peak time really for... for [name of organization], eh, September, October, em, and then three kids at home. It was just absolutely manic. I really... like, within a year physically I started to feel, you know, the strain of it, you know”.

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time, has three children)

Frances moved from a situation where she attended classes by night to progress her career in administration and on her return from her last maternity leave began to feel the stress of *“a new job... you know kind of, a supervisory role em”*.

For Frances, she no longer takes night classes and additionally has sought a parental leave day mid week in order to break up the week and the demands on her of the full time supervisory role. She describes the difference the parental leave day made to her daily experience of work.

“And it split the week in half for me so, I’ve two days in work and a day at home to kind of catch up... ... and then two days at home... or two days in work again, and it just started to feel like the weekend was the weekend again, you

know that kind of way that the housework wasn't mounting then 'til the weekend''.

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time, has three children)

Frances' narrative is hugely informative as a case example for this study as she methodically traces the introduction of more flexible work practices within her organisation and how she accessed these practices to give more balance to her working life. This trajectory can be traced in parallel with the journey Frances has made from full time to part time work and to more family friendly working practices that have significantly impacted on Frances' lived experience of working motherhood. This serves to reiterate what Joshi et al (2002: 2) refer to as the "two prong approach" to work-life balance involving both the individual and the organisation. Frances summarises her journey and experience in the following narrative:

"So now I work 9.30 to 1.30, Monday to Friday. So it's 20 hours a week, and I take the Summer then. I take July and August and then I have my annual leave where I can take days if I need them, you know. And em, Halloween break and Easter break and that kind of stuff when the kids are home. So I don't have a childminder anymore. [Laughs] I don't pay any childminding fees. I'm at home in the afternoon, I'm at home to pick up the kids, do the homework and all the rest. I've time to go for a walk with the dog, you know. Things are just far more relaxed, you know. I'm in a much happier place".

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time, has three children)

Frances' narrative highlights a positive experience of a working mother availing of work-life balance policies within a given organisation while giving credence to how mothers "bend their jobs to family needs" (Warren et al 2009: 127). It offers a useful summary of how an employee can successfully avail of work-life balance policies and it reiterates the predominance of working mothers availing of these work-life balance initiatives highlighted in the literature by Lewis (1997) and Robinson et al (2003). This experience is described by Frances in the sample extract in Appendix 7. Inherent in Frances' narrative is an insight into the emotional processes of attaining and maintaining balance in one's personal and social life. These processes are described by Hochschild (1989) and Kremen Bolton (2000) as activities in 'the third shift'.

Many other working mothers rely on the support of family and mothers in particular. Several of the other participants utilise the maternity leave scheme following the birth of their child or children. It was pointed out earlier in this chapter that Caroline has a continuous career except for four maternity leave schemes she opted for. Deirdre, who also works full time speaks about maternity leave as "*a gift*" in her second interview as she is about to take her third leave. Aside from the uptake of maternity leave, Frances' case above was quite unique as she tapped into various options from parental leave, to part time work to term hours over a period of years with the same employer. Uptake of work-life balance initiatives within the services and retail sectors for Paula and Martha working full time on shift work respectively was low which is supported by Doherty (2004) explored in the literature. These formal work-life balance initiatives were not evident as available to Paula or Martha.

FORMAL TO INFORMAL IN SEARCH OF BALANCE, THE PLACE FOR MANAGERS, COLLEAGUES AND CHILDREN:

ROLE OF MANAGERS:

Other working mothers tap into informal procedures within their organisations in order to attain and maintain balance in their lives. The literature points to the fact that while work-life balance initiatives are often in place, take up of these are often at an informal level (Anderson et al 2002). Cathy refers to informal strategies of work schedule adjustments that may be negotiated at line manager level. These relate to the work of Clark (2000) in her Border Theory of work-life balance. However, these are few, according to Cathy. Cathy's narrative highlights the difficulty of line manager positions being held by men and perhaps non parents who do not appreciate the needs of working mothers to at least attempt a balance between work and home domains. These reflections also relate to the findings in Tomlinson's (2004) work on the business case for work-life balance initiatives. Some manager responses in this research supported Hakim's (1996; 2000) idea that women choose to 'commit' or not to careers.

"Because I'm always doing other things, so they presume... whether it's being a mother whether it's being... you know, pursuing a part-time parallel path, you're never really taken as seriously as your male colleagues, I think".

(Cathy, married working full time, has one child)

Invariably Cathy's husband who works from home has the responsibility of collecting their daughter from school but when this arrangement does not work Cathy takes

informal time out of her work day to do the school run. She describes those days in the following way with reference to some comments from other mothers collecting their children from school at the school gate. These comments support a socially accepted model in Ireland of the woman as ‘mother’ which Byrne (2003) believes to be reinforced into the Irish psyche.

“‘Oh so you’re Lola’s mummy? ‘Cause we only see her daddy.’ ‘You’re the one, you know, oh you’re the one with the career’, kind of thing”. (Cathy, married working full time, has one child)

Cathy’s earlier criticism of management is also reiterated in her frustration of meetings being scheduled by management when Cathy is already scheduled with other responsibilities as per her contract of employment.

“The only thing is with a job like this, and you know yourself, when you are working, you can’t take a day off, you know. I’m amazed sometimes that, you know, there’s a doctor’s appointment or a dental appointment and it’s at such a time and you think, I can’t... I can’t make that, because I only finish teaching at a quarter past three and you can’t reschedule teaching at this stage and you don’t and you shouldn’t. Unless it’s an emergency. You know, I don’t reschedule, for example I don’t attend meetings if it means I have to cancel. Like [Managers’ name] continually em, you know, saying cancel tomorrow’s meetings we all have to meet. No, sorry, I won’t”.

(Cathy, married working full time, has one child)

The above highlights Cathy's commitment to work and her commitment to her work schedule. There is also a reference here to doctor or dental appointments which are connected to an earlier piece in Cathy's narrative where she refers to an occasion when she missed her daughter's dental appointments. The context behind the following narrative is that Cathy was pursuing studies on a part time basis over several years which entailed travelling away from the family home for a number of residential weekends. On one particular weekend the residential course clashed with a dental appointment for her daughter.

"I think at one stage she [Cathy's daughter Lola] said to me 'How come you're not around anymore?'. And it was a stage when my husband was able to come and collect her from ...school and em, it was like, at one stage I had to go to.... college, it's once a month residential weekend, so it would mean going into work on a Friday, getting on a train to [name of town] and then she'd see me again on Sunday evening, once a month. And it coincided on two occasions where she had to go into the dentist and she... and she was very angry and it came out after a while and said, you know 'You're never around anymore. You weren't with me at the dentist', because in her heart of hearts she felt her mummy should have been there".

(Cathy, married working full time, has one child)

On further exploration Cathy refers to how dreadful this made her feel but she explores how she reasoned with her daughter about how much more time she would need to study and how she would be available for all of her daughters' future summer holidays. These emotional processes are referred to in the literature as the 'third shift' (Hochschild 1997;

Kremen Bolton 2000). It is important to note that Cathy did not pursue a course of study to compliment her present job or career. What has emerged is a parallel life in a sense where she commits time and effort beyond both her work and family commitments. This parallel life is an example of a channel of coping and support to Cathy as a working mother and described by Kremen Bolton (2000) as a form of 'breakaway time' in a sense. In the second interview with Cathy, discussion of her parallel studies highlights a crossroads for her in terms of career and fulfillment on the one side and the pull of the permanent job on the other hand. Although Cathy reiterates the need for her job security she comes across as slightly helpless when she speaks of the salary cuts and levies that have recently occurred for all public service employees in Ireland and the issues of job satisfaction. These issues are significant to work-life balance debates across the globe (Grady et al 2008). In Cathy's case she is gleaning immense satisfaction from her parallel career and is somehow at a crossroads in her life. This finding would not have emerged without a second meeting with Cathy which facilitated the reflective process (Giddens 1991).

