(M)other Love: Cultural Difference and Gendered Practices in Queensland, Australia

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Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

Toni McCallum


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Abstract

This thesis seeks to extend existing understandings of mothering practices, behaviours and beliefs in contemporary Australia; the research provides an account of the meanings a culturally diverse group of women and men drawn from different class backgrounds ascribe to their ‘mothering’ practices. Samoan and Burundian mothers and working-class mothers living in the Brisbane suburb of Logan; privileged, White, middle-class mothers living in Ascot; and stay-at-home fathers, drawn from across the Brisbane region describe, in their own words, their lived experience of mothering. The project employed grounded theory and a broadly ethnographic approach, underpinned by a feminist epistemology. The data was gathered from 32 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the three groups of participants over a period of three years, combined with ethnographic immersion in the research sites over extended periods.

The findings show that in the Logan community, mothering and ‘othermothering’ are prevalent in Samoan, Burundian and working-class families and function as a kind of social citizenship: obligation and duty are the main underpinnings of this mothering work and women define themselves through others in this work. In contrast to the communal mothering at Logan is the much more singularised form of mothering practised by the White, privileged mothers of Ascot who practice an upper-middle class form of ‘intensive mothering’. The Ascot stay-at-home mothers show evidence of a “re-traditionalisation” of their gendered
role as mother and wife within their marriages in terms of taking primary responsibility for raising children and running their households. This is contrary to the “detraditionalization of marriage” in the discourse of “individualization”, the theory of social change in late modernity in Western contexts, that proposes that individual agency rather than traditional ties and family obligations propels individuals to act.

The thesis compares and contrasts patterns of work and attitudes toward work among the women in Logan and Ascot. Work is found to be an extension of, as well as complementary to, their mothering; and, thus, not an antithesis to it. The financial and cultural resources available to the professional, middle-class working mothers in Ascot and the extensive extended family support given to mothers in Logan support this integration of a work and mothering identity. Attitudes toward work and the women’s relationship to work and family responsibilities are examined with particular emphasis given to Hakim’s preference theory (2000) on women’s work and care choices.

The findings from the research into stay-at-home fathers asks whether men ‘mother?’, and the findings demonstrate the ways in which men build gendered constructions of their stay-at-home father identity. Men argued that this identity is undervalued and stigmatised. It is suggested that a new conceptualisation of stay-at-home fathering is required to do justice to this life choice and parenting style.
Overall, it is argued that within the diverse practices of mothering in contemporary Australia the structures of culture, class and gender continue to strongly affect the kinds of mothering women and men engage in, and the attitudes they have toward it. Integration of paid work and mothering in women’s identities and the desire for a new type of fathering identity add to our understanding of contemporary childrearing practices.
Chapter 1: Introduction

He aha te mea nui o te ao

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

(Maori proverb: ‘What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people’)

Introduction

Family formation in contemporary Australia

Increasingly diverse and varied heteronormative family structures exist in contemporary Australia. In 2018 the definition of family includes lesbian mothers, gay fathers, single mothers (straight and lesbian), children born by surrogacy (nationally or transnationally) or IVF, adopted children (both nationally and transnationally), transgender parenting and collective co-mothering within indigenous kinship systems (Moore and Riley, 2010) and ‘othermothering’ (Collins, 2000) of children by extended communities and biological and non-consanguine kin.

In the most recent 2016 Census 6 million families were counted on census night and while the majority of families are still couples with children (45%), there was a rise in the number of couple families without children (38%) and single parent families (16%). However, the most dramatic rise was in the number of identified same-sex couples (more than 47,000 and up from 33,000 in 2011; a 42%
increase, and up from 26,000 in 2006, an 81% increase). One quarter (25%) of female same-sex couples have children; 4.5% of male same-sex couples have children (ABS, 2016a).

This increase in diverse families significantly contributed toward the passing of the marriage equality law in Australia in 2017. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex couples wanted their children to have the same rights, both legislatively and culturally, as those born within a straight marriage.

Within this wide range of contemporary family formations is a diversity of mothering practices, behaviours and beliefs. Mothering work is highly culturally situated and profoundly affected by class and economic background as well as structural factors like poverty and government policy. These differences in mothering practices and attitudes across cultures and classes are investigated in this thesis. Studying men undertaking the stay-at-home father role allows a deeper examination of the gendered nature of this caring work.

**Research Aims and Questions**

This research aims to show the diverse, complex and gendered nature of mothering practice in contemporary urban Australia and highlight the differences between mothering in culturally diverse communities and mothering in White, Western settings. It does this by investigating women’s and men’s lived experiences of mothering in contemporary urban Australia, as told and
experienced by the mothers and fathers themselves. What do the women and men think about being mothers and what do they do in their everyday practices?

The data is drawn from in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The interview as an intimate “communion” (Ezzy, 2010, p. 164) with participants underlies this research and I have attempted to co-construct the mothering narratives of participants, representing their experiences in their own words. I adopted an ethnographic approach to develop a deeper understanding of the environments where the participants live and to build respectful relationships with research participants. As much as possible I wanted to attempt to see their mothering world through their eyes. By visiting the parks, daycare centres, play groups, community meetings, graduations, cultural festivals and the homes where the caring work occurs I hoped to understand at a deeper level the lives of the mothers and fathers who shared private, personal and intimate aspects of their mothering lives with me.

Using a feminist epistemological approach of honouring the participants’ experiences I interrogate how mothers and fathers negotiate and navigate the activities of care work of children, described in their own voices. The research process for this thesis has been a continuous process of reflection and rewriting; reviewing existing literature and analysing data; and each stage has informed the other stages.
In this thesis I examine the singularised ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996) that takes place in a Western privileged context in Ascot, Brisbane and I contrast this to the collective approach to mothering children common in the ethnically diverse Samoan and Burundian communities of Logan where women define themselves through others in their mothering work. The young working-class mothers similarly mother in extended, intergenerational family groups and have complex duties and obligations to these kin.

Among the stay-at-home fathers I ask the specific question ‘do men mother?’ using Ruddick’s (1989) definition of mothering work. I examine to what extent the role of stay-at-home father is a gendered response to mothering. Situating the research within contemporary fatherhood literature I look at the movement toward a new paradigm of paternal care that is more representative of the caring work the men do.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

This introduction chapter is followed by Chapter 2, the Literature Review chapter. Taking a broadly historical approach, this chapter examines the key theorists on motherhood from approximately the mid-twentieth century and second wave feminism to present day. Motherhood is framed as a gendered experience and subject to regulatory practices and ideals. An emphasis in this chapter is theoretical work on the lived experiences of mothers and stay-at-home fathers as this is the most directly relevant to my research. The chapter
examines the effects of class and culture and structural factors like poverty and government policy on mothering practices. Chapter 2 includes discussions of the key theorists’ work on mothering and family responsibilities in late modernity in Western contexts including the theory of social change “individualization” as it relates to family structure and social mobility (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bittman & Pixley, 1997; Hays, 1996). I contrast this to the collective approach to mothering common in culturally diverse cultures discussed in bell hooks, (2014, reprinted), Moore and Riley (2010), Pihama (2011), and Pihama et al, (2002) and Stevenson et al (2016) where indigenous mothering is informed by knowledge passed down through generations.

I discuss the literature on ‘mothering work’ undertaken by men to ask whether men ‘mother’ and how their male caring practices challenge traditional ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1991). I also examine how the stay-at-home fathers in my study build gendered constructions of their caring role.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the methodologies used in this research and the justifications for such choices. The chapter is framed by feminist and ethnographic epistemologies and a grounded theory method. The processes of sampling strategies, data collection and data analysis are also reviewed. A brief discussion of the geographic and social landscape of the areas I interview in is included to give a context to the research. I discuss structural and power issues of a White researcher interviewing Black women and a woman interviewing
men. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations, limitations of the research and the role and reflexivity of the researcher.

**Chapters 4, 5 and 6** report the qualitative findings of the research.

**Chapter 4** is an insight into mothering in Logan among young White working class women and Samoan and Burundian women in Logan. Thematic analysis of the interview data is employed to show the meanings mothers in Logan attached to mothering; how they mother; and whether this mothering occurs in an individual or communal framework. Mothering in Logan addresses the issues of subjectivity and individuated identity, and the complex relationship between the individual and collective responsibility. The Samoan and Burundian mothers in Logan don’t define themselves primarily as individuals: rather they define themselves though others in their mothering work. I also discuss the nature of obligation and duty in this kinship-based care practice and how the mothers navigate their work in the highly patriarchal Logan communities. I also interrogate issues of Logan mothers’ attitudes to work, broader questions of social citizenship and the working class, government attitudes to working class mothers, and how kinship care as a non-biological family relationship disrupts heteronormative, biological mothering.

**Chapter 5** examines the mothering beliefs and practices of a privileged cohort of mothers in Ascot, Brisbane. Just over half of these mothers were full-time, stay-at-home mothers; the remainder worked full- and part-time. This chapter
investigates why these Australian women would take on this traditional and
gendered role of stay-at-home mother; what does undertaking this gendered
division of labour mean to the women themselves? I ask to what extent does
mothering in Ascot show evidence of a re-embedding of a “re-traditionalised”
role of stay-at-home mother in a contemporary context? What are the women’s
responses to this “re-traditionalised” role and how do they frame their mothering
work? Within this broader framework I discuss attitudes to work, attitudes to their
high earning, largely absent husbands’ fathering styles, attitudes to daycare for
young children, the moral dimension of their mothering or ‘shaping of young
citizenry’ and the use of social media and modern technology to form digital
communities. The mothering practices and beliefs of the mothers in Ascot who
worked are also investigated in this chapter. The findings are shaped by a
discussion of ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ as expressed by Ascot mothers.

Chapter 6 discusses stay-at-home fathers’ experiences of caring in
contemporary Australia. In this chapter, I ask the question ‘do men mother?’
using Ruddick’s (1989) definition of mothering as work which she suggests may
be performed by men or women. I examine the gendered nature of the caring
role and look at how the men perform their gendered identities. I ask how much
the men who are stay-at-home fathers work against the traditional cultural
constructions and practices of masculinities and how much they re-inscribe
traditional masculine values and practices. How do the men feel about being
stay-at-home fathers; what is the nature of their everyday work as fathers; and
how do they perceive the role? A discussion of how the men were fathered themselves informs this section as it was more of an issue for the men than for the women (how the women were mothered themselves was less relevant for their own mothering practice).

Chapter 7 is a summary of the findings and it concludes the thesis. I suggest how the findings contribute to the existing body of literature in the area of contemporary mothering. I also discuss limitations of the research and finally point the way forward to possible future research directions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the scholarly literature on motherhood and fathering relevant to this thesis. The major ideas, concepts and debates in these areas will be discussed, with a focus on Australian research. There has been considerable research on motherhood however as Liamputtong (2007) has pointed out “although existing literature about motherhood has provided a rich understanding of motherhood and women’s personal experiences of becoming a mother, it has largely been examined from a western cultural perspective” (Liamputtong, 2007, p. 16). In this literature review therefore I outline the relevant, prominent themes in motherhood debates with an emphasis on mothering in Australia, from both Western and non-Western perspectives. In the area of fatherhood research I will look at the main debates in the area, with an emphasis on empirical studies of intensive fathering practices, mainly in Western contexts as nearly all my fathers were White.

The two central aims of the thesis are to give mothers and stay-at-home fathers living in contemporary Australia voices to articulate their mothering experiences and beliefs. The other is to find out how women from non-Western cultures living in Australia mother: how are their beliefs and experiences different to Western mothers? These two research objectives inform and shape this literature review.
The main broad concepts and debates discussed in this chapter are that mothering is gendered and that it has been framed as “motherhood is an institution” (Rich, 1977) and that “socially appropriate mothering” in Western contexts has been historically constructed as an ideology of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996, x). Intrinsic to this concept is the notion of maternal instinct and essentialist ideas around women’s biology. This is challenged by the later alternative view that mothering is a gendered, rationalist form of (unpaid) work (Ruddick, 1989; Everingham, 1994; Oakley, 1974; O’Reilly, 2004). The persistent normative ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ (Wearing, 1984; Hays, 1996) is discussed. In intensive mothering “a good mother certainly would never put her child aside for her own convenience. And placing material wealth or power on a higher plane than the well-being of children is strictly forbidden” (Hays, 1996, p.150). The impact of mothers working full- and part-time on this ‘intensive mothering’ ideology will be examined (Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Richardson, 2014). Mothering in Western contexts often occurs within singularised nuclear families and is based on an individualistic ethics of care focused on a woman’s biological family that takes precedence over a duty of care to the wider community (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In this chapter, mothering is located as culturally and social class-specific rather than a universalising experience (hooks, 2014; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Benza and Liamputtong, 2016; Liamputtong and Spitzer, 2007; Mangena, 2009; Campbell, 1984; Gillies, 2007). Mothering in non-Western contexts draws on alternative indigenous knowledge systems (Moore and Riley, 2010; Pihama, 2011, and
Pihama et al, 2002; Stevenson et al, 2016; Mangena, 2009). These ways of knowing about mothering are based on an ethics of care and duty to community and kinship group over duty to self (hooks, 2014; Collins, 2014; Mama, 2001).

One of the primary aims of this research is to foreground mothers’ voices. The literature on motherhood has been criticised for the comparative absence of contemporary accounts of Australian women’s lived experiences of mothering in the voices of the mothers themselves. Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) for example call for a more forensic investigation of maternal work: “… new social and political imperatives that encourage women into education and employment have disrupted ideas about the good mother. Does she work? What work does she do? How does she strategise the handling of family life and employment?” (2010, p. 8). Arendell (2000) similarly calls for research on: “what, exactly do mothers do? What is the character of mothers’ daily lives? How do mothers negotiate the activities of child rearing?” (Arendell, 2000, p. 1202).

My research is a contribution to empirical research on diverse contemporary Australian mothering practices and beliefs and sits beside other research on this topic, for example, Brady (2010) (single mothers in Perth); Natalier and Hewitt (2014) and Skinner et al (2017) (separated mothers and child support); Millbank (2003) (lesbian mothering and Millbank is also valuable for her work interrogating and deconstructing traditional notions of mothering and families more generally); Benza and Liamputtong, (2016); Liamputtong and Spitzer, (2007); Ngum Chi Watts et al, (2015) (immigrant Zimbabwean, Hmong and
teenage African Australian mothers’ experiences in Australia interacting with the Australian health system and constructing themselves as mothers in a new homeland); and Moore and Riley (2010) (Aboriginal co-mothering that is uniquely linked to Aboriginal kinship systems and after many years of government policy suppressing traditional maternal practices among Aboriginal women “for the current generations there is a revival and resurgence of cultural practices and pride” (Moore and Riley, 2010, p. 192)).

To situate the major contemporary debates in Western motherhood it is necessary to give a brief historical context to the foundational concepts in the field of mothering. As the focus of this thesis is not a history of motherhood in Western contexts it will be necessarily condensed and kept as brief as possible.

**Second-wave feminist framings on motherhood and ‘motherhood as institution’**

There has historically been a tension in feminist literature between the project of promoting greater autonomy, freedom and independence for women and the perceived constraints imposed by the role of wife and mother and the practical limitations imposed by care of children.

Within Western contexts motherhood has been a contentious issue for feminism and several empirical studies attempted to ask why mothers appeared to be participating in their own oppression (from a second-wave feminism point of view) (Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1977; Chodorow, 1978).
Feminist discourse through the 1970s and 80s was dominated by the belief that it was a mother’s acceptance of primary responsibility for their children that led to her subordinate position in Western society.

One of the main debates in motherhood has always been whether it is innate that women have children and that they have a ‘maternal instinct’ that drives them to procreate. Boyle (1998) dismisses this idea of maternal instinct as culturally constructed and historically situated:

*The idea of maternal instinct refers to a complex set of psychological and biological theories about women (and, by opposition, about men) developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The development and dissemination of these theories need to be seen against a background in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western states had made a variety of efforts of varying success to persuade women to welcome motherhood* (Boyle, 1998, p. 32).

Feminist theorists have been involved in the de-naturalisation of motherhood for at least three decades and typically argue that it is neither natural nor innate for women to desire children but rather that maternal instinct is culturally constructed largely to serve the purposes of men (Oakley, 1974; Rich, 1977; Everingham, 1994; Ruddick, 1989; Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; O’Reilly, 2004).
Taking an anti-essentialist stance influential North American cultural feminist Rich (1977) also argued that there was nothing natural or inevitable about mothering but rather that it was a culturally constructed role. Rich (1977) proposed an alternative moral and epistemological vision of society where the social relations between men and women are structured differently and women’s biological capacities are celebrated and central. Rich offered an alternative perspective to the normative heterosexual paradigm of motherhood by differentiating the “institution of motherhood”, which she identifies as serving the patriarchy, and an individual woman’s lived experience of mothering.

While among Western feminist theorists on motherhood Rich has remained very influential she has been criticised for being Eurocentric and middle-class in her discussions on mothering; a criticism she accepts in the revised edition of her classic *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (Rich, 1986).

The notion of maternal instinct within Western contexts faces multiple contemporary challenges including new reproductive technologies, the use of surrogates by both heterosexual and gay couples separating the biological component from the practices of mothering, and the increasing numbers of women choosing not to have children.

Therefore, the early second-wave feminist arguments in the 1970s largely framed motherhood as an oppressive institution. Furthermore, there was a
common belief that being a mother was a repressive occupation that precluded women from public life and the sphere of work.

This idea that it was a woman’s acceptance of primary responsibility for her children that led to her subordinate position in Western society began to change in the 1980s. Radical feminists shifted the exclusive focus of mothers on the child’s development, to a focus on the mother’s experience:

* feminists addressing the issue of motherhood took women’s autonomy as its critical standpoint… mothers had rights and needs of their own… (Everingham, 1994, p. 3).

Feminists also attempted to rearticulate and empower the state of motherhood itself:

* Feminist activists argued very persuasively that women’s responsibility for the care of children was responsible for the sexual division of labour and women’s position of subordination. If women were to be liberated… then the ties of motherhood which bound women so closely to the domestic sphere had to be loosened… (Everingham, 1994, p. 3).

‘Maternal Thinking’ and mothering as work

Rich’s (1977) critique of ‘institutionalised motherhood’ is revisited by Ruddick (1989) who concludes that it is the governing institutions of motherhood that limit women rather than the mothering work they undertake:
Whatever her domestic arrangements, her ability to determine her own and her children’s lives depends on economic and social policies over which she has minimal control (Ruddick, 1989, p. 35).

Ruddick’s main contribution to the debate on mothering is to frame mothering as a conscious activity that involves intellectual choices, reasoning, reflective thinking and moral decision-making. Ruddick attempts to classify the tasks of mothering as ‘maternal work’ to balance the sentimental discussions that have traditionally framed motherhood: “we have no realistic language in which to capture the ordinary/extraordinary pleasures and pains of maternal work” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 29).

Ruddick divides this work into the three main demands of providing “preservation, growth, and social acceptability” for a child (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17). She calls these “the key pillars of maternal practice” and argues that these three demands “constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by work of preservative love, nurturance, and training” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17).

Ruddick argues that the work of mothering leads to a distinctive kind of thinking and a specific kind of discourse. As a philosopher, Ruddick attempts to locate a place for the work of mothering in an anti-essentialist, rationalist, masculinist, world-view. She proposes that certain aspects of maternal work contribute to specific ways of thinking and philosophies – Ruddick calls these “cognitive
capacities” (1989, p. 61). The key planks of maternal work are “scrutinizing” (1989, p. 72) meaning to be vigilant and on the look out for dangers before they manifest, “maternal cheerfulness” (1989, p. 74) meaning presenting the world positively to give the child a sense of security and hope, and “holding” (1989, p. 79) meaning to minimise risk to vulnerable children and show “the fundamental attitude of protectiveness” (1989, p. 79). These maternal virtues demonstrate that mothering work can directly affect the socialisation of children and profoundly affect the kind of citizens they become.

More radically, Ruddick proposes that mothering work can be done by men and that only birth and breastfeeding must be done by women - all other ‘mothering’ work can be carried out by men.

Building on the work of Ruddick, Everingham’s ethnographic study of Australian mothers and children interacting at playgroups looked specifically at the social processes that occurred as the mothers attempted to understand their children’s behaviours (Everingham, 1994).

Contesting the traditional argument that mothering is instinctual and essentialist she highlighted instead the “agency of mothers engaged in nurturing activities” (Everingham, 1994, p. 7) to analyse the “interpretive dimension of nurturing”, and to consider “the significance of maternal-infant conflict in the construction of the child’s subjectivity” (Everingham, 1994, p. 7).
Like Ruddick, Everingham ultimately positions mothers as active agents of change:

> A political agenda must consider the interpretive activity that is carried out by women as sexually specific actors, who actively reproduce norms and constitute potentially emancipatory forms of subjectivity, in their everyday life context (Everingham, 1994, p. 135).

Contributing to the larger debate on how the practices of motherhood are culturally and historically situated, Everingham emphasises that cross-cultural studies on mothering (like Scheper-Hughes’s (1992) important ethnographic investigation of poor women and children in the Brazilian favelas):

> highlight the socially constructed nature of care-giving activity... [that] demonstrate[s] that mothering practices are contingent and therefore receptive to social change (Everingham, 1994, p. 13).

Scheper-Hughes is discussed in more detail later in this chapter under the discussion of mothering as culturally situated and located within a specific social class rather than being a universal experience.

Reframing the central tenets of motherhood in the 1980s and 90s, Ruddick (1989), radically for the time, argued that men can ‘mother’ and Everingham (1994) proposed that mothering is a rational activity not just an emotional one.
**The persistent ideology of intensive motherhood and the ‘good mother’**

The idea of the ‘good mother’ in Western contexts had its roots in the 1970s and is based on a theory of ‘bonding’ and ‘attachment parenting’ (Bowlby, 1969). It was argued that the ideas of Bowlby (1973) contributed to this idea that a woman’s needs are subjugated to those of her child’s. In Attachment Theory, the primary consideration in familial configurations was the psychological well-being of the child:

> the young child’s hunger for his mother’s love and presence is as great as his hunger for food and that in consequence her absence generates a powerful sense of loss and anger (Bowlby 1969, p xiii).

Bowlby (1973) argued that adults should shape their expectations and behaviours around the child’s emotional state. The needs of mothers were firmly positioned as second and subservient to their child’s.

Subjugating a woman’s needs to those of her child’s continues to inform more contemporary reconfigurations of the ‘intensive mother’ paradigm: “A child’s needs should be at the centre of child-rearing and are more important than the mother’s needs” (Hays, 1996, p xx).

Feminist psychoanalyst Chodorow (1978) proposed that women become mothers because they were mothered by women and wish to continue this relationship by mothering their own children. Boys, on the other hand, identify
with their fathers so take on the attributes of separateness and autonomy by defining themselves against their female care-takers.

A significant contribution to the culturally appropriate mother debate was from Marxist-feminist sociologist Betsy Wearing (1984). She contributed an important Australian-specific, empirical dimension to the framings of motherhood in Western contexts. Wearing proposed that there is a core of ideas that form a normative framework for the mothers of young children. Her findings were based on qualitative interviews conducted in late 1970s Sydney. Wearing interviewed 150 mothers with at least one pre-school aged child, from the Sydney Metropolitan area. She wanted to represent a range of social and economic classes therefore her mothers are recruited from a socially disadvantaged area, an affluent area, from single mothers, from employed mothers and from self-described feminist mothers. In her detailed qualitative interviews, Wearing’s findings showed that there is a ‘dominant ideology of motherhood’ with most of the mothers in her study believing that:

*For the right kind of love to develop, mother and child should not be too much out of each other’s sight during the first 3 and possibly 5 to 6 years of life* (Wearing, 1984, p. 61).

This ‘dominant ideology of motherhood’ as Wearing termed it both reflected the prevalence of the attachment theories of Bowlby (1969; 1973) and
foreshadowed Sharon Hays’s work on ‘intensive mothering’ (1996) twelve years later.

Like Wearing, American sociologist Hays (1996) proposed that motherhood is framed as an ideology that is culturally reproduced and that, despite rapid social change in the last thirty years is still based on persistent, traditional, gendered understandings. In the 1990s Hays interviewed North American mothers from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds about their mothering practices and beliefs about motherhood. She found that the persistent contemporary cultural model of mothering takes the form of an ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ which, echoing Wearing’s earlier findings, comprises the following:

   a. A child should have one central caregiver and it should be the mother, not the father;

   b. A mother must devote a huge amount of time, energy and money to raise a child;

   c. A child’s needs should be at the centre of child-rearing and are more important than the mother’s needs;

   d. A ‘good mother’ pays attention to expert advice on child development; and
e. A child is sacred, innocent and pure so any links to the efficiency and financial profitability of child rearing are morally forbidden (Hays, 1996, p 8).

Hays identified the two ‘contradictions’ of motherhood within this ideology: that mothers with young children are expected to spend enormous amounts of time with them at a time when so many women work outside the family home and that selfless ‘good mothering’ takes place in a late capitalist context where self-interest and profit are the primary valorised human behaviours: “Motherhood,… is one of the central terrains on which… a fundamental and irreducible ambivalence about a society based solely on the competitive pursuit of self-interest… is played out” (Hays, 1996, p 18). Hays argues that the ideology of intensive mothering persists as it “serves the interests not only of men but also of capitalism, the state, the middle class, and whites” (Hays, 1996, p. xiii).

**Hays’ ‘intensive mothering’ paradigm in more recent contemporary contexts**

Hays’ idea of mothering practice as a moral vanguard against “a society based solely on the competitive pursuit of self-interest” links to the concept of individual agency taking precedence over obligation to traditional family ties in ‘individualization’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Hays (1996) identifies the problem of the persistent cultural narrative of Western motherhood as the pressure to be with your children most of the time to be seen as a ‘good mother’,
with the reality that most women work, part- or full-time away from their children to be able to support them financially. Bittman and Pixley (1997) similarly examine the conflict between the pursuit of individual advancement and needs common in contemporary Western societies and the selflessness and unpaid altruism required of motherhood in their study of Australian life in the late 1990’s, ‘The Double Life of the Family’.

Bittman and Pixley’s (1997) contribution to the study of Australian motherhood compared “the gap between our normative expectations of family life and our disappointing experience of it” (Bittman & Pixley, 1997, p. 268). The authors’ findings are based on a study of 130 heterosexual couples in Sydney (most with young children) asked to talk about the allocation of household tasks in their household. The authors show how individuals form families wanting intimacy, warmth, mutual respect and self-growth but become frustrated when they discover the inequities between women and men over issues such as the division of household labour and care of children, and inequities between children and parents. They highlight the public/private split that has developed that has isolated families in a non-regulated environment (compared to the public, regulated sphere of the paid workplace): “it has been assumed that the problems of our personal family life must be solved individually and privately through interpersonal negotiation” (Bittman and Pixley, 1997, p. 268). A consequence of this cultural belief that family issues should be solved privately through interpersonal negotiation is the power imbalance between the wage-
earning husband and the often (especially when caring for young, pre-school age children) financially dependent wife. The authors discuss these issues in some depth, drawing on the work of England and Kilbourne (1990) to discuss the workings of marital power through superior male earnings:

Women have less marital power because first, ‘cultural forces devalue traditionally female work and encourage women to be altruistic’. Second, ‘the beneficiaries of much domestic work are children rather than men’. Third, ‘some domestic work involves making investments that are specific to a particular relationship’, rather than general, and fourth, ‘even “general” investments in domestic skills are less “liquid” than earnings because they do not ensure survival until one finds another partner’ (England & Kilbourne, 1990, p. 163, cited in Bittman & Pixley, 1997, p. 179).

Imbalances of power around financial earnings in heterosexual family formations are an important theme. Bittman and Pixley (1997) assert that despite the many flaws in the family model it is still the major institution within which children are raised and most people live. The 2016 Census confirms this with 45% of the 6 million families counted on Census night identified as couples with children. This includes of course female same sex couples with children (25% of all the 46,000 identified same sex couples in the census), and the 4.5% of male same sex couples with children (ABS, 2016a). Bittman and Pixley show how the “privatised nature of family responsibilities” (Bittman and Pixley, 1997,
p. 209) is useful to employers and they discuss how children are a public good that are not paid for by employers in the form of family-friendly, non-discriminatory workplaces. The authors suggest different policy models to fund families and care work more equitably, including a family wage (something Oakley (1974) objected to, claiming this was still a way to fund housewives and further entrench women in this role). The central dilemma between market rationality, the obligations of care-giving and the necessity to earn money to live is not resolved today. For Bittman and Pixley, “the way that parents divide their time between paid work and child-rearing, and arrange alternative care and education is a significant issue in explaining the tensions and confusions about family life” (Bittman and Pixley, 1997, p. 238).

Probert (2002) similarly argues that combining work and family responsibilities is difficult for Australian women. In her discussion of the stalled gender equality agenda in early 2000’s Australia she reminds us that “good workplace policy development is being undermined by other changes such as longer working hours, increased childcare costs, loss of award protection, and the failure of enterprise bargaining and individual contracts to give women’s needs and interests higher priority” (Probert, 2002, p. 8). The author argues that underpinning the employment policies and structures of the welfare state are culture and gender ideologies, more specifically ideas about the sexual division of labour and the breadwinner model family. Probert (2002) was part of a large-scale interviewing project that was designed to capture the way different groups
of men and women experienced their working and family lives in the 1950s and 1990s. Of the 170 in-depth interviews conducted half were women and men who had young children in 1956 and half were with men and women who had young children in 1996. They were asked to talk about their experience of employment, their role in the family, about how they think children are best cared for, about their views on good mothers and good fathers, and about government support for childcare or parenting at home. The findings revealed that the stalling of gender equality is inextricably linked to “the ideology and practice of domesticity” (Williams, 2000, cited in Probert, 2002, p. 14). In the United States, as in Australia, profound social change over the last fifty years has not overturned the entrenched ideology of domesticity: “Our interviewees, in their descriptions of good mothering… talk about the ‘selflessness’ of the moral mother, ‘endlessly giving’, of ‘hard work, patience, and self-sacrifice’, and a female sense of self that is ‘organised around being able to make, then to maintain, affiliations and relationships’” (Probert, 2002, p. 14, citing Gilligan, 1982, in descriptions of the language used by Probert’s interview participants to talk about mothering). Probert (2002) discusses how her evidence shows that women act with reference to a different set of social norms than those that apply to men. She points out that the ethics of care found in her data, and expressed elsewhere, is profoundly gendered and shows a culture that requires and expects women to become mothers and once they are mothers they are expected to act selflessly. The tyranny of the culture of domesticity punishes women who transgress: mothers are ‘self-sacrificing’, women who prioritise their career while having
children and women who choose not to have children are ‘selfish women’. Probert (2002) shows how the ideology of domesticity reinforces essentialist notions of women’s ‘natural’ role as caregivers in the private sphere. She contrasts Australia to other Western liberal democracies Denmark and Finland where the issue of caring for children is primarily a welfare state responsibility rather than a private, family responsibility.

More recent research in Western contexts shows the ideology of the ‘good mother’ and intensive mothering to be a persistent and pernicious presence in women’s lives. The assumptions around this ideology profoundly affect women’s choices around how they raise their children. They influence whether women choose to forgo paid employment and be stay-at-home mothers with young children or whether they choose to work.

Hoffman (2013) in her study of privileged mothers in America (working and stay-at-home) looked at the power struggles in child-centred, parent-child relationships and she found that this struggle “encodes... culturally situated notions of power, selfhood, and emotional control” and that the parenting of the privileged, American middle-class mothers in her study is “not just about the formation of child selves, but also about the identities of mothers themselves within contested fields of mothering” (Hoffman, 2013, p. 229). The author further confirms the persistence of ‘the good mother’ narrative in maternal belief and behaviour:
For the mothers in my study, who felt vulnerable to the criticisms of others in their attempt to carve identities for themselves as ‘good’ mothers, struggles were not only with their children, but with the larger community, and even, one might speculate, with the larger culture and its pressures to get the job of childrearing ‘right’ (Hoffman, 2013, p. 241)

Arendell’s outline of the following characteristics of the ‘good mother’ reiterates the cultural, classed and heterosexist nature of the concept:

The good mother is heterosexual, married, and monogamous. She is White and native born. She is not economically self-sufficient, which means, given the persistent gender gap in earnings, largely economically dependent on her income-earning husband (unless she’s independently wealthy and, in that case, allows her husband to handle the finances). She is not employed (Arendell, 2000, p. 3).

Australian sociologists Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) emphasise the range and diversity of motherhoods in contemporary Australia, showing that the discourses of the ‘good’ and ‘bad mother’ are:

classed and raced, with discourses of deviancy involved in the production and reproduction of differently classed and raced ‘types’ of mothers (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010, p. 5).
The shadow side to the ‘good mother’ is of course the ‘bad mother’: “To be a bad mother is seen as one of the most terrible crimes a person can commit, yet society offers so little support to the ordinary women who must shoulder this burden” (Dux and Simic, 2008, p. 96).

Hays’s ‘intensive mothering’ ideology continues to influence motherhood discourses in Western contexts 21 years after it was published. For example, in 2011 Mooney investigates how young women living in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, make decisions about if, and when to have children and discusses how her young participants still identify “selflessness” as the central plank of being a good mother (Mooney, 2011, p. 111). This echoes the central tenet of Hays’s (1996) thesis that the ‘good mother’ (and Wearing’s (1984) ‘ideology of motherhood’) selflessly subjugates her own needs and desires to those of her child’s.

Reid-Boyd (2002) contributes to the debate on the good mother always being available to her child with her discussion of the concept of ‘being there’. In qualitative interviews with 20 stay-at-home mothers in suburban Perth between 1996 and 2000, Reid-Boyd found:

*The emotional dimension of care constantly spills over, between the productive and reproductive, public and private. It cannot be contained by neat, linear, public/private gendered splits and defensive renderings of “quality” versus “quantity” time… Instead, ‘being there’ may be viewed*
as a rhetoric of possibility… It could offer opportunities for more than a gendered physical and/or emotional presence… in order to move beyond the dichotomy of paid work versus stay at home (Reid-Boyd, 2002, p. 469).

This time pressure on mothers to ‘be there’ with their children, particularly if they work, confirms Hochschild’s (1997) earlier work on the ‘time bind’. Hochschild (1997) argues that the intense pressures of paid work have left women in a time bind at home, attempting to juggle multiple domestic tasks with spending “quality time” with their children to make up for working. Hochschild (1997) calls this ‘the second shift’ and she details the intense emotional work carried out by working women with their children when they see them to compensate for not ‘being there’. This issue of gender and time in relation to working mothers and stay-at-home mothers is also played out around the notions of spending ‘quality time’ with their children, invoked by mothers in paid work, compared to stay-at-home mothers who spend ‘quantity time’.

This perception of spending ‘quantity time’ with young children and ‘not missing out’ is also seen in similar studies of highly qualified women who choose to be full time stay-at-home mothers in other Western liberal democracies. An example of this is Rubin and Wooten’s 2007 study of the lived experience of 10 highly educated Texan women who chose to become full-time stay-at-home mothers. In their quest to spend ‘quantity time’ with their children and ‘be there’ for them when they were young the women experienced feelings of loss of
identity they had as working women and a loss of independence. In another American study Zimmerman (2000) studied American stay-at-home mother/career father families and stay-at-home father/career mother families and found that the stay-at-home mothers and career mothers in both family configurations reported higher levels of stress and exhaustion than the male stay-at-home fathers and career fathers.

**Cultural challenges to the persistent ideology of motherhood**

From the 1980s and into the 2000s there have been many challenges to the hegemonic Western maternal narrative by groups of mothers previously excluded from this discourse. Feminist scholars have identified the lack of Black and indigenous voices on community mothering and co-mothering (eg, Moore and Riley, (2010) on Aboriginal co-mothering; bell hooks, (2014, reprinted) and Mama (2001) on Black mothers; Hill Collins (2000) on ‘othermothering’; Adia Story (2014) on ‘community mothering’; Pihama, (2011), and Pihama et al (2002) and Stevenson et al, (2016) on Maori ‘whanau’ support in mothering and Maori maternalities as part of te ao Maori (the Maori world)). Research also took place with previously under-represented groups like single mothers (Brady, (2010); Dux and Simic, (2008); Caro and Fox, (2008); Goodwin and Huppatz, (2010)); lesbian mothers (Millbank (2003) and (2008), Warren (1986), Golombok, (2000), Rawsthorne (2010); separated mothers (Brady, (2010), Natalier and Hewitt, (2014); Skinner, et al, (2017); immigrant and migrant women (Liamputtong and Spitzer, (2007); Benza and Liamputtong, (2016);

**Lesbian mothering**

A notable trend in the contemporary motherhood debate from the 1980s onwards came from lesbian motherhood. In the 1980s feminists looked to lesbian motherhood to provide a possible transgressive, transformative model that would challenge the heterosexual family unit, allowing women freedom from traditional gendered expectations. Mary Ann Warren (1986) looked at the social construction of sexuality and wrote: “greater availability of... new reproductive technologies... [has] free[d] both women and men to play a more active role in the shaping of their sexual lives... women can have babies without sexual intercourse... surrogate motherhood and someday, the artificial womb may make it possible for men to have children outside of heterosexual relationships” (Warren, 1986, p. 154). However, Millbank (2003) shows how lesbian mothers often still have to prove to courts that they are ‘good mothers’ and that in their daily domestic lives they face many of the same challenges as their heterosexual counterparts. In a 2010 qualitative study of 17 lesbian families living in New South Wales, Rawsthorne found that “lesbian women who parent
disrupt scripts concerning the ‘good mother’ in multiple and complex ways but also scripts concerning the ‘good lesbian’” (Rawsthorne, 2010, p. 209). Rawsthorne suggests these mothers are discovering “new territory… that is exhilarating but also overwhelming, lonely and risky” (Rawsthorne, 2010, p. 211) as well as redefining traditional parenting boundaries. Millbank (2003) cites numerous studies from America and Britain that find that lesbian co-parent families have a more equitable distribution of domestic labour than heterosexual ones and that lesbian non-biological mothers were more involved than heterosexual fathers with their children (citing Patterson and Chan, Millbank, 2003, p. 552). Lesbian family formation ‘queers up’ the traditional mothering narrative by rupturing the biological imperative of the heterosexual, genetic family. In this way, Millbank (2003) is proving Ruddick’s idea that mothering ‘work’ can be done by someone other than the biological mother.

**Mothering as culturally constructed rather than a universal practice**

Identification of the cultural construction and situatedness of motherhood has been foregrounded and critiqued in key critical empirical studies of mothering practice over time. In relation to Aboriginal co-mothering Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) remind us that:

… alternative conceptualisations of motherhood highlight the cultural and historical dimensions of dominant representations of the mother category. Most significantly, they highlight the incompatibility of prevailing
ideas about motherhood for women outside the dominant white culture

(Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010, p. 19)

Cultural mothering and women’s reproductive health scholar Liamputtong (2007) has also comprehensively argued that research on motherhood has been dominated by a Western, cultural perspective. Her work with Hmong immigrant women living in Melbourne, Victoria in 2006, shows the women are subject to ‘multiple identities’ (citing McMahon (1995)) and that they:

bear the primary responsibility for both the social and biological reproduction of a culture. Motherhood and attendant expectations of mothers as socializing agents of their offspring are particularly charged responsibilities for migrant women as these roles are vital to maintaining the reputed integrity of ethnic boundaries… truncated familial networks and different patterns in economic activities, labour market participation and domestic labour, have altered mothering and childrearing roles and practices… women’s… narratives have shown that motherhood and mothering is complex and not easy, particularly when combined with migration. (Liamputtong and Spitzer, 2007, pp. 233-234)

A form of this moral dimension of motherhood or sculpting new citizens is also seen in Western ‘intensive mothering’ practices (eg, Hays, 1996; Hoffman, 2013; Arendell, 2010).
Benza and Liamputtong (2016) investigated the meanings and lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrant mothers living in Melbourne, Australia and found evidence of a “paradox of motherhood” (2016, p. 77) with women talking of the delights and wonder of being mothers but also how they found the role of being a mother difficult. The other significant finding to emerge from the authors’ data was the women’s experiences of the difficulties accessing the Australian healthcare system.

Oakley (1974) describes many cultures in the world where children are not raised exclusively by their biological mothers but rather by large family groups of men and women. She also discusses cultures where men take primary responsibility for child-rearing. Oakley uses this evidence to show that motherhood (like housewifery) is not ‘natural’ for women but rather is culturally constructed and organised within the prevailing gender order. Similarly, Macintyre’s (1986) study of a matrilineal Papua New Guinean island community called Tubetube with “social identity, property and rights over land… transmitted through women” is another example of a culturally situated maternal practice (Macintyre, 1986, p. 248). Watson-Franke (2004) also discusses child raising in matrilineal and women-centred societies.

One of the most important theorists to contribute to this idea that mother love as care-giving behaviour is socially constructed, far from a universal practice and deeply ambiguous is anthropologist Scheper-Hughes (1992). She showed that severe and difficult economic and material conditions of hunger and extreme
poverty profoundly affect how mothering is practised. Scheper-Hughes’s significant cultural challenges to Western normative beliefs and her confronting of unconscious ideas about ‘human nature’ and mothers and babies are outlined in her 1992 ethnography of a Brazilian shanty-town with a focus on the mothers and children. Scheper-Hughes lived in a Brazilian shanty town for extended periods of time in the 1980s and she found that the material environment of the people had a significant effect on the care-giving behaviour of the mothers. In a community of extreme poverty, attachment was not always formed between mothers and the weakest of their children. In her discussion of her findings in a chapter entitled "(M)Other Love" Scheper-Hughes observed that the “high expectancy of death and the ability to face death with stoicism and equanimity” produced nurturing behaviour that differentiated infants thought of as “thrivers” and “keepers” and those “thought of as born ‘already wanting to die’” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, p. 342). These weaker babies are selectively neglected by their mothers and are not mourned when they die. The ‘keepers’ were nurtured while ‘doomed’ infants were left to die of neglect; the mothers “sometimes stepped back and allowed nature to take its course” with this latter group. Scheper-Hughes called this pattern “mortal neglect” (Scheper-Hughes 1992, p. 342).

Scheper-Hughes challenges both the biological basis of Attachment Theory and the cultural belief in a ‘essentially ‘womanly’ ethic and ethos of maternal responsiveness, attentiveness, and caring labour” (1992, p. 341). She goes further by specifically challenging Western feminist notions of the existence of a
maternal instinct and women having an innate caring for children. She urges discussion of a plurality of experiences and views of maternal thinking and behaviours and a movement beyond the “universal maternal script” that:

... surfaces in the writings of those feminists who argue for a ‘poetics’ of motherhood and for a specifically female moral voice and sensibility expressed in an ‘ethics of care’. The latter, in attempting to recover the muted and marginalised voices of women, can paradoxically do violence to the different experiences and sensibilities of poor and Third World women whose moral visions may not conform to the feminist paradigm (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 341).