ROLE OF COLLEAGUES:

The exploration of the meeting of family and work domains is explored by Mary Jo, in the context of exploring if her present employer is supportive of her as a working mother. Mary Jo works full time, while her husband is a stay at home dad to their four year old son. Mary Jo talks about the support given to her through the organisation of her work schedule at an informal level. While she is not sure if the support followed a directive, she is more convinced that it was a show of informal support and facilitation of work-family balance in the following narrative.

“When I started here my son was four months old and I didn’t have full hours but I do know that I went down to Tom, that used to do the schedules, and there was a few more hours, and he said “now I’ve been told that really, you know, your hours should all come before 12 o’clock, just to make things easier on you with the little fella”... I don’t think it was a directive or anything, you know”.

(Mary Jo, married working full time, has one child)

As this extract illustrates; a supportive colleague within her working environment informally facilitated Mary Jo’s work schedule adjustment in view of her having a young child. This serves to reiterate the findings that informal work-life balance initiatives are taken up by working parents (Anderson et al 2002; Dex and Scheibl 2002)

ROLE OF CHILDREN:

In relation to her attaining and maintaining a sense of balance, Mary Jo shares that she does not experience a clash of domains, which is further explored in connection with the child care arrangements in place at home given that her husband is a stay at home dad.

“But em, I’ve never had a clash in terms of... you know, nothing has arisen that I’ve kind of had to choose, you know or been put into that position..... I have childcare at home in terms of my husband being at home. But when I go home in the evenings I don’t do any work until Oscar’s in bed”.

(Mary Jo, married working full time, has one child)

Mary Jo tries to give time in the evenings to her son, at the expense of time with her husband which points to the reality of her lived experience of attaining balance between her work and home lives. This also mirrors findings in ‘*The Time Bind*’ study (Hochschild 1997) where finding ‘couple time’ is a constant challenge in families.

“Any work-related stuff, I don’t do any work-related things until... now, you know sometimes it means that poor husband doesn’t get to see me for a couple of hours or even a couple of days at a time if I’ve lots of stuff to do. But I do try and work it, that you know, home and life - particularly with son - are very, very separate”.

(Mary Jo, married working full time, has one child)

When Mary Jo talks about not doing work related tasks at home in the evening time so that she can have time with her son it brings to the fore questions of just what motivates individuals to seek out balance in their lives. This is explored in a very interesting way with Deirdre.

Deirdre works full time and is presently beginning her third maternity leave period. She speaks openly about her need to have her children around her against her other need to encourage a feeling of independence in her young children. Deirdre speaks about feeling guilty when she is away from her children but when this is explored throughout the interview it emerges that Deirdre’s need for time with her children is an active part of actually looking after herself. It is a ‘third shift’ strategy (Kremen Bolton 2000). Deirdre

describes her children as being pivotal in her life in terms of her sense of balance. This is evident from the following narrative:

“Em, I remember thinking, em... you know I used to put all that stress [of working full time] on myself, but simply because my job was my sole focus. I wanted to be really, really good at it. I really did. And I didn’t want to let myself down and I didn’t want to let other people down and consequently as I said, you know, I ended up getting very, very stressed about it. Whereas now... I suppose as well it comes with maturity, doesn’t it? Well I know I’m good at my job.. and I do a good job, and I work at it earnestly. Em, and as well as that, it’s not my sole focus now. My primary focus is my kids and my job is secondary to that. Em, and I ... so I don’t get stressed any more, you know..So I think maybe kids force you, in a strange way, to have a little less focus on your job, more focus on them and they actually naturally give you a balance, you know. ...”

(Deirdre, married working full time, mother of two young children)

The above narrative brings to the fore a key finding of this study in relation to the role of children in the lives of women. Children provide both the reality and the sense or feeling of balance. It is also interesting that Deirdre, like Caroline earlier speaks of the pull of wanting to instil independence in their children with the need within them to be very involved in their children’s lives be they young, teenagers or adults. Whether children are younger or older, of school going age or in jobs, the dynamics of parenting children in parallel with maintaining an identity for working mothers entails constant managing. This process is described in the literature as the ‘third shift’ (Hochschild 1989; Kremen Bolton 2000). Given the diversity of the participant mothers’ lives, the coping mechanisms adopted by them will merely reflect a small sample of working mothers.

They are significant, however, as they are the lived experiences of the participating mothers in this study.

COPING MECHANISMS ADOPTED BY WORKING MOTHERS

Throughout this research eleven women speak about how and when they pencil ‘me’ time into their busy schedules and timetables in an effort to address various needs outlined by Maslow (1970). The literature referred to in this study highlights the importance of work in peoples’ lives (Jahoda 1982; Strangleman and Warren 2008) and the significance of work for women and mothers (Raddon 2002) in maintaining their sense of self and identity. These activities include ideas of list making, priority placing and shopping therapy often advocated by popular writings in the media specifically Hobsbawm (2009). This present research study points to very significant emotional strategies referred to as the ‘third shift’ by Hochschild (1997) that working mothers use to buffer the demands of multiple roles and responsibilities. These strategies include intense involvement with their own children to meet ‘me’ needs. This is not perceived as a strategy utilised by everyone. Mary and Deidre particularly note the joy and comfort they gain from spending time with their children. Mary speaks frankly about the balance she achieves in her life:

“Yeah, well I’m happy with it. I mean it mightn’t be somebody else’s idea of balance, you know. I mean, it doesn’t bother me if I don’t go on nights out from work. I do go on nights out from work as well, but we just have a situation where if Sean is there I go to something. Or if I’m there he’ll go to something. But we

just don't go to much together that's all of it". (Mary, married works part time shift work at the weekend, has three children)

Mary also shares a common reflection within the participants which points clearly to 'third shift' strategies (Kremen Bolton 2000) when she says

"...it is nice to get time to yourself but I find even when I have time to myself I'm still constantly thinking about them [Mary's children]... I don't know, I just, I just feel it's important to be with them. I just... if I had to make a choice between going off doing things for myself and being with them, they'd win every time, you know. There's no, no contest".

When faced with home and work domain crossover difficulties in life, Caroline refers to her use of self talk as a coping mechanism.

"... I suppose I self-talk mostly, you know. Em, 'cause it's very, very easy for the negative thoughts to surface and at times, to take over. So, em, I mean I would have support in friends and I would have support in family, you know, so... and then after that, I mean just literally self-talk, you know 'Don't be silly. C'mon, get on with it', you know. 'Forget about it. You're doing fine. You don't need that person', whatever, you know. So I mean I would have... I would be quite strong from that point of view, that I would be able to deal with it 90% of the time but em, there's always the extra, that 10% there where you know, you just go downhill and you're... you know." (Caroline, married works full time, has four children)

Caroline's narrative above serves to highlight activity of 'the third shift' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) as a coping mechanism for working mothers to navigate their lives across work and home domains.

The most noted finding from the narratives of these working mothers is the lack of couple time that working parents possess. The couple time is most often family time and often put on hold in support of family time. In the previous extract, Mary gives a picture of this which reflects the findings of the works of (Hochschild 1989, 1997) in particular. This narrative piece also reflects the importance of family and children to both Mary and her husband and it mirrors Mary's earlier narratives of the importance of the family as a unit. Time or lack of it with spouses and partners is not included within the remit of the present study. Coping and managing in general for this sample is very much mediated through the presence of children. The role of managers, partners and spouses and work colleagues have a role to play in how working mothers navigate experiences of work, home and work/home cross over. This supports Clark's (2000) Border Theory of work-life balance which emphasises the supportive role of managers and supervisors. Specific contributions from this study to existing research debates on maternal employment lie significantly in returning to participants to glean their reflections of their own stories explored through the research.

THE VALUE OF RETURNING TO PARTICIPANTS WITH THEIR TRANSCRIPTS

The choice of methodological approach in this study presents significant learning in relation to how sociological research is undertaken. The influence in particular of the writings of C. Wright Mills (1959) highlights the importance of the sociological imagination in approaching sociological work. Returning the transcripts to the participants in the present study was an attempt to adopt a more three dimensional

approach to the study. This is particularly evident in how Jane reacted to her reading of her transcript and her subsequent reactions to the content.

“Em, I suppose when I read it em, I was... I thought Oh God, you know, is that really what I said? Is that, you know, what... I... I was kind of astounded by it in some ways... So it wasn't that I read it and thought Oh yes, this is lovely, a perfect piece of interview, or whatever, you know. So I was very critical of it, yeah.” (Jane, married, works full time, has four children)

Jane attended her second interview where she visibly displayed very different body language and strength of voice compared with her initial interview in her reflections of reading her own transcript. Jane's first interview was energetic and lively in Spring 2009 while in Autumn, some six months later, she came across as very tired and listless in relation to her working life and also her home life. This reflects her discussion of her two daughters who are in transition from college and the stress of this worry on Jane.

Most noteworthy of the comments on the transcripts are references to the style of conversation in initial interviews. The study participants commented on their speech patterns particularly and the use of incomplete sentences. Cathy expressed her annoyance at the structure of some of her dialogue with the following statement: *“I was frustrated by the amount of times I said “You know”. That really, really bugs me. And the fact I don't finish sentences.”* However, Cathy continued her reflection of reading her transcript with the following:

“But there’s something very powerful about seeing what you yourself have said in an interview down on the printed page, because it’s a marker. And then you look back and you say well, how much of it is true and how much of it is authentic?” (Cathy, married, working full time, has one child)

Paula referred to her experience of reading her transcript as interesting but strange.

“...I found out that I say an awful lot of em’s and ah’s. Mm, eh, I suppose and you know, and I go back on myself a lot when I’m talking. So I find that really funny like. I don’t finish my sentences. I sounded a little flimsy; a little not sure of myself. But anyway, it’s strange to read this, because all of it is em, things that are related to my work and my life. It’s not just related to my work.” (Paula, married, working full time shift work has four children)

Paula commented on how much she speaks about her children in her conversations.

“I find it funny because I’ve never seen my kids’ names so many times in anything before, you know? And I do seem to refer to them a lot. And an awful lot of my conversation revolves around my children and what they do, what we do for them. Em, and not really what they do for me, d’you know?” (Paula, married, working full time shift work has four children)

In particular the reflective methodology facilitated the participants to see their whole lives. Martha highlighted that reading her transcript allowed her to see exactly how organised she needs to be on a daily basis.

“Until you see it on paper written down you don’t realise how organised you would be, you know with how ... like, I mean like, the child is gone early in the morning and come home in the evening and it does point out that we only have one family day that we sit down and have a meal together”.

(Martha, married, working on shift work basis with one child)

Martha also expressed a sense of relief in the following statement as the second interview began. She clearly stated that *“It did come out that I do enjoy going to work”*. This served to reinforce how important her work life is to her.

The reflective methodological tool used within the study is very pertinent to the concept of *erlebnis* or lived experience (Carr 1986) as it allows the participant to read what has come before and what follows on paper rather than relying on memory per se. This is important to Frances when she highlighted the following:

“It’s funny, I never looked back like that at the whole experience from when I was first a mother all the way through my career up until now ... you know, as a whole, so it’s been interesting from that point of view to see the progress I’ve made, and to remember that I was such a young mother as well, you know, that I had so many different obstacles to overcome. Em, so I suppose I’m very proud of my achievements to date”

(Frances, in a relationship, working part time in administration, has three children).

In this context the use of the concept of lived experience and this methodology together is complimentary as it facilitates a reflective process which is essential to attaining and maintaining a sense of balance between competing roles and domains in our lives.

CONCLUSION

This chapter facilitated an exploration of ‘third shift’ (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) ideas for the eleven participating working mothers. Discussion highlighted how the presence of children plays a role in the search for work-life balance for working mothers. Experiences of balance are also facilitated by the supportive role of managers and colleagues at work and the pivotal role of husbands and partners at home. The process of seeking balance through movement from full time to part time work schedules are undertaken by some working mothers as a means of coping with the push and pull of work and home domains in the context of maternal employment.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

“Human lives embody narratives which no fictional narrative could ever accurately transpose” (Kearney 2002: 28).

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to develop a narrative account of lived experiences of a small scale sample of working mothers in Ireland. Traditionally Irish mothers were expected to adhere to socially constructed roles of stay at home mother carrying all the caring responsibilities within the family. In parallel a good Irish father was expected to work outside the home and provide for the family. This gendered division of labour was structurally upheld within Bunreacht na hÉireann (The Irish Constitution Article 41) which protected a mother’s primary place within the home. However, gendered roles and responsibilities as well as family relationships and types have changed dramatically in recent years in Ireland (Lunn et al 2009). Specifically, during the affluent bubble that was the *Celtic Tiger Years*, women and mothers increasingly moved out of the home and into paid employment. This study has explored the lived experiences of a sample of eleven working mothers in Ireland. This group of working mothers all worked outside the home prior to and during the boom years that hit Ireland through the late 1990’s up to 2006. They continue to work, with growing families and an ever increasing cost of living in Ireland that saw severe cuts in two economic budgets in 2009 followed by

public sector pay cuts (Wall 2009) and cutbacks in child benefit payments (Taylor 2009).

SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

A review of the literature on women and work highlights three interrelated themes: (a) the idea that women make choices with regard to work (b) that mothers who work outside of the home avail of formal work-life balance initiatives, and, (c) that working mothers are faced with the responsibilities of '*the second shift*' (Hochschild 1989) returning to childcare and household responsibilities when they leave their place of paid employment.

CHOICE OR CONSTRAINT

The literature review, chapter two, presented an overview of these competing ideas. On the one hand, Hakim (1996; 2000) and Blair-Joy (2003) argue that mothers make choices with regard to their work preferences; choosing to work at home, outside the home in paid employment or negotiating some balance between these two domains. On the other hand, theorists such as Walby (1990) and Crompton (1997, 2006) argue that women entering paid employment still face structural constraints and gendered inequalities.

WORK LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES

Given the competing devotions (Blair-Loy 2003) faced by mothers who work outside of the home the literature reviewed indicates that it is predominantly working mothers, as opposed to working men and fathers, who avail of the formal work-life balance initiatives on offer (Robinson et al 2003).

'THE SECOND SHIFT'

Furthermore, Hochschild (1989) argues that mothers who work in paid employment outside the home have always faced '*the second shift*' returning to childcare and household responsibilities. The hidden burden of organising, managing and worrying about striking a balance between work and home domains has been referred to as '*the third shift*' (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000). The review of the literature in this thesis has highlighted that it is mothers in paid employment who invariably take on this third shift, worrying about and organising the care of their children (Hochschild 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000).

The focus within this study on exploring the lived experiences of working mothers in Ireland is timely given the rapid social and family changes that saw nearly 300,000 women and mothers enter the Irish labour market in the nine year period between 1998 and 2007 (Russell et al 2009).

SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study used a biographical narrative approach (Kohler Riessman 1993; 2008) where eleven working mothers were interviewed on two occasions. This study explored issues of work-life balance and the coping mechanisms adopted by the working mothers. While cognisant that the themes of dual shifts and super mums (Hays 1996) are significant in the experiences of working mothers, it is important to point out that working mothers are seldom given the opportunities to reflect on their daily experiences. This contributes to an argument for the validity of this study and the relevance of hearing stories of women's lives.

In this study the working mothers were interviewed twice. At the first interview (Spring 2009) the participants were asked about their lived experiences and the reality of when work and motherhood domains meet, collide or spill over to the other. The second interviews (carried out six months later in Autumn 2009) created the space where the working mothers were invited to read and reflect on their narratives of lived experiences as described in the initial interviews.

Through '*the art of listening*' in the words of Les Back (2007) I explored the participants' own stories of their choices and commitments to both home and work domains. Exploring each mother's biography allowed us co-construct their narratives relating to their experiences of their daily routines and daily commitments to work and home demands. This was achieved primarily by asking participants to reflect on their first interview transcript prior to their second interview with me given a 6-7 month interval.