**Defining yourself through others in your mothering**

In the Australian context, indigenous mothering practices continue the disruption of Western normative models of intensive mothering. Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) point out that “the singularity and biologism implicit in contemporary meanings of ‘mother’ regulate women by demanding congruity with standardised relationships with others” (Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010, p. 19). In other words, there are many more ways of mothering than a child being raised by their biological mother.

Moore and Riley (2010) discuss the common practice of Aboriginal ‘co-mothering’ or sharing the raising of a child within an Aboriginal kinship system within “an understanding of the impact of contact, policies and inherent practices
on traditional cultural lore and mores... as it affects contemporary Aboriginal mothers in profound ways” (Moore and Riley, 2010, p. 175). The authors remind us that: “this is the first generation of Aboriginal mothers (since colonisation) who are able to take pride in their Aboriginal cultural traditions without fear that these traditions will be overtly used to demean, separate and segregate them from their children. This has meant that for the current generations there is a revival and resurgence of cultural practices and pride” (Moore and Riley, 2010, p. 192).

The practice of ‘othermothering’ is also relevant to the mothering practices of the Samoan and Burundian mothers in this study. Othermothering is a practice first identified by African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) among African American families where a woman will mother children not biologically related to her. The maternal practice of ‘fictive kin’ is also prescient to this discussion. ‘Fictive kin’ relies on “nonblood relations as close-knit family [and] has long been a defining characteristic of family in the African Diaspora” (Butler, 2007, p. 1).

Hill Collins framed the term ‘othermothering’ in 1990 to situate discussions about mothering in African American communities within a framework of race, class and heteronormativity. Her contribution to the meanings of mothering came from “connecting motherhood as an institution to manifestations of empire, racism, classism, and heteronormativity… to reconceive what it means to be a mother in a national and transnational context” (Hill Collins, 2014, p. 1). Hill
Collins reconceived ‘othermothering’ within a wider context of “the institution of Black motherhood [that] consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African-American community, and with self” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 176). ‘Othermothering’ is defined as “women who assist bloodmothers [biological mothers] by sharing mothering responsibilities” and they “traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 178). ‘Othermothering’ may occur when a child is born into extreme poverty for example and the biological mother cannot cope or if the children cannot remain with their biological (blood) mothers due to removal by government services due to concerns for child safety. James et al (1993) similarly frame ‘othermothering’ in a socially transformative context and contrast it to the individualised family unit in Western mothering contexts that involve women focusing primarily on their biological children. James et al (1993) propose that “mothering within the Afro-American community and through the Black diaspora can be viewed as a form of cultural work or what Bernice Johnson Reagon calls ‘the entire way a community organizes to nurture itself and future generations’ (Reagon, 1989, pp 167-80, cited in James et al, 1993, p. 44). Therefore, it can be seen that the practice of ‘othermothering’ also has a moral and ethical dimension in its cultural custodianship and transmission of cultural values. Adia Story (2014) discusses Collins’s ‘othermothering’ and pairs it with ‘community mothering’: both kinds of mothering she argues demonstrate a commitment to Black communities and an adherence to “a socially responsible
ethic that is imbued with the idea of political activism to the larger black community” (Adia Story, 2014, p. 6).

Related to this practice of ‘othermothering’ is where a child born to one sister is co-mothered with an infertile sister and the child has two mothers, passing freely between the households. Extended family and communities raising children is common in non-Western family formations (Mama, 2001 on African family formation; Pihama, 2011, and Pihama et al, 2002, and Stevenson et al, 2016, on Maori family formation and specifically the centrality of ‘whanau support’ (‘whanau’ means family) for Maori within te ao Maori (the Maori world).

It is important to note that the experience of mothering by women of colour will be diverse and far from a uniformity of experience as discussed in a more extreme form by Scheper-Hughes (1992). Like mothering in Western contexts experiences of mothering will be affected by a woman’s material conditions, her background and a multitude of other structural and personal factors. The justifications for the theoretical use of Black and non-Western theorists to discuss the data on the Burundian and Samoan women in Logan in my thesis and any possible assertions of potential cultural appropriation is discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

At the heart of a discussion of collective child raising is the whole notion of the individual’s relationship to self and community. African sociologist Amina Mama
(2001) has written that communalism rather than individuated subjectivity underpins African communities:

There is no word for ‘identity’ in any of the African languages with which I can claim any degree of familiarity… in English, the word ‘identity’ implies a single, individual subject… In Africa, if I were to generalize, ask a person who he or she is and a name will quickly be followed by a qualifier, a communal term that will indicate ethnic or clan origins, (Mama, 2001, p. 63).

Maori family formation in Aotearoa/New Zealand also has relevance to collective co-mothering in Logan. Maori family theorists have written about Maori maternality and their ideas echo non-Western mothering in the Australian context with their emphasis on family, place and land. By situating mothering practice within indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual traditions these theorists present an alternative to the persistent, normative ideology of the ‘good mother’ in Western contexts. In Aotearoa/New Zealand:

Te Ao Māori is a whakapapa based society that is grounded upon the cultural systems and structures of whānau, hapū, and iwi. Each of these terms highlights the significance and centrality of being hapū; that is, being pregnant and giving birth to the next generation… Whakapapa is a cultural and structural foundation for the organisation of whānau, hapū, and iwi in Aotearoa. Within whakapapa we are involved in a complex set
Whanau support underpins Maori maternity and women are supported and guided in their mothering through ‘whanau support’. Like Mama’s (2001) discussion of African identity as communal above, in the Maori world you are only known by your kin-based relationships and tribal affiliations.

I contrast this kind of mothering through and for others, operating within an ethical care framework of ‘duty to others’ over ‘duty to self’, with much of the mothering that occurs in Western contexts that is singularised and takes place within privatised settings. Gillies (2007) in her research with working-class mothers in England discusses this caring for others around you as “invisible labour”, reflecting “a more relational, connected sense of self” and “showing a higher moral sense and commitment to community” (Gillies, 2007, pp. 43-44). Thus, mothering in non-Western contexts and working-class mothering share an ethic of social responsibility.

Individualization has been a primary driver of contemporary families in Western contexts particularly with social mobility leading to families moving away from traditional families to pursue employment with higher pay. Black African sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has written that “U.S. middle-class family life is based on privatization” (2000, p. 182). By contrast collective raising of children has historically been more common in Black, indigenous and working-class families (hooks, 2014, on Black mothering; Moore and Riley, 2010, on Aboriginal
Many people raised in black communities experienced this type of community-based child care. Black women who had to leave the home and work to provide for families could not afford to send children to day-care centers, and such centers did not always exist. They relied on people in their communities to help (hooks, 2014, p. 145).

Furthermore, hooks argues that a shared communal responsibility for child care can only happen in “small community settings where people know and trust one another. It cannot happen in those settings if parents regard children as their ‘property’ or their ‘possessions’”(hooks, 2014, p. 145).

Contrasting this communal raising of children and the duty of care to others over self are the common care practices of the Australian family in a contemporary context: “individualization has become the primary narrative of the contemporary family” (Gilding, 1991). Rieger (1991) has also written extensively about the history of the White Australian family from a sociological perspective and she argues a similar point.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) in their deconstruction of the rights, responsibilities and obligations of individuals within a community discuss the
change in structure of contemporary families within a paradigm of individual advancement:

“Whereas, in pre-industrial society, the family was mainly a community of need held together by an obligation of solidarity, the logic of individually designed lives has become increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world… Since individualization also fosters a longing for the opposite world of intimacy, security and closeness (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) most people will continue – at least for the foreseeable future – to live within a partnership or family. But such ties are not the same as before, in their scope, or in their degree of obligation and permanence” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 97-98).

In the discourse of “individualization” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) social mobility leads to families living in different countries and states from extended family support, “beyond the legacy of family and kin” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 92). This results in a “system of modern marriage, [where] the partners are not only expected to form their own form of togetherness; they must do so” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 92).

Marriage and family used to be firmly embedded in a matrix of wider community relationships… In our contemporary society, by contrast, each family constitutes its own segregated sub-world (Berger and
Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) discuss the movement towards a contemporary “value system of individualization” containing “a new ethics” and based on the principle of “duty to oneself” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 38). By comparison, Black American theorists like Hill Collins (2000) discuss child raising as occurring in a paradigm of collectivity and communality. The women-centred child raising and support networks of women of colour show not only a commitment to building and sustaining community but also how “African-Americans as a collectivity cope with and resist oppression” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 183).

In empirical research within contemporary Australia on Zimbabwean refugee mothers, Benza and Liamputtong (2016) found that the women they interviewed did not experience high levels of community support for their mothering. However, Benza and Liamputtong's research is less relevant to my thesis as the focus of the authors’ studies have been the women’s experiences with their intersections with the Australian health system rather than being a deep, personal, introspective investigation of the lived intimate experience of mothering. In addition, the Samoan women I speak with were raised in New Zealand before travelling to Australia as adults and they do not see themselves as refugees. The Burundian refugee mothers in my study live in large, well-
established, extended kinship groups who have retained many of their cultural practices and community way of life.

**Mothering and paid work**

The context in which debates about motherhood occur has changed decisively since the 1980s. If a primary concern in the 1980s was a woman’s self-actualisation despite her mothering activities there was still an assumption that she was available to mother in the domestic sphere. The rapid increase in the number of women working in paid employment, mostly outside the home, completely recalibrated the motherhood landscape.

The overall trend in mothers working in Westernised contexts from the 1980s onwards is clear. Married women with children who work are also the norm in contemporary Australian contexts. In a recent investigation of Australian women’s workforce participation Richardson et al (2014) have shown that the model of the entrenched and normalised male breadwinner is over (Richardson et al, 2014). It has been replaced by the more common model of families with two income earners. The authors argue that this has been driven by substantially increased rates of women’s education thus allowing partners in a marriage more flexibility. Increased workforce participation enables women to move away from the restrictions of the domestic sphere and frees fathers to work fewer hours and spend more time with their families. The authors conclude that:
Australian women have marched quite boldly from the home into the paid workforce… The female breadwinner is no longer unusual, and the financial obligations on men are thereby reduced and shared. The consequences for family formation and for the bringing up of children are large and ongoing. The old order is indeed being disturbed (Richardson et al, 2014, p. 20).

Indeed, in the 2016 Census, of the 10,147,000 employees in Australia, 50.6% were female and 49.4% were male. However, more female employees were employed part-time (54.3%) than full-time (45.7%) (ABS, 2016e).

The most common family arrangement for couple families with young children is for the father to be employed full-time and the mother part-time: “Working mums with children under 6 worked an average of 33 hours per week full-time and 16 hours part-time” (ABS, 2016f).

It was uncommon for both parents to be working full-time with children aged under 5 years. It is more common for both parents to work full-time when children are older and the demands of child care and domestic activities have eased.

While families comprising couples with children (of any age) remain the most prevalent type of family in Australia, the increase in the number of these families was relatively small (3%) between 1986 and 2001. In comparison, the number of one-parent families increased by 53% (ABS, 2003). In New Zealand, a
similar social liberal democracy across the Tasman ocean, the trend of increasing numbers of women in the labour force and fewer stay-at-home parents is replicated.

Statistics New Zealand/Tatauranga Aotearoa which powers The Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) has been collecting information on the country’s employment and unemployment since 1986. Since then, women’s participation in the labour force (as a proportion of the working-age population) has increased by almost ten percentage points. Men, however, are participating less – male participation was at 74.4% in 2016, compared with 80.1% in 1986.

The survey shows that, after “retirement”, the most common reason given for not being in the labour force in 1986 was “at home looking after children” (21.1%). In 2016, this figure has dropped to 13.9% (Statistics New Zealand/Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2016).

In a broader Western context, in 2012 more than a third of mothers in the United States and the United Kingdom were the family’s main breadwinner, either because they were single, or because they made more money than their husbands (Rosin, 2013, p. 48). In the North American context the majority of women workers are mothers. In 1997 74% of mothers with children aged six to seventeen, 59 percent with children six and under, and 55 percent with children aged one and under are in paid work, about half of them full-time (Hochschild, 1997: xix).
Hochschild’s widely cited work on the family in the USA (1989, 1997) frames the discussion on working mothers. In the 1980s Hochschild examined the tensions arising when working mothers also do most of the childcare and housework; the ‘second shift’ as she called it (Hochschild, 1989).

Housework (as a necessary part of motherhood) framed as a repressive, cultural mechanism that suppressed women has been critical to the motherhood debates since the 1970s (Oakley, 1974). Oakley charts how the role of the housewife grew out of industrial capitalism and is intertwined with the privatisation of the family and the home. It is the “synthesis of ‘house’ and ‘wife’ in a single term [that] establishes the connections between womanhood, marriage, and the dwelling place of family groups” (Oakley, 1974, p. 1). Her empirical study talking to English housewives in the 1970s found that housework is a gendered, unpaid, low status activity performed in isolation and undervalued by society. Her findings remain an important contribution to this field. Later research on household work and the gendered division of labour (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Hochschild, 1989, 1997) is built on the foundations of Oakley’s work. For Bittman and Pixley, “the daring element of Oakley’s study of British housework was the simple gesture of treating housework as work” (Bittman and Pixley, 1997, p. 87). The other radical element (at the time) of Oakley’s research is letting housewives talk about how they feel about housework and how they see themselves as housewives, in their own voices. In-depth, qualitative interviews formed the central core of Oakley’s thesis.
Oakley’s proposed solution is to liberate housewives and abolish the role of housewife; she also calls for the abolition of the family and gender roles:

*Housework is work directly opposed to the possibility of human self-actualization* (Oakley, 1974, p. 222).

Oakley encourages women to reject the ‘label’ housewife and instead use ‘occupation: unpaid domestic worker’ or ‘occupation: child rearer’. The stay-at-home fathers that I spoke with forty years on from Oakley’s radical call to arms take her advice in their creative re-articulations of their caring role.

Oakley’s relevance to current debates on housework in contemporary Australia, as a critical part of the mothering and homemaker role, remains. According to 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics data:

*Unpaid household work, including cooking, cleaning, shopping and caring for children, takes up a substantial proportion of people’s waking lives. It contributes to the functioning of domestic life, providing goods and services that would otherwise have to be paid for. While it is excluded from most official measures of economic activity, the value of unpaid household work in Australia has been estimated as equivalent to up to half of Gross Domestic Product* (ABS, 2009).

My interviewing with PhD participants began just after the 2011 Census and in my ‘Interview Schedule’ I have a specific question about how the participants
described themselves in the Census. The 2011 Australian Census did not use the term ‘housewife’ or ‘housework’ but had instead an occupational category “spends most of my time on domestic duties” (ABS, 2011). In the 2016 Census this has been continued as “unpaid domestic work” (ASB, 2016b).

In the 2016 ABS data “of people who did unpaid domestic work in the week before the census in Australia, 26% worked 5 to 14 hours, 11.5% worked 15 to 29 hours and 9% worked 30 hours or more” (ABS, 2016b). Division of housework between couples is discussed in more detail under the heading ‘The Second Shift of the Working Mother’ below.

In Australia, family sociologist Pocock (2005) discusses changes in contemporary work/care patterns of Australian mothering occurring within:

>a powerful Australian cultural habitus [her emphasis] of motherhood that has shown all too little renovation in the face of very significant change in what mothers now do and manage. Society’s low regard for mothers – beyond what Hays calls a ‘sentimental valorisation’ – is revealed in a poor leave regime for mothers, the requirement that they accept job insecurity as the price for part-time paid work, weak support from the state, inadequate childcare and a poor system of support for women when they are at home doing full-time care (Pocock, 2005, p 19)

More recently Rosin’s 2013 findings on highly qualified American mothers, many of them married to similarly highly qualified men, show that while the domestic
tensions identified by Hochschild (1989, 1997) have not disappeared, many privileged, well-educated couples in her empirical study of contemporary married life have more democratic, equitable domestic arrangements. The American women in Rosin’s study still seek comfort in traditional marriage, a finding also made by Australian sociologist Emma Kirby in her 2009 research on expectations of marriage for young women living in the Upper Hunter region of New South Wales (Kirby, 2009). Incorporating the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996, 2002) on individualization and detraditionalization in families and intimate relationships Kirby found evidence that for her young women participants “marriage is constructed as the anchoring status and identity” in their lives and “that attitudes towards marriage … indicate the retraditionalization process; for example in the desire for full church weddings and in the defence of women taking responsibility for housework and raising children” (Kirby, 2009, p. vi).

A decade earlier Ailsa Burns asked ‘why do Australian women continue to marry’” in her overview of the contemporary research on marriage in Australia at the time (Burns, 1986). Carole Pateman also turned a critical feminist eye to the marriage contract over time (Pateman, 1986). However, in Rosin’s “see-saw marriages” the couples are “much more fluid about who plays what role, who earns more money, and, to some extent, who sings the lullabies” (Rosin, 2013, p. 7). Rosin situates this new domestic arrangement within a specific paradigm of contemporary attitudes toward work and individual fulfillment:
Couples are not chasing justice and fairness as measured by some external yardstick of gender equality. What they are after is individual self-fulfillment, and each partner can have a shot at achieving it at different points in the marriage (Rosin, 2013, p. 67).

Reiterating Richardson et al (2014) and Hochschild (1997) “the whole question... about whether mothers should work, is moot ‘because they just do. This idealized family – he works, she stays at home – hardly exists anymore’” (Rosin, 2013, p. 49).

The rapid increase in the number of Australian women working has even led to policy intervention at a federal level. In the face of a falling birth rate in Australia and increasing numbers of women in the paid work in the early to mid-2000s the then Prime Minister John Howard asked English sociologist Catherine Hakim to contribute toward his policies on families. Howard and his Liberal party’s political agenda encouraged mothers to stay at home full-time with their babies and young children. As well as a conservative view of gender roles, this policy also reflected concerns about a falling Australian birth rate outlined in their budget paper the Intergenerational Report 2002-03 (Costello, 2002). The response was to give out a universal cash payment or ‘baby bonus’ of up to $3000 on the birth of a new child (not means-tested) from 2004 and to give generous Part B tax rebates to families with only one parent working. The baby bonus was increased in 2006 and 2008 to $4,000 and $5,000 respectively. Howard’s pro-natalist views of mothering and his policies on families, especially
his view that mother-led care was the best were not dissimilar to Manne’s (2005): both Manne and Howard were informed and influenced by Hakim’s (2000) ‘Preference Theory’.

Hakim (2000) proposed that the decisions women make about raising their children and paid work are based on individual preferences and values about motherhood and that these are formed early in life and remain relatively static over a woman’s life trajectory. Against a background of the contraceptive pill being widely available and popular and increasingly equal opportunities in the workplace Hakim argued that women had many more choices about working and mothering than ever before. Hakim (2000), positions women as autonomous actors in their lives with free agency rather than individuals who are affected by structural limitations like class, poverty, access to education, discrimination because of sexuality or disability, etc. Therefore, Hakim argues that individual preferences were more important than public policy, economic necessity or affordable daycare when it comes to whether or not to have babies and, if so, how long you leave work for, or whether you work at all. Using extensive European, American and English studies on women, family and work, Hakim (2000) categorises women into three different groups: ‘home-centred’; ‘adaptives’ (women who mainly raise their children at home, working part-time and using limited childcare); and ‘work-centred women’ (these women are often childless and those with children work full-time and use full-time childcare).
Hakim identifies women as a heterogeneous group that choose the roles they play: “the roles played by women and men today are not only the product of contextual influences, but also the expression of chosen gendered identities” (Hakim, 2000, p. 273). She argues that preferences and values are more important to women than economics in decisions about employment and caring for children. Hakim’s preference theory challenges the notion that Western societies are ‘progressing’ toward a more egalitarian family model that shares equitably, between men and women, working for money outside the home and caring for children. In Hakim’s preference theory women’s choices are also significantly influenced by traditional gendered attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Hakim’s (2000) approach of individual agency over structural factors has been robustly criticized as has her simplistic categorisation of women, for example, not taking account the changing material circumstances of women’s lives that may force them back to work when they would rather be full-time mothers (in Hakim’s schema the categorization of a woman’s preferences are fixed and do not change over time). Furthermore, Hakim’s ‘typical family’ is a traditional one, ie a heterosexual couple, one stays at home to child mind, the other (usually the man) goes out to work, and the couple is married. There is also no discussion in Hakim of why women hold these views of mothering and work; and there is no attempt to interrogate this powerful, cultural construct about mothers’ seemingly unassailable connection to their children.
The Australian challenges to Hakim were multiple and fierce. Pocock (2005) objects to this typing of women into those who work and those who don’t as it “conceals the facts of women’s dynamic life-cycle (with most women being more than one ‘type’ over time) and it pits the interests of different types against each other. The beneficiaries of this ‘divided-typing’ are those who wish to do nothing much to assist the caring load of mothers” (Pocock, 2005, p. 19).

Australian sociologist Brady (2010) also challenges Hakim’s static typology theory with the results of her longitudinal ethnographic study of single mothers living in Perth. Brady found that material conditions are the primary drivers of mothering choices like whether to work (they have to for the money) and childcare options (using extended family where possible as this is cheaper and more flexible than daycare centres). Rather than an abstract belief about “intrinsic and constant, chosen identities”, “interviewees’ narratives of mothering and its relationship to paid work were overwhelmingly activity focused and pragmatic…. they [the single mothers Brady interviewed] spoke about managing a constantly changing relationship between their children’s needs, their own needs and participation in paid work” (Brady, 2010, p. 30). If Ruddick’s (1989) identification of the key pillars that constitute maternal work of ‘preservation’, ‘growth’ and social acceptability’ and the practices and attitudes the mothers demonstrated including “scrutinizing”, “holding” and “training” (Ruddick, 1989), Brady’s analysis of her participants’ maternal narratives sound remarkably similar. Brady revealed that the work of caring for their children fell into the four
broad categories of “provision of basic material needs”, “nurturing of the child”, “knowing and observing” and “teaching values” (Brady, 2010, p. 30).

Dux and Simic (2008) similarly challenge Hakim’s Preference Theory suggesting that mothers’ ‘choices’ are often not true ‘choices’ at all:

_The word ‘choice’ is also relied upon when it comes to mothers returning to work, even though their ‘choices’ are taken under the weight of economic necessity. If you provide women with no paid maternity leave, a labour market that disadvantages families, and employers who require them to keep their parenting issues outside the workplace, what you are left with is a swag of non-choices and non-decisions. The reality for many mothers is that they work out of economic necessity, not a pseudo-feminist-inspired ideal of independence and personal satisfaction_ (Dux and Simic, 2000, p. 108).

Furthermore, Rosin’s (2013) egalitarian model of raising a family discussed above is another challenge to Hakim’s ‘Preference Theory’ with high earning mothers choosing to work, leaving their male partner to parent their child. In the future however these roles may be changed and she is at home with the children for a while and he goes out to work. The ‘see-saw’ and changeable nature of the roles would further seem to undermine Hakim’s central premise of fixed preferences.
In non-Western family contexts Hakim would also seem to have limited relevance. The underpinnings of her preference theory are built on a nuclear family model and a biologically derived family formation. Concepts common to culturally diverse family structures such as gifting children to sisters, extended families and communities raising a child and co-mothering and ‘othermothering’ (Hill Collins, 2000) do not fit neatly into Hakim’s categorisations of women. Queer family structures including lesbian mothering and lesbian co-mothers, gay fathers, families formed through use of surrogates and ‘chosen families’ of LGBTI also are not reflected in Hakim’s ‘Preference Theory’ which might be more accurately described as ‘White, Heterosexual Preference Theory’.

**Class and race challenges to normative Western ideas on working mothers**

There is a good body of literature arguing that working-class women and Black women have always had to work (Gillies, 2007; Campbell, 1984; hooks, 2014) and about how working-class men and women are less likely to stop full-time work for prolonged periods to care for children, often continuing to work and using extended family for daycare. (hooks, 2014, on Black parents and working-class parents; Campbell, 1984, on White, English working-class parents and working; and Peel, 2005, on socially disadvantaged White Australian parents and working).
Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked (hooks, 2014, p. 133).

In her research in the mid-2000s with working-class communities in England, Gillies discusses the complicated and difficult choices working class women face when weighing up working fulltime and caring for young children:

Judgements about whether or how to combine paid employment with unpaid childcare depend on norms, values and beliefs as well as economic need… some mothers prioritised being at home for their children above any extra money they might earn from working… Employment options were for the most part limited to low paid, insecure posts that could be fitted around childcare responsibilities. Paying a stranger to look after your children in order to work full time was viewed as morally dubious by [sic] number of the mothers (Gillies, 2007, pp. 43-44).

One of the groups historically seen as deviant is young working-class women on welfare and family benefits and teenage mothers. Assumptions are often made that “impoverished women, who are assumed to be doing nothing, need to be rescued from their ‘welfare dependency’ and turned into workers, so that they can make their productive contribution to the world” (Peel, 2005, p. 34)
Peel’s study is based on interviews with working-class mothers and fathers living in public housing in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

For women who have little or no money and few life choices motherhood can be a route to respectability and social acceptance. The theme of pursuing motherhood in the absence of other choices afforded by education and middle-class privilege is explored in, for example, Hunt (2004) who examined mothering as a pathway to respectability and social acceptance in her study of poor, pregnant women living in a West Midlands town in England at the end of the twentieth century. Hays (1996) similarly believes that “for working class mothers… mothering is one of the more meaningful and socially valued tasks in which they might engage” (1996, p. 76). Gillies (2007) also explores this theme of motherhood as transformative in her study of working-class mothers in England in the early 2000s:

For the mothers in this research it [motherhood] was the source of great pride and self-respect, with many discussing how having a child marked an important point of transition to adulthood… for most their first child was experienced as introducing new depth and meaning to life (Gillies, 2007, pp. 118-119).
The so-called ‘daycare wars’

With data now showing that most women work, either part- or full-time, who takes care of the children has become a major issue in the motherhood debates.

Arguing vociferously against the use of institutionalised daycare (daycare centres) for young children Australian social commentator Manne (2005) argues that the ‘child-centred’ approach of the 1950s gives way in the 1980s onwards to an approach prioritising the desire of women to work. She calls this the “central transformation in the cultural narrative on childcare” (Manne, 2005, p. 205) and thinks this debate also “pathologises stay-at-home mothers” (Manne, 2005, p. 211).

However, Manne (2005) has been roundly criticised for not going beyond a White, Eurocentric, middle-class focus on motherhood and failing to incorporate any of the insights of the post-structuralist feminist challenges to this hegemonic view of motherhood. The primary problem with Manne is that there is no theory of gender implicit in her work; no attempt to interrogate the powerful, cultural construct that a woman has to be a child’s primary carer and even that the mother is in all cases the best carer.

In the 1990s the debate on working mothers moved to the issue of the use of day care. The so called ‘day care wars’ (Manne, 2005) were framed around two main precepts: (a) whether any daycare is good for children and the appropriate age for children if care if used; and (b) working mothers versus stay-at-home
mothers (Chesterman and Ross-Smith 2010; Caro and Fox, 2008; Goodwin and Huppatz, 2010; Dux and Simic, 2008, Manne, 2005). In ‘the intensive mothering’ ideology of Hays (1996) working mothers and users of day care for young children could not be ‘good mothers’. The hard work of the 1970s feminists to open up opportunities for women in the public sphere and encourage mothers into paid work for greater financial independence was still plagued with the shadow of the ‘good mother’ narrative.

These same deeply held beliefs, often by mothers themselves, still appeared to underpin discussions around motherhood in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly in discussions with women working away from the home. An Australian study by McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie (2005) exploring the relationship between attitudes towards non-maternal care and the mother’s labour force participation sampled mothers who were employees and ex-employees of an Australian university. Their results showed that stay-at-home mothers held negative views of all non-maternal care; women working part-time believed non-maternal care is acceptable if for a limited period of time and the child is likely to derive developmental benefits; and women working full-time were more positive about non-maternal care, although a substantial degree of guilt and ambivalence is expressed (McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie, 2005). This would seem to echo Hakim’s ‘typology of mothers’ and ‘preference theory’ (2000).

The prevalence of these views contradicts the evidence gathered on young children in quality childcare. McDonald et al (2005) cite the 1998 findings of the
National Institute of Child Health and Development, Early Child Care Research Network that found that:

when the quality of formal child care is high and the amount of care is not extensive (extensive is usually defined as in excess of 30 hours per week), even very young children do not suffer any adverse consequences (cited in McDonald et al, 2005, p. 66).

McDonald et al (2005) showed that normative beliefs of ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996; Wearing, 1984) are still deeply entrenched in contemporary society and profoundly affect women’s attitudes to mothering and engagement in paid work. These ideologies persist, despite robust evidence to the contrary that ‘good mothers’ don’t work or if they do it is part-time and that it is undesirable to have younger children in long hours day care.

Hays (1996) encapsulates this tension between women wanting to work and feeling guilty leaving their child looked after by someone other than themselves:

Motherhood,… is one of the central terrains on which… a fundamental and irreducible ambivalence about a society based solely on the competitive pursuit of self-interest… is played out (Hays, 1996, p. 18).
Private maternal experience reframed as public discourse: the rise of ‘mommy blogs’

Women working has become normalised and if women don’t have communities of stay-at-home mothers around them for support when they stop paid work to have a baby they risk isolation and postnatal depression. Hence, for some mothers, real life connections between mothers (like the ones forged in dirty sandpits at playgroup) are potentially being replaced by mediated online social connections where distance and anonymity are preferred (Morrison, 2010, 2011; McAbee, 2011). Mothers in contemporary Australia are increasingly turning to social media to create maternal connectivity, particularly privileged White, Western women. One popular example that came out of my interview data is the online mothers’ group called ‘April [or whichever month the baby was born] Mothers’ created by the ‘Australian Baby Centre’, an online resource for new and expectant parents. Mothers expecting a baby around the same time can form an online support and friendship community. It is common on these forums to actively resist any meet ups in person preferring the anonymity of an online group. This was also borne out in my data.

Privileged mothers may seek online communities to mitigate their sense of loneliness and isolation and to construct realistic mothering narratives to make sense of their lives. This is most common when the women are living in Western nuclear family formations and at a distance from community and extended
family support. In a detailed study of the language and intent of contemporary mommy blogs in Canada Morrison (2010) found that:

*Personal mommy blogging is purposive and deliberate social engagement; a creative as well as interpersonal practice that mitigates the assorted ills (physical isolation, role confusion, lack of realistic role models, etc) and celebrates the particular joys of contemporary mothering especially in the early years of parenting* (Morrison, 2010, p. 1).

Furthermore, Morrison’s (2011) analysis of bloggers describing “their online relationships as having a powerful authenticity and emotional attraction, at the same time as they feel freer to express experiences and feelings they do not feel able to articulate in the ‘real world’ of the offline broader public (or private) sphere” (Morrison, 2011, p. 37) may be one reason why mommy blogging remains so popular.

Sarah McAbee (2011) takes issue with the hegemonic title of ‘mommy bloggers’ arguing that the sexism in society always focuses much more on the moniker ‘mommy’ than the content of the blog itself. She argues for a problematisation of the term ‘mommy blogger’; for it to be a legitimised place for multiple mothers’ voices and issues.

The importance of social media in countering social isolation is investigated in an English study in 2012 (McDaniel et al, 2012) that addressed the relationship
between postnatal depression and blogging to enhance social connectivity. In the study one hundred and fifty-seven new mothers reported on their media use and various well-being variables. The study examined the way that blogging and social networking may impact feelings of connection and social support, which in turn could impact maternal well-being (e.g., marital functioning, parenting stress, and depression). On average, mothers were 27 years old and the children were 7.9 months old. All mothers had access to the Internet in their home. New mothers spent approximately 3 hours on the computer each day, with most of this time spent on the Internet. Findings suggested that frequency of blogging predicted feelings of connection to extended family and friends, which then predicted perceptions of social support. This in turn predicted maternal well-being, as measured by marital satisfaction, couple conflict, parenting stress, and depression. In sum, the authors found that blogging may improve new mothers’ well-being, as they feel more connected to the world outside their home through the Internet.

Social connectivity through digital means may be prioritised by mothers in Western contexts when they live away from extended family support. However, new mothers may also choose this more dis-embodied connectivity precisely because “their online relationships have a powerful authenticity and emotional attraction” but they can remain at a distance from the ‘real world’ of the “offline broader public sphere” (Morrison, 2011, p. 37).
Research on fathering

In this section I will discuss the literature on ‘mothering work’ undertaken by men as both a re-inscription of the gendered discourse of motherhood and a challenge to traditional enactments of masculinities and ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1991). How far have we moved on from traditional cultural constructions of fathering as “an initial sex act and the financial obligation to pay?” (Coltrane, 1996, p. 4). Drawing on contemporary fatherhood theorists I will finish this chapter by looking toward a new paradigm of paternal care.

In many Western countries, the number of full-time, stay-at-home fathers is low. In 2000, Hakim, examined data from a wide range of mainly Western nations on preferences on work and family choices and she identified that “the alternative life-style of long-term economic dependence and a focus on family work appeals to a tiny minority of men… [even] generous paternal leave schemes in the Nordic countries failed to persuade fathers to devote time to family work, even when the leave was fully paid” (Hakim, 2000, pp. 9-10). Contemporary statistics show that not a lot has changed: “In the United States, stay-at-home fathers are relatively uncommon…current estimates from the U.S. Census show stay-at-home fathers to number around 190,000 (U.S. Census, 2013)” (Solomon, 2014, p. 23). Overall then: “The U.S. Census Bureau also reports that 3.4% of all stay-at-home parents in America are men” (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Sabatini Fraone, 2013, cited in Stevens, 2015, p. 22). This is a substantial increase from 2002 when such dads were close to 100,000 (Fields, 2003, cited in Stevens,
2015, p. 23). It may be that this increase of stay-at-home fathers reflects changes in the cultural assumptions about fathering. In Australia the number of stay-at-home fathers is similarly low as recent statistical research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies reviewing Australian Census data from 1981 to 2016 shows: “these analyses find that the number of stay-at-home fathers is small, at about 4-5% of two-parent families” (Baxter, 2018, p. vi).

It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of stay-at-home fathers in Australia as the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census does not have ‘stay-at-home father’ as a specific category. Furthermore, men who are stay-at-home fathers may write the occupation they did before becoming a full-time carer as they are embarrassed to write ‘home duties’. (Some of my research participants revealed just this). This misrepresentation of their caring situation in the Census may lead to questions about the reliability of using Census data to make assertions about the prevalence of stay-at-home fathers in Australia.

**Fathering and the breadwinner role**

There has been considerable sociological research on fathers in their role as primary breadwinners in the family. There is a literature on good husbands and good fathers predicated upon being good providers, earning all, or most of the family wage (Campbell, 1984; Warren, 2007; Connell, 1991). There is also research on the lack of viable, alternative masculine role-models for men, particularly working-class men when they are not employed full-time and the
negative impact unemployment and redundancy can have on masculine identity (Campbell, 1984; Connell, 1991, 2000; Coltrane, 1996). Violation of the traditional gendered male breadwinner role can elicit negative attitudes from society (eg, Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2005, in a qualitative American study on attitudes to carers found that out of the four categories of employed mothers and employed fathers and stay-at-home mothers and stay-at-home fathers, stay-at-home fathers had the most negative attitudes expressed toward them). However, more recently there has been a growing body of research on the changing role of fathers as primary carers married to high earning wives (eg, Rosin, 2013, Solomon, 2014, and Chelsey, 2011, in America; Hunter, Augoustinos and Riggs, 2017; Stevens, 2015, in Australia). Natalier and Hewitt (2014) contribute to the debate on the breadwinner father by identifying the “control and authority” (2014, p. 4) attached to being a breadwinner even after separation. A significant contribution to the area was Craig’s 2006 study of Australia Bureau of Statistics Time-use Survey data from the 1997 Census. Craig looked at how parental education levels affects time in the paid workforce and time with children. She found that in Australia, households with university-educated parents spend more daily time with children than other households in physical care and in developmental activities. Furthermore, Craig (2006) found that sex inequality in care time persists, but fathers with university education do contribute more time to care of children, including time alone with them, than other fathers. Mothers with university education allocate more daily time than other mothers to both childcare and to paid work.
There has been a call for more indepth research on this male breadwinner role: “problematizing [this concept] should be as customary as that of such other key concepts as care” (Warren, 2007, p. 319). Furthermore, Dermott (2008), cautions against reducing fatherhood simply to an income earning role, arguing instead for a more nuanced approach to father care:

Financial provision is a component, like other forms of care, which emerges from the particular characterization of fatherhood. Earning money, in relation to men’s familial role, is primarily about being able to give opportunities (Dermott, 2008, p. 41).

Marsiglio (2000) problematizes the male breadwinner role by foregrounding the importance of “structural conditions” influencing “specific forms of father involvement” (Marsiglio, 2000, p. 79). He discusses how a low paid male worker with odd hours and no flexibility in his work schedule has far fewer opportunities to be an ‘involved’ father so capitulates to the role of breadwinner almost by necessity. Conversely, fathers of higher incomes and more flexibility in hours can better balance financial provision with care and nurturing activities.

While Natalier and Hewitt’s (2014) empirical study of the payment and non-payment of child support by the separated Australian fathers to the mothers of their children does not look at intact nuclear families (the main family form in my data) their conclusions are still relevant to the broader male breadwinner debate. The authors find that male caring is “centred on play, discipline, and role
modelling… masculine care is often discretionary… supported by mothers’ care activities… and shaped by the imperatives of paid work” (Natalier and Hewitt: 2014, p. 4). The authors emphasise how:

control and authority are central to hegemonic masculinity…they are evident in the position of breadwinning as a defining element of successful manhood and fatherhood. The dynamics of men’s power over household money vary across structural and cultural positions, but men’s right to ‘have a say’ on how money is spent is a consistent finding… Nonresidential fathers use child support to demonstrate their identities as good fathers… and implicitly good men. (Natalier & Hewitt, 2014, p. 4)

In interviews with 28 separated fathers and 30 separated mothers, Natalier and Hewitt (2014) show that how the men and women discuss child support illustrates their management of gendered parenting identities and re-entrench relationships of power and control in the system of gender.

The enduring relationship between male identity and income generation reiterates Connell’s articulations on masculinities (2005) and ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (1991). The role of breadwinner as critical to masculine feelings of self-worth emphasises the culturally entrenched perceptions men have both about their role/s in society and also the roles of other men.

Overall, there has historically been less research asking the men undertaking paternal care work about their understandings and lived experiences of the role,
expressed in their own voices, compared to research on mothering. Marsiglio (1993) identified a major methodological shortcoming in existing sociological research on fathers up until that date as relying on "mothers’ reports on fathers’ attitudes, paternal conduct, and father-child relationship quality" (Marsiglio, 1993, pp. 495-96). The author called for more research gathering data directly from fathers: many studies research studies since this time have done just this and my research is another contribution to this father-led data.

In the Australian context significant empirical research on the lived experience of fathers includes Daly, 1996; Grbich, 1997; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; and more recently Rose et al, 2015; Stevens, 2015; and Hunter et al (2017). Stevens (2015) and Hunter et al (2017) employed discourse analyses of Australian magazines and newspapers to investigate how men are represented in the media as primary care-giving fathers. Both studies found that while at a superficial level the contemporary Australian media encourages involved fatherhood it also constructs and reproduces hegemonic masculinity. These findings are replicated elsewhere, eg Wall and Arnold (2007) in their discourse analysis of Canadian fathering in the newspaper the Globe and Mail series ‘Family Matters’ which ran for a year over 1999 and 2000, suggest that through representations of parental guilt, parental responsibility, work–family balance issues, and hegemonic masculinity, mothers continue to be positioned as primary parents. The authors looked at the underlying assumptions about the culture of fatherhood in the year-long series. Support for father involvement, to
the extent that it exists, occurs within the framework of fathers as part-time, secondary parents whose relationship with children remains less important than mothers.

Daly (1996) found that a singular pursuit of paid work has been shown to detrimentally affect fathers’ perceptions of their paternal practice. In interviews with 32 fathers with children under 6 years Daly found that the discourses were dominated by talk of an ‘economy of time’ that “served as the central organizing principle of for the family worlds of these men… guiding many of their decisions and reflect[ing] their commitments as fathers” (Daly, 1996, p. 469). The participants felt even though they spent time with their families to be a ‘good father’ that paid work dominated their time and that family time was relegated to second place.

Grbich (1997) found that the overriding factor among men in becoming a stay-at-home father was “their desire to have greater involvement in the rearing of their young children” (Grbich, 1997, p. 344). She also found that the men experienced isolation at home and felt the support services for young children were set up for women and children. Grbich found “a group constantly struggling with familial and work structures and broader societal values, not only redefining but actively implementing new definitions of the traditional occupant of the caregiver and breadwinner positions against influences from early socialisation patterns and dominant expectations of friends, relatives and others” (Grbich, 1997, p. 351). In addition, importantly from the findings was “a recognition of the
historical limitations of definitions of ‘masculinity’ and a deliberate attempt to overcome them” (Grbich, 1997, p. 351). Like the fathers in my study, those in Grbich’s react against the restrictions of the gender stereotyped male role.

Another major empirical Australian study on fathers, following on from Grbich, was Lupton and Barclay’s research on new fathers in Sydney in the mid 1990s (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). This longitudinal study involved one to one semi-structured interviews with 16 couples when the woman was pregnant; just after the birth and then in early years parenting and at 1 year and 18 months. Both the father and mother were interviewed separately. It is the narratives of early fatherhood that are of relevance here. Lupton and Barclay found that in their findings:

couples are working towards a notion of parenthood that incorporates joint participation in child care and domestic labour. The men in [our] study, with only a few exceptions, tended not to adhere to ‘traditional’ notions of gender-defined child care… and there was little recourse in the men’s accounts to the notion that women are ‘naturally’ better at caring for children than are men (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 140).

However, there was still a tendency for the men “to draw on notions of ‘protector’ and ‘provider’, the person who ideally is ‘strong’ and ‘controlled’ when describing how best to deal with fatherhood” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 145). Furthermore, the men also did considerably less housework than their wives.
This suggests the dominance of a gendered discourse in paternal practice on being the main breadwinner and family protector. Balanced against this however, is the findings that the men did not, like Daly’s father participants (1996) ascribe displays of embodied affection as non-masculine.

This shows perhaps Connell’s “diversity of masculinities… that represent complexity of interests and purposes, which open possibilities for change… [and that a] plurality of gender prefigures the creativity of a democratic social order” (Connell, 2000, p 226).