Returning the first interview transcripts to each of the participants prior to their second interview was adopted as a core methodological approach within this study. The use of this reflexive methodological tool was influenced by both ethical and methodological considerations. As the researcher I was ethically committed to creating the space for all the participants to read, review and comment on the manner in which I heard and reported on the narratives of their lived experiences. I also believed that this approach significantly brought to life for me the ideas I absorbed from the work of C. Wright Mills (1959) regarding '*the sociological imagination*' and the use of journaling and

reflecting in research. In parallel, the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2000) influenced my choice of in-depth interviewing as my interview tool.

Central to the exploration of the participants' narrative biographical accounts of their lived experiences as working mothers are the ideas of social constructionism (Gergen 1985, Burr 1995). These ideas highlight how we co-construct our lives in and around the people, spaces and cultures we inhabit. All but one mother readily accepted the opportunity to reflect on their transcript (which resulted in my total number of interviews being twenty one rather than twenty two).

This process of returning interview transcripts facilitated a reflective process within the study which resulted in the generation of narratives from the working mothers highlighting the richness and complexity of their lived experiences of working motherhood. Furthermore, returning the transcripts and hosting a second interview reflecting on these narratives was perceived by me as an opportunity to go beyond previous research findings. This focus in my methodological approach brought to life the practice of the 'reflexive turn' (Bourdieu 1968; Giddens 1991) within the social sciences.

KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS: WORKING MOTHERS ‘LIVED EXPERIENCES’

In keeping with the literature reviewed this study focused on three key themes, within which a number of significant findings arose.

1. Firstly that the working mothers in this study made choices with regard to working outside of the home, but did so *within* certain constraints.
2. Secondly, that, given the ‘competing devotions’ (Blair-Loy 2003) faced by working mothers, many did take up formal work-life balance initiatives, while many more relied on informal work-life balance supports.
3. Thirdly, despite these formal and informal work-life supports, the working mothers in this study still faced the responsibilities and burdens of ‘*the second shift*’ (Hochschild 1989).

Specific findings from this research, within each of these broader themes will be discussed in more detail below.

CHOICES WITHIN CONSTRAINTS

A key finding in this study was how working mothers did make choices to work outside of the home but they made these choices *within* certain constraints. All of the women in this study made a choice to work outside of the home in paid employment. To a large degree, this factor of mothers making choices with regard to home and work domains reflects Hakim’s (2000) *Preference Theory*. However the women in this study ‘*chose*’

paid employment for a variety of reasons and demands; some participants worked for financial gain, others enjoyed their work experiences as a personal outlet and others wanted to be a good role model for their own children by pursuing a work-role identity outside the home.

At the same time, the women in this study were acutely aware of the structural constraints within work places which continuously reinforced a gendered division of opportunity (Walby 1990; Crompton 1997; 2006). Frances, for example, exemplified the worry that mothers carry on returning to work from maternity leave periods after the birth of their children (as explored by Halrynjo and Lyng 2009), while Deirdre shared her experience of feeling “*passed over*” when she returned to work from her maternity leave. Their narratives exemplify the process of negotiation between ‘competing devotions’ (Blair-Loy 2003) experienced by working mothers.

At the same time, a number of the working mothers in this study made clear choices with regard to how much of their lives they would commit to paid work, thus reinforcing Hakim’s (1996, 2000) *Preference Theory*. For example, Kirsten, Mary and Frances chose to work part time outside of the home in order to be available to their children. For these working mothers a sense of balance was experienced through their experiences of managing childcare. In particular, part time work schedules resulted in these working mothers paying out less or nil on childcare costs. These experiences contrast with the need for mothers working full time and shift work schedules to take up not just informal care arrangements with family and extended family but also formal childcare and afterschool care services.

SECOND GENERATION OF WORKING MOTHERS

A most interesting finding to emerge within this small scale study was just how many of the working mothers' own mothers had worked outside of the home. An initial question explored with each of the participants focused on their memories of their own mothers' roles at work within and outside of the home. The first question in the first interviews asked the participants "*Did your mother work outside of the home?*"

Within this study seven of the eleven working mothers had experienced their own mothers engage in employment outside the home. Given the social and media interest in the rapid increase in the number of Irish mothers moving out of the home and into paid work during the *Celtic Tiger Years* coupled with the historical context of the *Marriage Bar* (discussed in chapter two) which was clearly in place to deter women and mothers particularly engaging in employment outside the home, this figure of seven out of eleven seems significant. The impact of intergenerational issues emphasised the role of early experiences of seeing a mother going out to work. Experiences of mothers' work points to positive role models and a sense of empowerment for women whose mothers worked outside the home a generation ago.

Notwithstanding the fact that all of the women in this study chose to work and that more than half of them had some experience of their own mothers leaving home to go to work, the women in this study still struggled to find a work-life balance.

WORKING MOTHERS SEARCH FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A key finding in this study was how each of the participants struggled to find some sort of work-life balance. Invariably the mothers in this study availed of formal supports that

are open to women, particularly those choosing to have children. These include maternity leave and related schemes. In addition, Frances relayed in great detail how her transition from full time to part time work within a growing supportive organisation resulted in her availing of work-life balance policies formally offered within her organisation.

While formal uptake of work-life balance initiatives can be monitored by personnel departments and supervisors, this study discovered how often working mothers appreciate and need the flexible, informal supports within their work places. These informal work life supports can include line manager and colleague support in the form of informal schedule adjustments or colleagues covering for each other.

SIGNIFICANCE OF MATERNAL GRANDMOTHERS

This study brought to the fore the significant role maternal grandmothers play in the lives of their daughters and grandchildren. These related specifically to the experiences of becoming a mother and the care of grand children to supporting a daughter's employment outside the home. Many of the women in this study modelled their sense of self as a caring mother within the home and at the same time a capable working mother outside of the home, on their own mothers.

THE SUPPORT OF A GOOD HUSBAND/PARTNER

A most surprising finding in this study was how appreciative and acknowledging each of the women was of the support of their husband or male partner. Without being prompted in the interviews, each of the eleven working mothers in this study discussed how the

push and pull of work and home domains were mediated by the presence of partners and spouses in particular. Each participant spoke about their experiences of family life as shared with their husbands or partners. The daily cross over between work and home domains was described in the context of partnership and sharing. Again, what seems surprising about this finding is how each of the eleven participants openly reflected on the supportive role of their partners; while no one described their struggles in finding a work-life balance either being caused by or causing arguments with their partners.

It must be reiterated that, however unintentionally, this small scale study of eleven working mothers was in many ways limited. For example, all of the working mothers in this study happened to be married and cohabiting in what turned out to be long (er) term and (seemingly) stable relationships. Thus a key limitation in this study is that the voices of separated or single mothers were not included.

In the context of this study it pointed to a sharing of the demands of the '*second shift*' (Hochschild 1989) for these working mothers. Mary Jo aptly summed up her experience of full time work in her narrative when she said... "*I don't see myself as the provider. I feel like it's a joint enterprise. 'Cause I couldn't do this without him being at home*". It is significant to integrate Mary Jo's narrative into this concluding chapter because she is the sole earner within her family. She experienced this as a joint effort, therefore, reinforcing the pivotal role of partners and spouses to this sample of working mothers. Mary Jo's narrative does present a unique contribution in this study given that her husband was a stay at home Dad while she worked full time in paid work outside the

home. The other mothers in this study were more representative of mothers in general where spouses or partners too are employed outside the home or are often self employed.

However, even where the participants in this study spoke of the formal and informal supports offered by work place organisations and close family, these working mothers still had to face the realities and responsibilities of the second shift.

WORKING MOTHERS AND THE SECOND SHIFT

Despite the support of partners and maternal grandmothers, the participants' narratives of their lived experiences highlighted how the burden of planning, managing and worrying, as they sought a balance between work and home domains, still fell predominantly to women. The struggle for working mothers to balance the often competing demands of paid work and home life has been referred to in the literature as '*the second shift*' (Hochschild 1989); where the burden of house work and childcare still falls predominantly to women to do when they return home from work. The women in this study certainly evidenced their struggle with the second shift.