**Little social acceptance for the role of stay-at-home father**

Contemporary sociological maternal theorists like Nash (2014) in a discussion of changes in Western family life and the rise in postmodern families with their more “permeable… gender roles” claims “it is becoming more acceptable for men to be primary caregivers” (2014, p. 13). The evidence does not bear this out however, from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. As previously cited the most recent numbers on how many Australian men actually take up the role of stay-at-home father is stubbornly low – “4-5% of two parent families” (Baxter, 2018, p. vi). Issues of struggles for social legitimacy and persistent “gendered parenting attitudes” to the role of stay-at-home fathers (Baxter, 2018, p. vi) are common themes in relevant qualitative research on the topic. For example, Doucet and Merla (2007), in a qualitative study of 91 Canadian and Belgian stay-at-home found that the fathers in their study “struggled for social
legitimacy in the role of stay-at-home father” (Doucet and Merla, 2007, p. 463). Similarly, men and masculinities sociological theorist Messner (1997) in his extensive studies of men in the United State of America asserts that “despite the cultural image of the ‘new fatherhood’ and some modest increases in paternal involvement by men, the vast majority of child care, especially of infants, is still performed by women” (Messner, 1997, p. 45). The paucity of paternal involvement is further discussed in the work of fathering theorist Coltrane (1996), Hochschild (1989) and Michael Flood (2003) from The Australia Institute. Flood discusses how the perceptions of fathering in the contemporary Australian context may have shifted, and “the image of the nurturant and involved father now exerts a powerful influence on popular perceptions” however, “the culture of fatherhood has changed much faster than the conduct… Fathers share physical care of children equally in only 1-2 per cent of families, and are highly involved in day-to-day care in only 5-10 per cent of families… Fathers aspire to do more fathering than they actually perform… “(Flood, 2003, pp. 8-10). Craig (2006) studied the Australia Bureau of Statistics Time-use Survey data from the 1997 Census and looked specifically at how parental education levels affect time in the paid workforce and time with children. She found that in Australia, households with university-educated parents spend more daily time with children than other households in physical care and in developmental activities. Sex inequality in care time persists, but fathers with university education contribute more time to care of children, including time alone with them, than other fathers. The stay-at-home fathers I
spoke with may be atypical, as they are all primarily responsible for their children’s physical care and developmental activities and only three of them are university educated, but their accounts of their activities cast light on the impact that changing cultures and discourses around parenting can have on men who choose this path.

More recently, the findings of Rose, Brady, Yerkes and Coles (2015) in a recent Australian empirical study on fathers illuminates and problematises Nash’s statement. Rose et al (2015) found that the fathers they spoke with in their study are still affected by the limitations placed upon men by the gendered nature of caring for young children: the men did not feel comfortable or socially accepted in their roles of paternal hands-on carers of younger children. Hunter et al (2017) and Stevens (2015) also challenge Nash’s assertion with their discourse analyses showing depictions of fathering in contemporary Australian media for the most part re-entrenching hegemonic masculinity rather than encouraging a plurality of masculine roles.

Rose and her fellow authors (2015) interviewed 11 couples with an infant aged 6 to 8 months, focusing specifically on how couples negotiate and rationalise gendered divisions in infant care. While the researchers found, like Nash (2014), that “the time that fathers devote to child care is increasing” (Rose et al, 2015, p. 40), more significantly, their indepth, qualitative study found that “mothers and fathers accept gendered narratives of the instinctive, ‘embodied’ mother, particularly in the early stages of infant care, when the infant is breastfeeding.
and waking through the night” (Rose et al, 2015, p. 51). Overall, their research found that “dominant gendered discourses implicitly defend a father’s decision to opt out of infant care tasks they find more difficult, such as soothing an irritable infant” (Rose et al, 2015, p. 38).

A significant contribution to the debate on how fathers interrogate their own masculinity is Doucet and Merla (2007). Their qualitative study of 91 Canadian and Belgian stay-at-home fathers specifically addresses the question of how their participants deal with the relationship between their role as the main carers of children and their sense of their own masculinity. The authors propose that in an attempt for social legitimacy and as a way to counter their non-traditional roles of stay-at-home father it was important to participants to:

… remain connected to traditionally masculine sources of identity such as part-time paid work, unpaid masculine self-provisioning work, and community work that builds on traditional male interests (Doucet and Merla, 2007, pp. 463-464)

“Self-provisioning work” here means the unpaid male-interest work like building, repairing, car maintenance and renovating.

Solomon (2014) offers an alternative perspective to male self-provisioning work in fathering. In her in-depth interviews with mainly privileged middle- and upper-class stay-at-home fathers in the United States, she found a deviation to this trend of “enacting masculinity through traditional masculine household or
community activities” (Solomon, 2014, p. 27). Solomon suggests that this may be because these men were largely positively supported by their family, friends and wider community. Solomon terms this “evolved masculinity” (2014, p. 36) and suggests it may be a movement away from fatherhood being linked primarily to the breadwinner model. She suggests this difference with findings from, for example, Doucet (2007) may be because her cohort of stay-at-home fathers were privileged: “Men in my sample enjoyed privileges that accompany being middle- and upper class… individuals in the upper classes tend to espouse more egalitarian views about caregiving than individuals in other classes” (Solomon, 2014, p. 27).

Within a gendered discussion of fathering, mothers’ inability or lack of desire to relinquish mothering has been identified as a barrier to active participation in hands-on fathering by Everingham (1994) in her study of Australian parents. She found that the routines of child care established in the early months of caring for a baby were adopted by fathers rather than establishing their own ways of caring.

While hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991) and the “boys in a box” rhetoric (Connell, 2008, p. 238) still seem part of contemporary fathers’ perceptions of their practices attitudes are changing. Daly (1996) found in interviews with 32 Canadian fathers (Daly, 1996, cited in Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 121) that they felt that were doing a much better job fathering their children than their own
fathers. Furthermore, the men felt they father ‘against’ how they were fathered rather than using their fathers as a successful role model.

Challenges to fathering are also occurring at an ontological level. De Kenter (1987), as cited in Lupton & Barclay (1997) shows the fluid, multiple and changing nature of father and fatherhood by emphasising “there is a continual movement between at least three different levels of meaning: the person of the father (that is, an individual’s embodied presence), the socio-cultural position of the father and the more abstract symbol of the father” (De Kanter, cited in Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 16). Therefore, the movement between these constructs can mean there is no relationship between “maleness, masculinity, heterosexuality and ‘the father’… for instance, “among lesbian couples with children, a woman may be conceptualized as performing the ‘father’ role, while gay men can be fathers” in a number of biological (sperm donors) and non-biological ways (male friend of lesbian couple acting as loved father figure)” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 16).

Dermott (2008) calls for a new paradigm for the sociological analysis of contemporary fatherhood:

conceptualising contemporary fatherhood as an intimate relationship [that] allows for an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant; emotions, the expression of

As well as being an appropriate rubric for the way many of the fathers in my study conceptualised fatherhood ‘intimate fathering’ is both a frame to move beyond the binary arguments of ‘involved’ or ‘distant’ fathering and it allows a fluidity and openness to negotiate in fathering practice.

Doucet (2013) also looks toward a new paradigm of fatherhood and would reframe Dermott’s “exclusive, affectionate father-child dyad” within a framework of paternal embodiment. In her beautifully framed phrase “the choreography of becoming” she argues for more concern with the complex interrelationship between bodies and materialism in both paternal and maternal care:

gender differences in mothering and fathering are embodied, relational, and fluid identities and practices that shift and change over time and within complex webs of social and institutional relationships (Doucet, 2013, p. 291)

By arguing for a movement beyond fixed categories like ‘mother’ and ‘father’ and liberating new topics for investigation like male embodiment Doucet shares queer theory’s focus on families and care practices with its postmodern, ontological interrogations of gender categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ and ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ (eg, Butler, 1990; Beasley, 2012; Weinstein, 2010). Beasley (2012) in particular has criticised Connell (2000) for using sexual
difference as a fundamental ontological and constitutive foundation for all difference in her theorising on gender roles.

Like Dermott and Doucet, bell hooks (2014) argues for a reconfiguration and broadening of the definition of fathering practice and fatherhood. While it is acknowledged that hooks (2014) is primarily a scholar on Black fathers and mothers her comments on Black fathers in contemporary America have relevance for non-Black men who father. hooks argues that traditionally men have been:

allowed to conceive of the father’s role solely in terms of exercising authority and providing for material needs. They are taught to think of it as a role secondary to the mother’s (hooks, 2014, p. 139-140).

She calls for a discussion of fathering that includes the same words that are used to describe mothering, like “tenderness” and “affectionate” (hooks, 2014, p. 138). Hooks also calls for a fathering that focuses on the emotional as well as the material needs of children.

Theorists of colour that foreground the intersectionality of race and class like hooks challenge and trouble hegemonic articulations of fatherhood, arguing that class and race affect both experiences of, and discussions about, fathering.

Connell (1991) argues for a view of masculinities that is complex, culturally and historically situated, and profoundly gendered:
I take ‘masculinity’ to be a socially constructed form of life or project in time, which appropriates the bodily difference of men from women into a social process of gender. Masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relations… This project is found in social practice at several levels: in personality, in culture and institutions, and in the organisation and use of the body (eg in sexuality). In any given society there are likely to be multiple masculinities (Connell, 1991, p. 143).

Even the male breadwinner role is a recent creation and far from universally accepted in the history of masculinities (Connell, 1991).

Connell (2007b) encourages acknowledging the structures or race, class and sexuality in discussions about masculinity. In this way she is closer to intersectional theorists of colour like bell hooks who situate discussions about masculinities firmly in the context of race and class and argue against a universalising narrative in men’s experience of masculinities:

… men do not share a common social status, … patriarchy does not negate the existence of class and race privilege or exploitation, … all men do not benefit equally from sexism… bourgeois white women, though often victimized by sexism, have more power and privilege, are less likely to be exploited or oppressed, than poor, uneducated, non-white males (hooks, 2014, p. 69).
hooks is critical of maternal theorists like Ruddick (1989) who she believes glorifies the physiological experience of motherhood and is unwilling to concede motherhood as an area of social life in which women can exert power and control even while calling for equal child rearing between men and women. According to Ruddick:

…”mothering is potentially work for men and women… whatever difference might exist between female and male mothers, there is no reason to believe that one sex rather than the other is more capable of doing maternal work” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 41)

hooks objects to Ruddick's romanticisation of the idea of the 'maternal' and fathers' care-giving work being subsumed into this traditionally feminised term. Instead hooks calls for “a concept of effective parenting that makes no distinction between maternal and paternal care” (hooks, 2014, p. 139). hooks further identifies the flaws in Ruddick's arguments when it comes to working-class and sole mothers parenting – the kind of detailed, hands-on, attentive maternal care that Ruddick advocates is difficult for working-class parents to offer their children when they both come in exhausted at the end of a working day and for women who parent alone juggling the demands of work and child-rearing.
Conclusion

The research questions for this study are focussed on the meanings women and men attach to their caring work in contemporary suburban Australia and how they describe their lived experience of this mothering work. These questions are examined within a larger framework investigating the ‘institution of motherhood’ and an interrogation of the persistent ideology of the ‘good mother’. Furthermore, there will be interrogation of the idea that mothering is culturally situated and affected by the structures of class.

The research aims are to investigate the nature of work mothering entails in some detail; how do the participants construct their social identity of mothering?; is mothering is constructed as normative?; and the extent to which mothering is gendered. Important in the research was interrogating the interpretive frameworks that discuss motherhood.

Foregrounding how the experiences of women of colour are often elided into dominant discussions of motherhood is a central objective of this research. The study draws on theories of ‘individualization’ of the family in Western contexts (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and theories that have their roots in indigenous knowledge systems and intellectual traditions (Pihama, 2011, and Pihama et al, 2002; Stevenson et al, 2016; hooks, 2014; Collins, 2000; Moore and Riley, 2010) to investigate the meanings men and women attach to their maternal work.
As well as race, the effects of class and sexuality are also discussed in relation to the institution of motherhood: to what extent is the dominant ideology of motherhood heteronormative and middle-class? This thesis examines whether mothering is lived as an individual experience or a community one and the extent to which contemporary mothering contributes to broader debates on individualization: does a ‘duty to self’ take precedence over a communal approach of ‘duty to others’? What difference does it make both to maternal identity and the role of being a mother more generally if men undertake this mothering work? What issues exist for their own masculinities for the men who choose to mother and how does this affect the positioning of men in a society still influenced by ‘hegemonic masculinity’? (Connell, 1991).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research is also embodied, emotional, and performed.

(Ezzy, 2010, p. 169)

It seems to me that most ethnographic writing, and much recent feminist theory, is founded on the fiction of restoring lost voices

(Visweswaran, 1994, p. 15)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodologies that have been employed to provide a philosophical and conceptual framework to the research and the relevant theories that have been chosen to inform the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of this study. Honouring the lived experience of research participants and understanding that lives are lived within a materialist and culturally specific context are important methodological underpinnings of this research (Olesen, 1998; Oakley, 1981). Feminist research advocates lived experience as a valid qualitative approach and encourages the women and men
interviewed to describe their experiences in their own voices. Furthermore, a grounded theory approach, adopted in this research, rejects the claim of objectivity in quantitative research (Charmaz, 2011).

A feminist epistemological stance (Olesen, 1998; Oakley, 1981) underlies much of the theory chosen here and I choose to frame the process of interviewing “as communion rather than conquest” (Ezzy, 2010, p. 164). For Ezzy, qualitative interviewing is “embodied, emotional, and performed” (Ezzy, 2010, p. 169) and “to be able to listen to the Other, to know and understand the experiences of people studied by social researchers, is also to engage in an emotional relationship” (Ezzy, 2010, p. 169). This is what I have tried to do in this research.

I will look at some of the issues involved in feminist women interviewing women (Reiseman, 1987; Edwards, 1990; Oakley, 1981) and women interviewing men (Arendell, 1997). Included in this discussion is an interrogation of the question ‘how does a shared mothering experience (between interviewer and participant) affect the process of the research?’ and more specifically how does this “cultural affinity between feminist interviewers and the women they are interviewing?” (Edwards, 1990, p. 4) affect the interviewing process? The research design chosen for this thesis is a qualitative inquiry based on in-depth, semi-structured, intimate, intensive interviews and ethnographic data gathering techniques including intensive site exploration and writing extensive field notes and journals. This chapter will provide a detailed description of the overall research processes and analysis undertaken and I will discuss the research design and
provide a justification and explanation of why the study participants were chosen to be interviewed. The ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also discussed, and finally some thoughts are offered on the position and reflexivity of the researcher.

**Background**

In 2008 when I enrolled in my PhD I was living in the regional town of Singleton, a prominent mining town in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales. In 2009 I received approval from the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee to recruit participants from Singleton for my study. Original ethics approval was given for forty interviews with four cohorts of mothers living in the greater Singleton region. Specifically, I was going to recruit from the following groups of mothers: single mothers; the wives and partners of miners; the wives and partners of Army personnel; and lesbian mothers.

The chosen research design broadly replicated the methodology used by sociologist Betsy Wearing (1984) in her study of mothering experiences in Sydney in the early 1980s. Wearing interviewed mothers from more affluent and poorer areas of Sydney, single mothers and ‘feminist’ mothers. Like Wearing, I was attempting to garner a rich diversity of mothering experiences.

However, before I began actively recruiting and interviewing my partner and father of my four young children secured a job in Brisbane, Queensland. This necessitated an application for a ‘Variation to Ethics Application’ and this was
approved in 2010. After the move to Brisbane in 2011 the focus of the research changed to the nature of suburban mothering in the greater Brisbane region and the cohorts I began recruiting for were:

1. **Wealthy Brisbane mothers** (mothers living in Ascot and environs, the wealthiest suburb of Brisbane as established through the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Census);

2. **Mothers from a low socio-economic, disadvantaged area** (in this instance Logan, just south of Brisbane). This decision was also informed by Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data;

3. **Mothers with fly in/fly out (FIFO) husbands and partners**; and

4. **Stay-at-home fathers**.

The decisions about which suburbs to interview in were informed by selected quantitative approaches; specifically, detailed statistical analysis of Local Government Areas (LGA’s) data of the Brisbane Metropolitan Area using the 2009 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data on the standard of living indices including income level, percentage of resident population with tertiary education, ratios of manual and trades' workers to professional or managerial workers, home ownership and employment rates. This provided an informed context and background for the chosen interview sites. The rationale for interviewing FIFO mothers came as in 2011 at the peak of the mining boom this
was a growing social phenomenon in Australia affecting many families. In 2011 and 2012 FIFO was still an under-researched area therefore ripe for further investigation. The reason to include stay-at-home fathers in the research was to investigate whether men undertake and think about mothering work the same way as women (Ruddick, 1989). Interviewing men also offered an opportunity to investigate the relationship of the fathers to masculinities and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991). The data gathered from the stay-at-home fathers has provided a gendered dimension to the findings and allowed a valuable analysis of data around issues of the existence of a gender order and male identity. After carrying out 34 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in total and amassing a considerable amount of valuable, rich, in-depth data the decision was made, in consultation with my supervisors, to stop interviewing. The considerable mass of data collected by this point reflected saturation. Thus, I only completed two interviews with FIFO mothers and did not continue interviewing this cohort. The interviews were transcribed, however, the data is not included in this thesis.

**Purposive sampling**

The sampling of research participants in this study was purposive, an appropriate tool to use in qualitative research when there is “some specific purpose or focus in mind” (Punch, 1998). The primary research aims of this study are examining mothers’ behaviours and attitudes around contemporary mothering in Australia and interrogating the persistent good mothering ideology
despite significant diversity in mothering practices and attitudes across cultures and classes.

To capture the diversity in mothering experiences I intentionally sampled for cultural and class diversity. I wanted a range of women and men to talk about their mothering experiences in their own voices to ensure that my findings were not just “generalisations based only upon white middle-class women’s experiences - generalisations that do not take account of nor account for the experiences of working-class or Black women” (Edwards, 1990, p. 477). bell hooks similarly warns against this kind of feminist theorising that renders Black experience as invisible:

_The force that allows white feminist authors to make no reference to racial identity in their books about “women” that are in actuality about white women, is the same one that would compel any writer writing exclusively on black women to refer explicitly to their racial identity. That force is racism._ (hooks, 1982, p. 138, as cited in Edwards, 1990, p. 477)

A feminist study of motherhood in a variety of community and cultural settings necessarily highlights rich linkages between motherhood and class and ethnicity (hooks, 2014; Olesen, 1998; Collins, 2000).
While the overall location of the study is greater metropolitan Brisbane, I interviewed mothers and men who mother from contrasting parts of the city to ensure a diversity of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and voices. As a White New Zealander (Pakeha) growing up in Aotearoa/New Zealand, used to the more culturally diverse society of Maori and Pakeha living together in a treaty-based society, I intentionally designed a research design that would be culturally inclusive. Attempting to attain the highest degree possible of diversity of culture and sexuality in the voices of the research participants was an important part of the study design. While no lesbian mothers or gay fathers came forward to be interviewed I deliberately searched for culturally diverse participants.

Logan was intentionally chosen as one of the areas of study as it is the most multicultural region of greater Brisbane and therefore has a potentially higher number of alternative, non-Western models of mothering. Mothering in Logan presents alternative epistemologies of mothering experience with an intersectional focus on race, class and gender. The Ascot stay-at-home mothers were chosen to investigate how the structures of wealth, class and ethnicity influence mothering practice and beliefs in this privileged cohort of women. Stay-at-home fathers were chosen to see whether men ‘mother’ differently to women and to interrogate potential reconfigurations of masculinities in a lived experience context. The analysis of the data gathered from these different settings has led to rich resonances but also differences in maternal practice and
belief. The research design reflects the aims and relevant epistemologies of the study.

Women and men with young children (at least one child of pre-school age) were chosen from a range of socio-economic suburbs of suburban Brisbane. The age of the children was a significant design consideration in the overall research methodology as these early years parenting is recognised as one of the most intensive times in the parenting trajectory (Wearing, 1984; Hayes, 1996). It is also a time when it is more likely that one parent may not work and choose to be at home with young children. While all the mothers met this criterion two of the fathers did not have pre-school age children; they had slightly older children who were in the early years of primary school. As it was considerably more difficult to recruit the stay-at-home fathers I did not discount these participants from my study and their data is included here. (There is a more detailed discussion below on why recruitment of stay-at-home fathers was more difficult.) There was no age restriction on the mothers and stay-at-home fathers as I am aware that women become mothers and men become primary carers of young children at different stages of the life cycle and a diversity of experience was welcomed in the research. Lesbian and transgender mothers and gay stay-at-home fathers were not precluded from the study. However, no lesbian, transgender or gay stay-at-home fathers came forward to be interviewed – this may reflect both how heteronormative the practice of mothering is perceived to be and a weariness of researchers and being studied as a ‘fascinating Other’. 
There remains a need for further research in the area of queer, non-biological, non-heteronormative mothering in Australia.

**Consent, care and confidentiality**

Formal ethics approval for the research was given by the University of Newcastle Ethics Committee (Approval Number H-2009-0375). Consent was sought from participants at all stages of the research process. Consent and confidentiality provisions were approved by the University of Newcastle Ethics Committee and they also approved the recruitment posters, the advertisements and the interview questions.

Participants received an information statement about the research before the interview (see Appendix) and gave written consent to be interviewed. In addition, participants were able to see the interview questions beforehand if they requested this; and they were offered the write-up of the interview to comment on and modify if they wished. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw their consent until the thesis is submitted. Their identities have been disguised using pseudonyms and identifying details have been altered. I was mindful that discussing personal issues might cause distress and was prepared to offer support and information about counselling services if required.

The research consisted of a major period of data collection, sustained over 3 years and included recruitment and ethnographic immersion in the field; undertaking 34 in-depth, semi-structured, long interviews; transcribing the
interviews myself; checking back with the participants that they were satisfied
with the transcription; making the requested changes when requested to do so;
and data analysis.

**Ethnographic method**

Immersion in the field of your chosen research site is a key part of the
ethnographic research approach. The first phase of my data collection was
familiarising myself with each research site within greater Brisbane, ie, Logan,
Ascot and stay-at-home dads (more diffuse geographically but location and
neighbourhood was still a significant factor in their lives). Using an informal
ethnographic approach, I attempted to gain a sense of the area I was going to
be interviewing in and try see that place through the eyes of the interview
participants: to look for “connections, junctures, and nexuses that provide
alliance between ethnographers and those who can and will supply the raw data
of present-situation ethnographies” (Lincoln and Denzin, 2011, p. 717).
Furthermore, as I was new to Brisbane myself I felt the need to get to know the
human landscape of Brisbane in more depth for my research. This ethnographic
immersion laid the valuable groundwork for the recruitment phase of my
research.

Interwoven into this research was a method of informal participant observation
over approximately ten years. A mother of four sons I have observed and
spoken with mothers and fathers in playgrounds, parks, daycare centres, pre-
school carparks, P and C (parent and community) meetings, primary school
councils, cub scout halls, on the sides of swimming pools, at playgroups,
community health support groups for breastfeeding, and informal coffee
mornings for parents. An anthropological approach of sympathetic attention to
the culture of parenting is integrated into this thesis: as a mother of boys I was
especially intrigued by men’s caring practices. For me motherhood was and
continues to be an embodied and emotional gendered experience through the
experience of conception, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding and later
through navigating the highly gendered nature of daycare centres, preschools
and schools. I was curious as to how men would enact caregiving practices,
traditionally work defined as feminine, and how these practices would affect both
the individual father’s conception of his own masculinity and more broadly how
“the most honoured or desired” form of masculinity (Connell, 2000, p.10),
antithetical to femininity and built on power: “The hegemonic definition of
manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power (Kimmel,
1994, p. 125). How did fathers caring in the feminine environment of
motherhood make sense of their experiences?

Recruiting in Logan

My first research site was Logan and I placed recruitment posters up at the
Logan City Library asking mothers of young children to contact me about being
interviewed on their experiences about mothering. No-one replied to my
advertisements. All my eventual interviews with Logan mothers came through networks established and built upon during fieldwork in Logan and spending considerable time (approximately a year) at this research site.

Logan is a multicultural and young community: In 2015 44.3% of its residents were aged under 34 years and the median age was 33.3 years. Approximately 280,000 people from approximately 215 different ethnicities live in Logan and 26.1% of the population of Logan were born overseas. From July 2006 to 30 June 2012, 7,766 people settled in Logan and of these 2,538 or 32.7% were from the humanitarian migration system. In 2015 Logan City had the highest unemployment rate in Australia, at almost 9.4% (Logan City Council, 2016).

Logan is also recognised as having considerable social and economic disadvantage compared to other parts of Brisbane and Australia. In 2012 Logan was identified as one of the 20 most disadvantaged areas in Australia in relation to employment in the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Parliament of Australia, 2012). On other indicators of economic and social disadvantage Logan also stands out. There are more single parents in Logan, more people in public housing and fewer people with post-school qualifications – 5% (ABS, 2011) compared to national averages. Logan City has the highest overall crime rate throughout the Brisbane Metropolitan area in armed robberies, homicides, and gang activity (Small Area Crime Profiles, 2003). Therefore, on many significant indicators Logan has
significant disadvantage. How would mothers living in Logan make sense of their experiences?

My first interviews were with Samoan women after I attended a seminar on Samoan culture in the local library and introduced myself to the head of ‘Voice of Samoan People Incorporated’. A prominent local leader of the Logan Samoan community, he was very supportive of the research and wanted to ensure the voices of Samoan women would be heard. He gave me the name of two Samoan mothers and after I contacted them they agreed to be interviewed. One of the women gave me the name of the local African Development Officer in Logan working for ACCESS, a community organisation tasked with settling refugees. He gave me the contact details of leaders of the main African groups in Logan: Burundian, Ethiopian, Rwandan and Somali. Through meeting these women and men I gained interviews with my two Burundian participants. My remaining 6 interview subjects contacted me through a friend of a friend – the young mother living in Logan was part of a supported playgroup run through Queensland Health Community Health Nurses after they had had their baby. I interviewed all the mothers in this playgroup including an 18 year old teenage mother. Of these women two were Brazilian and four were White Australians. All of these women were young mothers (most were under 30).

The African Community Development Officer gave me the contacts for all the African groups living in Logan. I repeatedly phoned the Burundian, Ethiopian, Somali and Rwandan contacts. While the Somali women were initially
interested in being interviewed they then declined. I had an initial meeting with an Ethiopian community leader and she seemed keen to help but many subsequent calls to her mobile proofed fruitless. The Rawandan contact given to me was an imposing, articulate woman of around 60 who lived in a comfortable house in Brown Plains (a ‘nicer’ part of Logan). She invited me to meet her at her house and I thought we were having a getting to know you chat and that she would put me in contact with potential interview subjects. However, she never contacted me again after this meeting. Only the Burundian contact agreed to be interviewed and this occurred at her house. My interview with my Burundian participant was long, detailed, informative and at times emotional. She gave me her sister’s details and she also agreed to be interviewed. This interview took place about a week later at the library with an interpreter as her English was not good. I modified the interview questions as we went along in this interview as I found having an interpreter there added another layer of complication to the interview. The interpreter also had her young toddler at the interview so the questions were punctuated with short play times (all of us, the participant, mother translator and myself involved). In addition, some of the questions were not as relevant – much of this participant’s early years mothering had taken place in refugee camps. After this interview a friend of mine who lives in Brisbane gave me the contact of her Brazilian friend who lives in Logan. From this participant I recruited four other mothers – they were all part of a Community Health-initiated young mothers’ support group – and her sister- in-law, a Columbian mother of a two-year-old and full time accountant.
In Logan in particular, entering the world of still largely heteropatriarchal societies of the Samoan and African communities where the gatekeepers to the women I wanted to talk to were always men, was a significant challenge to my Western, feminist sensibilities. It was not an easy place to recruit interview participants for my research. All my interviews in Logan were procured through personal contacts and building relationships with key people within the communities who could help me.

The Catholic, Mormon and Seventh Day Adventist religions are very important to Burundian and Samoan communities and men are still the heads of these communities and gatekeepers to the women. To obtain interviews with the Logan Samoan and Burundian participants I had first to work through the men – no interviews were directly procured with the women themselves. All interviews were mediated through male heads of community and this involved multiple meetings with me in person before they released names and details of the women.

My experience of recruiting within the African communities in Logan shows the power of men over women in these communities. This was illustrated most sharply when I was invited to a local African development meeting by the Logan African Development Officer from the refugee re-settlement agency ACCESS, an extremely helpful young Rwandan man and my main link to my African interviewees. At the meeting I was physically intimidated by a large Somalian Muslim man when I attempted to talk to a group of Somali women to ask them...
about being interviewed. It had been conveyed to me before the meeting by another male Somalian leader that these women had agreed to be interviewed. As I was talking to the women the Somalian Muslim man came and stood over me (he was a very tall, well-built man) placing himself between me and the women I was talking with. They had initially started talking to me but when he intervened they bowed their heads, the shutters went down on their eyes and they turned their backs on me. They then said they would no longer be interviewed. At that same meeting which was largely African men and a few women and children I have never felt so invisible. The men sat at the front of the room and the women sat behind them. When it came to afternoon tea the men helped themselves first to tea and biscuits and the women fell back until they had finished. I didn’t see any mixing of the women and men – the men spoke to the men; the women to the women and they also looked after the children. I was advised before attending the meeting to cover all flesh so I wore a skirt and long sleeves to ensure modesty. I went with my 18 month old toddler, my 4 year old and 60s something mother and in discussions afterwards she shared my sense of feeling invisible.

A more joyous ethnographic insight was gained in my Logan fieldwork when I was invited to the Pacific Island Graduation night (‘Pasifika Graduation’) of a local university with a campus in Logan by one of my participants who was hosting the night. I attended with two of my children. It was a very moving and emotional night and an insight into the importance of family in Logan as
successive waves of mainly middle-aged Samoan, Cook Island and Tongan women graduated with their children and husbands with them on stage. The women also wore traditional dress and there was traditional music and dancing on the night. The warmth, laughter and large extended families sitting around tables laden with food could not be more removed from my memory of graduating from a traditional New Zealand university in the 1980s in a long, formal, pompous graduation ceremony where tickets for family were limited to two per graduate and the night was dominated by a long speech from a White, middle-class, male academic.

The contribution and value of this ethnographic method to my overall research methodology is that these insights into the cultures in Logan provide a valuable context to both the process of my interviewing and they help me make sense of the findings. The relevance of spending time at my chosen interviewing site of Logan and the ethnographic immersion in cultural events such as the Pasifika Graduation inform my findings by giving me richer insights into the culture of Logan from within this culture. The Pacific Island Graduation ceremony reinforced the central importance of family (both immediate biological and extended) in the lives of Pacific Island women and the expression of their identity as a communal and family-oriented one rather than a singular identity. The difficulties in recruitment in Logan in the Samoan and Burundian communities due to patriarchal barriers showed me the continuing presence and strength of male power at play in these communities and how it can be used to mediate
relationships with women. How did the mothers I spoke to negotiate and circumnavigate this male power in their everyday mothering practice?

**Recruiting in Ascot**

Recruiting in Ascot was more straightforward than it had been in Logan. I placed recruitment posters up in all the daycare centres (both public and private) in Ascot and immediately surrounding suburbs and the Ascot ‘C and K’. ‘C and K’s are specific to Queensland and they are ‘Childcare and Kindergarten’ early learning centres so the preschool or pre-prep year where children attend a kindergarten programme at 4 years old in the year immediately before starting school. With the daycare centres and C and Ks I cold-called first, spoke to the director of the centre about my research and left them written information and a recruitment poster to display. In almost all instances the director was very receptive and supportive of the research and placed the recruitment flier on their noticeboards and in relevant parent newsletters.

Most of my interviews in Ascot came from replies to my advertisements in these daycare centres. I also placed an advertisement in the free local parenting magazine *Brisbane Child* and I had two interviews come from this source. After I had finished interviewing in Ascot and had moved into interviewing stay-at-home-fathers I still had women replying to the *Brisbane Child* ad. Unfortunately, I told them I had enough data and no longer required any more interviews. In Ascot the interviews were conducted in the main public park in Ascot - Oriel
Park - and in the homes of the women. One interview took place in a private Ascot club.

While all the women I interviewed in Logan and Ascot were sent transcripts to check and comment upon only two participants returned them with minor modifications. As part of the ethnographic method in Ascot I spent time in the public parks and shopping centres observing mothers and their children. In addition, I attended a playgroup at Ascot run through Playgroup Queensland and this is described in detail below.

**A description of the neighbourhood location of Ascot**

My enduring memory of undertaking fieldwork in the plush, well-heeled Brisbane suburb of Ascot is the public toilets in Oriel Park; I did most of my interviewing in this popular children’s playground in the heart of the suburb. These are freakishly clean for public toilets and the standalone soap dispenser is still three quarters full of a heavily floral liquid soap. The park is flanked by a Greek delicatessen that has been there for 30 years on one side of the road and a ‘boutique’ (self-advertised) daycare centre with two lots of high gates and keypads to enter, on the other side. One of the mothers I interview later tells me the Director of this daycare centre interviews you, the parent, if you want entry to this educational facility. My interview participant was, inexplicably, denied entry for her 18 month-old daughter despite meeting all criteria on paper. Across the road from the park is a café called Vanilla Pod, selling an extraordinary array
of designer cupcakes at outrageous prices. When I arrive there later to buy coffees for my interview participants there is an advertisement on the wall about the visit to Brisbane of The Vienna Boys’ Choir. Families are encouraged not to miss this ‘unique opportunity’. Tickets are listed as $130 for an adult and $80 for a child.

To further pursue an informal ethnographic approach and gather richer data I also contacted Playgroup Queensland’s head office and asked permission to visit their local Ascot playgroup with the aim of recruiting mothers and to gain a deeper insight into the Ascot mothering culture. This request was granted and while the visit didn’t lead to any interviews it was a unique glimpse of the Ascot parenting culture. Half the adult attendees were au pairs (the biological full time stay-at-home mothers were at home having a rest I discovered after talking to the young au pairs – many of them from overseas – many were Brazilian and Spanish and appeared to be in their early 20s). The playgroup was run by a rather serious and earnest paid educational ‘leader’ wearing a uniform. She ensured the children were engaged in age-appropriate developmental learning opportunities. This is a sharp deviation from the traditional playgroup model where mothers meet in a run-down community hall and share intimate aspects of their personal, domestic lives while their children play nearby in the (usually dirty) sandpit (Everingham, 1994).

Some of the interviews with the Ascot mothers take place in Oriel Park, some in their houses and one is held in the Ascot Country Club, a private club for
members only. I was let in to the gated, high spiked, fenced club by the club’s caretaker, who looked at me suspiciously. The day I do the interview there is only one other slim, blonde woman there swimming in the pool with her two sons and one other father and son playing tennis on the courts. My interviewee, Tessa, an older mother at 49 of an 8 year-old (she also has a son in his 20s) is a wealthy White Australian and a member of the country club.

Recruiting stay-at-home fathers

The stay-at-home fathers were the most difficult group to recruit. As they were not a discrete geographic group my recruitment strategies included recruitment through personal networks, advertising in private daycare centres and C and K children’s centres. I also approached Playgroup Queensland to see if they had any fathers’ play groups registered with them that I could talk to. They did have a fathers’ playgroup but they wouldn’t talk to me as they objected (strongly) to my topic of ‘mothering’: “we are fathers not mothers”. [This issue of the refusal of the fathers’ play group to participate in the research is discussed further under the heading ‘Limitations of the research design’ at the end of this chapter.] Six of the stay-at-home father interviews came through personal networks, one replied to the C and K advertisement, two replied to the private daycare advertisements and one was a friend of a participant. As the recruitment strategies were necessarily more diverse for this cohort the fathers I spoke with live all over Brisbane. The men encompass a range of cultures [here I am using ‘culture’ not as homogeneous, neat entities or categories applied from outside,
but to reflect complex, dynamic and distinctive understandings within that culture.] Among the participants I spoke with, one is a New Zealand Maori, one is a White Zimbabwean and one is a Pakeha New Zealander (White New Zealander); the remainder are White Australians.

There was a range of classes among the participants; some of the fathers I interviewed live in the leafy, upper class, semi-rural, lifestyle acreage blocks on the North-West and South East edges of Brisbane; one working class father lives in the less affluent town of Ipswich, just out of Brisbane, and another lived in the older, more working-class Brisbane suburb of Wynnum.

There was a predominance however of men who lived in the outer Brisbane, semi-rural suburbs. These suburbs are quite salubrious and you generally need to be quite wealthy to live there therefore there may be a weighting in my data toward wealthier stay-at-home fathers. Balancing this however, there were two working class participants in my study who did not live in wealthy areas and one father who lived in a working-class, lower socio-economic suburb. One interview took place at a public swimming pool as a participant’s son was a representative swimmer and he spent so much time there. Another took place at a public park and one took place at the Brisbane Botanical Gardens as the participant was there with his three year old daughter so asked me along with them. Seven of the interviews were conducted at the men’s house: at my first interview with Ned he had cleaned the house before I came and baked me muffins. In another interview a participant made me many cups of freshly-brewed coffee as we
shared our love of caffeine. This level of hospitality was unique to the men: none of the Logan or Ascot participants baked for me.

Overall then in pursuit of the ethnographic research method I spent considerable time in my main research sites, visiting local daycare centres, libraries, community health facilities and on the ground community development offices. I attended a Graduation Ceremony for Pacific Island graduates (a ‘Pasifika’ Graduation) at a local university held in Logan one evening and I attended an African Market day. Both these invitations came from my research participants. I spent approximately one year visiting Logan and approximately 9 months in Ascot; the interviewing of the stay-at-home fathers similarly took place over a 9-month period. Although geographic dispersal of the male participants was all over Brisbane I still spent time in the individual neighbours where the men lived visiting parks, local daycare centres and shopping centres. From the findings, location and local neighbourhood were identified by the men as being important in their lives and interwoven into their lived experiences of being stay-at-home fathers, just as it was for the mothers I interviewed.

If I used an informal ethnographic approach in this research it was a queered and subversive one. I identified as lesbian and lived in lesbian relationships for many years before entering the world of heterosexual relationships, family formation and child birthing and raising. I have at least partially attempted to write “an insider, critical and experiential ethnography” (Lambevski, 1999, quoted in Plummer, 2011, p. 202). Through my own queer lens I never assumed
motherhood to be ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. Using a mixture of site observation, in-depth interviewing and ethnographic technique the research task would always include an interrogation of the gendered and heteronormative nature of mothering. I have always been an outsider looking in in terms of interviewing my heterosexual research participants.

For the reminder of the chapter I will be discussing the interviewing process including the rationale for the questions chosen in the interview schedule, the issues involved in feminist women interviewing women and women interviewing men, the importance of writing in my ethnographic practice, the reflexivity of the researcher and limitations of the research.

The Interviews

The Interview Questions

My research is informed by a self-reflexive understanding that the interview is an active, emergent process, with a feminist epistemological stance that frames these interviews as intimate, reciprocal conversations between two participants (Oakley, 1981; Ezzy, 2010). The interviews are collaborative and interactive and show a degree of agency of the participants in the construction of their own narratives.

The questions in my interview schedule (see Appendix) share similarities to those asked by Wearing in her 1984 interview schedule when she interviewed
mothers from a range of socio-economic areas of Sydney on their experiences of mothering. Wearing’s questions covered topics like attitudes to housework, division of family money, who spends most time with the children and questions on the participants’ backgrounds, ie how were they mothered?). The rationale for using a developed and revised set of Wearing’s questions was that part of my thesis question looked at the persistent ideology of the ‘intensive mothering’ narrative (Wearing, 1984) for my participants: what had changed for my participants in their mothering compared to Wearing’s participants’ descriptions of their lived experiences of mothering in 1980s Australia? In contemporary Australian mothering with such diversity of mothering practice was Wearing’s persistent ideology of ‘good mothering’ still prevalent today and, if so, to what degree? Reframing Wearing’s questions in a contemporary context updated and recalibrated this notion of ‘intensive mothering’. Substantial differences around questions on women and work and use of daycare between Wearing’s original questions and my interview schedule reflect contemporary attitudes to these issues. More specifically, the interview schedule I used with participants is centred around the following key questions:

1. What are the attitudes of women and men undertaking caring of young children toward their mothering practice?

2. What are the specific activities and routines of their mothering practice, in other words, what do they do in their mothering work?
3. What are the differences in mothering practice and attitudes across cultures and classes?

4. Is there a persistent gendered understanding of mothering work?

5. If there is, what does it look like in the lived practices of the men and women undertaking this care work?

Continuing the explicit methodological approach of a feminist epistemological stance in the research I also used some of the questions from Oakley’s 1974 survey of housewives in Britain (Oakley, 1974). My rationale for using these questions was that Oakley’s theorising that mothering is a gendered, rationalist form of unpaid work and that maternal instinct is culturally constructed and organised within the prevailing gender order have informed this thesis. I added new questions to the interview schedule and considerably expanded the section on ‘paid work’, much more relevant for contemporary mothers than it was for Oakley’s 1970s ‘housewives’ or Wearing’s mothers on the cusp of Second Wave Feminism.

While the interview questions were largely the same for all the cohorts I interviewed there were some variations. This adaptation of the interview questions to fit the individual circumstances of the participants follows a grounded theory approach of considering “the situated nature of participants’ interpretations and meanings” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 81). Modifying the questions based on successive interviews shows how I did not search for fixed meanings
or truths but rather that the interview is “contextual and negotiated” between the researcher and research participant and “the result is a construction - or reconstruction - of a reality” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27).

Details of how the interview questions were adapted to participants’ specific contexts include inserting questions for the Logan mothers on religious affiliation and the place of the church in their mothering as the role of the church is central to selected Logan communities. I further modified the questions for the Logan women after cultural advice given to me by the Head of the Samoan Cultural Group in Logan on interviewing Samoans. The original criterion for the mother to be interviewed to have at least one pre-school age child had to be altered in Logan as the Samoan and African mothers I spoke with talked of their whole community being involved in raising children rather than just individual families. Therefore my research includes mothers caring for informally adopted children (from their sister for example) and mothers caring for children temporarily removed from their own families due to child safety concerns (so an informal fostering situation). As child safety is a significant issue in Logan in certain communities temporary removal of children from biological families was not uncommon. For the Ascot mothers the religious and church support questions were less relevant but these women had a much higher level of online support for their mothering through Instagram, Facebook and Mommy Blogs so I introduced detailed questions about how social media affects their mothering for this cohort. The stay-at-home fathers had a special section on support networks
and groups (or lack thereof) specifically for stay-at-home dads and questions on why men may find it more difficult to access or attend such groups. These latter questions led to in-depth discussions interrogating contemporary Australian masculinities. However, the basis of the interview questions has largely remained the same across all interviews to allow a baseline for comparable and trustworthy comparison of responses.

All the interviews were conducted by me and took between 1 and a half and 2 hours. In many of the interviews at least one small child or baby was present. Specifically, the participants were asked about:

1. Their background information such as age, relationship status, family income and details of the age and sex of their children;

2. To describe their typical day as a mother or stay-at-home dad;

3. Their attitudes to caring for children;

4. The input from their wife/partner with the children;

5. Their support networks including online support through Facebook, Instagram and ‘Mommy Blogs’ as well as family, community and religious support;

6. Their involvement in paid work before and after having children;
7. Their attitudes to using day care for young children;

8. How they organise their family finances;

9. Their children and who makes most of the decisions to do with them;

10. Their own upbringing and role models, ie how they were mothered; and

11. Their attitudes to being a mother or stay-at-home father.

12. How they thought society perceived their role.

13. Their contentment and fulfilment levels at being a mother or stay-at-home father.

I did all my interviewing in the research sites; mainly in the women’s or men’s houses or in local parks; in Logan, many of the young, working-class women wanted to be interviewed at the local public library (presumably as it is a neutral space) so I used the Logan Library interview rooms. I interviewed two of my full-time working mothers in Logan at their workplaces, at the request of the participants. This immersive approach to gathering data allowed a richer experience with the women and men I interviewed. Postal surveys or telephone interviews would not have been successful with these participants; no-one replied to my recruitment advertisement for research participants displayed in the Logan Library for example. Furthermore, many of the mothers in Logan only agreed to be interviewed by me after I came recommended by someone they
trusted in their local community; this was less so for the Ascot cohort and stay-at-home fathers who seemed keen to ‘tell their stories’ to a relative stranger.

**Timeframe for the interviews**

The in-depth interviews occurred between 2011 and 2015. I spent two years at Logan interviewing; two years in and around Ascot interviewing and conducted the interviews with the stay-at-home fathers between July 2013 and February 2015. The transcribing of the interviews occurred simultaneously throughout this time and I tried to transcribe the interviews as soon after the interview took place. The fathers seemed to have a different attitude to being included in the research to the mothers I interviewed. Almost all the fathers requested the questionnaire schedule before the interview and asked to check the transcripts afterwards. It was not unusual for the transcripts to be returned from the male participants heavily annotated with multiple suggested changes.

**Issues involved in feminist women interviewing women and women interviewing men**

An important element in the research process was how the women participants and I shared a common experience of being mothers and women in the world (in other words our attitudes and behaviours around the practice of mothering are highly gendered). This shared experience of mothering with my women participants (and in parenting young children with my male participants) and women interviewing women are important methodological issues that have
occupied feminist researchers since at least the 1980s (Oakley, 1981; Reiseman, 1987; Edwards, 1990). Women interviewing men (eg, Arendell, 1997) is another methodological consideration that will be examined here.

Reiseman (1987) discusses the need for sensitivity to cultural differences when interviewing women of colour and the need for different approaches and analyses of the data. In her life-history interviews with a white, middle-class woman and a working-class, Puerto Rican woman Reiseman (1987) describes how she complicitly co-produced a narrative with the white participant because they shared a knowledge of narrative organisation and way of telling your story based on sequential events. Reiseman picked up positively on the cues of her white participant in the interview:

This collaborative process was aided by gender, class, and cultural congruity, which produced the unspoken but shared assumptive world of the two women (Reiseman, 1987, p. 190).

This is how I felt interviewing the women in Ascot as they opened up to me with at times intensely personal and intimate revelations. This may be because I looked and spoke like them – middle-class and White.

On the other hand, Reiseman said she missed many of the cues given to her in her interview with her Puerto Rican participant, for example, not understanding that when she spoke of family she meant extended kin, not just biological family. Reiseman identifies her own failure to listen to her participant:
with a minimum of interruptions and to take cues from those we study, if we are going to help them recall and report experiences in their own voices. In the analysis of their narratives, we can attend to their forms and meanings, letting our subjects' voices speak for themselves (Reiseman, 1987, p. 191).

Edwards (1990) similarly challenges Oakley’s (1981) claim that a pre-existing affinity between feminist women and the women they are interviewing based on a shared gender, overrides other structural inequalities. For Edwards (1990) race cannot be elided into a utopian feminist ideal of a woman interviewing a woman dyad; rather race is a central structuring agent and power differential underlying the whole research framework:

Race does not simply exist as an object of study or a variable in analysis, it enters into the research process itself - into the selection of a problem, into the methodology, the conduct of the research, the assumptions behind it, who is included in the study, whose perspective is highlighted – and importantly influences the relationship with those we are researching (Edwards, 1990, p. 482)

Edwards (1990) suggests foregrounding the structural inequalities of race in the interview and acknowledging your own position of power as a white interviewer interviewing Black women. She (1990) also poses the question: should white researchers even study and interview Black people? Like me she felt an acute
conflict in the process of interviewing women of colour in her study of mature aged women in England returning to tertiary study and questioned whether she should even be interviewing them. One of the criticisms levelled against my research may be my romanticisation of Black experience as ‘other’ and ‘exotic’ therefore more noteworthy than the experience of my white participants. This is discussed in more detail further on in this chapter under the heading ‘limitations of this research’. I am sure different responses to interview questions may have come from a Samoan woman interviewing a Samoan woman or a Burundian woman interviewing a Burundian woman. The transcripts would have been written up differently, different themes would have been highlighted and the analysis may have led to different conclusions. Attempting ethnographic immersion in the world of my Black participants and listening to them tell their own stories in their own voices may go some way toward a more equitable representation of their experiences by a white researcher. Furthermore, I considered that including the lived experiences of culturally diverse mothers in contemporary Australia was appropriate as Australia is a multicultural society and ethnically diverse mothers are part of this population of mothers. Furthermore, like Edwards (1990) the Black women I interviewed and myself shared a bond when discussing motherhood – we laughed together at the challenges of parenting in intimate relationships and the emotional weight of caring for young children and carrying a disproportionate amount of the housework load with our male partners and husbands. In motherhood my Black
participants and myself shared the structural position of motherhood – a place where we are both subordinated to male power and societal expectation.

**Women interviewing men**

Arendell (1997) encourages a great engagement with considerations of gender in qualitative interviewing, particularly when women interview men: “what are the power dynamics when a woman studies men, given that the society remains stratified by gender?” (Arendell, 1997, p. 343). The context for Arendell’s concerns came from 75 face-to-face interviews with men about their lived experiences of being divorced fathers. While there were many resonances between Arendell’s interviews with her male participants and my interviews with stay-at-home fathers Arendell interviewed 75 men; I interviewed 10. The comparisons in the experiences are therefore made with this knowledge of an uneven statistical division. Even taking into account the numerical context of the two data sets however, Arendell’s strikingly similar experiences with my own in interviewing men add a valuable insight into the enactment of gender in interviews with men.

Like me, Arendell (1997) found that “numerous men remarked that they had seldom or, more commonly, *never* shared their experiences or feelings about divorce to the extent they did during our meeting” (Arendell, 1997, p. 348). Australian social researcher Flood (2013) has similarly written that men are more likely to emotionally disclose to and confide in women than other men.
I also had stay-at-home-fathers open up to me at quite a personal and intense level and they may have done this because I am a woman. Like Arendell (1997) also, the narratives on the experiences of being stay-at-home fathers in my research also contained a meta-analysis of masculinity. Arendell (1997) says that men did a similar thing talking to her about their experiences of divorce: the men moved from discussions of their personal experiences of divorce to broader discourses on masculinity and how men generally are treated and affected by divorce. Like Arendell (1997) I was somewhat naïve in agreeing to a meeting place proposed by the men – usually their home – and initially paid little attention to safety issues. It was after the first few interviews with men that my partner suggested always telling a friend where I was going to do the interview and phoning them immediately after the interview to tell them I was alright. Looking back now I think I was very naïve and would probably not be so blindly trusting of entering the homes of men I had never met, probably encouraging an interview in a public place like a park. I was just so thrilled to attain the interview at the start of my research that I was going into many strangers’ homes (men and women) without a second thought. In terms of the actual interview, like Arendell, (1997) I sometimes had to steer the male participant back towards the question after they were giving me a lecture on one of their favourite hobby horses to do with parenting, and they asked me a lot more questions about my life and children than the women participants did. Sharing a bond of being a parent helped establish rapport with the male participants (like it did with the women), particularly if we found we had similar aged children. Unlike Arendell
(1997) however, the men I interviewed did not assert the natural superiority of men over women or denigrate women in any way. For the most part they spoke very highly and lovingly of their female partners and wives and of the mothers-in-law that helped them parent and of their own mothers. One of the interviews took place in a public park and this was because his wife was jealous of him spending time alone with other women in the family home. This participant was a little critical of his wife generally in the interview but he was the exception in this cohort. The most damning testimony I listened to was toward their fathers. Unlike Arendell (1997) also I was not inappropriately touched by my male participants – they were for the most part respectful and the most touch we had was a hand shake at the end.

While contextually situated, these relationships [between female interviewer and male interviewees] nonetheless are influenced by the identities and histories of those involved, researcher and researched alike. Gender identity is a major factor in these interactional dynamics. Just how gender is constructed and negotiated in research using in-depth interviews warrants much more systematic attention (Arendell, 1997, p. 365)

Transcription and analysis

All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder or iphone and I transcribed all the interviews myself as soon as possible after the interview took place. All the
women and men and their children and partners have been de-identified and pseudonyms are used here. Transcribing the interviews was an extremely laborious and time-consuming process. However, the process of transcription encourages detailed reflection on the issues of the research as you go along. I took notes while transcribing the interview and jotted down ideas about possible theoretical approaches and linkages between the data as they arose. Transcribing all the tapes also leads to modification of the questions which do not ‘work’ and alters my interviewing style for next time. The note-taking process feeds into data analysis and the intense level of transcription and reflection on the data also served as a preliminary form of data analysis. I began to make thematic links between the experience of the participants and concepts and theory.

For research rigour it is recommended that interview transcripts are sent back to participants for checking (Mason, 1996; Ezzy, 2002) and I offered all my participants this option. While not all participants took up the offer about one third did with many more men than women doing this. Almost all the stay-at-home-fathers checked their transcripts while hardly any of the mothers did (most of them said they would be too busy to check transcripts). Some of the fathers made extensive and detailed comments on the transcripts and changed them significantly while others only made minor factual alterations. All changes were taken on. The interview transcripts can therefore be seen to have been written
collaboratively and the final transcriptions were co-authored between researcher and research participant.

Writing up common themes emerging from the data early on in field journals and triangulating the findings after all data was analysed to cross-check and verify findings were also important methodological processes in the research. This follows a grounded theory method of qualitative inquiry in which “data collection and analysis reciprocally inform and shape each other through an emergent iterative process” (Charmaz, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p 360).

Other methodological approaches to attain research rigour included peer debriefing and talking about my data and interviewing experiences with my PhD supervisors to obtain other scholars’ responses to my interpretations. This was particularly valuable when the recruiting and interviewing processes took some difficult personal turns (eg dealing with the Somalian Muslim man who physically intimidated me in Logan and with one of my male participants when he may have misconstrued my intentions at the interview). Debriefing with my supervisors about these situations was very valuable as the path of a social researcher interviewing strangers can be a lonely one. Overall then, talking with other researchers prevented me jumping to conclusions and shaped my thinking along the way.

*The Importance of writing in my ethnographic practice*
A crucial methodological tool used in this research is writing. I wrote detailed field notes and journals as I spent extended periods of time in the research sites and over the course of my interviews. Writing field notes, journals and memos informed my ideas and thinking on the research process (Rice and Ezzy, 1999; Ezzy, 2002) and the rich, fully written descriptions and narratives informed and contributed toward new conceptual categories as part of my constructionist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Conducting data analysis concurrent with early data collection through checking interpretations with participants; transcribing, reading and coding early data; and writing journals and memos were all essential parts of my research process and part of an integrated grounded theory approach. I journaled all the decisions (right and wrong and those that didn’t work) about the methodology for the study so kept an audit trail in terms of methodology. Rice and Ezzy (1999) recommend that “maintaining and reporting an audit trail of methodological and analytic decisions allows others to assess the significance of the research” (Rice and Ezzy, 1999, p. 36) and this is what I tried to do for methodological credibility.

The analysis of the data was primarily thematic however particular ‘stories’ emerged from the data (and were later told in detail in the findings chapters) that illustrate dominant themes.

**Reflections on the research**

**The self-reflexive researcher**
Taking a self-reflexive role was also pivotal to the research process: “the researcher should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their ‘data’” (Mason, 1996, p. 6). Other researchers who have written on self-reflexive research include Visweswaran, 1994; Rice and Ezzy, 1999, Ezzy, 2002; Olesen, 2003, 2011; Hamera, 2011, and Perakyla and Ruusuvuori, 2011. Hamera reminds qualitative researchers that: “‘doing’ critical theory means investigating our research sites, our own methods and motives, our tactics of scholarly representation, and the structures of our own privilege” (Hamera, 2011, p. 319). Another deliberate strategy of this research is the idea of researchers and participants as “co-producers of data” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997) and the important influence of the researcher’s personal perspective on interpreting the data:

_Our own personal and psychic biographies, including such aspects as our age, ethnicity, gender and history of relationship with intimate others, will inevitably shape our participation in constructing the data. We bring to the research various epistemologies and beliefs, and we will have our own investments, desires, phantasies and emotional responses in relation to the issues we raise and explore._ (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, p. 95).

**Limitations of the research**
**Fetishisation of ‘The Other’**

My position as a White, middle-class researcher among culturally diverse communities is one of the central issues that affected the research process. Logan, a multicultural region just south of Brisbane was my first research site and my research participants from Logan included Samoan women and Burundian women. It is acknowledged that the relatively small sample size of this group of participants in Logan prevents a generalisability from the findings: the findings from this group of Burundian mothers, Samoan mothers and young working-class mothers in Logan pertain to my data. Qualitative research involving non-Western participants must address the difficult aspects of this issue such as why Western scholars have an almost vampiric “hunger for news of the ‘Third World Woman’” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 49); for the voice of ‘the other’. Class, age, race and gender differences inform this power and status imbalance between researcher and participant and may influence the outcome of the interviews (Charmaz, 2006, p. 27). Olesen (1998) similarly advises ‘unframing the frameworks’ that underpin research with women of colour and other traditionally oppressed groups and she cautions against the tendency to speak for these groups, “to know us better than we know ourselves”, citing bell hooks (1990, p. 22 in Olesen, 1998, p. 304). Acknowledging my own positioning as middle-class, White and from the Western academy foregrounds these power differentials in the relationship between myself as interviewer and my participants. I experienced this ‘love of other’ as Indian feminist anthropologist
Visweswaran alludes to, first-hand in 2013 when I presented my Logan findings at the annual Australian Sociology Association conference. The conference programme was overwhelmingly White both in subjects and presenters: “an audience narrowly constituted by the academy, be they feminists, anthropologists, or post-modern critics” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 49). My presentation on Black and working-class women mothering in Logan was well attended and afterwards comments from other (White) researchers typically were: “You are so lucky you interviewed Black women. I only had European mothers reply to my recruitment ad. I did have two single mums through….’ and ‘Wow. How did you even get Black and working-class people to talk to you?’.

Visweswaran further warns against conflating the Third World woman into a single subject for the purposes of study and ignoring the pluralities and multiple ways of her being in the world. She argues for an awareness that women of colour, like all women subjects are “a constellation of conflicting social, linguistic, and political forces” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 50). She also reminds White women from the academy interviewing Third World women and women of colour that this subject/interviewer relationship occurs within a context of colonial and post-colonial power relations. Film-maker and cultural theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991) critiques contemporary ethnography and she takes up this argument about the position of the studied/filmed exotic ‘other’ through the eyes of Western film makers in her exploration of this subject (Minh-Ha, 1991). She cautions against both the master narrative of the Western figure of authority and fetishizing the ‘other’ as a unique source of knowledge:
“In the process of decentralization, what is at stake is obviously not only the Master as sovereign subject of knowledge, but also the fantasized Other as authoritative subject of an other knowledge.” (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 186)

Despite best intentions of course I am part of this narrow, feminist academy Visweswaran criticises. I was excited to be interviewing Samoan and African mothers and young working class women in Logan. When I was based in Logan undertaking my fieldwork and doing my interviewing one of my Burundian research participants asked me to an African festival in Brisbane East and I went with my 4 young boys and we had a wonderful time. My children played with 4 little Ghanaian boys at a nearby playground – my children do not yet know racism. I bought African bags. Did this bring me closer to my African interviewee or give me any more insight into the world of my participant? – I suspect not. As a feminist researcher I fear I was suffering “the delusion of alliance more than the delusion of separateness” (Stacey, 1988), quoted in Visweswaran (1994, p. 41). As a White, middle-class, middle-aged woman my experiences did not come close to the world of a 28 year old year old single mother who has spent her life living in caravan parks or a Burundian mother of 5 who has spent 12 years living in a refugee camp.

Feminist poststructuralism however alerts researchers to the limitations of the ethnographic approach to give a complete picture of women’s lives. Visweswaran’s analysis of the ethnographer as an unreliable narrator (1994)
leads inevitably to a selective presentation of women’s lives rather than a universalising account. I was cognisant of this in my ‘intimate’ personal interviews with mothers about the private domestic details of their lives. In Logan there was a sense in some of the interviews with young working-class women and Samoan and Burundian mothers that they considered the interviews almost like another job – they were polite but more detached than the Ascot mothers. I had the feeling with some of the participants they were doing it with a sense of duty, perhaps to the person who recommended they speak with me. All the Logan interviews were considerably shorter and less emotionally draining than the Ascot ones. The interviews with the stay-at-home fathers had the sense of interviewing ‘the other’ as a biologically gendered man but at the same time many of the interviews with the men were quite intimate, long and emotional. This was the case with my interviews with stay-at-home fathers and, on the whole, these interviews felt more like the interviews with the Ascot mothers. There was only one stay-at-home father where the interview ended abruptly and quite unpleasantly; I think when he sensed I was not attracted to him.

Sample size and transferability

The small sample sizes in this study (10 participants from each area were interviewed and 12 in Ascot) may point toward context-specific findings and caution in generalising them to other settings. Balanced against this however is the in-depth nature of the interviews and the detailed responses given in the words of the participants themselves. Statistical information from the Australia
Bureau of Statistics also provides a context for the sampling choices and conclusions drawn from the data. This information contributes to the rich, qualitative data collected in the research and it is likely that they may be cautiously transferred to other wealthy developed multi-cultural societies.

Refusal to participate in the research by the men who attended the playgroup specifically for fathers run by Playgroup Queensland potentially has implications for the research findings. The men who did not identify as mothers may exclude from the research the perceptions of people who might have a different answer to the question ‘what do men and women think about being mothers?’. However, this potential line of research is outside the current scope of this research and as discussed above the smaller sample sizes interviewed for this research does not lead to generalisations about typical behavior for a specific group (here it is men who care for young children full-time) but rather diversity of experience is emphasised within each cohort interviewed and between the different cohorts. It is suggested that even among this group of men who refused to be interviewed, differences in ethnicity and social class would potentially have led to a range of different answers to the question ‘what do men and women think about being mothers?’

**Heteronormativity of the findings**

The findings from this study are situated in a relentlessly heterosexual context. No lesbian mothers or gay fathers came forward to be interviewed thus the
findings are heteronormative. Research in diverse family structures and queer families more generally is important to continue pushing out the boundaries of so-called ‘normal families’. Gay fathers in particular would be valuable to study as do they reinscribe hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991) in their parenting or point to other calibrations of masculinities not yet explored? Both lesbian and gay family formations trouble a parenting based on genetics and a biological connection to a birth parent. Queer families move beyond these prescriptive and limiting parameters of family. Furthermore, as was seen in Logan informal surrogacy arrangements among family, co-mothering children that may not be biologically connected to you, fostering children from your wider community and othermothering, and reconceptualising family support within a wider definition of ‘whanau’ already violate traditional heteronormative definitions of mothering and family.

**Cultural appropriation**

This research may be vulnerable to accusations of cultural appropriation in my discussions of mothering among Samoan and Burundian mothering in Logan and my use of theoretical literature on indigenous mothering knowledge systems from North America and among Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, I am not imposing a framework on the women studied but rather using the most appropriate theoretical approaches for the mothering that occurs in these communities and this is literature written by Maori theorists like Pihama (2011, and Pihama et al, 2002)) and Stevenson et al (2016) and Hill Collins
(2000), a Black, North American feminist theorist. I was guided in my use of appropriate theory with these groups of women by what came out of my data. I had no preconceived notions of what I would find before I began interviewing.

This research is ethnographically-informed so the writing up of the findings, particularly when they were not favourable to the participants, has been a profoundly uncomfortable experience, and at times felt like a betrayal of intimate truth given in trust.

Methodological rigour was attained through the use of recognised and appropriate qualitative research methodologies designed to reap rich, detailed data and to both interrogate the data gathered and also situate and contextualise it. Furthermore, there is a reflexivity embedded in the research process from the beginning, or constructed retrospectively through examination of research field notes, keeping a journal and research memos and the recoding of transcribed interviews (Rice and Ezzy, 1999).

**Conclusion**

The qualitative feminist research epistemology underpinning this research is grounded in valuing the lived subjective experiences of the women and men interviewed as told in their own voices. My research epistemology understands the reflexive nature of ethnography and the position and location of the researcher in the research process. In feminist research building a relationship
with the participants is prioritised over merely seeing the research participant as a subject to be mined for information and then discarded. I have also interrogated the issues around how a shared experience of mothering is not enough in interviewing other mothers: structural issues of class, cultural background and race also affect the interviews. Issues around women interviewing men are also examined. An awareness of the structural inequalities of class, race and social position being as important as the ‘cultural affinity of gender’ between interviewer and research participants has informed the processes of this research.
Chapter 4: Defining yourself through others: Mothering in the diverse economic, social and cultural context of Logan

You can send your babies to sleep over at aunties. ‘Mum can I go and sleep over at aunty’s?’ Everyone in the culture helps raise the child. When a child is born you all feel you have an obligation to assist in one way or another.

(Vanessa, 42, Burundian, married, 5 children aged 2 to 17)

Being a mother you grow a bigger heart. As a mother you help other children than your own who are suffering.

(Beth, 49, Burundian, married, one biological child aged 17, fosters many African children removed by Child Safety)

My children have two mothers… our kids rotate through us.

(Grace, 33, Samoan, 4 children aged 5 to 15 years)
Introduction

This chapter examines the attitudes, beliefs and lived experiences of a diverse group of mothers living in Logan. As the mothers differ culturally and in social class and thus, social status the chapter employs an intersectional analysis of ethnic diversity, class and gender. The women provided a picture of mothering in Logan that is collective, based on extended, intergenerational kinship care and not necessarily linked to consanguine ties. The women I spoke with about their maternal practices and beliefs define themselves through others in their mothering and this chapter will show how this ethics of care is based on a social responsibility of obligation and duty to others.

Within this overarching argument of collective, shared mothering and defining yourself through others in your mothering, themes discussed in this chapter include: collective mothering challenges the main underpinnings of ‘individualization’ as the main social change theory in Western societies in late modernity (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002), “a social transformation… means freedom to choose… being responsible for yourself” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 7) and that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s argument that the social structures of nation, social class and family are transcended by individual agency as the primary determinant of human behaviour do not work in Logan among the groups of women I spoke with; the obligations and duties of collective mothering; collective mothering challenging a biologically privileged maternal narrative; how patriarchal power and social disadvantage affect mothering in
Logan; government attitudes to working-class mothers; motherhood as a path to respectability for young working-class women; attitudes to housework; and Logan mothers’ attitudes to work.

*The cultural framework of the Logan mothers*

The following table outlines the key characteristics of the women I interviewed in Logan.
### Table 1: Key demographic characteristics of the Logan mothers interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of children &amp; ages</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Rent or Own</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (9 weeks)</td>
<td>De Facto</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mum</td>
<td>Left school in Year 12 without finishing. TAFE Certificate 2, Make-up Artistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (7 and 10 months)</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Lives with mother-in-law</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mum</td>
<td>Left school end of Year 11. TAFE Certificate 2, Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (6 months)</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$50,000 - $80,000</td>
<td>Works part-time at a popular local garden centre</td>
<td>Left school after HSC. TAFE Certificate 3 Horticulture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Burundian</td>
<td>5 (2, 2, 8, 14, 17)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mum, Looking for part-time work</td>
<td>Unfinished University degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>2 (2, 4 months)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mum</td>
<td>*University qualified Nutritionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>2 (3 &amp; 4)</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mum, Recently separated, Currently sole carer.</td>
<td>*University qualified Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$50,000 - $80,000</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>University qualified Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Burundian</td>
<td>1 (17) foster mother to African children of all ages</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Under $50,000</td>
<td>Works part-time</td>
<td>TAFE Certificate 3 Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>4 (5, 7, 9, 15)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$150,000 - $200,000</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>**University qualified Education (completed part-time over 12 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>6 (8, 9, 16, 16, 17, 19)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$120,000 - $150,000</td>
<td>Works full-time</td>
<td>**University qualified Education. Studied part-time for years with small children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Qualifications obtained at universities in Brazil and Columbia.

**Qualifications obtained at Australian universities.
It must be emphasised that the cultural diversity of this sample of 10 women that includes two Brazilian women, a Columbian woman, two Samoan women, two Burundian refugees and several White Australians from a range of classes demonstrates different ways of knowing, cultural practices and beliefs. I recognise that the mothering carried out by this divergent group of women occurs in different historical and contemporary social structures. Rollock et al (2015) remind us how “policy debate tends to position Black families as a homogenous working-class entity…” (2015, p. 2) yet the picture is much more complex than this: “This is no single Black identity… it varies along a continuum” (2015, p. 39). This group of mothers in Logan shows this complexity; both the Samoan participants earn high family wages thus their class status would be more appropriately classified as middle-class. However, they have not moved out of the Logan area and are still subject to the cultural and social structures of racism and prejudice: “to be Black and middle class does not mean having transcendened racism” (2015, p. 3). In the discourse of individualization once a family get wealthier they will move out of a more disadvantaged area to a more privileged suburb:

*As soon as people enter the labour market, they experience mobility. They are removed from traditional patterns and arrangements and, unless they are prepared to suffer economic ruin, they are forced to take charge of their own life. The labour market, by way of occupational mobility, place of residence or*
employment, types of employment, as well as the changes in social location it initiates, reveals itself as a driving force behind the individualization of people’s lives. They become relatively independent of inherited or newly formed ties (e.g., family, neighbourhood, friendship, partnership). By becoming independent from traditional ties, people’s lives take on an independent quality which, for the first time, makes possible the experience of a personal destiny (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, pp. 32-33).

However, this didn’t happen with these women as the collective pull of living with extended family - the “traditional ties” - is considered more important than social mobility and moving for higher paid work - “personal destiny” in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theory (2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) work on the development of Western societies in late modernity has been criticised as “Eurocentric in its presentation and detail” (Hakim, 2000, p. 12). In Logan cultural obligations override individual agency. The women live within communities where obligation and duty to other members of that community are paramount. Parenting anthropologist Faircloth (2013) reminds us that “kinship confers obligations and is about the creation of social personhood” (Faircloth, 2013, p. 18). For these women caring for aging parents and children of other women in the community is more important than shifting states, or countries, for a higher paid job.
It is not my intention in this chapter to elide the diversity of backgrounds and cultural and social structures that frame the women’s lives. Differences in the ontological basis of the different cultural systems discussed here are acknowledged. It is my intention to describe their mothering practices as they were told to me. Despite the considerable cultural and class differences of the women I spoke with in Logan common themes around their mothering practices and beliefs emerged from the data. The central one of these was the primary commitment to the collective good over individual fulfilment in their mothering; another was the central importance of being a mother to their identity and sense of purpose in life. The importance of work to their mothering identity was also a prominent theme to come from the findings.

Motherhood in Logan disrupted many preconceptions I had and presented an alternative understanding of contemporary maternal practice and belief. In Logan the very assumptions underlying my interview questions are challenged (ie that identity is singular; that mothering is a largely individual practice carried out by one woman; that the visceral, embodied experience of motherhood conflicts with a woman’s choices and ‘freedoms’ – from a second wave feminism point of point; Rich, 1986; Kristeva, 1983). The problematic dynamics inherent in White women interviewing Black women participants is also acknowledged here (see for example Rieseman, 1987 and Edwards, 1990) as I have already discussed this issue in detail in the preceding Methodology chapter.
Defining yourself through others

In Logan, many women I spoke with define themselves through others in their mothering work. The exceptions to this are the one single mother I spoke with in Logan, Kristy, who is newly separated from her husband and Theresa, who is currently experiencing postnatal depression. Both women are Brazilian and were raised within large extended families back in Brazil: they travelled to Australia to experience another culture, and then fell in love with and married White Australian men. Both their husbands are local Logan and Brisbane men with immediate family living here. Unfortunately, they offered little support to Theresa and Kristy with their young children and the women experience profound isolation and loneliness living and mothering in Logan. This was exacerbated for Theresa as she doesn’t drive. All the other women I interviewed in Logan receive extensive family support. This shaping of mothering by the collective rather than ‘individualization’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) is built on different foundational concepts to contemporary Western mothering. If the individual nuclear family is built on concepts of service and duty to an individual family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) a more collective maternal approach has different moral and ethical roots. This is described by the philosopher Gilligan (1982):

Women’s basic moral orientation is caring for others - “taking care” of others in a personal way, not just being concerned with humanity, in general – and attending to their needs.... Sensitivity to the needs of
others leads women to “attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgement other points of view” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 128).

For African theorist Mangena (2009) the moral and ethical dimensions of collective maternal care are also explicit. In researching contemporary Zimbabwean women’s maternal practices Mangena (2009) argues for a more explicit African feminist ethics of care and proposes that:

*Zimbabwean women, just like other African women elsewhere, are the custodians and gatekeepers of cultural values because of their strategic position in the home… reclaiming motherhood means strategically accepting the responsibility of looking after children including those other members of the family that lie outside one’s family circle – I mean outside the nuclear family – as a way of fighting patriarchy from within* (Mangena, 2009, p. 25).

The important gatekeeper and custodial role responsible for maintaining cultural values in collective mothering is foregrounded by Rollock et al (2015) in research on the experiences of Black Caribbean heritage middle class families living in contemporary England navigating their children through the education system. The authors’ findings show evidence among these families of “cultural adhesion”, a process the authors describe as “cultural heritage, identity and values transmitted through pastimes, foods, music… sometimes facilitating connections with other Black people” (2014, p. 172).
These concepts of cultural custodianship, transmission of cultural values and an ethical and moral imperative underpin the maternal collective care evident in Logan. The young, working-class, White Australians and Samoan and Burundian mothers I spoke with commonly defined themselves through *others* in their mothering work. They live in intricate, inter-generational kinship care arrangements and collectively raise their children; they co-mother each others’ children (Moore and Riley, 2010) and demonstrate ‘othermothering’ (Hill Collins, 2000), ‘community mothering’ (Aida Story, 2014) and ‘whanau support’ (Pihama, 2011 and Pihama et al, 2002; Stevenson et al, 2016). Hill Collins (2000) and Aida Story (2014) use these terms to describe shared mothering among contemporary American Black African communities and ‘whanau support’ is extended family support common among New Zealand Maori. It may be a criticism of this approach that referencing Samoan and Burundian practices in Logan to indigenous Australian and New Zealand practices, and practices of Black American mothers equates to some kind of cultural appropriation. It is accepted here however, that diverse ethnic identities bring their own unique epistemologies and social and cultural backgrounds. However, the indigenous theorists selected here to illuminate and explain the Logan findings are the most appropriate frameworks within which to discuss non-Western, collective mothering among these women.

It is acknowledged that while inter-generational kinship care may be fully realised in indigenous populations, when that population has been relocated or
dis/located to another context these support networks may be weaker. In the Australian context this theme has been explored through the qualitative work of Benza and Liamputtong, (2016), Liamputtong and Spitzer, (2007) and Ngum Chi Watts et al, (2015) on immigrant Zimbabwean, Hmong and African Australian teenage mothers’ experiences resettling in Australia respectively. In these studies, the specific focus is the mothers’ engagement with the Australian health system.

By contrast, among the Samoan mothers and Burundian refugee mothers in my study their kinship networks are robust and entrenched over many years. The women emphasised to me in the interviews the importance of settling in areas like Logan with established Samoan and Burundian populations and family support networks. This significantly influenced the women’s decisions on where to live in Australia. This preservation of networks of kinship and ethnicity is a major point of difference between the current study and other contemporary qualitative Australian studies of refugee mothers where the mothers interviewed appeared to be more isolated.

Vanessa is a Burundian mother of 5 and her mothering practice illustrates collective child raising and a strong community focus. Vanessa defines herself through others in her mothering:

*Within the Burundian community when you plan it is important to think of others.*
Vanessa left Burundi after a civil war and she lived in a refugee camp for 12 years in Tanzania. She settled in Logan 7 years ago with her husband and three children born in the camp. She gained work first as a teacher’s aide at a local primary school and then in administration at the Logan ACESS centre, an organisation set up to help re-settle refugees. Vanessa has been on extended maternity leave after having twins at 40. The interview took place in her home, an immaculate house in a less salubrious part of Logan. The Roman Catholic faith plays an important part of her life and religious iconography dominated the interior decorations. Later in the interview Vanessa tells me “it is a cultural requirement to attend church on Sunday”. With such a large family surviving on less than $50,000 a year is difficult: our conversation is punctuated by discussions of lack of money and the continual struggle to make ends meet. Several times during the interview she shares how her children miss opportunities because of lack of money, eg Vanessa would like her younger children to learn to swim but cannot afford the swimming lessons. Within her large family responsibilities are shared: her 14 year-old son helps his 8 year old brother do his homework and the 17 year old helps cook dinner. All the family help with the two year-old twin daughters: “When we are all here everyone’s hearts are on the little girls”.
In an example of collective responsibility within a community built on kinship ties she describes the common practice of Burundian mothers helping each other out:

*When I have an appointment I don’t need to take the girls. I just drop them at a friend’s and when someone else has an appointment I do the same thing for them.*

To Vanessa “mothers are the pillars of the families” and they “co-ordinate... the overall family relationship”. She also talks of how being a mother is valued and supported in her culture: “In our culture we consider a mother is someone to respect”. She also emphasises that “everyone in the culture helps raise the child. When a child is born you all feel you have an obligation to assist in one way or another”.

Beth is Burundian, 48 years old, and she has one older biological child aged 17. She also lived in a refugee camp for 14 years. Beth lives modestly with her son in rental accommodation, surviving on a welfare payment and money she receives from Child Safety to foster African children in Logan removed from their families by Child Safety. Child Safety Services is part of the Department of Communities and is run by the Queensland Government. Beth raised her sister and brother’s nine children in a refugee camp after they were both killed in the Burundian civil war. She recently nursed her mother in her home to her death:
Being a mother you grow a bigger heart. As a mother you help other children than your own who are suffering.

(Beth)

Logan mothers share mothering of children among biological female relatives (including but not exclusively sisters, grandmothers and aunts). Like the Aboriginal family structures and maternal practices discussed by Moore and Riley (2010), the use of ‘co-mothers’ to raise children is a foundation of building Logan communities. Engaging a childless sister in the raising of your children in a co-mothering arrangement was not an uncommon practice. Grace’s children spend a lot of time at her sister’s house:

*My children have two mothers… our kids rotate through us*

Francis is another full-time working mother of Samoan heritage and she has 6 children. She has always had a lot of help with her mothering and she spoke of a sister who, unable to have her own biological children for many years, co-mothered her children:

*When my children were little… we lived six houses away from my younger sister…. [she] was married for 16 years before they had their first baby so they never thought they could have children… So they were like surrogate parents to my kids. They have bought them up as another set of parents to them.*
As one of 13 children herself Grace was raised by a single mother. In her family of origin her brothers and sisters were a mixture of legally adopted children, those acquired through informal family adoption as well as three biological sisters.

Grace works full-time and she has four children aged between 5 to and 15 years and she credits her extended family support with enabling this to happen, “I couldn't do it without my family”:

I have a very big extended family. My cousin runs a family daycare centre down the road… and my aunty’s home is also a family daycare centre.

The extended family help out a lot. We all live within 15 minutes of each other. My mum and my sisters and my cousins. We have all come to Brisbane from New Zealand and Sydney. We’ve all settled and located very close to each other.

Grace also has a child with a learning difficulty:

If it wasn’t for my mum dropping in randomly… she has her own key and at least once a fortnight I’ll come home and my mum will have cooked and done the washing. Or my sisters dropping in. I think I would go insane sometimes so I think it is really important to have that connection to others. You need a community to raise a child.
For Francis, having a Samoan cultural heritage has profoundly affected her mothering:

> Because you are not on your own. I think that’s the main thing. When you are a Samoan mother… you are not mothering on your own. So, if I am having problems with my teenagers and I can’t get across to them I ring my sister to come and talk to them… So that’s one of the beautiful things – you are not parenting alone.

In this kinship care web your duty is to others not yourself. Grace and Francis articulate this relationship between individual and community in the Logan context:

> In Western society children are seen as individuals. In Samoan culture children are part of a family. You are not seen as an individual.

African sociologist Amina Mama (2001) has written on this notion of collective rather than individuated subjectivity in African communities:

> There is no word for ‘identity’ in any of the African languages with which I can claim any degree of familiarity… in English, the word ‘identity’ implies a single, individual subject… In Africa, if I were to generalize, ask a person who he or she is and a name will quickly be followed by a qualifier, a communal term that will indicate ethnic or clan origins (Mama, 2001, p 63).
Maori theorists have written about Maori maternity and their ideas echo non-Western mothering in the Australian context. In Aotearoa/New Zealand “the Maori world is a whakapapa-based society that is grounded upon structures of whanau, hapu and iwi” (Pihama, 2011; Pihama et al, 2002). In the Maori world, as in the Samoan and Burundian communities of Logan, and to a lesser extent the worlds of the young working-class women I spoke with, you are only known by your kin-based relationships and tribal affiliations. An African or Samoan mother may be the “pillar of the family” (Vanessa) but the family is the whole community.

The only woman I interviewed in Logan who was unhappy with her mothering practice was Theresa. Recently diagnosed with postnatal depression, Theresa, a Brazilian stay-at-home mother of a 2 year-old and a 4 month-old spoke of her isolation and loneliness living so far from her extended family in Brazil. Her depression has been exacerbated as since the birth of the children. Her husband has been studying part time as well as working long hours and shift work in the hospitality industry. Theresa is trying to convince her husband to move back to Brazil so she can get support with raising the children from her large extended family:

*In Brazil we have lots of extended family. We stay in touch with third and fourth cousins… we have big family gatherings. You visit your grandmother.* (Theresa, Brazilian, married, has a 2 year-old and a 4 month-old)
The analytical significance of Theresa’s experiences to this discussion is to show how a lack of an extended support network within a collective mothering paradigm can be detrimental to mothering and lead to maternal isolation and despair. The effects of postnatal depression and lack of biological and extended kinship support on your mothering are further explored in chapter 5 on Ascot stay-at-home mothers.

**Collective mothering contrasted to Western motherhood that is based on ‘individualization’**

This collective approach to mothering contrasts the individualization that may be the primary narrative for the contemporary family in Western contexts. In writing about the history of the White, non-Aboriginal, Australian family sociologist Michael Gilding (1991) has suggested that ‘individualization’ may be the main way we describe the contemporary family (Gilding, 1991). Rieger (1991) has also written extensively about the history of the White Australian family from a sociological perspective. She has written about the move away from an honouring of traditional female wisdom in raising children, more common in collective mothering approaches to the rise of a medical, technical interest in mothering from the 1930s. Maternal common sense was reframed as a set of skills that had to be taught to women:

*Women were being confronted by a new group of middle-class child professionals [the professionals of medicine, psychology and education]*
who were decrying and undermining their traditional mothering patterns, arguing that mothering should be taught along rational scientific principles

(Rieger, 1985, p. 128).

The insecurity of feeling you are not mothering ‘the right way’ and relying on external experts for mothering advice has been identified as a feature of the ‘intensive mothering’ paradigm, more common among privileged Western mothers (eg Hays, 1996; Hoffman, 2013). This resorting to external advice was evident among the privileged White, Ascot mothers I interviewed and this issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), in their deconstruction of the rights, responsibilities and obligations of individuals within a community discuss contemporary families within a paradigm of individualization:

Within the system of modern marriage, the partners are not only expected to construct their own form of togetherness; they must do so.


This is because marriage and family used to exist within a complex web of community relationships:
In our contemporary society, by contrast, each family constitutes its own segregated sub-world (Berger and Kellner, 1974: 162-3; cited in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 92).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) further discuss the movement towards a contemporary value system based on a new ethics that contains the principle of “duty to oneself” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 38). This contrasts a more traditional view of ethics where duties are social and the individual is part of the whole.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have a limited analysis of “multicultural families” and collective mothering is not addressed in their classic text Individualization: Individualized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences (2002). There is little discussion of non-White, Western parenting or working-class parenting (communal, involving extended family, often intergenerational). Overall their analysis is set within a largely White, heterosexual, middle-class framework. Their discussion of ‘bicultural or bi-national marriages’ where each partner comes from a different country or culture leads to a discussion of increasing isolation from your ‘cultural roots’ and the comment “that both partners must achieve the ‘construction of a new intercultural reality’… build an ‘intercultural world’ or a ‘bi-national family culture’… and [that] the partners have to work out arrangements of their own” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 93). Among the Logan mothers I spoke with some would fit into this definition of ‘bicultural couples’, ie my interviewee
was Samoan and her husband is Cook Island, she is White Australian and he is Maori, she is Samoan and he is Tongan, yet far from being ‘free’ to construct their own ‘segregated sub-world of family’ these women mother within tight-knit communities predicated on family obligation and duty – the shadow side to the extraordinary levels of personal and practical support they receive in raising their children. Therefore, overall Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) fail to address either the ethnic diversity or the complexity of contemporary mothering practice.

If individualization has been the primary process for the contemporary family in Western contexts collective raising of children has historically been more common in Black, indigenous and working-class families (hooks, 2014, on Black mothering; Moore and Riley, 2010, on Aboriginal mothering; Stevenson et al, 2016 and Pihama, 2011; Pihama et al, 2002 on Maori mothering based on ‘whanau support’; Hill Collins (2000) and Aida Story, (2014) on ‘othermothering’ and ‘community mothering’ respectively; and Gillies, 2007, and Campbell, 1984 on working-class mothering):

Many people raised in black communities experienced this type of community-based child care. Black women who had to leave the home and work to provide for families could not afford to send children to daycare centers, and such centers did not always exist. They relied on people in their communities to help. (hooks, 2014, p. 145).
In Aotearoa/New Zealand “the Maori world is a whakapapa-based society that is grounded upon structures of whanau, hapu and iwi” (Pihama, 2011, p. 3).

hooks also argues that a communal shared responsibility for child care can only happen in “small community settings where people know and trust one another. It cannot happen in those settings if parents regard children as their ‘property’ or their ‘possessions’” (hooks, 2014, p. 145). Children are not seen as ‘individuals’ or ‘possessions’ in the multicultural communities of Logan – rather as members of an extended family and kinship group and mothering is not limited to consanguine relationships nor is it an individual practice.

Collective child-raising among the young White working-class mothers: 
Motherhood as a pathway to respectability

A theme to come out of the Logan findings was that for some of the Logan mothers, motherhood was a bridge to a better and more fulfilling life. For women with little education who have little or no money and few life choices motherhood can be a route to respectability and social acceptance (Hunt, 2004; Gillies, 2007). While many of the participants in Logan have post-school qualifications, for some of the young working-class mothers and one teenage mother the qualifications were not an end in themselves but a ‘stop gap’ until they could have children.