The data within this study highlights how the structural demands of work organisations means that working mothers must try to find a balance in their lives through the re-organising of family activities to fit with the demands of work schedules. Mary's narrative demonstrated the impact of her part time shift contract on Sunday dinner. Mary's permanent weekend shift work results in the Sunday roast dinner being re-scheduled to Tuesday. Family days, family dinners, wash days and play days were reversed and re-organised as work commitments demand. Similarly the experiences of

Paula and Martha highlight the pervasive tendency of shift work schedules to take over the scheduling of personal lives and family life. The narratives of their lived experiences highlighted how, on a daily basis, they had to negotiate, re-organise and often reschedule wash days and family meals. Their experiences highlighted the impact of paid work in mothers' daily lives. It reinforced the push and pull of two domains in their lives. Work schedules per se clearly played a role in the spillover effects from one domain to another.

A crucial finding in this study came about through the process of allowing the participants to read their initial interview transcripts and then returning to interview the working mothers for a second time. This methodological approach created a conversational space where the working mothers spoke of slowing down just long enough to reflect on the competing devotions and the struggle to search for a work-life balance.

Within the conversational space of the second interviews the working mothers deepened their reflections to include a discussion on feelings of guilt associated with leaving their children to go to work and the constant unspoken demands and pressures of what has been termed within the literature as '*the third shift*' (Kremen Bolton 2000).

WORKING MOTHERS AND THE THIRD SHIFT

In addition to the demands of the second shift discussed above, Hochschild (1997) and Kremen Bolton (2000) suggest the '*third shift*' as the phenomenon of coping and managing between the competing domains of work and home. The third shift refers to

the psychological dialogue women partake in with themselves; where working mothers question their motives and choices between their personal lives, home lives and work lives.

Analysis of the participants' narratives in this study evidences how often these mothers struggle with issues of guilt and involvement in their children's lives. For example, Caroline and Jane represented working mothers who experience the demands of having a number of children of varying ages. These mothers strove to instill a level of independence in their children but at the same time they wished to be consulted on teenage and adult decisions. Evident in this is the pull of full time work with the needs of children of varying ages at home. While the demands of teenage and older children require a skilled set of coping techniques the demands of younger children are significant to many of the participating mothers within this study. In particular the need to be involved with younger children was explored by a number of mothers as a coping mechanism. Participants shared their feelings of guilt when away from their young children and openly shared their need to be around their children doing things with them for their own emotional needs. The latter highlights the process of striking the balance between time spent with children and time spent at work. This process is referred to in the literature as one element in the 'third shift'.

A further element in the 'third shift' refers to how mothers attempt to look after their own needs as they are engaging with their 'competing devotions' (Blair-Loy 2003). This refers to how working mothers look after themselves as they strive to meet the demands of work and home domains. Invariably, this study found that working mothers do not

visibly partake in looking after themselves. They prioritised family time and time with children as more important than seeking out time for self. While all the study participants spoke of immense support in their lives, they invariably still felt '*time starved*'. Cathy who worked full time, evidenced how little time was ever available to her in her personal life. Even attempting to make a hairdressing appointment she felt guilty and refers to the appointment as '*me time*' but she also laments the reality that she can only afford this two hour time slot to go to her hairdresser.

Investment in a particular leisure activity did not feature as important within these findings unless pursuit of this was connected with family time or care of the family pet. Specific times for leisure or relaxation purposes solely for themselves were not perceived as significant in the narratives of the working mothers in this study. This serves to reiterate the tendency of working mothers to take on board the care and scheduling of child care and domestic responsibilities at the expense of specific time devoted to personal leisure pursuits or '*breakaway time*' (Kremen Bolton 2000). All of the participating mothers in this study experienced the pull of one domain or the other at different times throughout their lives, through the working year and through their working days.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of a sample of working mothers in modern Ireland. Eleven working mothers were interviewed twice where they were invited to reflect upon the competing demands of paid work and child care responsibilities. This study was set within the context of a rapidly changing Ireland

where traditionally a mother's role was seen, supported and limited to that of carer within the home. More recently however, through the *Celtic Tiger Years* more than 300,000 women and mothers have entered the paid workforce in Ireland. A review of the literature in this study highlighted the intersecting ideas of women's choice with regard to work and home (Hakim 1996; 2000) against the 'constraints ideology' supported by Walby (1990) and Crompton (1997; 2006). The women in this study all chose to work; many of these women had watched their mothers before them also work outside of the home. All of the women in this study spoke of the supportive role of their own partners in helping them achieve some sort of balance in the '*second shift*'; of managing the competing demands of work and home responsibilities.

Central to this study was the reflexive methodological approach of returning the initial interview transcripts to the participants. The ethic of returning interview transcripts facilitated a reflective process within the study which resulted in the generation of narratives from the working mothers highlighting the richness and complexity of their lived experiences of working motherhood. However, more than this, the central finding in this study was how surprised these women were to become aware of how constant the '*third shift*' was in their lives in trying to find a balance between competing devotions to both work and home. Regardless of their devotion to one domain or the other the working mothers in this study still engaged in 'third shift' thinking.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM 1

A Qualitative Study of lived experiences of working mothers: Consent Form 1

You are asked to participate in a study by Jacinta Byrne-Doran, Doctorate student with The Centre for Labour Market Studies at The University of Leicester.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or information contained in this form, please feel free to contact Jacinta Byrne-Doran at jmb57@leicester.co.uk.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study is to carry out in-depth interviews with mothers who work outside the home in paid employment, to explore issues relating to working mothers' experiences.

PROCEDURES

- If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
- Participate in a one to one interview with me about your experiences as a working mother.
- Be open and honest in answering the questions asked.

- Participate in a follow up interview within two to three months to explore further your stories as working mothers in Ireland.
- Your identity will only be known to me and your name will not be used when writing up my study.
- What you say in the interviews will be confidential. However if there are disclosures of abuse or violence I am obliged in consultation with you to make contact with the HSE to report any concerns in the appropriate manner.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. This means that if at any point you wish to end the interview and/or withdraw from the study you may do so. Also if at any point I feel that you are emotionally unable to participate I may also end the interview and/or your participation in the study. Your welfare will be my main concern.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

This study seeks to explore working mothers' lived experiences of their work/ motherhood and lives from their personal stories.

VOLUNTARY NATURE FOR PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research is voluntary.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

During the interview you will be recorded by voice recorder. This information will then be transcribed and thereafter will be placed in a password-protected file so that it cannot be accessed by anyone other than myself. The recordings of the interview will be kept for the duration of the research and a period of five years thereafter. The information you give will be used only for the purposes of this research unless you agree otherwise.

Your name will be changed in order to protect your identity and I will have only one document, password protected, on computer stating your actual name and the 'new' name so that the only person who can identify you is the researcher (myself). None of these files will be printed into paper format. Should it be necessary to do so for any unforeseen reason the file will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and immediately shredded once it has served its purpose.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. This study has been approved by the ethics committee of the University of Leicester where I am pursuing my doctorate studies.

CONSENT SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for this study “A Qualitative Study of lived experiences of working mothers”. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Name of study Participant (please print)

Signature of study Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness/ Researcher (please print)

Signature of Witness/Researcher

Date

Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research and /or in further publications and presentations on my study? Yes ☐ No ☐

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FROM 2

A Qualitative Study of lived experiences of working mothers: Consent From 2

Thank you once again for volunteering to participate in my study and agreeing to meet for a second interview on your experiences as a working mother.

The purpose of our second meeting is to explore your reflections of reading your story from our initial meeting in June last. I posted a copy of your interview transcript to you and I hope it has been a pleasant experience for you to read it.

I will be following the same procedure as I used in our initial meeting with regard to confidentiality issues and the storing of our recordings which included the following:

Your identity will only be known to me and your name will not be used when writing up my study.

What you say in the interviews will be confidential. However if there are disclosures of abuse or violence I am obliged in consultation with you to make contact with the HSE to report any concerns in the appropriate manner.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. This means that if at any point you wish to end the interview and/or withdraw from the study you may do so. Also if at any point I feel that you are emotionally unable to participate I may also end the interview and/ or your participation in the study. Your welfare will be my main concern.

During our second interview today you will be recorded by voice recorder. This information will then be transcribed and thereafter will be placed in a password-protected file so that it cannot be accessed by anyone other than myself. The recordings of the interview will be kept for the duration of the research and a period of five years thereafter. The information you give will be used only for the purposes of this research unless you agree otherwise.

Your name will be changed in order to protect your identity and I will have only one document, password protected, on computer stating your actual name and the 'new' name so that the only person who can identify you is the researcher (myself). None of these files will be printed into paper format. Should it be necessary to do so for any unforeseen reason the file will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and immediately shredded once it has served its purpose.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or information contained in this form, please feel free to contact Jacinta Byrne-Doran at jmb57@leicester.co.uk or on my mobile at *****.

CONSENT SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for this study “A Qualitative Study of lived experiences of working mothers”. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this second meeting with Jacinta.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Name of study Participant (please print)

Signature of study Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness/ Researcher (please print)

Signature of Witness/Researcher

Date

Do you consent to the information provided by you being retained and used in further research and /or in further publications and presentations on my study? Yes ☐ No ☐

APPENDIX 3: RESEARCH FLYER

Would you like to participate in a study on working mothers?

Are you a working mother in paid employment – do you work full time/part time or on shift work? – I would like to hear your story.

What is my study about?

The study aims to carry out in-depth interviews with mothers who work outside the home in paid employment to explore issues relating to mothers' experiences of work and being a mother in Ireland.

Who will be carrying out the study?

My name is Jacinta Byrne-Doran, a working mother of three. I work in Waterford Institute of Technology and this research is part of my studies with The University of Leicester. My study of working mothers in Ireland is under the supervision of the University and has been approved by the ethics board.

Are you interested in participating and telling me your story...

Contact Jacinta at jmb57@leicester.co.uk or 087 *****

APPENDIX 4: LETTER TO GATEKEEPERS

Dear Sir or Madam

My name is Jacinta Byrne-Doran and I am carrying out a study on working mothers in Ireland with The University of Leicester. I am a working mother of three and I work in Waterford Institute of Technology.

The research study aims to document the lived experiences and stories of mothers who work outside the home in full time, part time and or shift work arrangements. I hope to carry out interviews with mothers to discuss their experiences as mothers, their stories of working outside the home and how mothers balance both work and being a mother. Key questions will relate to experiences of being a mother and experiences of being in the workplace? What work means to mothers and how work impacts on the lives of working mothers? Stories of how mothers achieve balance in working outside the home and being a mother are of particular interest to me in undertaking this study.

I would be very grateful if you would consider displaying an information leaflet asking for participants for my study in your place of employment. I appreciate workload pressures on you but if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Enclosed please find a number of information leaflets.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

Jacinta Byrne-Doran

087 *****

jbdoran@wit.ie

APPENDIX 5: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND TOPIC GUIDE

First Round interview topic schedule guide for Qualitative Study of Working Mothers in Ireland by Jacinta Byrne-Doran:

The topic guide in relation to the literature explored and potential interview questions to guide the participant in a biographical narrative on lived experiences as a working mother.

The first part of the interview will welcome the participant, ask them to read and sign the consent form and address any issues the participant needs to clarify.

Phase one

Biographical look at women (in particular her mother or mother figure) in the participant's early life who were employed outside the home. Literature points to the lack of available roles for working mothers to follow, therefore the significance of such real models is an important area to explore in a biographical narrative.

- Could we start with your early years and tell me if your mother or mother figure / women in your early life worked outside the home?
- Can you tell me the impact this had on you? In your education/play time/time with family/ early relationships?

- How did this experience impact on your experiences in school and did they influence you in terms of your choice of further education, training and /or employment.

Phase two

In this phase of the interview I would like to explore with the participant, her experiences of work and employment outside the home. Is this role experienced as positive; enjoyable and challenging or negative; challenging and stressful. Simultaneously the phase will explore participant's experiences of being a mother.

- Can you tell me about your experiences as a mother? What you enjoy about it? Do you identify yourself easily with motherhood? What are your experiences as a working mother today?
- Could you tell me about what your work means to you? How do you feel about your employee role? Do you identify yourself with the working role?
- How does employment outside the home impact on your role as a mother?
- How does being a mother impact on your work role as an employee outside the home?
- What are your experiences of taking on the roles of mother and employee simultaneously?

Phase three

‘The Third Shift’ (Hochschild 1989, 1997; Kremen Bolton 2000) concept refers to mothers psychologically working out the balance in order to keep up with cultural scripts like “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996). In exploring the lived experiences of the participants it may illuminate how working mothers construct their lives and patterns of negotiation and balance and what supports if any they access and ultimately use in co constructing and maintaining their lives as working mothers.

- How do you negotiate the roles of mother and employee?
- How does it impact on you personally/physically and emotionally? Does it impact on your relationships?
- What supports do you rely on? Where are these to be found and can you access them when you need them?
- How would you sum up your story as a mother who works outside the home in paid employment in Ireland?
- Where do you identify most?

Thank the participant, clarify any issues and close the interview

APPENDIX 6: COVERING LETTER FOR INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Dear [participant's name]

Please find enclosed your interview transcript from our interview together in April last on your experiences as a working mother.

I mentioned to you at the time of our interview that I would love to meet you again once you have read through the interview transcript. I hope that may still be possible.

Your interview tells a wonderful narrative of your experiences and I have enjoyed reading it. I will be re reading it many times over to analyse it and theme the ideas. I have transcribed it as accurately as possible but there are a couple of inaudible pieces. These do not take from the content in any way. Because of the confidential nature of the exercise I want to hand deliver your transcript to you.

Thank you once again for participating.

I hope you enjoy reading it and hope we can meet to follow up on your thoughts about it.

I can be contacted via email (researcher email address) or on mobile *****.

Sincerely

Jacinta Byrne-Doran

APPENDIX 7: SAMPLE INTERVIEW 1

Sample of Transcription of First round Interview with Frances (Spring 2009)

(Frances has three children and works part time in administration)

F – Frances (pseudonym)(All children's names have been changed)

JBD – Jacinta Byrne-Doran

F So when I came back to the new job then, from maternity leave, Colette was about six months and again my mother started to take care of Colette. And the two girls then were both in primary school at that stage and she would collect them from school as well in the afternoon. So I was working nine to five. There was no Flexitime or anything like that in ***** when Colette was born but then it kind of came in a year, maybe two years later.

JBD Right.

F But there was no real family-friendly options as such, you know it was... it was your full year and your 23 days leave and that's basically it. Em, although I do know they introduced something like em, Force Majeure Leave you know, if there was an emergency, that you could take a day or two. Em, and I'm trying to think, I came back and that's when stress hit me. A new job... you know kind of, a supervisory role em. There had been a huge changeover within ***** in the administration staff because the

Department of Education had given a lot of new posts and created a new, you know, higher levels of em, administrators within *****. Some people had moved up and moved on to different departments so when I came back the ***** team itself had completely changed and it was new staff from outside of *****. It wasn't people that had moved internally and then the new ***** had come in. So I had to learn that and train new staff. Worked my nine to five. Came back in the September of the year as well which would be the peak time really for... for *****, eh, September, October, em, and then three kids at home. It was just absolutely manic. I really... like, within a year physically I started to feel, you know, the strain of it, you know. Em, and had to... I suppose I didn't go for counselling or anything like that but I certainly started exploring things like reflexology and you know, stress management from that point of view.

JBD Yeah.

F Em, I didn't go to any more night classes. I felt that was kind of putting an extra strain on my time, you know. Em, and really had to start thinking about what was my... what... what is a better option, you know for... for em, the work. So I think we moved down here to ***** then. We're probably talking about three years ago and at that stage then I requested a parental leave day so that I would take a day off per... per week, and that was the Wednesday. And it split the week in half for me so, I've two days in work and a day at home to kind of catch up...