Kelly (18 years), who has a certificate in make-up artistry and a history of short term stints working as a hairdressing assistant, sees herself proudly as a
traditional full-time, stay-at-home mother and grew up with the sole ambition of becoming a mother. Kelly’s daughter is not an accidental pregnancy but a planned and very wanted baby with her de facto partner, a young man of similar age who works in the trades:

“I just want to be with my baby all the time – day and night… I like doing the housework too, I like being the housewife… being a mother means everything in the world to me… I want more kids…. I want a netball team!”

(Kelly, 18 years old, de facto relationship, has a 9 week-old baby).

Kelly’s comments show an adherence to a traditional mothering role as stay-at-home mother: to Kelly, with a working-class background and exposure to domestic violence growing up, this old-fashioned mothering ideal is a bridge from her background to an imagined social respectability and emotional fulfilment.

Gillies (2007) explores motherhood as a transformative process in her research with young, working-class mothers in England in the early 2000s:

For the mothers in this research it [motherhood] was the source of great pride and self-respect, with many discussing how having a child marked an important point of transition to adulthood… for most their first child was experienced as introducing new depth and meaning to life (Gillies, 2007, pp. 118-119).

Single mother Gail is 28 and has two children, a 7 year-old boy with ADHD she share cares with her ex-partner and a 10 month-old with her current fiancé. Gail was raised by a single mother after her parents separated when she was three years old. She spent most of her childhood living in caravan parks across Australia as her mother moved around all the time. She moved out at 13 to live with a family friend in a fostering situation until she was 18. Gail fell pregnant with her first child at 19 in what she describes as a “shock to the system”. At 20 her boyfriend left her to raise their less than one year-old child alone with no financial support. As a pregnant teenager Gail reconciled with her mother and lived in the same caravan park as her when she was pregnant and had her first baby. Recently the father of her older child has come back into Gail’s life and she now has a share care situation with him but receives no financial support. After a rocky start as a teenage mother at 19 Gail met a new partner in her 20s and is now pregnant again with a planned second child. Gail is determined to
give her children the stability she never had and expresses her longstanding
desire to have children:

_I do [enjoy being a mother]. I wouldn’t change it for nothing… I love being
a mum… You learn something new every day as a mum. You face new
challenges… But I wouldn’t change it. I always knew I would have kids_

(Gail, 28, single mother currently engaged, has a 7 year-old and 10
month-old)

Therefore, it can be seen that both Gail and Kelly are pursuing motherhood as
a path to social respectability. Their identity as mothers is constructed within a
communal rather than individual framework as both women undertake their
maternal work in webs of intergenerational, extended kin family support. It is
these webs of support that facilitate the mothering of Gail and Kelly. Gail
currently lives in her mother-in-law’s house and in an example of reciprocal
obligations within a kinship network she lives with her two young sons and fiance
rent-free while she cleans her mother-in-law’s house and does all the cooking:

_My typical day starts with getting up. 5.30am give the baby his bottle.
Drive my partner to work as we only have one car. Come home. My
mother-in-law works full-time. I clean the whole house and do all the
cooking. At 3pm pick partner up from work. 40 minute drive. Come home
and in the dinner mode. Jack comes in and relaxes plays with Neil (baby).
Mother-in-law comes in at 6. All eat dinner together…_
Gail and her fiancé who works in turf management are saving to buy a cottage or caravan in Logan. Gail describes extended family as being very important to her mothering:

*I get help from my mum and my mother-in-law. All of Jack’s family are supportive and they love me for some reason! Probably because I gave them their first grandchild.*

Gail is vehemently opposed to daycare for her young children preferring to leave them with biological family if she has to leave them at all: “I don’t really like having to use daycare unless I have to because I’m pretty wary who I actually leave my kids with. It’s usually only family. I’m not very keen on leaving my kids with people I hardly know”. Gail becomes quite angry talking about “these women who go back to work when babies are really young… and palm their baby off to some stranger to look after so they can go to work”.

Kelly is the fourth generation of her family to live in the Logan area and she illustrates mothering in an extended kinship care arrangement beautifully:

*I have always lived in Logan. My daughter is 5th generation…. My mum had me when she was 24. I’m 18 and my mum is 42. My nan is 66 and*
my nan’s mum is 90. She’s only just moved into a home….. Mum lends us her car. Takes me shopping. We don’t have a car… when we got the house we got given everything. My nan’s friend gave us a $5000 Italian table, a $2000 coffee table – an Italian oak one or something. We were given a cot. I didn’t have to buy any furniture. ….

**Collective mothering brings obligation and duty**

While this intergenerational kinship-based caring practice provides considerable support to women in their mothering it also brings obligations. Gillies (2007) describes this caring of others around you as “invisible labour” reflecting “a more relational, connected sense of self” and showing a higher moral sense and commitment to community (Gillies, 2007, pp. 43-44).

Obligation and duty is deeply entrenched in the lives of the Logan mothers. Grace, a Samoan mother, has a bed set up for her mother in her house. Her mother has a key and comes and goes as she pleases, often helping Grace with housework and making meals. When Grace’s mother is no longer able to care for herself she will move in with Grace’s family and they will look after her. To a Samoan old age homes are cruel:

*I would never put my mother in an old aged facility. I can’t believe you palangis do this. [*palangi* is how Samoans refer to White people]*

(Grace, 33, 4 younger children, works fulltime).
Similarly, caring for aging parents is also commonly done in community settings among the African communities:

*When we were young we were looked after by our old people. As Africans we have obligations to our community and our old people*

(Beth, 48, has one biological son aged 17, fosters many African children in Logan removed from their biological families by Child Safety)

Grace is also a women’s leader in the Samoan community and helps mentor young Samoan women. However, this relationship with the church is reciprocal. Grace’s husband works away for 6 weeks at a time, so she takes her children to the local Seventh Day Adventist church most weekends where they are involved in activities for young people. This gives her a break from full-time mothering. In Grace’s paid work of 40 hours a week she does an additional 15 hours a week in unpaid, community service work, setting up Pacific island dance groups and scout groups for young people. She also regularly attends community meetings at night.

Francis is a woman’s leader in the Mormon Church in Logan – she has a role in the leadership and helps run the church services on Sunday. She works closely with the women in Logan who have husbands in the local Wacol prison and is a church mentor, regularly visiting and supporting local women. Francis also fosters a young cerebral palsy boy every second weekend to give the biological family some respite. Vanessa is very involved in the local Catholic church and
sings in the church choir. Every Sunday she leaves her husband in charge of their 5 children, leaving early to spend the day at church, help set up the church, organize and sing in the choir, and help run the church activities for the children.

Francis and Grace both talk of the tithing or gifting of money to a Samoan, Cook Island or other Pacific Island nation family after someone dies in that family or there is a wedding. This practice is described by Francis as ‘fa’alavelave’ and ‘the Samoan way’. Francis and her husband are both full Samoan and the issue of tithing came up recently when one of his family died: “We are asked to give willingly and give what you can. [It puts] a lot of pressure on families”. It is irrelevant how much money you have – you are expected to give as much as you can possibly give. Grace discussed how this financial pressure can cause considerable stress within families especially when there is not much to go around in the first place.

Thus, it can be seen that family life in Logan is lived within the context of obligation and service to community and others. Mothers are often embedded within close relationships with their own mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunties, other female kin, childless female relations, neighborhoods and their church communities:

My house is usually full so we [my extended family] have this rotating.

Our kids rotate through us

(Grace)
Attitudes to housework demonstrates collective mothering

The general attitude to housework among the Logan mothers I spoke with further shows a collective approach to family responsibilities and a sharing of the domestic load. This is different to a Western view of housework where the primary responsibility for housework falls disproportionately on an individual mother (eg, Oakley, 1974; Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Bittman and Pixley, 1997). In the wider context of the study employing a cleaner was more common among some wealthier full-time stay-at-home mothers in Ascot and full-time stay-at-home fathers. However, many of the women I talked with in Logan are managing families on less than $50,000 a year and for most of them paying for a cleaner was not an option. More than money however, there was an attitude that you wouldn’t get someone you didn’t know into your house to clean up after you. Samoan mother Francis was bemused by my interview question about outsourcing aspects of housework you cannot do or choose not to do: “Do you have a cleaner?”. Francis replies to the question with:

*I would never get one! I would be too embarrassed to have someone come into my home and see the way I live. Why would I pay someone to do what I could do myself or my family could do? I would never have one?... That’s just too palangi [how Samoans refer to White people]!* [laughs] (Francis)
Single mother Gail is similarly derisive of the idea of paying for a cleaner to clean your house:

*No! Even if I was working full time. I’m really funny about who I invite into my space. I think well that’s my space and well cleaners are pretty much strangers aren’t they? Not family or anything. Just to invite a stranger into your home to clean it seems weird. Even if I was rich I wouldn’t do it. I would not do it!*

An exception to this was Helen, a Colombian mother of a 2 year-old working full-time as an accountant. It was causing too many arguments with her husband over who should do the housework as they are both working full time so she has just hired a cleaner.

For Vanessa cajoling her sons into helping with housework has required work to change cultural assumptions:

*The boys help me so much now. But in the beginning.... in our culture women are there to do the housework. While the man is the breadwinner, blah, blah, blah....so when I first asked my sons to help me they say ‘mum, can't we get someone in to help us’ and I say ‘this is not Africa, it is a different place.’... so it was hard for them to understand that they had to do the housework. And including that they are boys. They [now] grow up understanding that housework is for boys, girls, women and men*
Thus, it can be seen that sharing housework within the family is part of a greater ethic of collective mothering and responsibility to others, as well as an opportunity to transmit cultural values.

**Effect of patriarchal power and social disadvantage on Logan mothers**

Mothering in Logan among the ethnically diverse communities demonstrates the existence of an enduring and deeply patriarchal structure. Evidence of patriarchal power came up in conversations with the women from the Samoan and Burundian communities and in my fieldwork observations. For example, in a conversation about how family money is negotiated and divided within a household Vanessa tells me she and her husband have a joint bank account and that even though he earns all the money he doesn’t use money as a tool of power over her. However, she tells me male economic abuse of money over women “happens all the time in African communities”.

Both Grace and Francis talk of the more traditional gender roles expected in Samoan families. Francis’s father is a Samoan “patriarch…a chief of my extended family”. While in Samoa the mother is expected to stay at home with the children “we’re trying to fit into a Westernised society where a lot of things cost money and the husband’s wages are not enough” (Francis). Francis talks of many couples she knows where the women works at night as a cleaner or supermarket filler so she can fit in around the husband’s job and the children.
Grace, Francis, Vanessa and Beth all discuss the ongoing issue of physical discipline of children within Samoan and African families occurring within a larger patriarchal system of power and control. Traditional cultural practices allow quite harsh physical disciplining of a child and teenager but obviously in Australia children are taught that they are ‘the boss of their own body’ (to paraphrase the parlance used in high schools). This is a major cause of disagreements within Samoan and African families in Logan and one of the main reasons Child Safety is such a significant issue in Logan (as described to me by the Samoan, Maori and African Development Officers at ACCESS, the Logan refugee settlement office).

The Catholic, Mormon and Seventh Day Adventist religions are very important to Burundian and Samoan communities and men are still the heads of these communities and gatekeepers to the women. To obtain interviews with the Logan participants I had first to work through the men – no interviews were directly procured with the women themselves. All interviews were mediated through male heads of community and this involved multiple meetings with me in person before they released names and details of the women. This is discussed in some detail in the preceding Methodology chapter.

It seems ironic that in these deeply patriarchal and religious communities that the mothers I spoke with are encouraged and supported to work and supported to a high extent with child raising. While some the women recognised the influence of patriarchal power (this is not a phrase the women themselves would
have used) and the influence of male community leaders on their lives, they did not speak negatively of their male partners in the interviews. To the contrary, in almost all cases the male partners and fathers of their children were phrased highly for their practical and emotional support.

It may be of course that the women I spoke with were in more equitable relationships than others in their communities. Indeed, it may be that I would not have been able to speak with the women who were the most oppressed as the men who surround them would not have allow them to speak to a ‘palangi’ outsider.

The patriarchal attitudes common in the multicultural communities of Logan were largely absent from the interviews with the young White Australian working class women I talked with. Only one participant (Linda, 25), a qualified landscaper with a 6 month old baby was discouraged from working part time in the weekends at a local garden centre (work that she loved) by her husband as he felt this undermined his male provider role:

*My partner would rather I was at home and not have to work. He doesn’t really like me working cause that takes time away from us as a family and time from us. He’s very much ‘the man’…*

(Linda, 25, has a 6 month-old baby)
While Linda’s quote may indicate more complex reasons for her partner’s reluctance to see her work it is beyond the scope of this research to speculate upon or discuss this issue in more depth here.

The other male partners of the young working-class women I spoke with were supportive of their partners working: some of these young men were only in their 20s and some had been raised by single mothers so to them women working for a wage outside the home would have been the norm.

However, despite strong evidence of patriarchal attitudes in the Samoan and Burundian communities, the women’s happiness with their maternal practice was high. To my interview question: “Are you happy with the way you mother?” came the responses:

“Yes! I am happy with the way I mother.” (Vanessa)

“In general I am happy with the way I parent.” (Grace)

“Yes!” (Linda, 25, engaged, has a 6 month-old, works every Saturday and Sunday at a local garden centre, and is a TAFE-qualified horticulturist).

“Yes, very much. I have a feeling in my heart this is what I should be doing.” (Beth, 48, foster mother to many African children, has her own 17 year-old son)
As mothering is a valued and supported activity within the Burundian and
Samoan communities Logan mothers did not generally connect with questions in my interview about mothering and discontent. As previously discussed several of the young White, working-class women also received high levels of emotional and practical support in their mothering.

Only one mother, Theresa, Brazilian and mother to a 2 year-old and 4 month-old had recently been diagnosed with postnatal depression and was on medication. She felt less happy now than before she had children. As discussed above Theresa is feeling isolated and missing her extended biological family. She spoke of her upbringing in Brazil that involved aunties, uncles and grandmothers and contrasted this positively with her current isolated nuclear family situation.

To elicit responses to the idea that there is a persistent normative ideology of intensive mothering (Wearing, 1984; Hays, 1996) that mothers should aspire to I asked the question: “Do you ever get the feeling you are not mothering ‘the right way’ and that other mothers are doing a much better job than you?” In the Logan context this question was almost invariably answered with:

“Not really, no”. (Gail)

“No.” (Kelly)
“No. Don’t have that point of comparison.” (Helen, 35, has a 2 year-old, works full time as an accountant).

“No.” (Linda).

“No! I am feeling I am doing the right thing.” (Vanessa)

Even Theresa who has postnatal depression initially answered with “Yes. Other mothers have everything in control. They look great and their hair is right…” qualifies this with later with “Now I think no-one knows my child better than me. I follow my instinct and my heart”.

These responses would indicate that the persistent ideology of ‘good mothering’ is largely a Western construct and that it has limited relevance within a collective, kinship care-based mothering practice.

Some of my questions on maternal discontentment were met with frank bemusement and puzzlement, like the one asking “have you ever resented your partner in your years of mothering and wished he [in my interviews it is always a he] was the one at home with the kids and you were out working?”. Francis’s response is typical:

“No, of course not!” [said as she laughs] (Francis, Samoan, works full-time, six children, strong Mormon faith).

and
“No!” (Vanessa, Burundian, 5 children)

**Challenging a biologically privileged maternal narrative**

Collective mothering, particularly ‘co-mothering’ (Moore and Riley, 2010) or ‘othermothering’ (Hill Collins, 2000) non-biological children challenges the biologically privileged maternal narrative common in Western mothering. Queer theorists like Weston (cited in Rodriquez, 2013) argue for a reconfiguring of kinship arrangements not tied to strict biological relations. Weston calls this enacting “chosen families…. [which] do not directly oppose genealogical modes of reckoning kinship. Instead they undercut procreation’s status as a master term imagined to provide the template for all possible kinship relations” (Weston, cited in Rodriquez, 2013, p. 325). In Logan, the sharing of the raising of children by multiple caring adults (not necessarily connected to the child biologically) shows this undercutting of “procreation’s status as a master term”.

The multi-layered care matrices of Logan mothering, particularly ‘mothering’ non-biological children, challenge a biologically privileged maternal narrative. Like queer parenting it may present an opportunity to develop an alternative epistemology of motherhood.
High Income women and working

One of the significant findings to come out of the data was that even though both Grace and Francis have both recently completed university qualifications and their respective combined family incomes as expressed to me were quite high they have no plans to leave Logan or their extended families. In Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theory of ‘individualization’ (2002) theory of ‘individualization’ once an individual has upskilled and qualified they are then mobile to work anyway in the world and follow a higher wage. This often means leaving the place where you grew up and have your roots: “The improvement of educational opportunities [for women] contributes to the fact that some women manage to rise above the social status of their original family… it means leaving the familiar context for a new world marked by different experiences and habits, different convictions, rules and norms…” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 65)

However, neither Grace nor Francis have left Logan upon completion of their degrees. For them, it is these very “traditional ties” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) that provide the significant extended intergenerational family support that enables them to work with their many dependent children.
Grace works full-time at a local university and works close to 60 hours a week. She is 33 and has four children, one of whom is pre-school age while the other three attend primary and secondary schools:

*Hubby is away as he travels a lot. He is away every two weeks and then here for two weeks. It has its challenges but the extended family help out a lot. I have a very big extended family.*

Francis also works full-time at a local university. To Francis, family, the church and work are all important in her life. Francis’s significant and numerous community commitments have already been discussed above but even with all this unpaid, voluntary labour she has still been working full-time for two years and has always worked off and on through raising her six children:

*In New Zealand I worked when I just had the older four as a Pharmacy Technician. I worked for the 11 years prior to having children and then I worked part-time… I have worked for the money. To help pay the mortgage. I mean I did work when my kids were little but that was part-time and the kids were with my mum which is like being with me. That is the only option I would consider. I would only work if mum could look after them. I’m not a big fan of daycare – what is lacking is that real, deep emotional interaction that only you can have with your children… When I first started full-time work I was not a good mother. I was so tired I would just want to sit. But my husband was a great support.*
Francis’s husband works from 4.30pm to 1.30am daily in a distribution warehouse therefore enabling him to do all the work with the six children during the day, including reading at the primary school, going to the school assemblies and organising school drop offs and pick ups. Francis takes over when she returns home from work.

Thus extended family support enables and facilitate the working and professional lives of Grace and Francis.

Grace and Francis also disrupt Hakim’s (2000) preference theory around mothering types. Hakim identifies women as having individual preferences and values about motherhood that determine their choices. In Hakim’s schema, as full-time working women Grace and Francis would be classified as ‘work-centred women’. ‘Work-centred women’ in Hakima’s schema are often childless and those with children who work full-time usually use full-time childcare prioritising work over their children. For Grace and Francis, the binary delineation between work and mothering does not exist. For example, Grace clearly loves her job:

*If we won Lotto and I didn’t need to work would I work to bring money in?*

*No… I would do it for the love of work!*

However, Grace tells me her children and her maternal identity are also “really important to me”. She has listed on her resume, under ‘Personal Achievements’ “having 4 children has been my greatest achievement”.

Grace reiterated many times through our interview how much she loved her job. She also tried as much as possible to integrate family life and work, bringing her children onto her work site (a local university) as often as possible and taking her children to community events that she attended in a work capacity.

For Grace paid work and mothering are inextricably linked within a framework of community service and she describes working as enhancing rather than detracting from her identity as a mother. For Grace there is no choosing between motherhood and working, both are nurtured and valued in her life:

\[
\text{Being a mother is really important to me… And being a mother means service to community is really important. And I think my role as a mum is to instill those qualities in my children. (Grace)}
\]

Francis also works full-time at a local university. To Francis, family, the church and work are all important in her life. Francis’s significant and numerous community commitments have already been discussed above but even with all this unpaid, voluntary labour she has still been working full-time for two years and has always worked off and on through raising her six children:

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**Moral valence and working-class mothering**

Mothering in Logan interrogates broader questions of moral valence and the working class and the government’s attitude to working-class mothers. The media and conservative political parties may have propagated a narrative of teenage mothers and young working-class mothers’ ‘welfare dependency’ and having babies to ‘get the Benefit’ (for example, see the 2010 work by Cutcher and Milroy on how the reporting about the introduction of the 2004 Maternity Allowance reinforced negative stereotypes of young Aboriginal mothers; and the research of Wilson and Huntingdon (2006) on teenage mothers: “teenage
mothers are vilified, not because the evidence of poor outcomes for teen mothers and their children is particularly compelling, but because these young women resist the typical life trajectory of their middle-class peers which conforms to the current governmental objectives of economic growth through higher education and increased female workforce participation” (2006, p. 59).

Many of the working-class mothers I spoke with in Logan see work as very important both for the money but more importantly for issues of identity and self-worth. The exceptions to this are teenage mother Kelly who sees herself as a solely ‘traditional’ stay-at-home mother and Gail who is embracing full-time motherhood at this time. Both women have always wanted to be mothers and see motherhood as a legitimate and much anticipated career path and way to add meaning to their lives.

Assumptions are often made that “impoverished women, who are assumed to be doing nothing, need to be rescued from their ‘welfare dependency’ and turned into workers, so that they can make their productive contribution to the world” (Peel, 2005, p. 34; – based on interviews with working-class mothers living in public housing in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane). Most of the Logan mothers I spoke with want to work and can work as they are often supported by male partners and extensive community support. The women see work as an extension of mothering not the antithesis to it and indeed some women talked of paid work as “enriching their mothering” (Grace, 33, 4 younger children, works full-time). There is a robust literature arguing that working class women and
Black women have always had to work (Gillies, 2007; Campbell, 1984; hooks, 2014).

*Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked.* (hooks, 2014, p. 133)

Gillies (2007) discusses the complicated and difficult choices working class women face when weighing up working fulltime and caring for young children:

*Judgements about whether or how to combine paid employment with unpaid childcare depend on norms, values and beliefs as well as economic need… some mothers prioritised being at home for their children above any extra money they might earn from working… Employment options were for the most part limited to low paid, insecure posts that could be fitted around childcare responsibilities. Paying a stranger to look after your children in order to work full time was viewed as morally dubious by [sic] number of the mothers* (Gillies, 2007, pp. 44-45).

This attitude of finding “a stranger to look after your children in order to work full-time… morally dubious” was seen in Gail’s comment above where she thought paying a stranger to look after your children so you could work was “weird”.
Therefore, contrary to images of Logan as an area of welfare dependency, equitable, shared parenting by husbands and other relatives freed the women I spoke with to work, often full-time in responsible positions and contributed to higher levels of happiness overall with their mothering. The issue of valuing work was a major theme to come out of the findings.

Many of the Logan mothers I spoke with hunger to return to work either full- or part-time or have never stopped working full time. The Logan mothers generally return to work with very young babies - as young as 7 weeks in one case (Grace) – on average returning to some kind of part time work when their baby is 6 months old. This attitude of balancing paid work undertaken outside their home with care of young children and how working mothers define good motherhood includes (eg, Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2010; Smith, 2010, specifically on women who work in physical trades; Probert, 2002; Pocock, 2005; Dux and Simic, 2008; McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie, 2005; and Caro and Fox, 2008).

Most of the Logan mothers I spoke with relished returning to work and many were actively job-seeking. This attitude to work has strong historical roots among working class women and women of colour. bell hooks (2014) has written extensively on the attitudes to work of Black women. Discussing feminist analyses of motherhood at the start of the women’s liberation movement hooks wrote that:
Some white, middle-class, college-educated women argued that motherhood was a serious obstacle to women’s liberation, a trap confining women to the home, keeping them tied to cleaning, cooking and child care… had Black women voiced their views on motherhood… racism, lack of jobs, lack of skills or education, and a number of other issues would have been at the top of the list – but not motherhood. (hooks, 2014, p. 133).

hooks further argues that maternal work has always represented something different and deeper for Black women:

work in the context of family [is identified as] humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing (hooks, 2014, p. 133).

hooks also includes working-class White women in the same category as Black women in attitudes to work; that is they have always worked outside the home in what hooks calls “alienated work” (hooks, 2014, p. 134) and they do not vilify mothering work or “humanizing labor” (hooks, 2014, p. 133) in the same way as their more privileged, White middle-class sisters.
Working for identity and financial independence

There is a fierce strand in the Logan findings of a desire for economic independence and the accompanying equity this brings in their heterosexual partnerships. There is also the repeated expressed need to be able to financially support their children by themselves if they had to. The women also work as they see this as an important part of their identity.

Grace, 33, married, Samoan full-time working mother of 4 children aged 5 to 15 years articulates this desire to work:

Growing up I saw a lot of mum’s friends choosing not to work but then being unhappy. ‘I make your lunches, I cook and clean and you don’t appreciate it’. And I thought I can do that and still have meaning to my life. I can still be a mum. But not have cooking and cleaning be the only purpose for my existence. I always knew I would never give my children the responsibility for me not going for what I can do as a person.

Work is important for the three Logan mothers who worked full-time (Grace, Francis and Helen) and the two mothers who worked part-time (Linda and Beth). Stay-at-home mothers Vanessa, Theresa and Kristy expressed the desire to work in the future. The desire to find paid employment existed irrespective of the age of the women, their educational background or the age of the children: and some of the children were very young. Helen who works full-time as an accountant has a 2 year-old and she has worked since her daughter was 3
months old; Linda works part-time in a gardening centre and has a 6 month-old; Vanessa has two 2 year-old twins (as well as three older children) and is looking to return to the workforce. While Vanessa expressed the need to earn extra money for her large family that were struggling to survive on her husband’s semi-skilled trademan’s salary of less than $50,000 a year, her motivation to return to work was only partly financial. To the interview question: ‘Is it important for you to bring in money you have earned to the family relationship?’ Vanessa replies ‘Yes of course!’

Helen who works full-time as an accountant and is the main breadwinner in her family answers:

Yes. Earning money is important as you feel you are as important as anyone else in the house. You have the same rights…. and with the housework I say ‘I am working full-time and earning as much, and probably more than you, so these things should be equal as well’.

Linda who works part-time and has a six month-old:

It’s hard for me being financially reliant on Darren [partner]. I was financially independent until I was 38 weeks pregnant with Gloria [daughter]. Then I got government-funded maternity leave and then it ran out and I went back to work. It was really for me because I was independent for so long. To be the one at home and someone earns all the money and I spend it. It feels wrong…. 
For Francis, her ability to contribute to the family income was very important:

>You have to be prepared for anything. I think that’s what the women’s groups [the Samoan Mormon-run groups for women with children and husbands in Wacol Prison] are so good for. Making sure we are prepared and independent. What happens if my husband has a terrible accident and loses his job? I think that was another reason I went back to get this degree.* Get a career that would be help me support my family financially.

*Both Grace and Francis completed their university degrees part time over many years, starting when they had young children. Grace took 12 years to complete her degree.

Working as the women do not enjoy being at home with the children

Kristy, a qualified teacher, and mother to two pre-school age children aged 4 and 3, is not content to be at home with children and desires paid employment away from the home:

… stay-at-home mums are born to be like that. They love it. They are born to be wives and mothers. But it is not for me. I saw my mum teaching…. Her whole life. I always saw my mum busy. I was with babysitters. I didn’t miss [out]…. 
Similarly, Theresa believes paid work may give her life more meaning than motherhood does and may also be a way out of postnatal depression in the future:

I think getting paid work will be an outlet from the children. To have something for myself… so money [important too] but deep down I know I need the break too

Helen is a 35 year-old mother to a 2 year-old. She has worked full-time as an accountant since her daughter was 3 months old. While she was on maternity leave she considered being a stay-at-home mother but found the reality of life with a baby unrewarding and exhausting. Helen and Theresa attended the same play group run by Logan Community Health for young mothers experiencing isolation and struggling with their first baby. Like Theresa also, Helen grew up among a wide network of extended family in her native Columbia and comments in the interview on the isolating way Australian women raise their children:

I was full-time with Lucy for 2 months after she was born. Working from home part-time. Doing all the cleaning, the washing, the pooey nappies. But is shouldn’t be like that because at the end of the day when you have been all day with them and doing all the cooking and cleaning you don’t want to see them or be with them... You don’t have the experience and you don’t have anyone to suggest what to do. I couldn’t let her cry so I was always picking her up. My back was killing me. I was waking up to
her all night so not getting any sleep. You are just so tired and grumpy. So I say to him (my husband) if I only saw her at nights or in the weekends it would be fine. I would probably enjoy more kids... as it was they (my company) asked me to come back earlier from maternity leave.

Me: And you didn’t mind that?

H: Laughs. No because I wanted to get out. And actually, I think it is more the quality of time that is important. If you stay at home every day with them you can get frustrated so that’s not the best way to ... you have to feel comfortable all the time to be with them.

Helen is in the fortunate position of having her mother-in-law living close by. She was able to help looking after her child when Helen returned to work: her daughter went into full-time daycare at 8 months. Helen works 40 hours plus a week as an accountant and her mother-in-law helps to with pick ups and drop offs to daycare if Helen has to stay later at work. Her husband is an owner-operator truck driver and Helen describes him as relatively hands on with their daughter “although he needs direction”. Helen and her husband are saving to buy a house in Logan.

However, despite Helen being the higher income earner in the house and working full-time she still believes she carries a disproportionate amount of responsibility for their daughter:
I think always as the mum you have the responsibility. Men don’t see that they have the responsibility. They see themselves as just helping you. I think because you have the child they see this. I think it should be 50/50.

Thus, almost all the women in Logan demonstrate a desire for economic independence and the accompanying equity this brings in their heterosexual partnerships in the high value they place on working. The women are able to work, even with very young children, as they mother collectively and use extended kinship care and ‘othermothering’ (Hill Collins, 2000) of biological and non-consanguine kin to mind their children. Work is identified as an important component to a sense of identity and purpose for the women. The factors that drive the Logan mothers of younger children to work full and part-time are wanting a sense of purpose that being a stay-at-home mother does not give them, using a qualification they worked hard to attain and wanting to bring money they have earned into the family home.

The myths propagated in the media and conservative political parties of welfare dependency among teenage and young working-class mothers in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are challenged in these findings where the pursuit of paid work is valued and prioritised.

The only participant who didn’t value work as a crucial part of her identity and didn’t consider earning her own money as important was Kelly: ‘Not really. I’ve got my mum. And he’s [partner and father of her baby daughter] not the sort to
leave me with nothing.’ As discussed above Kelly is following a trajectory of being a full-time, stay-at-home mother as a path to social respectability (Hunt, 1994; Gillies, 2007).

**Conclusion**

In Logan, women define themselves through others in their mothering work. Their mothering practice is shaped by collective care practices that contain the principle of ‘duty to others’ over duty to self. This kind of mothering is a contrast to Western mothering that is built around the concept of ‘individualization’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Mothering among the Logan participants is undertaken within community frameworks and extended kinship networks that support their maternal work and enable them to pursue paid employment. A discourse of mothering based on indigenous knowledge systems passed down through generations of women and predicated on a communal ethics of care is common in Logan. The communities of Logan value the work of mothers generally and the women were overwhelmingly contented with being mothers and their mothering work; being a mother was identified as central to their identity.

Collective mothering in Logan brings obligation and duty, whether it is having your aging mother live with you when she is no longer able to live in her own home or looking after your sister’s children so she can work. Mothering in Logan also occurs within patriarchal power structures and among the women I spoke
with ethnic backgrounds this was often related to their religion and the church. Social disadvantage was also evident in Logan and the material and economic disadvantages were often compensated by extended family support in caring for children to enable women to work and helping women with accommodation and fitting out their houses with furniture.

There is a general dissatisfaction with being a stay-at-home mother among the participants and many women work to enhance their identity and gain financial independence. There were two mothers pursuing full-time motherhood as a path to respectability and social acceptance (Hunt, 1994; Gillies, 2007). Hays’s (1996) notion that intensive mothering is inextricably linked to not working (in Hays’s paradigm the intense demands of spending all your time with a young child and making them the focus of your life excludes working) is inapplicable in Logan. As Hays suggests the ‘intensive mothering’ model is culturally propelled because motherhood is perceived as “the last best defence against what many people see as the impoverishment of social ties, communal obligations and unremunerated commitments” (Hays, 1996: xiii). However, the findings from Logan turn this idea on its head: the work and mothering matrix succeeds in Logan precisely because of these ‘social ties, communal obligations, and unremunerated commitments’. Logan mothers do not ‘mother intensively’ in Hays’s model, ie, they work full or part-time, by choice, and if they are not working they are actively seeking work. In Logan the social ties and communal obligations of caring for aging parent and sharing children with childless sisters
to ‘co-mother’ extends to these mothers and sisters reciprocating by looking after your children so you can work. In other words, Hays’ intensive mothering originates from a persistent Western, hegemonic discourse on motherhood. There has been considerable work on how working mothers define being good mothers that builds on the foundational work of Hays and this includes Hochschild, 1997 and Rosin, 2013 in the United States and in the Australian context includes Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2010; Probert, 2002; Mooney, 2011; Pocock, 2005; Dux & Simic, 2008; McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie, 2005; Brady, 2010; and Caro & Fox, 2008. Theorists such as hooks (2014) show that Black and working-class women have always combined working and mothering.

The wealthiest women in Logan did not follow Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (2002) trajectory of tertiary educated, higher income individuals leaving “traditional ties” and being socially mobile to follow high income jobs. Instead the women stayed in Logan and lived within their extended family networks who support them to work. The women are also subject to the web of obligation and duty that living collectively prescribes. Grace and Francis also contradict Hakim’s (2000) schema of classifying mothering types based on individual preferences and personal value systems. In Hakim’s typology Grace and Francis would be ‘work-centred women’ and thus prioritize work over children. However, neither of these women follow this binary choice of work or mothering with both of them encompassing and valuing working and mothering and
integrating both into their lives. They are facilitated in this process by the extensive extended support of collective mothering.
Chapter 5: Re-embedding of a ‘re-traditionalised’ role as stay-at-home mother in an affluent Brisbane suburb?

Like some of these mothers after they drop their kids off are going home to have another cup of tea. The demographic of Ascot/Clayfield is [that] there are a lot of stay at home mums. It’s all about the house. It’s a vacuous existence based on appearances.

(Martha, 46, White Australian, full-time university lecturer, 2 children aged 8 and 11 years)

I love my children, but I hate motherhood.

(Kath, stay-at-home mother, compares herself at one stage of the interview to a ‘Gucci Mama’, 35, White Australian, married, 3 young children under 6).

That’s the hard part… [children] can break your heart like nobody else. So intense and demanding… So everything can go swimmingly and then… all out. Motherhood is uncertain and unpredictable. Things change. Quickly.
(Tessa, 49, works part-time in Federal Government, has an 8 year-old and a 22 year-old).

**Introduction**

This chapter examines the mothering beliefs and practices of a privileged cohort of mothers living in and around the wealthy Brisbane suburb of Ascot. Just over half of these mothers were full-time, stay-at-home mothers; the remainder worked – one woman full-time, the others part-time. Both groups of women will be discussed in this chapter through the critical theoretical approaches of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) and Hakim (2000). Starting with a discussion of stay-at-home mothers, I move to a discussion of working mothers in Ascot then conclude with an exploration of the themes common to both groups.

In Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s discourse on “individualization” (1995, 2002) individual agency is considered more important than structure in determining individual choices: these structures include social class, loyalty to nation, familial obligations and “traditional ties”. Social mobility and moving for higher paid work or “personal destiny” will overcome “traditional ties” in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theory of social change (2002). For some of the privileged Ascot stay-at-home mothers I spoke with this premise is true: the women moved states within Australia and moved countries to follow their husband’s work ambitions of a higher paid job with greater responsibility. However, one of the effects of following their husbands’ and partners’ careers was that they left behind consanguine families and support networks for their mothering: “traditional ties”
in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s framings (1995). The women spoke of experiencing isolation, resentment at the long hours their husbands and partners spent at work and several of the stay-at-home had experienced post-natal depression. There was some resistance to this isolation with several mothers creating an altruistic ethics of care through intergenerational kinship networks and grandmothering mentors from neighbours and friends. These women use information technology and social media to create online communities of support that do not exist in the real world.

Furthermore, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that the institution of marriage no longer holds a central moral authority and position in Western society in late modernity and that it is constraining of individual freedoms: “it is no longer possible to pronounce in some binding way what family, marriage, parenthood, sexuality or love mean, what they should or could be; rather… these vary from relationship to relationship” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 5). This theoretical premise is also examined in relation to the Ascot findings. The authors claim that the institution of marriage has become less relevance for individuals and they call this the “detradi tionalization of marriage” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). However, rather than a “detradi tionalization of marriage” as proposed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) my findings in Ascot among the stay-at-home mothers show a re-embedding of a ‘re-tradi tionalised’ role of stay-at-home mother in a contemporary context. I investigate why Australian women would take on a traditional and gendered role of stay-at-home mother and what
does undertaking this gendered division of labour mean to the women themselves? I explore whether the norms and expectations of the traditional stay-at-home mother role are replicated or recalibrated in twenty first century Australia within this group?

This investigation of the “re-traditionalization of marriage” among the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot builds on recent work by Kirby (2009) on the attitudes of young Australian women living in the Upper Hunter of New South Wales to marriage. Kirby found that far from traditional ideas about marriage no longer being relevant for young women, evidence of “retraditionalization trends in the aspirations, expectations and lived realities of the young women interviewed… ; for example in the desire for full church weddings and in the defence of women taking responsibility for housework and raising children” (Kirby, 2009, vi) were common. Kirby’s (2009) research and my own with the Ascot stay-at-home mothers challenge this idea of a prevalent “detraditionalization of marriage” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

In addition, I explore issues around ‘choice’ and ‘agency’ within a using Hakim’s Preference Theory (2000) in this chapter. Additional themes to emerge from the findings and summarized here ae attitudes to work; attitudes to daycare for young children; the moral dimension or ‘shaping of young citizenry’; the use of social media and modern technology to form digital communities; and volunteering and creating communities from their neighbourhoods to mitigate isolation and build self-esteem.
In the interviews with the six stay-at-home mothers there was a common thread of the quest to be a ‘good mother’ and this was associated in the women’s minds with ‘being there’ for their young children (Reid-Boyd, 2002) and ‘intensive mothering’ (Hays, 1996, Wearing, 1986). However, their choice to be full-time stay-home mothers and to follow an intensive maternal practice came at a price: all described frustration and resentment with elements of their role. By contrast the six working mothers believe that their paid work informs and enriches their mothering practice and is a critical and important part of their identity. The Ascot interviews with stay-at-home mothers and working mothers were the most intense and emotional of all the 35 interviews I conducted. Tears and confessions were common – in one interview a participant revealed she had experienced postnatal depression when the children were younger and that she had never told anyone else about this. There was a strong sense of unburdening and catharsis in these interviews. These women were all white Australians except for one British migrant. They were, with one exception in each case, married, highly educated and owned their own homes. With two exceptions they were in the top decile of family incomes in Australia. Further details are outlined in the Table below.
**Table 2: Key demographic characteristics of the Ascot mothers interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of children &amp; ages</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Rent or Own</th>
<th>Family Income*</th>
<th>Work Status</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kath</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (6, 4, 2)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$200,000 +</td>
<td>Stay-at-home Mother</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (8, 22)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$200,000 +</td>
<td>Project Manager, Federal Government.</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Ngaire</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (2, 1 and 4 weeks)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$150,000 to $200,000</td>
<td>Currently on 6 months maternity leave from full-time HR job.</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renni</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (6 and 4)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent. About to Buy</td>
<td>$150,000 to $200,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home Mother</td>
<td>Postgrad Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raquel</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>English (emigrated in 2003)</td>
<td>2 (8, 2)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$150,000 to $200,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother</td>
<td>Postgrad Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (4, 16 months)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>$120,000 to $150,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (17 months)</td>
<td>De Facto</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$120,000-150,000</td>
<td>Part-time Nurse</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (8, 7, 4)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother</td>
<td>TAFE Qualified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (8, 11)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>University Lecturer full-time</td>
<td>Postgrad Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Rose</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (5, 2, 6 weeks)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>Part-time. Owns marketing company</td>
<td>Postgrad Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freda</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (6, 5 and 2)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Renting as renovating own home</td>
<td>Up to $50,000</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (8 years)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>Up to $50,000</td>
<td>Part-time Hostess</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Ngaire lives in a more salubrious part of Carindale (another well-off Brisbane suburb.)
** Rose lives in Brookfield. She was living in Ascot until a week before the interview.
ascot stay-at-home mothers

significance of the term ‘stay-at-home mother’ in this context

Before discussing the lives of the Ascot mothers who do not work, the term ‘stay-at-home mother’ should be clarified; it occurs in this chapter deliberately. It refers to a married woman whose main occupation is caring for her family and managing household affairs and housework. Significantly, the women in this study describe themselves as ‘stay-at-home mothers’ usually in comparison to negative comments about ‘those mothers who work and use daycare’. In addition, I use the term ‘housewife’ specifically when discussing the more traditional aspects of their role as ‘stay-at-home mothers’.

The chapter uses this term in preference to the available alternatives. While there has been a move in the contemporary motherhood literature to the alternative term “parent-only care” (Phillips and Baron, 2016, p. 41) to describe a full-time male or female caregiver of young children not in paid employment, this term ignores the analytical significance of gender to the role. Feminine and masculine interpretations and expectations of the caregiving role are elided: “Parent-only care occurs when parents care for their own children and do not outsource their care to formal and informal care providers” (Phillips and Baron, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, there is a conservative ideological underpinning to this term with the use of the language of Economics and commodification in “outsource” and “care providers”. In this caregiving paradigm daycare or the
‘outsourcing’ of childcare is inherently inferior to “parent-only care”. Therefore “stay-at-home mother” here is used with a particular gendered paradigm and historical association in mind.

**Back to the future: Ascot stay-at-home mothers**

Childcare, of course, was their [the mothers’] domain. Fathers usually worked long hours outdoors or away from home. Fathers often appeared only for the evening meal, by which time children were supposed to be ready for bed. Women made the decisions on child management on a day-to-day basis, keeping paternal authority for reinforcement (Rieger, 1991, p. 50).

Rieger (1991) is referring here to “the typical White Australian family” in the 1930s. Ascot stay-at-home mother Angela has three children under eight, and she describes the input of her husband to the family’s domestic arrangements in 2012:

> I do everything. Colin is just a speed bump in my life. **In terms of the routine of my day he contributes very little.**

(Angela, 44, White Australian, stay-at-home mother of 3 young children under 8)
The stay-at-home mothers in Ascot are in largely traditional and gendered roles as housewives and mothers within their marriages. What are the experiences and meanings the women themselves place on this maternal practice? The over-arching question for this group of mothers is why, if the male breadwinner/full-time housewife configuration is widely considered to be obsolete and at best, unusual: “the old order is indeed being disturbed” (Richardson et al, 2014, p. 20), is it followed so religiously among some mothers in Ascot in 2012? Is there evidence among this group of women of the re-embedding of a re-traditionalised role of stay-at-home mother in a contemporary context?