JBD Of course, yeah.

F ... and then two days at home... or two days in work again, and it just started to feel like the weekend was the weekend again, you know that kind of way that the housework wasn't mounting then 'til the weekend.

JBD Line up the washing baskets.

F Yeah, you know. Yeah, yeah, that's it. And just having time with the kids. And once I got a taste of that then I said there has to be something better. And the Flexitime as I said, had come in, so if you did work late you could finish early on a Friday if you needed to. You could work your time around a little bit. And build a few extra hours here and there you know, for emergencies as well. Em, I then...

JBD Did it make a huge impact? Because I can identify with the move from the bigger campus to a smaller. Did that impact in terms of... logistically I suppose?

F Em, well it did... I mean, it took us a year really to settle into, you know, the logistics really of, you know, meetings and trying to get even just the simple thing of post, that kind of stuff.

JBD Right.

F *[inaudible 15.15]* down, you know, from the work point of view. Em, from a family point of view, it was probably easier to get parking in here, you know. I was able to drop the kids to school and you know...

JBD Yes, of course.

F ... be in there for about 9.15, 9.30. And flexi time certainly helped that. Whereas before you had to be in for 9.15 and I was depending on parents and friends or whatever to drop the kids to school, whereas the Flexitime just gave me that extra 15 minutes in the morning that I need to come in from ***** and just to see them off for the day. And it's just a nice feeling to drop them to school and wave them off, you know. Em, what else then...? There I was saying about the Flexitime and then there was an opportunity to move department for a year and I thought it would just be a great break for me and just get a new slice of the... the ***** and what else is going on around the place because, in my first few years I would have moved to a lot of different departments and I went up to the ***** then to cover for another lady who was going on maternity leave. And it was her first child and she was just delighted to be going out and I think she was out for almost a year, between complications before the baby was born and you know, taking extra leave before she left, and then taking extended unpaid leave, you know. So the child was about a year old when em, she came

back to work. So I had a good old stint up there. And it was a different... different environment and I kept up the Wednesday day, you know, having that day off. So just a four day working week. And I was due to come back here then eh, the following September, and I took the Summer, I took June... no I took July and August off. I took eh, the two months. There's em, a new scheme now called Non-term Time where you take two months out of the year, unpaid leave, and that's taken out of your overall salary but you get a weekly payment, which is just reduced over the year, you know, for 52 weeks. So you've money coming in over the Summer but you're at home. So, em, I just thought these are here to be taken, you know, taken advantage of, just make the most of it. You know, the kids will grow up eventually and you'll be back to the nine to five and all the rest, you know, when you're... when you want to be ... *[inaudible – crosstalk 17.18]*

JBD So is that the present ... that the present time you're on?

F Yeah, I'm doing that again now. That was last summer and I've applied for this summer again now, and I've been given that so. I'm really delighted, you know, it just... it completely changes the it feels like I'm back in college almost, you know that kind of way of being here in September, starting the new year, you know. And in September I'm working through to May, June time and then having time with the kids. Em, and I also then applied for em, a job-share for my current post here in the *****. And I was supported with that. Absolutely no problem at all. Em, didn't have to fight any battles, do you see what I mean, beg or steal or anything like

that. Em, I was just lucky that when I was on maternity leave em, another lady was filling in for my post here and when I came back, she was interested in sharing the job. So it was ideal that she stayed on to do the other half. So now I work 9.30 to 1.30, Monday to Friday. So it's 20 hours a week, and I take the Summer then. I take July and August and then I have my annual leave where I can take days if I need them, you know. And em, Halloween break and Easter break and that kind of stuff when the kids are home. So I don't have a childminder anymore. *[Laughs]* I don't pay any childminding fees. I'm at home in the afternoon, I'm at home to pick up the kids, do the homework and all the rest. I've time to go for a walk with the dog, you know. Things are just far more relaxed, you know. I'm in a much happier place. Certainly less money but I feel it's quality, you know, time that's there you know, and 'cause I'm at the... the Grade 6 level, certainly from my hourly rate, let's say, is much better. You know that kind of way of tax and everything like that. So I'm much better off, you know. So I finally found my, you know, happy medium I think, you know, after a lot of exploration and you know, learning what my limits were, you know, from that point of view, and my three kids.

JBD And I suppose, did you only learn what your limits were when you were physically stressed out or...?

F I think so, I think so yeah. Yeah, definitely and also I felt that my wage was absolutely necessary, you know that kind of way. That I had to be working those... those 40 hours or we wouldn't... we wouldn't make it, you know that kind of way. But

I started to look at our finances and see what can we do to extend the mortgage, you know? Where can we save money? And I suppose the job-sharing certainly was the biggest part of it, realising that em, without having to pay child-minding fees, it would be cheaper to... for me to actually just be at home, you know, in the afternoons. I'm so much happier for it, you know. So it's em... it is eh, certainly just a learning process definitely, you know that kind of way and if I had my time over... I suppose at this stage, if I hadn't had a few children up until, you know, the last couple of years, all those options would have been available to me, you know, from the start. But when I had Sarah, you know, now you're talking 12 years ago now, about 12, 13 years ago, then a lot of those kind of schemes weren't in place.

JBD No, no, no.

F So it was a Monday to Friday, nine to five and that was it like, you know or...

JBD Yeah, yeah. Well I suppose, you know, the Flexitime has come in and the Term-time has come in and, in terms of your work environment, what... were you ever asked, you know, what would work for you as a working mother? Or were you ever involved in any...? **End of sample first interview extract.**

APPENDIX 8: SAMPLE INTERVIEW 2

Transcription of Second round Interview with Alison (Autumn 2009)

(Alison, married with three children working full time in administration)

JBD – Jacinta Byrne-Doran

A – Alison (Pseudonym)

JBD Alison, thank you so much for giving me time again...

A Not at all.

JBD ...to explore the... your experiences of working motherhood. I have one question, I suppose, and maybe others will follow. What was your experience of reading your transcript, the stories you told?

A Well my main... my main major experience was what a bad public speaker I am because there are so many mmm's and um's and half sentences. That was my major, but as far as the theme em, oh I don't think it's any surprise to me because I've always seen my central role as a mother.

JBD Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, there were a number of things that struck me em, if you recall when I was exploring role models...

A Mm hm. Mm hm.

JBD ... and eh, what really struck me from your transcript was how you spoke about the third role. How you learned so much from your own mother.

A Mm hm.

JBD You're very tied up with children and that was, for me, that was the most powerful thing that came out from the interview. That you learned so much and, in a sense, because of that, which was a very sort of embodied experience...

A Yeah, yeah.

JBD ... that you want to provide a model for your girls. So...

A Mm hm. Well family, I think, is the most important thing to my family and, you know, I'm just fortunate that I grew up in a family like that. Where you hear so many circumstances of people having, you know, the family doing the most harm to 'em, whereas I would say our family was just so loving. And it was extended, with my aunts as well as my grandmothers, you know. Like I mean, how many people do you know that, like, had Sunday dinners with their grandmothers, like, on a regular basis? Mm hm.

JBD Yeah. And funny you say, you mentioned Sunday dinner, the family meal...

A Mm hm.

JBD ... just seems to be a pivot in what you're saying. That it's such a ritual.

A Mm hm. Mm hm. Oh beyond a doubt. Yeah. In... I do recall, you know, in saying that I try to extend that in my own family now. And it is, it's fairly important. Not only that, just teaching your children em, social skills at the table. *[Laughs]*

JBD Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's... that for me, that was just very significant.

A Yeah. No, I'm very, very fortunate in having the mother that I had. And even my children would say in having, you know, my mother as their grandmother, I mean of course they love their other grandmother but like, she just pales in comparison to my mother because she is the epitome of what a good grandmother should be. So, so attentive, and her grandchildren are her life. And now that she's a widow, like, her grandchildren are her life. I mean, her children still are but it's extended now.

JBD Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's a lovely notion [*inaudible 3.04*] is the extension of family.

A Mm hm. Mm hm. No, she's a very loving person, so I'm just glad to be brought up under that.