A stay-at-home mother role is striking in this group as, on the whole, the women are so highly educated. The participants include an Environmental Manager with a Masters degree in Environmental Law; a high school English teacher; a university qualified Nutritionist; a Marketing Manager; a Human Resources Project Manager; an Architect; and a Masters’ qualified agribusiness marketer who had run her own company. Most of the women had rich professional work backgrounds: one had run a large medical establishment overseas and another had worked as a policy adviser in local government. Although one of the participants currently works 5 hours a week for a charity and another helps with the books for her husband’s business they describe their central focus as their work in the home and with their children. For the stay-at-home mothers any work
outside this domestic sphere is minimised and must fit in around their maternal responsibilities.

Raquel, is a stay-at-home mother four days a week – on one day a week she works in the city in marketing: “I finish work at 2.30pm. Train back. Pick the car up at 3 and pick up the kids”. Raquel’s attitude to work is telling – she minimises her working self and essentially subsumes it into her maternal, domestic self: “the kids don’t know I work. They wouldn’t know any different”. This contrasts the findings from the Ascot (and Logan) working mothers who foreground their working selves.

To theoretically situate the findings and attempt an explanation of why these more traditional roles as mother and housewife persist in contemporary Ascot I will contrast my research findings with Hochschild’s work on the family in the USA (1989, 1997); and more recently, Rosin’s 2013 findings on highly qualified North American mothers, many of them married to similarly highly qualified men.

In the 1980s Hochschild (1989) examined the tensions arising when working mothers also do most of the childcare and housework as well, referring to it as the ‘second shift’ (Hochschild, 1989). In the Australian context, the research findings around this theme find similar conflicts for working women who also end up doing most of the housework and a bulk of the care work with children (Pocock, 2005; Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Dux and Simic, 2008; Caro and Fox, 2008; Probert, 2002, 2005). In Rosin’s 2013 study of privileged, well-qualified
working mothers the domestic tensions identified by Hochschild, while not disappearing completely, have been absorbed into more democratic, equitable domestic arrangements. The college-educated American women in Rosin’s study still seek comfort in traditional marriage however in Rosin’s “see-saw marriages” the couples “are much more fluid about who plays what role, who earns more money, and, to some extent, who sings the lullabies” (Rosin, 2013, p. 7).

It may be that the women taking on the traditional and gendered role of stay-at-home mother are examples of Hakim’s Preference Theory-based “chosen gendered identities” (Hakim, 2000, p. 273); in Hakim’s schema the women would be the ‘home-centred’ type. The women may also be pursuing a stay-at-home mother role because it is amenable to individual flexibility and fulfillment; after all many of the women emphasise they ‘chose’ this role. However, an interrogation of what this type of gendered division of labour means to the Ascot women themselves reveals a different truth. Rather than this re-embedded re-traditionalised stay-at-home mother role being an individual preference it could be more accurately described as a pragmatic survival strategy in the face of absent husbands and lack of paternal and family support.
Agency and choice: “But I’m choosing to be a stay-at-home mum. It’s my job...”

Many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers insist that being stay-at-home mother is their chosen role. Furthermore, they treat it as a job and attempt to mother within perceived rules, mores and norms of “socially appropriate mothering” (Hays, 1996, p. x). Issues of choice in mothering have been discussed in the work of feminist ethicist Carol Gilligan (2003) and she links choice to taking responsibility for those choices. Against a background of historical patriarchal oppression Gilligan proposes that “for centuries, women’s passivity has been anchored to their sexuality” (2003, p. 68) but that now women have a significantly increased range of choices and with it concomitant responsibilities:

The essence of moral decision is the exercise of choice and the willingness to accept responsibility for that choice. To the extent that women perceive themselves as having no choice, they correspondingly excuse themselves from the responsibility that decision entails. Childlike in the vulnerability of their dependence and consequent fear of abandonment, they claim to wish only to please, but in return for their goodness they expect to be loved and cared for (Gilligan, 2003, p. 67).

Gilligan’s comments on choice affect the pervasive narratives of the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot, many of whom insisted they chose to be stay-at-home mothers:
I'm a stay-at-home mum. I made a conscious decision to do this

(Jane, 35, stay-at-home mother, two children, 4 and 18 months)

and

Actually being a full-time mum is really important to me. I made a conscious choice

(Renni, 38, stay-at-home mother, two children, 6 and 4)

If mothers in Logan undertake their maternal work in communal networks of support many of the mothers in Ascot thought they should be able to mother independently before having children:

I am stubbornly self-reliant and I don't like to ask for help… I mean as the oldest of 4 I thought motherhood would be fine… I remember helping mum with the youngest two. I knew motherhood would be big but I didn’t know how big it was.

(Renni, 38, White Australian, two children aged 6 and 4)

and

Before I had kids I was very independent… it didn’t occur to me I wouldn’t be able to cope on my own
(Jane, White Australian, two children aged 4 and 18 months)

While these attitudes are expressed by the mothers when they have their first child, most of them accept the need and benefit of reaching out by the time their second child is born.

Within the narratives of choice of the stay-at-home mothers the women’s individual agency is highly calibrated by their husband’s and partner’s behaviours and attitudes. Having a high-earning, highly-educated husband who is largely absent from the routines of family life often resulted in the ‘choice’ to be a stay-at-home mother. Lack of parental involvement by highly educated men in their families’ lives is contrary to much contemporary research in this area (eg Craig’s 2006 study of Australia Bureau of Statistics Time-use Survey data from the 1997 Census found that fathers with a university education contribute more time to care of children, including time alone with them, than other fathers; more involved, hands on fatherhood is also noted in Rose et al, 2015; Doucet, 2006; and Miller, 2011, 2014). However, this is not the case with this group of women.

Many of the husbands of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers are in managerial positions: one is the founder doctor of a major Brisbane medically-related institution, another became a managing director of a construction company at 32, another is a tax lawyer, another is a Business Consultant for a major takeaway chain, another is an Information Consultant. In Connell’s 2008 study of “managerial masculinities” she interviewed male managers and found
evidence of entrenched ideas about masculinities and that traditional ways of working are embedded in organisational life. Connell found that these ideas have a profound effect on the relationship between work life and the family:

Most of the men we have interviewed work about a ten-hour day, are focussed on the demands and responsibilities of their work, and rely on having a wife to look after the children and keep the household going (Connell, 2008, p. 243).

These entrenched notions of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 2000) are found to still exist in the 2011 longitudinal study by British sociologist Tina Miller with British fathers anticipating and experiencing first time fatherhood. She found that there is a paradox between the men expressing wanting to be ‘involved’ fathers but still holding on to traditional notions of being the economic provider:

...hegemonic constructions of worker identity as a prized dimension of masculinity and achievement sit at odds with constructions of more involved, emotional fatherhood that the men [in her study] have also envisaged… (Miller, 2011, p. 80)

These conflicts between an economically-providing masculinity and male active caregiving of children remain in 2013 among middle-class Western families. Among selected Ascot mothers, patriarchal absence during the week is even extended to the weekend as some of these high-earning male partners engage in semi-competitive sports like triathalons and cycling; one had had a racing car,
another had a boat, and another played regular poker on Friday nights. Family responsibilities were often moulded around their male training and recreational schedules.

Me: And is your husband more hands on over the weekend?

Well during the week he’s up at 5am. Out the door (running or cycling) and then he has a coffee. In again at 8am. Comes home at night at 6pm. Watches ‘Deal or No Deal’ [sarcastic, mocking voice]. And I just keep going. Occasionally he might do the washing up. Or I’ll do it. He says, ‘I’ll do it in the morning’ but I can’t stand looking at it so it’s easier if I do it.

(Angela, 44, stay-at-home mother, three children, 8, 7 and 4)

... so the last two years have been quite full on for him workwise. And my sense watching him is that he really just needs down time in the weekend. And um we went through a phase when my first child was 1 when I would ask him for help in the weekends and he would get sick. And when I didn't ask for help he didn't get sick.... So I thought I’m not going to ask you for help any more because then I have to look after you as well. It’s easier for me to look after the kids and keep you well rather than to stretch you... So now I see the weekends as my husband’s time.

(Renni, 38, stay-at-home mother, two children, 6 and 4)
Me: *Does he ever give you a break? Take the kids to the park? Kick a ball?*

Renni: *No. Well rarely… I’m tired of the argument now…*

The issue of ‘choice’ in mothering is not just affected by external constraints like not having extended family to help you with the children and a husband who is largely absent. In investigating English mothers’ decision-making with respect to care of their pre-school age children and employment, internal factors like their self-perceptions of their own mothering identity were as important to their decision making as external circumstances (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). The researchers found that “only certain options [in terms of the type of mothering pursued] were under consideration because of who they were” (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, p. 461). While Himmelweit and Sigala are not necessarily arguing in favour of Hakim’s Preference Theory and her inflexible mothering typology (Hakim, 2000) their findings show the complexities involved in the decision to be a stay-at-home mother. The Ascot stay-at-home mothers’ ‘choice’ to be at home is the combination of a commitment to the identity of ‘home-centred’ mother and the influence of external circumstances like absent husbands, little support in their caring and living away from biological family. The enactment of this ‘choice’ in their everyday lives as stay-at-home mothers reflects the complexities and individual configurations of the role.
The moral dimension: shaping model citizens and striving to be a ‘good mother’

An important part of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers’ parenting is creating clever, well-behaved citizenry within the ‘good mother’ paradigm. Rieger (1985) has researched the development of this intensive mothering movement from the 1900s onwards: “...mothering, was subjected to new pressures which implicitly made it a more difficult, anxiety-prone and psychologically oriented enterprise than in the late nineteenth century” (Rieger, 1985, pp. 174-175). To Ascot mother Angela, motherhood is partly about:

Shaping little lives, identities. About routine. Consistency. Direction and support

(Angela, stay-at-home mother of three children, 8, 7 and 4)

And there’s all these pressures to be the perfect mother

(Raquel, 43, English immigrant, stay-at-home mother of a 2 and 8 year-old)

Yes [I find being a mother difficult and tiring]. Juggling all the time. To do it ‘right’ is time consuming

(Freda, 42, stay-at-home mother to three children aged 6, 5 and 2 years old)
This led to a rigorous domestic regime that which may appear exhausting. Many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers show an uncompromising adherence to strict eating regimes for their children. The children eat only nutritious, home-made food, using preferably organic ingredients. In one interview an 18 month-old ate frozen peas and small bits of cut up organic tomato as her mother tried to eliminate processed food from her diet. The mothers also limit television viewing to an hour a day and only ABC 2; further, they involve their children in many out of school activities such as gymnastics, Grasshopper soccer, dancing, tennis lessons and swimming; they enforce strict homework rules; engage tutors for their young junior school aged children; and are very particular about where they send their children to school, usually choosing private schools over state. The private/public school debate was a central topic of conversation in the interviews and in almost all cases the children were on wait lists for expensive private high schools – some had been on there since birth. In about a third of the interviews the husband was an old boy of an elite private Brisbane boys’ school and the wife had been told this was where their son was going; no discussion was entered into and her personal views were considered irrelevant.

In the regimented schedule of ‘good mothering’ free play was not a concept accepted or encouraged by some of the participants:

_I have never played with the children. I don’t really like it. I create opportunities for play and direct activities._
(Angela, has 3 children under 8).

Kath is similarly bemused by my question of whether she plays with her children:

Who has time to play? I find it boring! Playing in the park in the weekend maybe. But…. no play.

(Kath has 3 children aged 6 and under).

Rose has a similar attitude to play with her children: “there is not much playing”. Rose has three children: 5, 2 and 6 weeks and she works 20 hours a week running her own marketing company with her husband.

Seeking external advice and validation for your mothering practice

One of the tenets of Hays’s (1996) intensive mothering paradigm is mothers seeking external expert advice for their mothering. More recently Hoffman (2013) identifies a contemporary adherence among privileged American mothers to a childrearing and parenting that is:

informed by expert advice, highlights the desirability of child-centred forms of parenting, in which parents focus on the developmental needs of the child, respect the child as an individual, and provide children with ample opportunities to exercise choice in order to develop a sense of individual agency (Hoffman, 2013, p. 229).
Kath refers to herself as a ‘Gucci Mama’ at one stage of the interview and is very into French parenting, citing Druckerman’s 2012 *bringing up bebe*:

> I am not an attachment parent… No I think the French know how to parent and I think someone needs to cotton on to that. So they are strict and they have discipline, ‘you will wait and you will be quiet’. I’m having an adult conversation and that’s more important than you telling me there’s a bird over there or something… Parent here [hand up], kid down there [hand down]… How did kids become top of the pecking order?… Now we have the ‘Little Emperor Syndrome’ or whatever it’s called.

(Kath, 35, White Australian, 3 children under 6)

Kath’s adherence to a French parenting style was matched by other women I spoke with who seek extensive external advice for their mothering, usually in the form of books and advice online. Many of the participants rated highly Steven Biddulph’s (1998) *Raising Boys* and Susan Mushart’s (1997) *The Mask of Motherhood* (these are the titles that kept coming up time and again with participants).

In adhering to a perceived ‘right way’ to mother and seeking external validation and approval for their mothering practices the Ascot women were similar to the privileged mothers of Hoffman’s (2013) study of contemporary middle-class American mothers. Hoffman examined child-centred mothering by focusing on the ‘power struggle’ between child and mother to gain insights on whether
notions such as “power, selfhood and emotional control” are “culturally situated” (Hoffman, 2013, p. 229).

The women in Hoffman’s research strove at all times to do their job as mother well and to be ‘good mothers’:

[they] felt vulnerable to the criticisms of others in their attempt to carve identities for themselves as ‘good mothers’, struggles were not only with their children, but with the larger community, and even,… with the larger culture and its pressures to get the job of childrearing ‘right’ (Hoffman, 2013, p. 241).

In their quest to be ‘good mothers’ and raise stereotypically successful children the Ascot mothers also share similarities with Amy Chua’s Chinese mothers, the so-called ‘Tiger Mothers’. In her 2011 book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* Chua describes the single-minded and relentless parenting of Chinese children to be the best students: “academic achievement reflects successful parenting” and “if children did not excel at school there was a problem and parents were not doing their job” (Chua, 2011, p. 5). While the Ascot stay-at-home mothers were no so fierce in this pursuit for academic supremacy for their children both the Chinese Tiger Mother and the Ascot stay-at-home mothers share a hands-on and directed parenting style. However, for some this rigorous regime came at a cost.
“When you are working you can go to the toilet when you want” (Raquel): 
loss of social identity with mothering

Loss of self-esteem, little external validation, shame at not feeling adequate in their role as stay-at-home mothers and a loss of identity they had experienced while working are all common themes in the stories of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers. These are commonly held beliefs among stay-at-home parents of both genders. Research on stay-at-home fathers and loss of self-esteem and identity include Zimmerman, 2000; Rubin and Wooten, 2004; Lupton and Barclay, 1997; Gribich, 1997; Daly, 1996; Doucet, 2006; and Miller, 2011.

Stay-at-home mother Raquel who has a 2 year-old and an 8 year-old and little family support ran a major medical establishment in England before she had children. Raquel is English and has no biological family in Australia; her husband’s family live in another state. She describes how she wished her husband had been the one at home with babies and she had been going out to work:

... when you go out to work you don’t get all this emotional rubbish you get with mothering. You can have a coffee break when you want, you can go to the toilet when you want. So yes I have had resentment as I think sometimes that his job is easier than mine

Definitely [resentful at husband going out to work]. Especially at the start. When George was a baby I went to the movies a lot. I was stuck in a
cage. I felt like I had to beg for time for myself when George was small...

I was jealous at James going to work

(Jane, 35, White Australian, stay-at-home mother to a 4 year-old and an 18 month-old).

While the descriptions above could be interpreted as merely mothering being boring, tiring and constraining the connection to identity specifically was foregrounded by the women themselves. The Logan mothers also spoke of the boredom and exhaustion of motherhood (especially new motherhood) but in the Ascot stay-at-home mothers’ narratives they made explicit links between their mothering selves and their previous working selves, framing the transition within a paradigm of loss and diminution of identity.

Exhaustion, dealing with unpredictability, diminished self-esteem, and in selected narratives, resentment toward their husbands at not helping with the children or contributing to housework, were prominent themes in many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers’ narratives. The women sometimes explained this paternal absence away by turning it back on themselves and reframing it within a paradigm of choice: “But it was and continues to be my choice to be a stay-at-home mother” (Renni, 38).
‘Being there’

Underpinning the interviews of many of the mothers was the idea of “being there” for their children – a quality of time they thought would be negatively impacted by paid work. This notion of being there for young children is highly gendered and it has been traditionally women who feel responsible for the emotional dimension of care of children. Furthermore, they feel guilty if they perceive they are not delivering it satisfactorily (Hays, 1996, Hochschild, 1989; Wearing, 1984). The notion of male caregivers ‘being there’ for young children is also an increasingly popular topic for research (Doucet, 2006; Miller 2011) and this is explored in more depth in chapter 7 on stay-at-home fathers.

The concept of “being there” (Reid Boyd, 2002) describes how “the emotional dimension of care constantly spills over, between the productive and reproductive, public and private” (Reid Boyd, 2002, p. 469). This notion of “… the value of time. Being there for the child, availability and responsiveness to the child were considered as integral and related aspects of this time commitment…” (Phillips and Baron, 2016, p. 52) were identified as primary drivers for mothers’ reasons for choosing parent-only care in the Phillips & Baron’s 2016 qualitative study with Australian caregivers of both sexes. This perception of spending ‘quantity time’ with young children and ‘not missing out’ are also central tenets underpinning Rubin and Wooten’s 2007 study of highly qualified women who choose to be full time stay-at-home mothers.
For the Ascot stay-at-home mothers ‘being there’ for their children when they were young was a major reason for choosing to be stay at home parents:

So I made the important call to my work and said look I’ve decided not to come back… so John’s getting a lot of satisfaction from me being here with the kids.

(Renni, 38, White Australian, stay-at-home mother, 2 children aged 6 and 4, worked in government in Environmental Management before having children)

I feel like a dinosaur as a stay-at-home mum but, I wouldn’t use daycare for younger children. I’d feel like I was missing out. I would regret it

(Jane, 35, White Australian, stay at home mother, 2 children aged 4 and 18 months, worked as a Legal Secretary before having children)

Personally I would never have sent any of my children to daycare as a baby… I would never judge a mother who had to go out to work to pay a mortgage, feed the family. I am more critical of those women who hand over their babies to daycare and say ‘I need to work for me’ because I think they lose out on that bonding process. I think it was an invaluable process to be at home with the kids until they were 2…

(Raquel, 43, stay-at-home mother, 2 children aged 8 and 2 years)
Although many of the stay-at-home mothers would never use daycare for their young children some employ au pairs and nannies. Rose was the first Ascot participant to use the expression, “we follow the au pair model” and at first I thought it was specific to her family. However, after this interview I noticed it peppered through the interviews with subsequent women. Following an ‘au pair model’ means choosing not to use institutionalised daycare but instead employing an au pair who lives with the family. This is considered a superior way to parent. Kath, Angela and Ngaire are full-time stay-at-home mothers and currently have or have had nannies in the past; like Rose, Tessa used nannies and au pairs when her children were young and she worked full-time.

Experiences of postnatal depression among the Ascot stay-at-home mothers

While the Ascot stay-at-home mothers are an economically and socially privileged group of mothers and despite their narratives emphasizing their ‘chosen’ maternal path, the experience of post-natal depression was a significant feature of their interviews.

Five of the six Ascot stay-at-home mothers had experienced post-natal depression at some time. One of the five women who were working – May - also had PND when her son was born. Some of the women were managing the condition on an ongoing basis even though the children were older. Two of the women who had been on medication for PND had recently changed to St John’s
Wort (a herbal remedy for depression). Another regularly consulted a kinesiologist for her PND “to pick up on the vibrations of [your] body”. One of the women was radically changing her diet to cut out all processed food in an attempt to eliminate depression. All the women talked of how exercise was important to them for their mental health; one of the women who had had severe PND was training for an upcoming Tough Mudder event:

...Having kids in your 30s and [being an] ex-professional. I'm convinced it's [PND] because you go from having such high and clear expectations and a clear identity to nothing. And going to being locked in to four walls. That's one of my challenges. Just being around the house. It drives me crazy

(Raquel, 43, 2 children, 2 and 8, had run a large medical establishment in the UK before having children, married to an IT specialist who regularly works away overseas and inter-state)

After I had Mary I did have times when I was down, but it was more because I was tired. It was more about things like being tired, isolated and wanting connection

(Renni, 38, two children under 6, has a Masters in Law, married to the managing director of a major company who works long hours, shifted to Queensland from her home in another state shortly after having her second child and desperately misses her family for support.)
It’s hard work [being a mother]. It’s like those jokey emails about job
desccriptions for mothers – no pay, no sick leave, no sleep...If you knew
what you were signing up for you wouldn’t do it... It’s a shitty job.

(Kath, 35, 3 children under 6, has a medical specialist husband who is
‘on call’ and often away, has a nanny three and a half days a week and
a cleaner)

At work it [having a baby] is not valued. Like [Airline name]. They tick the
boxes but when it comes to the crunch. I had a really terrible time when
I first went back to work after having Brad and they really put me through
the grinder. I had PND.

(May, 48, single mother, has an 8 year-old)

Therefore common stories of postnatal depression among the Ascot stay-at-
home mothers shape how the women think about being mothers in a range of
ways: Raquel identifies a lack of a strong, valued identity as a mother compared
to the value of being a paid worker; Kate identifies the 24 hour nature of the
work that can lead to sleeplessness, exhaustion and depression; May identifies
how companies still do not appreciate the difficulties of mothering when you are
trying to also juggle paid work (exacerbated in May’s case as she is a single
mother); and Renni links the isolated nature of mothering and “lack of
connection” in nuclear families to postnatal depression. While May is not a stay-
at-home mother I have included her data on postnatal depression here as it is a valuable insight and contribution to this discussion.

Therefore, the Ascot stay-at-home mothers as a whole do show evidence of a re-embedding of a re-traditionalised and gendered role as stay-at-home mother and housewife within their marriages. This is contrary to international and Australian trends where the norm is that most married women with children engage in paid work (Hochschild, 1989; Richardson, 2014). The self-reflexive mothering narratives of the participants emphasise that this is their ‘chosen’ role and they highlight the importance of ‘being there’ and ‘not missing out’ when the children are young. However, there is a contradictory and complex nature to the women’s own perceptions of their position and status in life as unequal. In the space of 5 minutes in one interview Jane says:

*I’m fortunate I don’t have to work. I have a choice to be a stay-at-home mum. Having said that motherhood is relentless*

And

*If you work it’s easier. You get to go to the toilet on your own. You get to interact with adults. But there are so few small years...*

(Jane, 35, stay-at-home mother, two children, 4 and 18 months)

The significant absence of their husbands from their domestic arrangements
and a lack of family support for their mothering more accurately represents the women’s narratives as pragmatic survival strategies. While this interpretation of the stay-at-home mothers’ situation may seem to run counter to an explicit feminist epistemology that honours the women’s perspectives of framing their situation as a “choice”, taken as a whole the data of this group points overwhelmingly to an alternative interpretation. Thus while there are indications of a re-embedding of a re-traditionalising of the gendered role of stay-at-home mother in Ascot maybe in time these women will insist on a “see-saw arrangement” (Rosin, 2013, p. 17) that evens up the balance:

*Before we had kids we were a modern progressive family. My husband is highly educated. I thought the split would be 70/30. The reality was 90/10 or sometimes 95/5. In terms of sharing the care of children. I thought ‘oh shit’. But then I thought this is a small time in our lives. I need to make sure I buy back that time for myself at some point. I will walk out and say you deal with them*

(Renni, 38, stay-at-home mother, 2 children, 4 and 6)

**The working mothers in Ascot**

*Work as crucial to identity*

Five of the twelve mothers from Ascot worked full- and part-time. Elise (24) works as a registered nurse 32 hours a week and has a 17 month-old; Rose
(43) has a 6 week-old and two other children under 5 and has just started working again in her own business – a marketing company she runs from home – she has just employed an au pair to help her do this – she works approximately 20 hours a week, or 4 days; May (48) is a single mother and part time international flight attendant with an 8 year-old; Martha (46) is a full-time university lecturer with an 8 and 11 year-old; and Tessa (49) is a part-time executive officer on a Federal research project – she has a 22 year-old and an 8 year-old.

Elise uses a combination of daycare, her mother and her partner who has one day off a fortnight to care for her daughter; Rose has a live in au pair; May has a sister living close by, her girlfriends and the biological father of her son to care for her son while she is overseas; Martha is married to a full time stay-at-home father (I did not interview him for this study); and Tessa has had nannies in the past when her children were younger – now her husband who also has flexible working hours shares the care of their children. Tessa also uses girlfriends to help out if she has to fly to Canberra for work.

There is a rich literature on the challenges for women of working and mothering. Here I concentrate on the most relevant sources to interpret the experiences of this group of White, privileged, well-educated women while the literature on Black and non-Western women working and working-class women and work is discussed in more depth in the chapter on Logan mothers. The influential research by Hochschild (1989, 1997) in the North American context established
the concept of the ‘time bind’ of women working and still picking up the bulk of the housework and child care; closer to home there is Chesterman & Ross-Smith’s (2010) work depicting privileged White Australian executives struggling with the “‘work devotion’ demonstrated in holding down a senior position and ‘family devotion’ shown in motherhood and caring for children” (Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2010, p. 46); Smith (2010) on the experiences of Australian women who enter the male-dominated world of the trades: “even if the tradeswomen were transgressive before they became mothers, they still experienced motherhood and mother’s [sic] work as highly gendered and as requiring constant negotiation” (Smith, 2010, p. 53); Probert (2002) on the pernicious ideology of domesticity and self-sacrificing motherhood that punishes ‘selfish women’ who prioritise their work while having children; Pocock (2005) and Dux and Simic (2008) on the structural limitations of Australian workplaces for working women; and McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie’s (2005) qualitative study of the experiences of full-time working women in the Australian university sector expressing generally positive attitudes to using daycare for young children mixed with a substantial degree of guilt and ambivalence at working).

Tessa explains how working is central to her identity and how she prioritises working and raising children:

*I always worked since having kids because I don’t want to be financially dependent on anyone. It takes away the element of choice in the relationship… I always took leave without pay. Always tried to take the*
first 18 months off. I breastfed. I got maternity leave both times. Got 3 months paid. 12 months unpaid. Breastfed both kids until over one… But I have always worked right through. I enjoy working…

(Tessa, 49, works part-time, has an 8 year-old and a 22 year-old)

Yes [I enjoy working]. It’s not just work, it’s a career. It’s a huge part of my identity. I don’t think I would have able to manage Dean [autistic child] without having a specific sense of my own identity that is separate from that… I do wonder about whether if I haven’t had such a full-on career whether I could’ve given more to my children, time wise…Then on the other hand I have observed women who are full-time mothers and they haven’t had careers and they seem quite depressed…My daughter loves coming out to my work too. She tells everyone she’s going out to mum’s work… But then the other day she says to me “I wish you were a mummy who baked!”

(Martha, 46, full-time academic, has 2 children, 11 and 8 years)

I think working has affected my mothering positively. And it gives his father a chance to have him.

(May, 48, single mother, part time air hostess, has an 8 year old)
Yes I enjoy working. It has a positive effect on me. It would do my head in if I was a full-time mum… The combination of mothering and working is important to me… Even if we were really wealthy I’d work on our business. It’s still nice to work. I like to have a sense of purpose.

(Rose, 43, mother of a 6 and 2 ½ year-old and a 6 week-old, works part-time in marketing)

I absolutely love being a nurse! When I am with Wanda [17 month old daughter] I don’t take it for granted. I am more attentive to her. I enjoy being a mum. I have really found the balance between the two. When I am at home I am a mum but when I am at work I am a nurse.

(Elise, 24, mother of a 17 month-old, works part-time as a registered nurse)

Elise had severe postnatal depression after her daughter was born and she returned to work when Wanda was 10 months old. Elise knew that being a stay-at-home mother was never an option for her: “Combining mothering and working was a juggle. But I had no choice”. Balancing working and caring for children has not been easy for some of these women. For single mother and part-time air hostess May at times “scheduling work and care [of her young son] was difficult”. May, who has been an air hostess for 23 years, can fly all around the world so when she is away her son will go to his biological father with whom she
has never had an ongoing intimate relationship, for 4 days or so, or to her sister who lives nearby, or to a friend’s.

Martha believes working as an academic has been a particularly difficult job to combine with raising children:

I find it difficult because in academia there are a lot of people who don’t have children. I think historically academia has been about the exclusion of children. So I feel I’m in a minority. And it means people don’t understand the demands that that puts on you. And so it takes you longer to reach your goals. And you just can’t start a meeting if you have a school pick up…the culture of the university is not centred around the fact that you have children.

Like Tessa, Martha’s earning ability gives her a freedom to spend money as and when she pleases: “I earn the money. It gives me the power.” Martha also thinks like Tessa that a woman should not have to choose between work and family:

If [a woman] has a career she loves and she loves her work it will make her a better mother if she feels she is not sacrificing a part of herself for some perceived greater good to do with their mothering.

For all these women working is an important and valued part of their identity. These women are all highly qualified and working in skilled jobs they love: many are on clear career tracks. They prioritise combining working, earning money
that gives them choices and power in their intimate relationships, and raising children equally. They are supported to a high extent by male partners, biological family, friends and daycare to enact their work practices. In this way they are similar to the Logan working women. However, the attitudes to mothering and working expressed here are in stark contrast to those of the stay-at-home mothers. The two groups of women do however share many maternal themes and these will now be examined.

**Themes common to working and stay-at-home mothers**

The following discussion of the issues of how living away from family affects mothering; building connectivity through created grandmothers; and how the women’s mothering was affected by how they were mothered are pertinent to both the working and stay-at-home mothers in Ascot.

**How living away from family affects mothering**

High income families often don’t have other family members in the state or country because they have travelled interstate to follow their husband’s work:

*The whole time we’ve had kids we’ve never had family support. Having the kids around all the time is all we’ve ever known*

(Raquel, 43, stay-at-home mother, 2 children, 2 and 8)
When the baby was little, everything was so tricky. When do I feed her? What do I do? How do you wean? Babies seem so little and vulnerable.... I was so anxious about everything. I remember I used chat rooms for those really specific technical questions....

(Renni, 38, stay-at-home mother, 2 children, 4 and 6)

I do find Wanda (17 month old baby) very demanding and it is really exhausting. The PND is not so bad now. I have better coping strategies now after counselling, like cognitive behaviour management... I don't have fantastic memories of that time (when Wanda was a young baby) What I do remember is very sad...

(Elise, 24, has a 17 month-old baby, work part-time as a nurse, baby in daycare 2 days a week)

This individualised, isolating experience of stay-at-home mothering in Ascot can lead to a void of support and nurturance but women demonstrated creative ways to overcome the isolation. The more prominent ways the women dealt with this isolation was firstly to go online and build connections available via the internet; to ‘create grandmothers’ and ‘turn friends into family’ (Jeffrey Weeks calls these ‘families of choice’, 2001) from their neighbours and existing friendships networks; and thirdly, to prioritise volunteering as important to their sense of self-worth as well as being considered just ‘part of their job’.
**Online support for mothering**

Selected Ascot stay-at-home mothers turned to social media to create maternal connectivity. Privileged mothers seeking online communities to mitigate their sense of loneliness and isolation from biological family and construct realistic mothering narratives to make sense of their lives is not uncommon. A researcher on ‘mommy blogging’, Morrison (2010), in an English study of online ‘mummy bloggers’ found that:

> **Personal mommy blogging is purposive and deliberate social engagement, a creative as well as interpersonal practice that mitigates the assorted ills (physical isolation, role confusion, lack of realistic role models, etc) and celebrates the particular joys of contemporary mothering, especially in the earliest years of parenting** (Morrison, 2010, p. 1).

The importance of social media in countering isolation in mothering was confirmed in a 2012 study addressing the relationship between postnatal depression and blogging to enhance social connectivity (McDaniel et al, 2012).

The Ascot mothers using social media in their maternal practice experienced less depression and increased enhanced social connection. Elise (24, has a 17 month-old, works part-time as a nurse) gets her main emotional support from her online mothers’ group:
I am part of the ‘April Mothers’, set up by Baby Centre, Australia. They set up a forum for everyone expecting a baby due in April, May, June etc and then all the Aprils got together and formed a private Facebook Page and we all joined… The other women wanted to meet up in person from the get go. But I really didn’t want to lose my anonymity.

Elise looks at her Facebook page multiple times a day and is often online at 1am. She describes it as “an absolute godsend to my mothering” as she is able to seek advice for an issue to do with her baby all hours of the day and night and she experiences a sense of connectedness and support with other mothers. Elise experienced post-traumatic stress disorder after the birth of Wanda and her journey to love and acceptance of Wanda has been a rocky one, including time in a Tresilian Centre (a government-funded live-in sleep training clinic run by nurses for women with postnatal depression). It is online that she has been able to open up and share at an intimate level her experiences of mothering in a trusted forum. Renni, a stay-at-home mother with two children, aged 4 and 6, also sought technical support on baby feeding and sleeping from online mothers’ forums:

I did a bit of that – seeking electronic support – in the first year that my first baby was born. Electronic chatting. Facebook. I also used chat rooms for those really specific technical questions… I am not on it for hours and hours though. And I don’t really like posting stuff about myself. Now I mainly use text – I text my friends throughout the day.
Jane is 35 and a stay-at-home mother with two children aged 4 and 18 months. As well as studying nutritional health through a school in America online, Jane is very digitally savvy and uses multiple social media platforms in her everyday mothering. She has no family around for support (they all live in another state) and she has been very lonely. She has a twitter account and tweets constantly on mothering; she also posts photos of what the children are doing on Instagram and shares these with family living interstate.

Jane, like Elise, is constantly on her phone checking for messages and tweeting. The phone beeps continuously throughout my interview with her and she seamlessly conducts conversations online whilst also talking to me. Jane’s ‘real live’ experiences of motherhood are paralleled in an electronic universe where she creates an electronic mothering alter ego. Like Elise, she exists in two mothering worlds: an online one and a ‘real world’ one. To these women however they are not separate but lived simultaneously.

Building connectivity through creating grandmothers

If the mothering world of Logan is built on community support and extended kinship ties then just as queer families create ‘chosen families’ from non-biological kin (Weeks et al, 2001), these stay-at-home mothers have created their own intergenerational kinship networks from their neighbourhood communities. These created communities and ‘families of choice’ (Weeks et al,
2001) support the stay-at-home mothers in their role and make them feel valued. Renni decided to develop friendships with older women to have grandmotherly figures in her children’s lives:

These older women are at the top of the mountain and I’m only half way up so I am able to look up to them… I mean I had mentors at work and I thought I need the same here. I’m quite committed to motherhood and I treat it like an occupation so I thought how can I benefit from the experience of others…

(Renni, 38, stay-at-home mother, two children aged 6 and 4)

Renni organised a grandparents’ day at the local nursing home so once a month mothers took their children up to the old people’s home. The manager of the nursing home has become Renni’s “dearest mothering mentor”. Kath, one of the most privileged and wealthy mothers I spoke with in Ascot employs several staff including someone to mow the lawns, also bought in a grandmother figure to her family in the absence of existing biological kin when her children were young: “I advertised and spent 6 months looking for Jolene. [despite being an employee] She has become part of our family. She is 61. A grandmother figure… I had 3 under 5. I couldn’t have done it without Jolene”.

May, a single mother who had an unexpected baby at 40 and works three quarter time as a flight attendant also thought it important to bring ‘elders’ into her son’s life as her parents were both dead: “[I needed] mentors. When Brad
was born I put an ad in the local paper to find a woman to help me and also be a grandmother figure for Brad and a woman who applied was younger than me. I told her she was too young!” Angela has a close girlfriend who lives nearby and they mother each other’s children:

*Friends are like family. And Christine doesn’t have any family here. She’s English. And I don’t have any family here… So we struck up a friendship because of our kids… So most afternoons her kids are here or my kids are at her place.*

(Angela, 44, stay-at-home mothers, has a 3, 7 and 8 year-old)

While it is accepted that there is a difference between a ‘paid’ grandmother and a grandmother relationship developed through community links the effect of the older women on the lives of the younger mothers and the importance of the older women in the younger mothers’ lives are similar. It is accepted that structural dynamics of power and agency exist in these relationships. ‘Paid’ grandmothers have less power and agency in the relationships described above than the grandmothers from the community choosing to undertake the role unencumbered by an employer/employee relationship.

Raquel is the only religious participant in the Ascot group. With no biological family nearby she gets a lot of practical support with the children from the church, especially in the weekends. Like the Samoan and Burundian mothers who receive extensive support from their different churches with their mothering
Raquel describes her church as a “very family friendly church. They provide babysitting and food”. She also describes her friends as very supportive of her personally and of her mothering: “They are 10/10 there for me as a person. Always there for emotional support”. Tessa is a senior public servant and works 3 days a week. She helps her friend and neighbor who are both single mothers:

*Because Maria has a child Adam and is a single mum [and works away] and his dad is a doctor so works long hours we just pick Adam up and he lives with us when they’re away. For days at a time. Then my neighbor has all these children to four different dads and she’s by herself and she can’t stand it with the kids so we have some of her’s sometimes. So in the holidays whenever I go anywhere I have all these kids of all different colours – Black, White and Brindle.*

Tessa has an informal fostering situation with her friend’s child and neighbour’s children. Angela demonstrates a western, privileged, non-biological equivalent of cultural ‘co-mothering’; Kath, Renni and May acknowledge the importance of older, wise women, ‘elders’ in mothering mentorship in examples of non-biological, intergenerational kinship support for their maternal practice. These are examples of active resistance to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (2002) individualised nuclear family with its exclusive focus on ‘duty to self’. These women, despite having limited family support around them have created extended kin and foster an alternative, more altruistic ethics of care. Kath and
May may be employing older women as grandmother figures in line with their own sense of what is important for *their* children but Kath spends many hours at her oldest son’s school helping with reading groups and in the tuckshop while Janine minds her younger children. May also volunteers as much as she can at her son’s local state primary school despite working three quarter time.

**Volunteering to enhance community connectedness and mitigate social isolation**

The high number of Ascot mothers I spoke with who volunteer follows national trends. In 2014, the proportion of unemployed women who did voluntary work increased from 24% to 38% (ABS, 2016c). I include the Ascot stay-at-home mothers in the ‘unemployed’ category rather than the ‘out of the labour force’ category of the ABS here. Volunteer work has been identified as important to self-care with stay-at-home mothers:

> volunteer work in their children’s schools and surrounding community…
> [was partly about being around] other women that supported their choice to stay at home… [and] was often cited as instrumental in their experience of self-worth (Rubin and Wooten, 2007, p. 342).

Among the Ascot stay-at-home mothers in particular extensive volunteering is common and considered ‘just part of the job of being a mother’. Angela runs an organic co-op – she sorts the food for people into boxes and they collect it from her house. Kath does tuck shop and parent helping at the school most days
during the week (she is free to do this without her 4 and 2 year-olds because of her nanny). Renni does 3 to 4 hours a week as a parent helper at the school. Raquel volunteers at the school and takes reading groups, helps with swimming and in the uniform shop. Tessa who works 3 days in a government job in the city volunteers at her daughter’s school with reading for 2 hours a week and for 1 hour a month she mans the pick-up zone. Stay-at-home mother of three Freda is a parent helper in the Year 1 classroom of her son. Single mother May works three quarter time as an air hostess but still finds time to spend 2 hours a week at her son’s primary school as a parent helper. Only Rose does no volunteer work and describes herself as “not philanthropic”. Therefore, these volunteer, community-focused activities undertaken by both the stay at home and working mothers in Ascot are undertaken for many reasons but among these are self-esteem and for collegiality: to “[be around] other women that supported their choice to stay at home… [and] … as instrumental in their experience of self-worth” (Rubin and Wooten, 2007, p 342).

How has their mothering been affected by how they were mothered?

For most of the working Ascot mothers their own mothers worked so they have grown up with this as the norm. In most of the interviews with the working mothers they speak of the strong work ethic of their mothers (some of them single mothers) and how hard they worked to make ends meet. May’s comment on having a working mother was typical: “Yes having a working mum very much influenced me being a working mum.”
To the question ‘Do you mother differently to your own mother?’ many of the women replied ‘I would love to say yes but think her values and attitudes underpin how I mother’. One of the themes that came through when the women reflected on their families is that their parents didn’t work as a team. In these interviews ‘wanting to be seen as working as a team with their husbands’ was considered important. For the stay-at-home mothers there was a theme that their mothers were not as nurturing as they would have liked so they try to be more nurturing in their own mothering. Tessa describes her mother as “hating kids. Had six of her own. Over kids. She never liked kids.” The other theme that came up in half the stay at mothers’ narratives was that their own mothers expressed negative self-esteem with ‘just being a mother’ and always wanted to do more with their lives. Overall, there was less of a relationship between the way the women were mothered and their own mothering; the link is much stronger among the stay-at-home fathers who deliberately father against how they were fathered. This is a theme in the fatherhood literature (eg, Daly, 1996).

**Conclusion**

It is a contradiction in Western societies that the “institution of motherhood” (Rich, 1976) is valorised as ennobling at the same time that the unpaid role of raising children in the home is valued less than profit and individual success in a workplace. For “a society based solely on the competitive pursuit of self-interest… motherhood,… is one of the central terrains on which… a fundamental and irreducible ambivalence… is played out” (Hays, 1996, p. 18).
Motherhood is not recognized. There is a stigma attached to work done by stay at home mums.

(Rose, 43, has 3 young children under 6 including a newborn baby, works part time)

No, no!! [motherhood is not supported or valued generally by society]. It is the most underrated profession. I’m like people at work saying’ I’ve had such a hard day – I’m so glad I’m going home’. And I’m like you’re so lucky – my night is so busy it’s just like my day. And no one is going to say well done on that! So it is really tiring and demanding but incredibly rewarding.

(Elise, 24, has a 17 month-old, works part time as a registered nurse.)

The stay-at-home mothers in Ascot often mother in the individualised setting of the nuclear family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and show a ‘re-traditionalisation’ of their gendered role as mother and wife within the marriage in terms of taking primary responsibility for raising children and running their households. However, this ‘re-traditionalisation’ of the stay at home other role is counter to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s argument of the detraditionalization of marriage (1996) and women’s more liberated role in a social environment where men and women have free agency unfettered by external structures (like traditional marriage and the dichotomous binary of male breadwinner and female homemaker).
Furthermore, the mothers in Ascot (both stay at home and working) debunk Hakim’s (2000) preference theory of fixed ‘chosen gendered identities’. The Ascot stay-at-home mothers’ ‘choice’ to be at home is the combination of a commitment to the identity of “home-centred” mother and a reaction to the external structural factors like absent husbands and fathers, little support in their caring, isolation and living away from biological family. The lives of the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot show a pragmatic response to their external domestic situation as much as an adherence to an abstract belief in a fixed, gendered identity. As shown the mothering narratives framed around the self-professed ‘choice’ to be home-centred women must be viewed critically when the wider picture of the women’s lives is examined. Among the working women, Hakim’s preference theory is also seen to have limited applicability. The one participant who worked full-time (Martha) was the main breadwinner as she was able to earn more money than her husband. As much as Martha loved working this structural factor of income-earning ability was important in her decision to be a ‘work-centred woman’ and mattered as much as an abstract belief in a mothering ideal.

Ascot mothers’ (both stay at home and working) often did not have access to the community-based support networks and knowledge about child raising passed down through generations as happens in non-Western communities. These women talk of feeling isolated and suffering a lack of self-esteem and social recognition as a result. In actions and behaviours that are like their sisters
from non-Western countries both the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot and the working mothers resist this isolation and paucity of social validation by creating it themselves from their local communities and neighbourhoods. They build their own versions of co-mothering, whanau support, ‘othermothering’ and intergenerational kinship care. The working women in Ascot also did not as a whole express conflicts attempting to adhere to a ‘good mother’ ideology and were overall very happy with how they mothered. The older age of these mothers - four of five in their forties – may mean a more relaxed style of mothering:

*Being a mother means long days. Questions. I think it’s really challenging. It’s a job you’re never trained for. You can read endless books but they are contradictory. It’s an experiential role. Being a mother is unpredictable.*

(Tessa, 49, works part-time, has an 8 year-old and 22 year-old)

A prominent theme that arose from the findings of the Ascot working women was the central importance of work to their identity. Like the Logan working mothers working and mothering are equally valued in their lives and working is identified as strengthening and enhancing their mothering. While the literature supports the struggles of juggling work and motherhood this was not a dominant theme in my findings. Many of the working women worked part-time rather than full-time so perhaps the rigours of the ‘time bind’ are less; the one mother who
did work fulltime (Martha) expressed the most conflicts with juggling family and work, even with a full-time stay-at-home husband. It may be that the financial, cultural and social resources available to these professional, middle-class working mothers buffers them from the more challenging aspects of work and motherhood.
Chapter 6: Stay-at-home fathers’ experiences of caregiving in contemporary urban Australia

*Parenting is not a woman’s job or a man’s job. I think it is extremely masculine, a man bringing up his boy!*

(Colin, 50, White Australian, stay-at-home father to a 3 year-old).

*You feel like some sort of paedophile predator*

(John, White Australian, 48, stay-at-home father to a 2 and 4 year-old describing the hostility from mothers when using the shopping mall change rooms to change his 2 year old son’s nappy.)

*A man would rather learn how to operate a piece of machinery than engineer a balanced diet for a 4 year-old.*

(Lloyd, 48, White Australian, stay-at-home father to a 5 and 6 year-old)

*Men have always been out there running after animals killing them. Evolution… men have been doing it for thousands of years and women have by instinct mothers* (Simon, 48, stay-at-home father to a 7 and 10 year-old)
**Introduction**

This chapter is an examination of the experiences of caregiving practices, beliefs and attitudes of stay-at-home fathers living in greater Brisbane. The focus of the research is on their caregiving work, performed within a classed, culturally constructed and gendered context.

For the men who are caregivers in this study I ask the specific research question: ‘do men mother?’ and furthermore, how would we know if they did?; in other words which specific criteria are used to make this judgement? The second research question at play with this group is how does the undertaking of a traditionally feminine role of caregiving affect ‘hegemonic masculinity’? (Connell, 2000) or more correctly ‘masculinities’ (Connell, 2000, has discussed extensively how there are multiple masculinities, that multicultural societies construct gender differently and that masculinities are different across time and place). Thirdly, how are the men interviewed for this study building gendered constructions or re-constructions of the stay-at-home father identity?; are fathers challenging an existing definition of masculinity or recalibrating it within existing gender borders of masculinity and femininity? These research questions are asked within an overarching framework that situates the men who are undertaking primary caregiving for younger children at its centre. What meanings do the men themselves ascribe to their role as stay-at-home father?
As part of a broader conversation within the flourishing research area of masculinities, this qualitative, empirical and deeply intimate research attempts to illuminate aspects of the social practices of masculinities in fathering. It further seeks to understand the constructions and enactment of these masculinities from the voices and experiences of the men themselves. My research is a contribution to the ethnographies of masculinities (Connell, 2000, p. 8; 1998; Messner, 1997; Doucet, 2006) as I lived among and entered the domestic worlds of the men I interviewed; coming into their homes, meeting them in parks, cafes and swimming pools where their caring work takes place. Over my years of parenting four children I have also had informal conversations about parenting with fathers at cub camps, on the edge of soccer fields and AFL grounds, on school excursions, camping trips and trampoline parks and in school grounds and daycare carparks. In my research I aim to ascertain the patterns of socially constructed gender relations moving from a focus on individual agency to broader social patterns.

I will be adding contemporary fathering voices to earlier empirical Australian studies of fathering (Lupton and Barclay 1997; Grbich 1997; Daly, 1996; Craig, 2006). Lupton and Barclay (1997) constructed the experiences of fatherhood through discourse and lived experience and the authors asked the questions “how are power relations sustained and justified by discursive choices? [and] What types of resistances and alternative discourses are generated in response to dominant discourses?” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 5). These research
questions are relevant to the current study and the questions I ask around re/constructions of existing definitions of the stay-at-home father identity and potential recalibrations of the existing order of masculinity. This chapter looks at current stay-at-home fathering practices in Australia and questions the extent to which contemporary fathering is informed by gendered discourses and practices. The question of whether there are new forms of parenting evolving alongside more traditionally gendered ones is also explored. I will begin the chapter with a brief descriptive overview of the men interviewed before moving on to a discussion of the issues as outlined above.
**Background: contextualising the findings of the participants**

**Table 3: Key demographic characteristics of the stay-at-home fathers interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of children &amp; ages</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Rent or Own</th>
<th>Family Income</th>
<th>Occupation before full-time parenting</th>
<th>Partner/Wife's Occupation</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (5 months)</td>
<td>De Facto</td>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Up. to $50,000</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Student Nurse</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>2 (6, 8)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Self industrial Relations Specialist</td>
<td>Left school before HSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>New Zealand Maori</td>
<td>3 (5, 6, 20)</td>
<td>Single Dad (Separated)</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$150,000 to $200,000</td>
<td>Primary teacher</td>
<td>Nurse Manager</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (11)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>Retail Manager</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Left school after HSC. No qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$50,000 to $60,000</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>Collections Manager of a large public institution</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>3 (2, 4, 24)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>Historian (Outside Academia)</td>
<td>Systems Analyst</td>
<td>Post grad Uni qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White Zimbabwean</td>
<td>2 (7, 10)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $120,000</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$200,000+</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>Intensive Care Doctor</td>
<td>Apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White New Zealander</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$80,000 to $100,000</td>
<td>Paramedic</td>
<td>Area Manager (Food Chain)</td>
<td>TAFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>White Australian</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Own</td>
<td>$50,000 to $80,000</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>Uni Graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Characteristics of the men interviewed**

Most of the fathers I interviewed for this research were married with one father a single father and another in a de facto relationship. Most of the fathers were married to high earning wives with responsible jobs. One of the participants, Kevin (an ex-cook), was partnered with a student nurse. He was parenting their young 5-month-old baby as her earning capacity was potentially much greater than his – he had been a cook before becoming a full-time stay-at-home father. His current earning capacity was limited and he was not in current employment; the family was living on the Aus Study allowance.

Based on expressed family income in the questionnaire the fathers were a relatively economically privileged group – they were mainly middle-class with only two fathers earning considerably less than the others and coming from more working-class backgrounds. These participants described themselves as working class in their descriptions of their early lives. The self-described working-class participants were Ray, Kevin and Colin “I grew up in Housing Commission housing. And I’m not ashamed of that” (Colin); “So we grew up on welfare at home [New Zealand] … so there was three kids, mum and dad in a state house [the New Zealand equivalent of a Housing Commission house]. I grew up not expecting anything. If you did you’d get very disappointed. I grew up on the basics and this is how we live” (Ray). Generally, to allow one parent to be able to stay at home and care full time for a child the other parent is able
to earn a substantial wage; enough to support the family. All but one of the participants owned their own home; one father was renting.

All the participants identified as heterosexual and eight of the ten men were married; one father was in a de facto partnership and one father is a single stay-at-home father, recently separated from his wife. All participants were full-time, stay-at-home fathers with young children: about three quarters of the men were caring full-time for pre-school age children and had an older child as well.

**The influence of race and class on paternal practices**

Class, cultural and linguistic background and access to economic power among the participants is instrumental to the degree to which the men experience the role of stay-at-home father. For example, Rick, demonstrates knowledge of the cultural practices of child rearing common among New Zealand Maori. Rick draws on ‘whanau support’ as a single father. ‘Whanau support’ is a tribe or community responsible for raising a child and individual Maori families parenting within intergenerational kinship groups (Pihama, 2011, and Pihama et al, 2002; Stevenson et al, 2016). Rick’s mother lives close by and provides considerable emotional and practical support for her son, including housework and child minding:

> I found it really hard when Cheryl [his wife] left. I would sit on the sofa wrapped in a blanket and cry on the weekends when she had the kids. I am lucky to have my mum around to help. She pops in to check on me…
The Maori attitude is much more family focused - looking at how I was raised I had lots of extended family around me.

(Rick, 47, Maori, stay-at-home father to a 5 and 6 year-old)

Some of the participants were married to non-Western women so their paternal practice was influenced by cultural caring practices from other countries. As a White Australian with a Chinese partner Kevin was in the fortunate position of having his Chinese mother-in-law living in with them and helping care for their 5 month-old baby. She was staying for a year. This is a common practice in Chinese culture. While the arrangement led to some tensions between Kevin and his mother in law over caring practices he acknowledged that her help and support in raising their baby was invaluable. Colin was married to a Spanish professional woman and her more relaxed maternal beliefs and practices (bed sharing; never leaving a baby to cry; eating late at night so late to bed; and travelling back to Spain regularly to ensure Spanish language immersion and development) were causes for tension in this relationship.

Ray, as a working-class father from Ipswich always kept working one night a week in a pub to keep his skills in hospitality work current. Relying on his partner financially was not seen as viable or desirable long term: “I have worked since I was 15. You have to work ….” A career change such as Colin was enacting from electrician to Psychology student, funded by his high earning doctor wife, was not an option for Ray; nor was outsourcing the housework to a cleaner behind
his wife’s back as Colin was also doing. Remaining financially dependent on his high earning wife was also not an option for Ray like it was for Lloyd (the wealthiest father in the study based on expressed family income) or Simon (financially comfortable) who was able to explore other more flexible work options than he had previously as a mechanic or choose not to work until he has found more meaningful paid employment.

Age of the Participants

Table 4: Age of Fathers and Age When The Men Became Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age of men</th>
<th>Age of men at birth of first child now caring for</th>
<th>Previous marriages/partnerships</th>
<th>Age of the men when first became fathers</th>
<th>Age of older children</th>
<th>Is a second time stay-home-father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>49 years</td>
<td>49 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>45 years</td>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47 years</td>
<td>41 years</td>
<td>No, just a large gap between first and later children.</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>47 years</td>
<td>36 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>47 years</td>
<td>44 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>50 years</td>
<td>38 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>48 years</td>
<td>38 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>50 years</td>
<td>47 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>37 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned</td>
<td>39 years</td>
<td>35 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average, the stay-at-home fathers in my study are older than the average Australian father (approximately 47 years in my study). The fathers’ age is significant to this research as a stated aim of the research is to reflect the fathers’ experiences of caregiving in their own words. Some of the older fathers initiated discussions about being an older father and they identified this as significant to their fathering. I have a question in the interview schedule: ‘What would you change [in your caring practice] if you could?’ Colin, who is 50 and parenting a 3 year-old year said “my age”. Being an older father was identified as an issue especially among the men who had been fathers when they were young and were on a second marriage with younger women or had a significant gap between older and younger children with the same partner, now parenting infants and young children in their 40s and 50s. (See the Table on page 270).

One of the fathers (John, 48 years) had been married before and he already had a child with a previous partner; in John’s case he became a first time father at 22 in his second year of university, then had two more children in his late 40’s. Rick at 47 had a 5 and a 6 year-old, however, he also had an older 20-year-old daughter: all his children were with his ex-wife. Rick was a stay-at-home father to his oldest daughter too when he was attending university. Colin (50 years) and his wife, a successful intensive care doctor of a similar age, tried for many years to have a child. Colin’s wife fell pregnant unexpectedly at 45 after they had stopped trying and they have only one child. Colin says if she got pregnant again that would be welcomed but he thinks it is unlikely at this stage.
Ned, at 39 the youngest father in this cohort, had a 4 year-old daughter. He and his wife wanted more children but she went through early menopause in her thirties. This is the second time Ned has been a full-time stay-at-home father to his daughter – when she was 2 he looked after her for 6 months on long service leave when his wife worked. James, at 54 the oldest father in this group, has a 4 year-old child. His wife is 15 years younger than him and for many years they chose not to have a family. However, after James's mother died he changed his mind:

*One of the driving points for having Ruby was my mum died. For much of our relationship we weren’t going to have kids but 5 or 6 years ago she passed away… I realised that I was getting on and I thought if I pass away Joanne won’t have anyone. There won’t be anyone. That’s what made me want to have a child*

(James, 54, White Australian, stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old daughter)

Overall, the general trend with the men in this group was to start or continue their families later. A consequence of this however was that in many cases they chose to have only one child. Rick’s (47 years) attitude is typical: “I would have liked more [children] if I’d started earlier”. Many fathers had one child by choice; most citing their age as the reason they didn’t want any more. James’s comments on this topic are typical:
So the physical side of things. Sleep deprivation. And going down to the shops and the whole pram, stroller thing. And going camping. Oh god!... I thought at my age I’ll be an old man when she’s a teenager

(James, 54, has a 4 year-old daughter)

Conversations about dying before you see your children grown up as flourishing, competent adults also featured prominently in these interviews.

**Motivations behind becoming a stay-at-home father**

The decision to be a stay-at-home father was often made in response to a family crisis, e.g. the husband is made redundant, so his wife ends up changing from part time to full time work (Ned and Paul were in this situation); the wife wants to return to work early when the children are still babies or young toddlers and wants to use daycare – the father strongly objects and leaves full time work (Colin, Rick and Lloyd); the wife gets a career opportunity that is too good to turn down earning substantial amounts of money and he leaves his paid work to care for the children (James, Simon and Kevin). Sometimes leaving the world of fulltime work is welcomed particularly if the men had been working since they were 15 (Ray and James) and were ready for a change of pace. Therefore, while there were a range of reasons for becoming a stay-at-home father the men share a commitment to the emotional and nurturing responsibility for their children.
Numbers of stay-at-home fathers

Being a full-time stay-at-home father remains a relatively unusual occupation. To situate the current research on male care givers in a wider context the numbers of full-time stay-at-home fathers in other like Western democracies is similar to Australia: “In the United States, stay-at-home fathers are relatively uncommon… current estimates from the U.S. Census show stay-at-home fathers to number around 190,000 (U.S. Census, 2013)” (Solomon, 2014, p. 23). Overall then, “3.4% of all stay at home parents in American are men” (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Sabatini Fraone, 2013, cited in Stevens, 2014, p. 22). In 2002 such fathers were close to 100,000 (Fields, 2003, cited in Stevens, 2014, p. 23); this change in the number of stay-at-home fathers possibly reflects a change in social assumptions about fathering.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of stay-at-home fathers in Australia as the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census does not have ‘stay-at-home father’ as a specific category. The perceived stigma of the role also affects how the men I talked with represent themselves in the census. I have a specific interview question in my ‘Interview Schedule’ asking: “How did you describe your role in the last census?”. Some of my participants ticked the ‘home duties’ category of work (like many of the stay-at-home mothers I spoke with), but more men ticked the professional work category that they belonged to before becoming stay-at-home fathers. Ned, an architect and now a full-time stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old is typical of the group in his comments on this:
I couldn’t bring myself to tick ‘house elf’ so I ticked ‘architect’ even though I was a full-time stay-at-home dad at the time of the census... I felt a bit bad about it (Ned, White Australian, 39, stay at home father to a 4 year-old).

Therefore, stay-at-home fathers can be elided into other categories in the Census or their numbers exaggerated by being wrongly attributed to other ABS categories. Therefore, Stevens’ (2014) claim that: “the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2003) report reveal[s] that approximately 3.4% of all two-parent families with children under the age of 15 in Australia have a father who is not employed and a mother who works” (Stevens, 2015, p. 22) does not mean that these men are all stay-at-home fathers. They could be fathers who are unemployed and looking for work; fathers who have been made redundant; fathers who are studying; and fathers temporarily off work after a major accident. Furthermore, their presence in the home in no way means they are more hands on with the children than if they had been working outside the home. In addition, as these statistics focused on two parent families, stay-at-home dads who are also single fathers would be elided under this category also. In comparison to these relatively low numbers (as far as researchers can ascertain) in Australia and America, Canadian men account for approximately 10% of all stay-at-home parents, which is an increase of 25% over the past decade (Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 456). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, of the fathers in opposite-sex couples
with dependent children in 2013, 7.4% were not in the labour force (Statistics New Zealand/Tatauranga/Aotearoa, 2013). Again however, these statistics will also include the categories outlined above: it is unlikely all 7.4% of these men with children not currently working are currently New Zealand stay-at-home fathers. Overall in Western contexts, it can be seen, that a relatively small number of men in the population are undertaking full-time paternal work (with the notable exception of Canada).

However, alongside the persistently low numbers of stay-at-home fathers in Western populations there is a growing body of research from the United States and the United Kingdom that supports the view that it is more common for heterosexual couples raising children to hold and practise egalitarian notions of parenting children (Rosin, 2014; Miller, 2014; Shirani, 2014; and Team and Ryan, 2014). Rosin asserts that in these “see saw marriages” between heterosexual men and women there is fluidity over “who earns the money and who sings the lullabies” (Rosin, 2014, p. 7). It should be noted that the participants in the above studies were overwhelmingly heterosexual and in normative family constructs so I cannot comment on data about gay fathers, lesbian mothers and non-biologically derivative family formations. However, these findings of equitable “see saw marriages” were not reflected in my data. English fatherhood theorist Dermott (2008) asserts that “notwithstanding suggestions in the liberal press, fathers do not tend to choose to reduce the amount of time spent in work when they have children after the initial period
surrounding the child’s arrival” (2008, p. 39). She further comments on the even rarer occurrence of full time stay-at-home fathers. Dermott calls them the “tiny minority (statistically hard to find but with a strong public voice) of ‘satisfied homedads’” (2008, p. 39). My findings in this chapter bear out part of Dermott’s proposition that stay-at-home fathers remain a tiny minority of the population. A significant recent addition to research on Australian fathering was Rose et al (2015) and the researchers found that intensive, hands on fathering of infants was not common and that it was dominated by gendered discourses of mothering and fathering.

In the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics data 3.4% of men not in the labour force report their main activity as “caring for children” (ABS, 2016f). My findings also show that many of my participants express high satisfaction rates with their everyday practices of being stay-at-home fathers. However, almost to a man, they vociferously do not believe they have a ‘strong public voice’, rather they feel socially disenfranchised and de-masculinised.

I will now turn to a discussion of the key issues in this chapter that arose from the findings starting with the question ‘do men mother?’.

Do men mother?

One of the most prominent theorists to discuss men and mothering is feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick (1989). She proposed that men and women can undertake mothering work, which she divided into the central tasks of providing
“preservation, growth and social acceptability” for a child (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17). Ruddick calls these the “key pillars of maternal practice” and she argues that these three demands “constitute maternal work; to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by work of preservative love, nurturance and training” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17). Significantly, Ruddick also proposed that both men and women can engage in mothering work: “A man or woman is a mother in my sense of the term, only if he or she acts upon a social commitment to nurture, protect and train children” (1995, pp. 229-230).

Using these key aspects of maternal work as defined by Ruddick I will explore the behaviours and attitudes of the male caregivers in this study to ask the question: do men mother? Canadian sociologist Doucet (2006) uses a similar framework in her book *Do Men Mother?* in her study of Canadian fathers. However, she reframes Ruddick’s key pillars of maternal work as “responsibilities” (Doucet, 2006, p. 10). Doucet’s conclusion was that while men can mother and develop ‘maternal thinking’ (Ruddick, 1989) fathers do not mother in practice as mothering is such an institution (Rich, 1986) and a varied experience and because the larger ‘gender regime’ (Connell, 1995, 2000) does not permit the eliding of the two institutions (motherhood and fatherhood) and distinct identities (masculine and feminine). In the current study exploring the question ‘do men mother?’ I will now discuss the first aspect of Ruddick’s ‘maternal work’: ‘preservative love’.
Preservative love

The capacity and evidence of fathers in this study to care for and provide preservative love for their children is overwhelming. In their descriptions of their relationships with their children their strong emotional responses shone through in the interviews:

*I don’t want anything other than being a dad.*

(Rick, full time stay-at-home father to a 5 and 6 year old)

*It’s taken a long time to grow into the role but now I’d be gutted if I lost it… I know you only get one chance to have those early years with your children. There is no way to catch up and compensate for it once it’s missed. You can’t pick up your kid at 15 and say ‘sorry I wasn’t there at the beginning. Now I’m going to make up for all that lost time’*

(Lloyd, full time stay-at-home father to a 6 and 8 year-old)

While many of the participants may not have planned to be stay-at-home fathers they all describe the experience as irreplaceable and would not change it:

*Being a stay-at-home dad is irreplaceable. A once in a lifetime opportunity to build a relationship that will benefit us our entire lives*
(Lloyd, full time stay-at-home father to a 6 and 8 year-old)

*I didn’t really think about being a stay-at-home dad until after Timoti [first son] was born. I became besotted with him.*

(Rick, full time stay-at-home father to a 5 and 6 year-old)

Some participants have grown into the role of stay-at-home father over time and have learnt to appreciate it:

*I spent the first 2 years thinking I don’t know if I can do this much longer. If I can just hold out for another month. And eventually I got used to it. I grew into it. Learnt skills I never knew I had. And they are growing and changing. The goalposts change all the time when they are young and that stretches out as they get older.*

(Lloyd, 45, stay-at-home father to a 6 and 8 year-old)

In many ways their care giving practices could be seen to be gendered, eg there was a strong element of physical ‘rough and tumble’ to the play between the men and their children; many of the participants favoured taking the children out on day excursions, eg to Dreamworld, to the beach or to visit their families over being at home with the children – eg, Ned had a ‘Wildcard Wednesday’ and a ‘Funday Thursday’ so on these days he and his daughter head to Seaworld or Movieworld and “just try and do fun stuff”; many of the fathers had
a more relaxed approach to their fathering, eg after dinner Rick and his children
“put our jammies on and put a mattress down in front of tele and all ly there and
watch it”; many of the fathers did not seek out parenting support groups or
playgroups preferring to father alone: “I don’t really search for them [support
groups]. I can do this on my own” (Rick) and many of the men’s wives, partners
and mothers-in-law gave considerable support in housework, cooking and child
minding.

Caring work of the stay-at-home fathers mediated by women

The wives, partners and other women relatives (manly mothers in law) facilitated
their paternal work to a significant degree. Many of the wives of the men still do
a lot of cooking: the full time intensive care doctor wife of Colin for example
spends much of the weekend cooking meals for during the week; the full-time
industrial relations specialist wife of Lloyd cooks all weekend and insisted they
get a cleaner to ensure the house was cleaned to a high standard – Lloyd now
has a weekly cleaner who comes on Friday for 3 hours; John’s wife who is an
archaeologist/systems analyst for a major minerals company works two days
from home allowing John the freedom to leave the house unencumbered with
toddlers to do his unpaid administrative jobs on these days – she also does most
of the cooking; Paul’s wife, who is a manager of a large retail institution, does
all the cooking; James’s mother in law arrives at his house Friday morning and
takes over full care of his 4 year old freeing him entirely to do yard work and
house renovations; Rick’s mother comes over frequently to help with the
children, support Rick and she will often clean the house. Ned’s wife offered to get a cleaner and Ned said no; John’s wife offered to employ a cleaner once a fortnight and she has just started coming.

To contrast this with the findings from Logan and Ascot, this facilitation of the stay at home Ascot mothers’ maternal care work by high earning male husbands and partners is entirely absence. In Logan the mothers I spoke with are supported to a high level by extended family and male partners.

Women gatekeeping motherhood?

An alternative perspective on the facilitation of the stay-at-home fathers’ work by female relatives and wives is that mothers who work full-time may find it difficult to relinquish the child caring role or may feel guilty working and not being stay-at-home mothers themselves. Offering to employ a cleaner and cooking most dinners to help their partner may make them feel less guilty at being away from the family home for significant periods. It is outside the ambit of this research to investigate the motivation of the mothers in the fathers’ narratives as I did not speak with them myself. However, there is research on successful career women still trying to be ‘good mothers’ as well (eg, Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2010).

A reluctance to relinquish active mothering to male partners was identified as a contributing factor to the lack of social legitimacy for stay-at-home fathers in at least three of my male participants’ interviews:
There might be more stay-at-home dads if they [mothers] gave their husbands a choice to stay at home…

(Colin)

Stay-at-home dads are not generally supported or valued – we are still in a minority in a world that is still largely perceived as a woman’s domain or sphere

(John)

Society still believes that a woman who stays at home to raise her kids is a very admirable person but a male who stays at home to raise his kids is a lazy bum and a shirker

(Lloyd)

Therefore, while it can be seen that the stay-at-home fathers’ caregiving takes place within a gendered paradigm there is substantial evidence of the men’s emotional connection to the child and their moral and emotional responsibility for the child is always present. Many of the fathers also plan, coordinate and facilitate all the caring-related activities for the children (eg playdates, swim lessons, running to and from kindergarten, attending school information days) because their wives and partners are away at work most of the time. This
overseeing and coordinating of a child’s day to day life has traditionally fallen to mothers.

**Nurturance**

The second pillar of maternal work identified by Ruddick is ‘nurturance’ and the men in my study demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for nurturing their children.

“One of the important things is being close to her [his young daughter] at this age so I’m hoping we’ll be close all the way through our lives. I’d like to think I’ll have a really good relationship with her when she’s 25…that the openness and closeness at this early stage will hold in my lifetime…

(James, 54, father to a 4 year-old)

I am very strong on nurturing. If you have the opportunity to be at home with the children do it. Money is transient. Family first… I had a very happy childhood. Very strong nurturing in my family. I try to be a dad like my dad was.

(Rick, Maori, 48, stay at home father to a 5 and 6 year-old)

In a more honest assessment of his abilities to emotionally support his three year-old toddler Colin says: “Some days you think you are all over it. Other days you are crap without a clue”. He also adds “But I adore my boy”.
One of the most pronounced ways nurturance was demonstrated by the stay-at-home fathers was in their strong resistance to their child entering daycare at a young age. They chose to leave paid employment and care for the child themselves rather than let this occur. The reason to become a full-time stay-at-home father was often made in response to their professional partner not enjoying being a carer to a baby and a resistance to their wives wanting to place the child into full-time daycare at a young age.

Rick’s position is probably the most extreme: he disagrees with any form of outside care until the child attends school so neither his 5 year-old nor 6 year-old have attended daycare or preschool. Other fathers were equally scathing of out of home childcare and particularly institutionalised daycare:

_I consider it [daycare] a modern disease… at the time I was horrified by the thought of being a stay at home dad but I was so determined my kids would not be latch key kids raised by daycare centres and babysitters_

(Lloyd, White Australian, 45, stay-at-home father, has a 6 and 8-year old)

_…what is the point of having kids if you are not going to spend time with them. Some people have kids and they hardly see their kids_

(John, 48, White Australian, stay-at-home father, has a 2 and 4-year old)
We didn’t want Claire in daycare under 2 so I took long service leave to stay at home and care for her until she went to C and K.

(Ned, 39, White Australian, stay-at-home father, has a 4 year-old)

I strongly believe Ruby shouldn’t be in a daycare situation all the time

(James, 54, White Australia, stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old)

Ray’s pregnant wife expressed no interest in leaving work to care for a small baby therefore he has cared for their young daughter from the age of one week old. Many of the men I spoke with have been full-time stay-at-home fathers since their children were babies - 6 months onwards is most common, generally at the termination of breast-feeding. These quite extreme negative comments on daycare are at odds with the attitudes expressed about daycare by the mothers in Logan and Ascot. Even the women I spoke with who chose not to use day care for their own children acknowledged that for some families (single mothers; both parents had to work full time to survive financially) day care was necessary.

In addition, there was a general attitude among the women that daycare was good for socialisation of the child: generally, this attitude was not supported by the stay-at-home fathers. Therefore the need to be with their young children at home in the early years as stay-at-home fathers and sacrificing hegemonic notions of masculinity and breadwinning shows evidence of the men’s nurturance in their caregiving.
The third key pillar of Ruddick’s maternal work is ‘social acceptability’ and ‘training’ and these concepts are underpinned with a moral dimension. Ruddick wrote about ‘social acceptability’:

“The third demand on which maternal practice is based is made not by children’s needs but by the social groups of which a mother is a member. Social groups require that mothers shape their children’s growth in acceptable ways ... the criteria of acceptability consists of the group values that a mother has internalized as well as the values of group members whom she feels she must please” (Ruddick, 1995, p. 21)

How the children are disciplined is also at the core of this pillar of maternal work. Discipline here means much more than physical discipline such as smacking children and encompasses establishing clear behavioural boundaries:

As the primary carer I had rules about what to do with him...eating only when sitting down for example

(Colin)

Structure is important to me in bringing up Ivy.

(Ray, stay-at-home father to a 3 year-old)
Now they [Lloyd's two children] are starting to play one against the other. I have to discipline them.

(Lloyd)

For Colin discipline of his three year-old “has been a big struggle”. As Colin came from a violent background he hated smacking and although his wife and he smacked their toddler initially he couldn’t cope with it. He has now tried “all sorts of things… time out, the naughty corner, all sorts of things…it’s only been through trial and error that I have finally come to this point of tenderness, reason and reward”.

Another way of looking at social acceptability/training is that acceptable standards of behavior for children are often built from being in groups. However, the men in this study didn’t join groups of other fathers.

The social conditions in which the men father is very different to that of mothers. Many of the participants spoke of the maternal work undertaken as isolating, of having no support, and of not being taken seriously by nurses and midwives when the children were babies:

After my son was born I went to one of those information sessions put on by Community Health. On feeding. And all the women were looking at me like ‘what’s he doing here?’…. Like I’m a father who wants to know what to feed his young children. I felt really alienated…. 
Many of the fathers discuss a perceived lack of social credibility and social legitimacy of their roles and how they think people think they are paedophiles, unemployed or have custody of the children for the day:

*Stand up for yourself! Don’t let people think you are babysitting for the day or this is your custody day [Ray’s passionate advice to other stay-at-home dads]*

(Ray, 41, full time stay-at-home father, has a 3 year-old)

... with all the media these days... males doing all sorts of things they shouldn’t be doing [this follows a discussion about Rolf Harris] ...you sort of have this idea that people might think you know... How can I say it? I might be a paedophile or abuse my child...

(James, 54, full time stay-at-home father, has a 4 year-old)

*You feel like some sort of paedophile predator*

[on going into shopping centre change rooms to change his 2 year-old son’s nappy]

(John, 48, full time stay-at-home father, has a 2 and 4 year-old)
The ‘training’ of children therefore is more difficult for stay-at-home fathers as they tended not to be part of fathering groups. Ray recalls a time when he approached a group of mothers in a park after his two year-old daughter had started playing with one of the children from the group. He retells with emotion the hostile reaction he received from the women when he tried to talk to them and remembers one of the women saying as he walked away ‘typical father for a day on his custody day out’. Another participant Ned tried to join the local playgroup but he stopped going when none of the mothers talked to him. Ray and Lloyd have school-age children as well – both speak of the unfriendliness of the women waiting at the school gate to collect their children: “They are not friendly. They stop talking when you walk up” (Lloyd) and “A shared cluster of women is intimating to a male stay at home carer” (Ray).

Social acceptability/training as an aspect of maternal work is inextricably tied up with gendered normative assumptions of what is a good mother and a good father.

Therefore, it can be seen that the male caregivers in this study struggle with providing social acceptability and training of their children because of the ‘institutionalized nature of motherhood’ (Rich, 1986) that is highly gendered in its normative practices and because men tend not be part of groups in their maternal practice. They often father children in more isolated settings. This pillar of maternal work, more than the other two shows the difficulties of undertaking
traditional feminine work (mothering) within the gender borders of masculinity and femininity.

**How does undertaking of a traditionally feminine role of caregiving affect ‘hegemonic masculinity’?**

John, a stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old articulates the limitations of current structural masculine enactments of fathering work and the relationship of stay-at-home fathering to hegemonic masculinity succinctly:

“Men don’t want to be stay at home dads because they are aspiring to climb ladders and bring the money in… be the boss…be the main strength figure in the relationship. Everything is built around my status of being in this high income role. Or not being in the high income job but in a more masculine job. This is preferred over the softer role of being at home and caring for the kids.”

John feels however no less of a man in his current caring role:

*Even though Kate earns all the income and is the professional and is highly regarded, in the family sense if it comes to fixing the car, doing the house work, building the house, making a decision or those major decisions on any of these things it will all come down to me. Because of that skill base I have. That’s why I still feel [like] a reasonable male because I work across all these roles.*
A primary theme that came from the interview data was that although almost all the men I spoke with loved the everyday paternal care work undertaken of their child universally they disliked housework and talked of the limitations of the role of stay-at-home father as it currently exists.

Money and breadwinning

One of the central planks of the male participants’ masculinities was their relationship to money; many of the stay-at-home fathers expressed difficulties with no longer earning the primary family wage. Breadwinning and masculinity have long been linked (Connell, 2000, 2008) although caution has been expressed by contemporary fatherhood theorists like Dermott (2008) who argues for a more nuanced and subtle examination of ‘financial caring’ as just one practice among many that make up ‘involved fatherhood’.

Natalier and Hewitt (2014), in their detailed qualitative studies of payment (and non-payment) of child support by male ex-partners in contemporary Australia, emphasise how:

“control and authority are central to hegemonic masculinity…they are evident in the position of breadwinning as a defining element of successful manhood and fatherhood. The dynamics of men’s power over household money vary across structural and cultural positions, but men’s right to ‘have a say’ on how money is spent is a consistent finding…”
Nonresidential fathers use child support to demonstrate their identities as good fathers… and implicitly good men” (Natalier and Hewitt, 2014, p. 4)

In interviews with 28 separated fathers and 30 separated mothers, Natalier and Hewitt (2014) show that how the men and women discuss child support illustrates their management of gendered parenting identities. The authors conclude that definitions of how child support should be used re-entrench the power and control of the system of gender.

This relationship between Australian male identity and income generation reiterates Connell’s articulations on masculinities (2008) and ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (1991) and emphasises the culturally entrenched perceptions men have both about their role in society and also the roles of other men. The role of breadwinner can therefore be seen to have been critical to masculine feelings of self-worth.

Ned articulated how the participants typically shaped their narratives about not being the breadwinner in their families:

You have grown up with the expectation that you will be the provider. You are expected to be competent. There is a lot of pressure when you are growing up with people always asking you ‘what are you going to do with your life? (Ned, 39, stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old)
The participants no longer earn the family income, and in most cases did not contribute to the family finances in any way so they re-inscribe their masculinity and perceived self-worth through traditionally male gender work like building and fixing. Seven of the ten stay-at-home fathers in my study did not bring any money into the household; Craig was caring for his 5 month old daughter while his wife studied a undergraduate medical-related degree; their family was surviving on Aus Study; Paul was working ‘part-time’ selling goods over the internet – although I am not sure from what he said in his interview this earns much money; the only single father in the study, Rick, received child support from his ex-wife, a high earning manager in a medical institution and he supplemented his money with running a business on the side as a child’s entertainer. (Rick is also a qualified and experienced children’s educator).

If “control and authority are central to hegemonic masculinity” (Natalier and Hewitt, 2014, p.4) then the loss of masculine identity that comes with taking on the role of stay-at-home father leads to a crisis of identity for the participants:

*I don’t feel I have an identity any more but before kids I was a fledging rock star [in a band] (Rick)*

*My wife is a member of [an exclusive executive club]. She has asked me to stop telling people I am a stay-at-home father when we are introduced as it makes her feel silly… the most common response from the husband*
when we are introduced is they laugh and say ‘oh so you don’t work at all then…” (Lloyd)

When I was the photographer [at a major cultural institution] I had a high status job. Everything was built around my status of being in this high income job. It’s all different now (James)

hooks (2014) discusses the “psychological stress or emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sex-role patterns” (2014, pp. 74-75). The stay-at-home fathers I spoke with experience psychological and emotional stress in undertaking a role traditionally framed as feminine. The extent to which they can resist or alter the role is dependent on their social and economic resources (eg having a mother in law who comes in once a week to child mind leaving the father to have a day to himself doing repairs like James or being wealthy enough to outsource the drudgery of housework to a regular cleaner like Lloyd or Colin).

Some of the fathers talk of feeling de-masculinised when they are out and about with their children by the societal attitudes they experienced. They also spoke of their feelings of inadequacy in not being the main breadwinner, a central plank of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991). There is a robust literature on good husbands and good fathers predicated upon being good providers, earning all, or most of the family wage (Campbell, 1984; Coltrane, 1996), and on the lack of viable, alternative masculine role-models for men, particularly working-class men when they are not employed full-time and the negative impact on male

While there is a literature that indicates breadwinning is no longer the sole definition of contemporary fathering and that fathers’ care for their children is an important element of ‘good fathering’ (Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011), contemporary male caregiving still takes place within a highly gendered context. A significant recent contribution to the study of fathering practice within Australia is Rose et al (2015). The authors present a complex and comprehensive picture of contemporary intensive fathering and in a qualitative study of 11 couples with an infant aged 6 to 8 months, they looked specifically at how couples negotiate and rationalise gendered divisions in infant care. They found that “dominant gendered discourses implicitly defend a father’s decision to opt out of infant care tasks they find more difficult, such as soothing an irritable infant” (Rose et al, 2015, p. 38). They also found that both men and women are strongly affected by gendered understandings of their roles.

These findings of Rose et al are important because they calibrate Nash’s (2014) assertion that “it is becoming more acceptable for men to be primary caregivers” (Nash, 2014, p. 13). Rose et al (2015) present a more nuanced picture of the enduring gendered nature of caring for young infants in contemporary Australia. The fathers in Rose’s study and the stay-at-home fathers I spoke with are still affected by the limitations placed upon men by the gendered nature of caring for young children: neither group describe being comfortable or social accepted
in the roles they undertake of paternal hands-on care of younger children. They are still largely governed by the binary and prescriptive categories of gender; specifically, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (1991) and “boys in a box” rhetoric which confines men to traditionally acceptable male roles (Connell, 2008, p. 238). Messner (1997) has also deconstructed masculinities and gender categories, and like Connell reminds us that “gender is a problematic construct rather than a natural, taken-for-granted reality” (1997, p. 2) and that there is no “singular masculinity”; rather “at any given historical moment here are various and competing masculinities” (1997, p. 7).

In Australian sociologist Probert’s (2002) findings, contemporary fathers may have expressed a strong interest in having closer emotional links with their children but most of them worked long hours and developed careers that precluded the inclusion of children in their lives: “The practice of fathering is relatively unchanged [from the 1950’s], despite the changes in expectations since the 1950s” (Probert, 2002, p. 15). This reaffirms Daly’s (1996) findings that a relentless pursuit of paid work can detrimentally affect fathers’ perceptions of their paternal practice. In intensive, qualitative interviews with 32 fathers with children under 6 years Daly found that the discourses were dominated by talk of an ‘economy of time’ that “served as the central organizing principle of the family worlds of these men… guiding many of their decisions and reflect[ing] their commitments as fathers” (Daly, 1996, p. 469). The participants felt even
though they spent time with their families to be a ‘good father’ that paid work dominated their time and that family time was relegated to second place.

However, Dermott (2008) cautions against reducing fatherhood simply to an income earning role, arguing instead for a more nuanced approach:

Financial provision is a component, like other forms of care, which emerges from the particular characterization of fatherhood. Earning money, in relation to men’s familial role, is primarily about being able to give children opportunities (2008, p. 41).

The implications of being a non-earning, older, full-time father

An outcome of fathering a child later in life and relying solely on the income of a high earning female partner is the effect this has on your self-imagined trajectory as a future worker earning a wage and accumulating superannuation funds. This potential future scenario is complicated by the persistent narrative of the ‘male breadwinner model’. This was identified as an issue for many of the male participants. It was much more important than it was for the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot, many of whom were happy to remain as either full-time, non-earning financially dependent mothers or to continue to earn small amounts of family income. The mothers in Ascot did not express to me worries about the impact taking time out of the workforce to care for young children would have on their future earning capacity.
At 54 and the oldest participant in this study, James, imagines picking up smaller jobs in carpentry and woodwork once his daughter starts school to ensure he continues to bring money into the household in some capacity. Prior to becoming a stay-at-home father, he was a professional photographer. James described himself as “finishing full-time work at 52” so sees himself as having retired from the world of full-time paid work. Colin at 50 is about to enrol in a Social Sciences degree as he wants more fulfilling work for the second part of his life than the fly in/fly out technical work at remote mine sites he engaged in before having children. He wants work that is more amenable to school hours so he can be there for his young son. This segueway into another career after being a full-time stay at home carer of young children is also common among the financially well-supported stay-at-home mothers in the study. At 48, with a 2 and 4 year-old, John is questioning the path he has taken in life:

Being a stay-at-home dad is great for the family and the kids, but not good for personal career and directions (John, 48, has a 2 and 4 year-old)

Among the participants I spoke with contemplating retraining and changing careers in your 50s is considerably more complicated than it is in your 30s and even 40s. Ned envisages returning to the profession of architecture after his daughter starts school and Rick will pick up more teaching once his youngest starts school. Ray, with a more pragmatic attitude to work has maintained a work presence since starting his stay-at-home fathering of his infant daughter (she
was a week old when he took on full time care) working Friday nights in a pub for a friend. Ray has a working-class background and there is a robust literature on how working-class men and women are less likely to stop full-time work for prolonged periods to care for children, often continuing to work and using extended family for daycare (hooks, 2014, on Black parents and working-class parents; Campbell, 1984 on White, English working-class parents and working; Peel, 2005 on socially disadvantaged White Australian parents and working). Ray’s background is in hospitality and he wanted to “keep a foot in the industry”. His daughter is now 3 and after the interview he returned to fulltime work; that is, shift work in the hospitality industry and using both grandparents and daycare to take care of his young daughter while he is at work. As Ray’s wife works full-time and long hours managing a popular fast food restaurant she is able to help with child care in the mornings but is often not around in the evenings until late.