JBD Yeah. Yeah. And when you reflect on how you look after yourself in your working life, and I know you're just getting over sickness and illness, that can, you know, that can maybe cloud how you see it....

A Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JBD ... but in reading what you told me six months ago, how do you feel about how you look after yourself and how you balance and how work facilitates you in, as you say, in being a mother – that’s your primary...?

A Well I do think em, you know, even before the interview I was very aware that that was my mother’s shortcoming, that she didn’t take care of herself and I think you always learn from your parents’ mistakes and you say, Oh that’s not what I’m going to do. And where I am a much more selfish person than my mother as well, so I would look after myself. And I’ve always, always maintained that if you’re not happy... oh my brother’s got a new saying now “Happy wife, happy life” [*Laughs*].

End of second interview extract.

APPENDIX 9: THE RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL

Personal and professional reflections of a journey through a research project

Impetus for a reflective journey

This summary reflects in earnest a journey that began several years previous with an application to The University of Leicester for the Doctorate in Social Sciences. The application required a summary of my research interests and this was based around maternal employment. Having revisited the research proposal and attained ethical approval for the proposed study, my journey commenced specifically in relation to conducting an independent study of my own design in order to satisfy the requirements for the thesis phase of the Doctorate. While I have recorded sporadically my experiences of the taught aspects of this training I set about recording in more detail the thesis phase of the Doctorate journey. This impetus was supported specifically by my experiences of my first University of Leicester teaching day which was organised by The Centre for Labour Market Studies in November 2008. This day was intellectually stimulating and exactly what I craved. I was introduced to C. Wright Mills' (1959) work in *The Sociological Imagination* at this event and on return home acquired this piece of writing. This book has encouraged me to be reflective of my professional development and it has instilled greater confidence in my approach to the methodology within my study.

The Pilot

This latter phase of my personal and professional log commenced properly for me on the 17th March 2009. It marked the first day of my field work for my own study. Even though it was our national holiday in Ireland; St. Patrick's Day, I had an interview arranged with a working mother for that day for logistical reasons. Both my participant and I were not in work, therefore, it was a time when we were both free. On that morning in the participant's own home her children were either having a lie in from school or were away playing sport with their friends. I had planned on using this interview as my test or pilot in order to ease into my role as interviewer and researcher given both my lack of confidence and also the emphasis in the writings on qualitative research that it was important to test out the interview schedule (Bryman 2001). There was huge learning in this interaction, which resulted in me questioning my style of social interaction and specifically the questions I asked within the interview. Following the interview, I became a little concerned about the timing of the phases of my interview schedule and the questions I had asked. I wanted to move chronologically from early experiences of their own mothers who may have worked, to their own experiences as working mothers. I have included the work with this participant in my study. Following the first interview on St. Patrick's Day, I listened to the recording several times and it became clearer to me that the chronological nature of my questions did work well and facilitated the biographical narrative methodological approach.

Two interviews per day

Following the initial interview and my own reflection I scheduled two interviews for April 2nd 2009 in my enthusiasm. Conducting two research interviews on one day can be both exciting and tiring. While both participants were open and talkative I felt that I lost out on a few opportunities to explore the third phase of my schedule and specifically the exploration of supports and the idea of “the third shift” put forward by Hochschild (1997) and referred to by Kremen Bolton (2000) in her book *The Third Shift*. The first interview of the day was conducted in the participant’s place of work which was a little nerve wrecking for me as I was concerned that the digital recorder would not pick up her voice in the relatively open space of the closed restaurant at her place of work. The second interview of the day however was conducted at my place of work. This was strange for me also and I was anxious about preserving my participant’s anonymity in my own place of work. I had to ensure that I had displayed the appropriate signage on the office door so the interview would not be interrupted.

Location, location, location

It is important to note that the locations for my research interviews on reflection caused a degree of stress and anxiety for me. I was willing to meet the participants at a location convenient for them as I was grateful to have the participants. In parallel I was also very conscious of my previous training in counselling and particularly aware of issues of my own safety in term of meeting potential study participants in their homes. I met three participants on both occasions for interview one and two in their own homes. These meetings were always during the working day. I made a decision to inform a colleague when I was conducting interviews. I informed him each time I began and finished an

interview that I had arranged in a participant's home or place of work. Of the twenty one interviews conducted eleven were conducted in my place of work, four in the participants places of work and six in the participants homes (three mothers invited me to conduct both interviews in their own homes).

Interviewing a participant (and a toddler)

I met with Mary in my office for both first and second interviews and my participant had her young son with her. This was challenging for lots of reasons. From the outset it was difficult to keep the toddler occupied and away from various office equipment and books. With three children myself I borrowed crayons and several small toys from my home. It is important to note that I used toys that my own children had grown out of and I anticipated that the young child may decide to hold on to one or two of the items. This was OK with my own children and so I felt I had covered every eventuality with regard to keeping the toddler amused while his Mam and I spoke. Nevertheless the interview was in one sense chaotic but it ironically reflected the very active life of working mothers. My participant and myself worked very hard throughout the given time to conduct the interviews. This chaos resulted in the audio tape being disjointed with various conversations unrelated to the interview questions which occurred when I tried to rescue various pieces of office equipment from the curious toddler. However, the interview was very focussed and slightly shorter than my first interview for example. Four other interviews were conducted with two mothers and their children present. These subsequent interviews were conducted in participants' homes so the children had their own toys and their own space with which to engage.

From first round interviews to second round interviews

On reflection I was more relaxed moving into the second round of interviews than I was approaching the first interview with my participants. This was directly related to the fact that I had the interview transcripts as a reference point. While the transcript was very fresh in my mind I felt that it may have been some time previous to our second meeting since some participants had read their transcript. I was particularly struck by one working mother. Jane spoke about how her life had moved and changed since our initial meeting. She talked about how nice her life seemed from her transcript and how her domestic situation had changed in the intervening time between our meeting in June and our second meeting in November. Throughout the course of the second interview Jane explained that she did not want to come and thought about making contact to cancel. Her demeanour throughout our second meeting was quiet, heavy and lacking in the energy she showed when we first met.

A most significant crisis occurred for me mid way through the field work phase of the study. I experienced a crisis when I realised that I did not have in my sample any single working mothers or working mothers parenting alone, that is, doing the daily work and parenting solo. This realisation brought about what Giddens (1991) termed a fateful moment. This proved to be much more serious when I reengaged reflectively with my original motivation to study working mothers. However, I explored this with my supervisor at the time and I have detailed this in the study limitations in the methodology chapter.

I sought to meet the participants in my study twice thereby giving me twenty two interviews. However, I only conducted twenty one interviews; Mary Jo decided not to meet for a second interview.

This following reflective section, therefore, refers to my sense of role conflict with this. Mary Jo became visibly upset as a theme regarding her early experiences was explored. The recording was stop. I immediately felt the pull of my other professional training, namely counselling psychology. Because the recording was switched off for a couple of minutes, it gave both my participant and I time to compose ourselves. The sequence of the interview appeared as a cathartic stimulus for her. The interview resumed and nearing the end, I explained my intention to give the written transcript back to her to read prior to a second interview. Mary Jo very clearly stated that she would not have another meeting to discuss it. She had clearly engaged herself in a reflective process and made a decision not to read her interview transcript. This may not have been what I expected to happen but given the reflective nature of the methodological approach to the study, Mary Jo's decision was clearly respected.

Sampson et al (2008) discuss a section in their paper on "The cost of reflexive research methods" concerned with role conflict in research relationships. This phenomenon is of particular relevance to the interview I carried out with Mary Jo outlined above. It is not clear if becoming upset had an influence on her decision not to read her interview transcript. From my training in counselling psychology I facilitated the interaction to the best of my professional training. As the researcher on this project, it posed a conflict and

a slight nervousness in terms of my role. There was immense learning in this interaction for me. My perceived conflict clearly lay between my role as a social researcher and as a counselling psychologist in this research interview. This learning experience has also highlighted the place of briefing potential research participants in any research work.

End of the researcher's journal entry.

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