Of the stay-at-home fathers, only John, Simon, Lloyd and Paul have no plans to return to full-time work. They “love” the job of being a full-time stay-at-home father and did not want to rupture the close bond they have developed with their children. However, all of them expressed vulnerability at losing ‘work readiness skills’, potentially having to re-enter the workforce as an ‘older worker’, and having complete financial dependence on a woman partner:

I am at the stage of thinking I’d like a nice fulfilling 2 or 3 day a week job but it’s not looking like it’s possible at the moment. I’m always so stressed out with the kids and projects around the house and fixing cars and the
mowers (I always fit the little jobs in here and there - brings pocket money in – not huge amounts) (Simon, 48, a full-time stay-at-home dad to a 7 and 10 year-old)

Like many of the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot the men worked on the side for pin money as well as caring full-time for their children. Paul sold goods on the internet part-time; Rick ran a part-time children’s entertainment business for children’s birthday parties; Ray worked one night a week in a pub; Lloyd works one day a week in the city at his wife’s industrial relations business running the IT.

The older average age of the male participants (47 years) meant many expressed a vulnerability about being out of the workforce as older workers:

*I feel like I’m in the wilderness now. Been out of work for a while and I’m older* (John, 48, stay-at-home dad to a two and four year-old)

The possible spectre of divorce and financial vulnerability as a fulltime carer with rusty work skills also emerged as a theme in the data. As a man with the breadwinning narrative firmly in mind a future after divorce from a high earning female partner was discussed in the interviews with considerable trepidation:

*I’ve thought that if we get a divorce I have no career. As a man… you have no career. So as a man it would be pretty hard getting back on your feet after divorce…So she’s going to be a Senior Project manager in five
years earning god knows how much and I'm going to walk out at 55 saying 'I've been a stay-at-home dad for 5 years’ and try and find a job at Bunnings. Earning $50 grand a year if that. So that’s the biggest concern if we do part and go our own ways (Simon, 48, stay-at-home father of a seven and ten year-old)

Enacting fatherhood differently than their own fathers: Emotional, intensive caring built on ‘being there’ over ‘distant fathering’

If traditional fathering has been more distant and centrally built around breadwinning the male caregivers here position themselves against this model. One of the significant factors that affected how the men I spoke with father and how they see their role was how they were fathered. Fathers’ assertions that they are doing a much better job fathering their children than their own fathers and that they father ‘against’ how they were fathered rather than using their fathers as a successful role model was prominent. Colin’s comments on this are typical “I definitely parent against how I was parented”.

Daly similarly found this trend of fathering against how they were fathered in her findings with stay-at-home fathers (Daly, 1996, cited in Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 121). My findings show that many of the men I spoke with had old fashioned dominating fathers and were bought up in traditional, patrician, almost Edwardian ways and some had violent fathers. Lloyd was raised in the Jehovah’s Witness faith where his father is an Elder Priest. When he left the
faith he was estranged from his family for a time. Colin had a brutal, violent upbringing where his mother fled from her husband in the middle of the night to a new life with four children; Colin has had nothing to do with his father since. John was estranged from his father after an old fashioned, strict upbringing with parents who were not affectionate and never told him he was adopted. He only found out as an adult from another relative.

The participants are split between those that are estranged from their father (sometimes because he was violent to the family) and those that are very close to their father. This relationship with their biological parents, particularly their father, was a more prominent part of the interview than it was for the mothers discussing their parents. In many interviews with the fathers, there was detailed and emotional discussion about their fathers and how this relationship informed their own parenting practice. In the interviews with mothers I spoke with analysis of their self-reflexive practice as mothers through the filter of their relationship with their own parents did not feature so highly. However, many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers spoke of how their mothers worked when they were growing up so they were determined to ‘be there’ at home for their own children growing up. Therefore, in both the narratives of the stay-at-home fathers and the stay-at-home mothers ‘parenting against and better than’ how they were parented was present in the findings.

Therefore, it can be seen that undertaking a traditionally feminine role like caregiving and mothering affects hegemonic masculinity in many ways from the
men caring for young children feeling inadequate as they don’t earn money any more; to crises in their identity as their work and public identity that was affirmed and validated socially has been replaced by a shadow, private identity caught in the domestic world; to the men consciously fathering against their own fathers’ dominating, disciplinarian and emotionally distance approaches. I will now look at the third research question and ask are the fathers in this study rebuilding their own identity as stay-at-home fathers or just recalibrating it within existing gender borders of masculinity and femininity?

**Building gendered constructions of the stay-at-home father identity or recalibrating it within existing gender borders of masculinity and femininity?**

*Conceptualising contemporary fatherhood as an intimate relationship [that] allows for an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant; emotions, the expression of affection, and the exclusivity of the reciprocal father-child dyad* (Dermott, 2008, p. 143).

(Fathering sociologist Esther Dermott calling for a new paradigm of father-led care.)

The third research aim with the stay-at-home fathers was to explore whether the men are building gendered constructions of the stay-at-home father identity and how this is challenging existing definitions of masculinity. The findings show that
while my participants overall “love” the paternal work and lived experience of
the everyday practice of primary caring for young children full-time, most of them
express a dissatisfaction and sometimes rage with the attitudes they meet in
their daily caring practice from the broader community. I asked them to consider
the questions: “Are you happier now or less happier than before you had
children?” and “Are you happy with the way you parent?” Most of the men felt
happier with their lives after they had had children and all were happy with the
way they parent. While they express general contentment with their individual
paternal practice they articulate strong views about the social and cultural
meanings and myths attached to the role of stay-at-home father in their lived
experience of carrying out this work:

   I feel like everyone thinks I’m a bludger

   (Paul, 46, White Australian, stay-at-home father, one child aged 11 years,
describing his experience of not being in the workforce and having a
coffee at a shopping centre during the day)

   I feel like I’m a bludger!

   (Rick, 47, New Zealand Maori, stay-at-home father to a 4 and 6-year old)

However, some of the men in my sample spoke of the challenges to an
entrenched and gendered understanding of masculinities that being a stay-at-
home father represented. Only one participant did not see gender as relevant
to his stay at home caring role considering parenting to be neither a woman’s or man’s job: “I think it is extremely masculine, a man bringing up his boy!” (Colin)

The attitudes to housework of the stay-at-home fathers I spoke with illustrate a highly gendered response to work that has been traditionally women’s work. The men in this study either outsource the housework component of their job to paid cleaners (with and without their wives’ and partners’ knowledge); their female relatives help substantially with housework as well as child care (mothers and mothers-in-law contribute significantly to this – in one case study James’s mother in law drops by every Friday, does all the housework, cooking and child care thus freeing him to spend the day with power tools); and in some case studies their full-time working wives do most of the cooking. Therefore, the caring practice of the stay-at-home fathers is significantly mediated and facilitated by their wives, de facto partners and other female biological relatives, primarily their mothers-in-law, wives and partners. Dermott (2008) concluded that:

for most of the fathers the two [housework and childcare] were considered separate entities. While for mothers, routine responsibilities of home may overlap with those of being a parent, these men saw the obligations of fathering as lying elsewhere (Dermott, 2008, p. 53)
The men in my study similarly differentiate the work of cleaning a house and caring for young children in their paternal practice, prioritising the latter and if possible outsourcing the former:

*I mean if I was at home only dealing with domestic duties like housework that would be a bit hard to deal with but I have the time to do things that you know need doing [ie, construction and building work outside] ... And the stuff you have to do every week...like clean the floors, vaccum, grocery shopping .... that stuff never ends... I mean if you only did that you're go nuts* (Ned, 39, White Australian, stay-at-home father, one 4 year-old child)

In their attitude to housework the men in my study seem to concur with Oakley’s foundational and widely accepted notion of housework as a repressive cultural mechanism that has contributed to women’s oppression (Oakley, 1974) and her called for its abolition. In redefining housework to suit their own needs or eliminating it entirely if resources allow the men in my study have partially fulfilled Oakley’s rallying cry.

**Unpaid, masculine, self-provisioning work**

One of the primary ways the stay-at-home fathers undertake their paternal care work within a gendered paradigm is by redefining their role as ‘house worker’, not stay-at-home father, and by spending a disproportionate amount of time on paid and unpaid work that re-inscribes traditional hegemonic notions of
masculinity, like yard work and building projects. Participation in more traditional masculine projects was identified as important and time consuming by my participants. Furthermore, some of my participants were resentful of their women partners and wives because they never mowed the lawns or built the retaining wall. Most of the men in my study were either renovating the house, undertaking extensive yardwork, making furniture, building elaborate cubby houses and slides, repairing cars, and one of the participants was a volunteer for the local Rural Fire Service, long recognized as a bastion of traditional masculinity:

If I go into my fire brigade and say ‘oh guys I’ve has such a tough day at home with the kids’ I’d be a laughing stock. They’d be going ‘yeah mate’….

(Simon, White Zimbabwean, 48, stay-at-home father to a 7 and 10 year-old)

Doucet and Merla (2007) specifically address this question of how their participant fathers deal with the relationship between their role as the main carers of children and their sense of their own masculinity. The authors propose that in an attempt to attain social legitimacy and as a way to counter their non-traditional roles of stay-at-home father it was important to participants to:

… remain connected to traditionally masculine sources of identity such as part-time paid work, unpaid masculine self-provisioning work, and
"Self-provisioning work" here means the unpaid male-interest work as described in detail above like the building, repairing, car maintenance and renovating.

The men in my study identified the importance of male self-provisioning work to their masculine identity and redefined housework as ‘house work’.

If the men in my study are in relationships with high earning wives and partners and they are not earning money their feelings of self-worth come from participation in other male projects that re-inscribe traditional hegemonic masculinity.

Many of the participants define the role of stay-at-home father to include more traditionally masculine projects like yard work, major building projects such as constructing a child’s playground and building a sandpit, renovating the outside of the house or undertaking major gardening and tree clearing projects. Doucet and Merla (2007) call this “masculine self-provisioning work”.

Colin is a stay-at-home father of a 3 year-old. After dropping the child at daycare where he goes three days a week from 9am to 5pm Colin’s focus of the day is clear:
Those days are spent building a retaining wall. Or on the lawns, pool, outside stuff and fixing…. I’m building Oscar a cubby house and a sandpit down the way at the moment which is taking up a lot of time….

(Colin, stay-at-home father of a 3 year-old)

Simon is an ex-mechanic and a stay-at-home father to two young school-age children. Living on acreage he does a lot of gardening, planting, building and landscaping as well as building an aeroplane and servicing the cars. Like many men in the study he has an ongoing argument with his wife about the cleanliness of the house:

I say hang on a minute I’ve serviced all the cars, mowed the lawns…. So most people have to pay a mechanic to fix the car…. But I do it all. That’s my main argument with Tanya that I do all that sort of stuff, look after the cars, etc as well as the housework and the emotional support of the kids

(Simon, 48, stay-at-home father to a 10 and 7 year-old)

If the wives and partners of the stay-at-home fathers in my study do not perceive that the men are doing as much housework as they should then the men in my study understand the term ‘housework’ differently to their wives. They interpret it as ‘work around the outside and inside of the house’, not the more commonly understood unpaid household work of cooking, cleaning, shopping and cleaning
toilets. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defined housework in the 2009 Census as:

unpaid household work, including cooking, cleaning, shopping and caring for children… [that] takes up a substantial proportion of people’s waking lives (ABS, 2009).

In 2016 the definition of housework has changed to “unpaid domestic work” and it now includes “gardening, home maintenance and repairs” (ABS, 2016c) as well as the more traditional food preparation and laundry. This broader definition of housework draws closer to that understood by the male participants from my study.

James, a 54 year-old stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old is typical of the participants’ re-definition of the housework role in his reply to my interview question ‘who does most of the housework in your house?’:

I do as I’m the one at home. But in a lot of cases the work that needs doing is around the house (mainly the outside work) and I probably have a broader base of skills to do these activities. And when you say ‘housework’ you probably mean cleaning floors and things or do you mean the broader perspective of cutting firewood and doing lawns? … So to me ‘house work’ means looking after this property and cleaning the inside and maintaining the outside…
The participants in my study often differentiated their role clearly between looking after the children and undertaking housework. If the first was clearly perceived as enobling, housework, on the other hand, is seen as either a necessary part of the role or “as drudgery” (Colin, 50, father to a 3 year-old). [Colin’s full quote is “Anyway the stay at home mum role equals drudgery!] Simon also “hates housework…it is so time-consuming!”

Redefining housework to include major projects around the house also justified the way the men discussed spending (sometimes large amounts) of family money on power tools and building supplies. A discussion on how couples negotiate discretionary spending bought an angry response from James. When I referred to trips to Bunnings for male partners as ‘discretionary spending’ James replied:

*Bunnings is part of the house. It’s part of maintenance. It’s part of what has to happen to keep things running. So Bunnings – is it discretionary? No, it’s not discretionary for me…*

(James, 54, stay-at-home father to a 4 year-old)

Like the wealthiest Ascot stay-at-home mothers I spoke with employing a cleaner is one way the fathers avoided the drudgery of household tasks. The two wealthiest participants in my study employed cleaners; one without his
wife’s knowledge, to do the housework. Colin has no guilt at paying for a cleaner because he believes the pressures of being a stay-at-home father are intense and mainly cluster around an expectation that fathers are expected to do the inside and outside work: “no-one expects stay at home mums to mow the lawns and build fences”:

_The cleaners come once a fortnight. They do all the cleaning and she [my wife] comes home and the house is all clean and she thinks I’ve spent the day cleaning and that I’m a wonderful husband. I get good bonus points from that_ (Colin, stay-at-home father to a 3 year-old)

Lloyd employed a cleaner at his wife’s suggestion:

_We have a cleaner now. Comes for an hour and a half. Two cleaners come on a Friday so that’s taken a lot of the load off me. They do the hard stuff. Like mopping, bathrooms. I used to do it but I wasn’t keeping up and the wife’s really fussy so she said ‘bugger it I’m getting a cleaner’._

(Lloyd, stay-at-home father to a 6 and 8 year-old.)

A deviation from this idea that fulltime male caregivers re-embed traditional masculinity through masculine, self-provisioning projects is the findings of Solomon (2014). In her findings from mainly privileged middle- and upper-class stay-at-home fathers in the United States, she found a variation to this trend of “enacting masculinity through traditional masculine household or community
activities” as the men in her study were largely positively supported by their family, friends and wider community (Solomon, 2014, p. 27). Solomon terms the fathering practices undertaken by the men in her study “evolved masculinity” (2014, p. 36) and suggests it may be a movement away from fatherhood being linked primarily to the breadwinner model. She suggests this difference with findings from, for example, Doucet and Merla (2007), may be because her cohort of stay-at-home fathers were largely privileged:

“Men in my sample enjoyed privileges that accompany being middle- and upper class… individuals in the upper classes tend to espouse more egalitarian views about caregiving than individuals in other classes” (Solomon, 2014, p. 27).

Even though the men I interviewed were largely privileged my findings align with Doucet and Merla (2007) in the high level of masculine, self-provisioning work undertaken within the group and the privileging of this work over other caregiving-related tasks (like housework).

**A gendered twist to the ‘time bind’ and ‘double-shift’**

One of the issues to emerge from my findings is that because the men at home can build and fix mowers they try and do this as well as the housework and the emotional work of looking after young children. Subsequently, many of the men feel overwhelmed and exhausted at trying to do all this. Sometimes they feel
resentment at their female partners because they think all they did when they were at home (if they did spend time at home with young children) was housework and look after children:

Toyota never builds fences, makes a doll’s house, picks up a chainsaw, etc.

(Ray, stay-at-home father, has a 3 year-old)

Therefore, from the findings it can be seen that the male caregivers in this study build gendered constructions of the stay-at-home father identity and recalibrate it within the existing gender order of masculinity and femininity rather than reinventing their role entirely. They do this by undertaking “self-provisioning work” like building cubbies and sandpits, painting the house and repairing the car because this reinscribes traditional hegemonic masculinity and enhances feelings of self-worth. Outsourcing housework and less desirable aspects of the stay at home role also shows men recalibrating the role within existing gender borders. Redefining the role of stay-at-home father as “house work” (James) encompassing “looking after the property and cleaning the inside and maintaining the outside”, and prioriting the masculine ‘outside’ activities over the feminine ‘inside’ activities is another example of modifying the role to fit existing definitions of masculinity.


**Conclusion**

At the start of this chapter I asked the research questions do men mother?; how does doing a feminine role like caring for children affect hegemonic masculinity?; and how are the stay-at-home fathers in this study re-constructing the stay-at-home father identity within existing gender borders of masculine or feminine? My findings indicate that men can and do ‘mother’ using the schema of maternal work proposed by Ruddick, that is men do undertake ‘preservative love, nurturance and training/social acceptability’. However, this maternal work is carried out in highly gendered ways like re-asserting traditional, hegemonic masculine self-worth through ‘self-provisioning work’ like building, constructing and renovating; outsourcing housework where possible in a paid (sneaking in cleaners behind his wife’s back) and unpaid capacity (generally their mother in law); the kind of activities the men do with the children, favouring ‘rough and tumble’ play and being outside to indoor more sedentary activities; and not being part of a wider support group of mothers like playgroup or a mothers’ support group run by Community Health. This latter element can lead to feelings of social isolation for the father. There is an overarching narrative in the findings of a lack of social legitimacy and acceptance for their role, with many men describing experiencing hostility and social stigma in their daily parenting lives. Thus, like Doucet (2006), I find that the ‘institution of motherhood’ (Rich, 1986) and the ‘existing gender order’ (Connell, 2000) continue to dominate men’s caring practices and they do not ‘mother’ in the same ways as women. It may be more
productive to ask different questions than do men mother? Rather, the focus should be on finding a language to describe and reflect the intimate caring work men do and valuing its worth. A reinvention of how we theorise and talk about fathering practices is needed.

Fathering, like motherhood may be held up as a culturally desirable and ennobling institution but the work involved in the role, as described in the lived experiences of the men undertaking the paternal work in this study, is the opposite to this. Many of the participants describe the vilification that comes with identifying as a stay-at-home father and the isolation and social stigma that comes with this role. To be a stay-at-home father it seems is outside the accepted scope of hegemonic masculinity. Uncoupling fathering and breadwinning and reframing the father-child dyad along emotional and relationship lines is desirable. The fathers themselves would support this as they generally love the work of being a stay-at-home father and believe the foundations they are building with their young children will last a lifetime.

Furthermore, fathering, like mothering work is seen to be culturally situated and highly affected by class, race and economic background. The only non-Western father in my study, Rick, a New Zealand Maori was emotionally fragile after going through a recent separation however ‘whanau’ support, based on child raising practices of New Zealand Maori, from his extended family is helping him through this difficult period. While most of the men disliked housework only the wealthiest participants could outsource this work to cleaners. A working-class
participant in the study, Ray, has never relinquished part-time paid work and by keeping his one night a week work at the pub, shows his ongoing and naturalised attitude to working, “I have worked since I was 15. I have always worked”.

A reframing of masculinities and paternal care practice built on more fluid ontological foundations of sexual difference, gender and identity is desirable for men and women if more men are to choose being a stay-at-home father and more women feel they have a choice to prioritise paid work over maternal work. It may be in the work of queer parenting, transgender fathering and gay men using surrogates that some of these ontological reframings around ‘mothering’ and ‘fathering’ can transact real change in heterosexual, biological models of mother- and fatherhood.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis is an original contribution to the literature on mothering and seeks to extend existing understandings. Situated within the rich diversity of mothering practices, behaviours and beliefs in contemporary Australia, this research is intended to provide an account of the meanings a culturally diverse group of women and men drawn from different class backgrounds ascribe to each of their mothering practices. Samoan and Burundian mothers and working-class mothers living in the Brisbane suburb of Logan; privileged, White, middle-class mothers living in Ascot; and Brisbane stay-at-home fathers, drawn from a wider geographical spread describe, in their own words, their lived experience of mothering.

The findings in this research are that community mothering and ‘othermothering’ are prevalent in Samoan, Burundian and working-class families in Logan and served as a strong counterbalance to the White, middle-class paradigm of ‘intensive mothering’ found in Ascot. Both ‘othermothering’ and co-mothering in Logan function as a kind of social citizenship where obligation and duty are the main underpinnings of their mothering. The women in Logan define themselves through others in their mothering work. In a more singularised form of mothering the Ascot stay-at-home mothers show evidence of a “re-traditionalisation” of their gendered role as mother and wife within their marriages in terms of taking
primary responsibility for raising children and running their households. Both the stay-at-home mothers and the working mothers in Ascot however, resist this individualized mothering by creating their own versions of co-mothering, whanau support, ‘othermothering’ and intergenerational kinship care from friends and neighbours. In an interrogation of attitudes toward and practices of work, among the women in Logan and Ascot, work is found to be an extension of, and complement to, their mothering; and thus not the antithesis to it. Among the stay-at-home fathers I ask the question: ‘do men mother?’ and show the ways the men build gendered constructions of the stay-at-home father identity.

The main research approach in this thesis is qualitative, using indepth, intimate interviews and ethnographic immersion in the research sites, to provide rich data on the attitudes, beliefs and practices of stay-at-home mothers, stay-at-home fathers and working mothers living in culturally and socio-economically diverse settings of Brisbane. In this chapter I will summarise the findings from the research and discuss how they contribute to the existing body of literature in the area of mothering. I then address limitations of the research and finally suggest possible future research directions. I will begin by discussing the findings from the Logan and Ascot mothers and then move to an analysis of the findings from the stay-at-home fathers.
My findings indicate that there is a rich diversity of mothering practices, behaviours and beliefs in contemporary Australia. However, within this diversity mothering work is highly culturally situated and profoundly affected by class and economic background. A striking finding among the young, working-class, White Australian and Samoan and Burundian mothers I spoke with in Logan is that their mothering work is relational and connected to community. Logan mothers commonly defined themselves through others in their mothering work. The mothering of this group of women is commonly informed by indigenous maternal knowledge systems and it is collective. The women in Logan live in intricate, intergenerational kinship care arrangements and collectively raise their children practising a range of models of communal care, the differences in the ontological basis of these different cultural systems notwithstanding. The women ‘co-mother’ each other’s children (Moore and Reilly, 2010) and practise ‘othermothering’ (Hill Collins, 2000), ‘community mothering’ (Aida Story, 2014) and they provide ‘whanau support’ for each other’s families (Pihama, 2011, and Pihama et al, 2002; Stevenson et al, 2016). The obligations and duties of the women to their extended kinship networks are considered more important than individual self-fulfillment. ‘Othermothering’ non-consanguine children in their communities, involvement in their churches, and mentoring women whose husbands are in prison are some of these obligations and duties. Mothering among young working-class women in Logan similarly shows a this more
relational caring work whether it is through supporting aging relatives, cleaning and cooking for your mother-in-law in exchange for living in her house to save money for your own house or by supporting other mothers at a Community Health Support Group for young mothers. The collective mothering work among young working-class mothers in Logan shows the women defining themselves through others in their mothering.

A significant duty of ethnic mothers in Logan is the cultural custodianship and transmission of cultural values. Living in extended kinship networks facilitates nurturance and transference of cultural values within the Samoan and Burundian communities. This transmission of culture between generations occurs across social class in Logan: it is evident in the mothering work of both working-class and middle-class ethnic mothers.

Community mothering and ‘othermothering’ with its moral and ethical dimensions of obligation and duty to community, and intergenerational transmission of cultural values runs counter to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theory of social change in Western contexts, “individualization” (2002). In “individualization” individual agency is more important than social class, loyalty to your country, and familial ties and is a primary determinant of human behaviour. In “individualization”, individuals choose social mobility and will move away from traditional family networks to pursue higher paid work. The authors describe this social trend as “personal destiny” taking precedence over “traditional ties” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In Beck and Beck-
Gernsheim’s “individualization” new Logan graduates and relatively high family income earners Grace and Francis are now socially mobile and would move to more advantaged suburbs. However, these women choose to remain in their communities based on “traditional ties” as they define themselves through others in their mothering work and live in a nexus of maternal obligation and duty. Therefore, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s theories of social change, particularly, “individualization” (1995, 2002) have been shown to have limited relevance to the culturally diverse and working-class mothers in Logan. My findings expose the cultural bias and White Eurocentric focus of the authors.

**Pursuing ‘intensive motherhood’ and the re-traditionalisation of the stay-at-home mother role in Ascot**

If the Logan women define themselves through others in their mothering work and demonstrate a communal ethics of care, conversely, among some of the privileged Western, White mothers living in the wealthy suburb of Ascot a more singular form of mothering prevails. The persistent cultural ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ is also common (Hays, 1996) in Ascot among the stay-at-home mothers. Despite international and national trends showing that most married and partnered women with children in Western contexts work in paid employment as well as mothering just over half of the women interviewed in Ascot are full-time, stay-at-home mothers. Pursuing an ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ means the women prioritise and value most highly the *quantity of time* spent with their children (as opposed to the *quality of time* valued by
working mothers) and they value always ‘being there’ for their children. The Ascot stay-at-home mothers resist daycare for their preschool-age children and pursue a deliberate moral motherhood of purposively shaping well-rounded citizens and getting the job of childrearing ‘right’.

Many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers moved states within Australia and sometimes countries to follow their husband’s work ambitions of a higher paid job with greater responsibility. They are part of families who demonstrate social mobility to pursue greater wealth and career opportunity; they pursue “personal destiny” over “traditional ties” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s, 2002).

Further, many of the Ascot stay-at-home mothers hold traditional views of marriage. If for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) the institution of marriage no longer holds a central moral authority and position in Western society nor is it relevant for individuals - the authors call this trend the “de-traditionalization of marriage” - my findings show the opposite is true among some mothers in Ascot. Rather than a “de-traditionalization of marriage” my findings show evidence of a “re-traditionalisation” among Ascot stay-at-home mothers of their gendered role as mother and wife within their marriages in terms of taking primary responsibility for raising children and running their households. It is particularly striking that these women would embrace a traditional, highly gendered role because as a group they are highly qualified and most had previous work experience at a high level before becoming mothers.
The effects of this “re-traditionalisation” of their mothering role, a dedicated adherence to an ‘intensive mothering’ ideology and the severing of “traditional ties” due to following their husbands for work (social mobility) are significant for the Ascot women. These include a lack of family support, isolation, diminished self-esteem, a loss of identity associated with a previously fulfilling working life, high levels of resentment at their husbands and partners at the long hours they spend at work and struggling to find advice on their mothering practices. Among some of the women post-natal depression was, and still is, present. In a resistance to these negative effects of ‘social mobility’ and distance from traditional family ties the women create non-consanguine kinship networks and grand-mothering mentors from neighbours and friends. The working mothers in Ascot similarly build non-biological caring networks that are pivotal in supporting them to combine full-time working and mothering. Furthermore, the mothers in Ascot use digital technology and social media to create online maternal communities of support that do not exist in the ‘real world’ and find their mothering advice online. The Ascot mothers build their own versions of co-mothering, whanau support, othermothering and intergenerational kinship care.

**Work as an extension of their mothering not the antithesis to it**

A further finding from this research is that for most of the women in Logan and Ascot, work is an extension of, and complement to, their mothering; thus, not the antithesis to it. The women identified work as significant and central to their identity. Working mothers (both part- and full-time) in Logan and Ascot value
equally their children and their work: for some women working is identified as strengthening and enhancing their mothering.

While the literature in the field of women and work supports the significant challenges of juggling paid work and motherhood (Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Chesterman and Smith, 2010; Caro and Fox, 2007; Dux and Simic, 2008), this was not a dominant theme in my findings. In Ascot, many of the working women worked part-time rather than full-time; hence, the rigours of the ‘time bind’ (Hochschild, 1989) are diminished. The one full-time working mother in Ascot expressed the most conflicts with juggling family and work, even though her husband was a stay-at-home father. In Logan women are supported by extended family to a high degree in their part- and full-time work. My findings indicate that the financial and cultural resources available to the professional, middle-class working mothers in Ascot and the extensive extended family support given to mothers in Logan support this integration of a work and mothering identity.

Further, my findings indicate that the patterns of caring and work among the mothers in Logan and Ascot do not support Hakim’s (2000) preference theory of fixed ‘chosen gendered identities’ for women. In Hakim’s schema women who work part-time are “adaptives”, that is, these women only pursue part-time work and the primary focus of their lives is their families. This was not a finding in this research as all the women except for the two Logan participants who were pursuing full-time motherhood as a path to social respectability, pursued work
because they loved and valued working and they described this as being as _important to their identity_, as being a mother.

Hakim (2000) describes a “home-centred woman” as a woman who “accept[s] the sexual division of labour in the home, prefer[s] not to work, and give[s] priority to children and family throughout their lives” (Hakim, 2000, p. 159). While the Ascot stay-at-home mothers seemingly fit the description of “home-centred woman” perfectly a more critical examination of their ‘choices’ around mothering practices, behaviours and attitudes demonstrates a more complex relationship between structure and agency. Their commitment to a stay-at-home role is the _combination_ of a devotion to the identity of “home-centred” woman and a reaction to the external structural factors affecting their choices like absent husbands, little support generally in their maternal caring work, isolation, and living away from their consanguine family. My findings indicate that the lives of the stay-at-home mothers in Ascot show a pragmatic response to their external domestic situation rather than an adherence to an abstract belief in a fixed, gendered identity.

For Hakim “work-centred women” or “careerist or career-centred women” have as their main priority in life “some activity other than motherhood and family life… employment is by far the most common type of central life activity in this group” (Hakim, 2000, p. 164). My findings indicate that none of the women who work full-time in Ascot and Logan have this simplistic binary approach to work and mothering. The women encompass and value working and mothering
equally and integrate both aspects into their lives; one of the full-time working mothers in Logan purposively brings her four children into her workplace and to relevant work-related community events on a regular basis as a symbolic representation of this work/life fusion. The Ascot participant who works full-time is the main breadwinner in her family because she is able to earn more money as a full-time university lecturer than her husband. The structural imperative of her higher income-earning ability is as important in this participant’s decision to be a “work-centred” woman (Hakim, 2000) as a belief in a symbolic mothering ideal.

**The narrative of welfare dependence among the poor contested**

The findings of this thesis dispute a dominant narrative perpetuated by media and conservative political parties of young working-class women and teenage mothers living on ‘welfare dependency’ and having babies to ‘get the Benefit’ (Cutcher and Milroy, 2010, and Wilson and Huntingdon, 2006; Peel, 2005). The findings from the lived experience of young working-class and teenage mothers in Logan is very different from this picture. In my research the women are pursuing part- and full-time work and do not desire to be on any government benefits. Further, they value financial independence and the ability to support their children by themselves if they have to. The women value paid work as a bridge to financial independence from husbands and partners, as an important part of their identity, and as a crucial response to the structural circumstances of poverty. The attitudes and practices of young Logan working-class and
teenage mothers to work places them within the known broader historical narrative of working class mothers always having worked (eg, hooks, 2014; Gillies, 2007; Campbell, 1984).

Two of the mothers in Logan were full-time, stay-at-home mothers and my findings indicate they are pursuing motherhood as a pathway to respectability. For young working-class women who are uneducated and who have little or no money and few life choices motherhood can be a route to respectability and social acceptance (eg Gillies 2007; Hunt, 2004; Hays, 1996).

“You feel like some sort of paedophile predator”

(John, stay-at-home father to a 2 and 4 year old)

Findings from the stay-at-home fathers

My findings on the stay-at-home fathers in my research are based on the specific research question: ‘do men mother?’. My findings indicate that men can and do ‘mother’ using the definition of maternal work proposed by Ruddick (1989). The author proposed three “key pillars of maternal practice” (1989): “preservative love, nurturance and training” (Ruddick, 1989, p. 17). I find that while men do ‘mother’, that is they undertake ‘preservative love, nurturance and training/social acceptability’, this maternal work is carried out in highly gendered ways. My findings indicate that the role of stay-at-home father is not culturally or socially perceived as an appropriate enactment of masculinity and that it is
counter to ‘hegemonic masculinity’. This affects how the men themselves perceive their role as stay-at-home fathers. My findings show that within a public discourse encouraging men to be intensive, hands on fathers, the men undertaking the role experience discrimination and prejudice.

To counter this the men re-inscribe traditional masculine activities within the role. They re-assert traditional, hegemonic masculine self-worth through ‘self-provisioning work’ (Doucet and Merlo, 2006) like building cubbies and sandpits, constructing elaborate playgrounds in the back yard and renovating the house, building new verandahs and fixing the roof; outsourcing housework where possible in a paid (covertly employing a cleaner behind his wife’s back) and unpaid (primarily using their mother-in-law) capacity; the kind of activities the men do with the children, favouring ‘rough and tumble’ play, being outside and going on excursions to playgrounds and Dreamworld to more indoor sedentary activities; and generally not being part of a wider support group of mothers or stay-at-home fathers like a playgroup or a mothers’ support group run by Community Health. A lack of social support and negative public attitudes to their work leads to the men experiencing isolation and reduced self-esteem. A significant finding among the stay-at-home fathers was a lack of social legitimacy and acceptance for their role, with many men describing experiencing hostility and social stigma in their daily parenting lives. Thus, like Doucet (2006), I find that the ‘institution of motherhood’ (Rich, 1986) and the ‘existing gender
order’ (Connell, 2000) continue to profoundly dominate men’s caring practices and that they do not ‘mother’ in the same ways as women.

Another finding in the research is that because of the social stigma the men experience in their stay-at-home father role they did not identify as stay-at-home fathers in the 2011 census, rather ticking the occupation they were before becoming a stay-at-home father. They did this because they associate the role of stay-at-home father as having a lower social status than paid work and a profession. This means there may be an under-reporting of the actual numbers of men undertaking the work of stay-at-home father in Australia. While recent research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies reviewing Australian Census data from 1981 to 2016 shows: “that the number of stay-at-home fathers is small, at about 4-5% of two parent families” (Baxter, 2018, p. vi) these ‘objective’ figures may be an underestimate of the true numbers undertaking this role.

My findings show that most of the men who are stay-at-home fathers in my research are older in age and this aligns with recent similar research findings (Baxter, 2018). However, the evidence that many of the stay-at-home fathers in this research have been stay-at-home carers since their children were babies makes the data more striking as recent research has found that the numbers [of stay-at-home fathers] “swapping roles [so mother goes out to work, father cares full-time] while the children are very young… [is] very small” (Baxter, 2018, p. vi). Another finding from this research is that more men in this study chose to
be full-time stay-at-home fathers rather than reacting to external structural factors like job loss or redundancy (the more common route to becoming a stay-at-home father according to Baxter, 2018). A significant number of the men in this study purposively left full-time paid work to prevent their younger children entering full-time daycare as their partners wanted to re-enter the workforce full-time.

Fathering, like motherhood may be held up as a culturally desirable and ennobling institution (Hays, 1996) but the work involved in the role, as described by the men I interviewed, is not experienced like this. Many of the participants describe the vilification that comes with identifying as a stay-at-home father and the isolation and social stigma that comes with this role. My findings show that to be a stay-at-home father is outside the accepted scope of hegemonic masculinity. While there was some evidence of ‘gatekeeping’ by the women partners and wives of the men that may have hindered the full participation of men in the stay-at-home caring role (some of the men raised this with me) it was not a dominant finding of the research.

**Freedom to shape the stay-at-home role due to significant support from wives and partners**

A more significant finding was the high degree to which women in the men’s lives mediated the care work of the stay-at-home fathers. It was common for the men’s partners and wives to do all or most of the cooking, despite their full-time
employment status. The women also undertook significant amounts of housework and many of the caring duties with the children. This enabled the men a freedom to sculpt the role to fit their needs and values to a much higher degree than the stay-at-home Ascot mothers could in their maternal work. If there was resentment among the stay-at-home fathers, it was targeted exclusively outwards toward societal attitudes compared to the inward resentment of Ascot mothers toward their largely absent husbands and partners.

My findings from the stay-at-home fathers show that, like mothering, their caring work is culturally situated and affected by class and economic background. While most of the men disliked housework only the wealthiest participants could outsource this work to cleaners. A self-described working-class participant in the study, Ray, has never relinquished part-time paid work in his role as a stay-at-home father and by keeping his one night a week work at the pub, shows his ongoing and naturalised attitude to working, “I have worked since I was 15. I have always worked”. This attitude to work aligns him with the working-class mothers in Logan who show an ongoing commitment to work. Work here is shown to be an important part of working-class identity for all the participants in my study. For the wealthier stay-at-home fathers, they considered their role to be difficult, time-consuming work and they did not have time to engage in paid employment. In another example of the cultural specificity of mothering, like the Logan mothers who are highly supported in their mothering practice by
extended family, the only culturally diverse father in my study, Rick, a New Zealand Maori stay-at-home father, was emotionally fragile after going through a recent separation. However, ‘whanau support’, based on collective child raising practices of New Zealand Maori, from his extended family living in Brisbane is helping him through this difficult period. This buffered him from the isolation and corrosion of self-esteem commonly experienced by the Western stay-at-home fathers of this research.

**Limitations of the research**

**Transferability of the findings**

The small sample sizes in this study (10 participants from each area were interviewed and 12 in Ascot) may point toward context-specific findings and caution in generalising them to other settings. Balanced against this however is the in-depth nature of the interviews and the detailed responses given in the words of the participants themselves. Statistical information from the Australia Bureau of Statistics also provides a context for the sampling choices and conclusions drawn from the data. This information contributes to the rich, qualitative data collected in the research and it is likely that they may be cautiously transferred to other wealthy developed multi-cultural societies.

A limitation of this research may be my romanticised portrayal of Black and working-class mothers. In my interviewing of ‘The Other’ (Visweswaran, 1994;
Minh-Ha, 1991; Chamaz, 2006) I may have appear to have glorified the devotion to family, service to community and positive aspects of mothering in Logan. A life lived in a web of obligation and duty also has a shadow side. Some of these negative aspects are touched upon in the Logan findings chapter, for example the stress within Pacific Island families of having to tithe money when an extended family member dies or gets married even when your family is living on the poverty line. Further investigation of the patriarchal restrictions on the women’s lives may have given a fuller and more nuanced picture of the lives of mothers in Logan. While I discuss aspects of this issue in the Methodology and Logan findings chapters the effects on the women’s mothering of the strong patriarchal structures and attitudes evident in the Samoan and Burundian communities warrant further research.

Another potential negative aspect of mothering in Logan may be limitations on free choice although I found no evidence of this in my data. Issues around ‘free choice’, like issues around ‘identity’ and ‘self’ would be differently calibrated and framed anyway in these communities. Further, I did not explore what happens in Samoan and Burundian communities that prioritise mothering so highly if a woman chooses not to have children; what about lesbian mothers in these communities who desire to mother? Are they gifted children with the same alacrity as their heterosexual sisters? In one interview inability to bear children was described as almost a pathological abnormality by a participant and “very unusual” in her (Burundian) culture; in another interview having babies was
described as “coming naturally to the majority of women; the woman’s role is made for the caring for children”. There is a theme here of the naturalisation and essentialisation of women being mothers in these culturally diverse communities. What happens to women in these communities who choose a different script? These questions would be fertile ground for further research on mothering in ethnically diverse communities. While these questions may have added further dimensions to the findings they were outside the scope of this current research due to time and resource limitations.

A White woman Interviewing Black women (eg Reiseman, 1987; Edwards, 1990) and a woman interviewing men (eg, Arendell, 1997) also carries considerable structural baggage and presents research challenges. However, these issues were thoroughly discussed in the Methodology chapter and their influence on the findings has been comprehensively addressed.

**Heteronormativity of the findings**

The findings from this study are situated in an exclusively heterosexual context. I did not purposely preclude lesbian mothers, gay fathers or transgender parents from the study however no-one from these groups came forward to be interviewed thus the findings are heteronormative.
Further future research

Mothering literature is diverse but theorists from ethnically diverse backgrounds such as Pihama (2011, and Pihama et al, 2002) and Stevenson et al (2016) on Maori mothering and “whanau support”, Hill Collins (2000) (2014) on ‘othermothering’, and hooks (2014) and Aida Story (2014) on community mothering directly challenge social change theory as it relates to the family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002) and expose the theory of “individualization” as culturally limited and Eurocentric. These ethnically diverse theorists writing on cultural mothering emphasise the intersections of class, economic background and ethnic background in mothering work. Their ideas inform and extend our understandings of the diverse practices and identities in contemporary mothering and their voices should be heard more.

Furthermore, there is a need to study the mothering experiences of those far out from the academy: studies of the lived experiences of single mothers, lesbian mothers, Black mothers, working-class mothers and stay-at-home fathers will extend our knowledge about divergent mothering practices, identities and attitudes. Studying culturally diverse mothers would ideally be done by a member of that ethnic group to allay issues of cultural appropriation. This points to the need to recruit to university, and retain until PhD level, students from working-class and culturally diverse backgrounds. Male researchers studying stay-at-fathers would potentially bring a different gendered understanding of this role.
More qualitative research on stay-at-home fathers is needed to reframe the role as substantially more than an opt out of male bread winning. There is scope for the role to be reframed as an intimate, nurturing relationship that is a chosen path and equally important to the mother/child dyad. Further research is also needed on why community attitudes remain so hostile to stay-at-home fathers. A reinvention of how we theorise and talk about fathering practices more generally is needed. For stay-at-home fathers asking the research question ‘do men mother?’ may be the wrong question to ask. Rather, the focus should be on finding an appropriate language to describe and reflect the intimate caring work men do and valuing its worth.

More research on queer and LGBTI families, especially empirical studies on contemporary Australian queer and LGBTI families in the voices of the fathers and mothers themselves would challenge the current heteronormative bias of current family research in contemporary Australia. Research on queer parenting, transgender fathering and gay men using surrogates presents opportunities for extending discussions around ‘mothering’ and ‘fathering’ and challenging the primacy of biological, consanguine families. Research in diverse family structures and queer families is important to continue pushing out the boundaries of so-called ‘normal families’. Gay fathers would be valuable to study as do they reinscribe hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991) or point to other calibrations of masculinities not yet explored? Both lesbian and gay family formations trouble a parenting based on genetics and a biological connection to
a birth parent. Furthermore, as was seen in Logan informal surrogacy arrangements among family, co-mothering children that may not be biologically connected to you, fostering children from your wider community and ‘othermothering’, and reconceptualising family support within a wider definition of ‘whanau’ already violate traditional heteronormative definitions of mothering and family. Further research on diverse, non-heteronormative family structures would be valuable to show that family formation in contemporary Australia is far more complex than the conventional cultural constructions of family that currently dominate public discourse.

Conclusion

In this research I have argued that mothering among culturally diverse and working-class women in Logan is successful and valued both within their communities and by the women themselves. The mothering is communal and shared and children may have more than one mother – they may be cared for by both biological and non-consanguine kin. The women define themselves through others in their mothering but they also carry high levels of obligation and duty to these same communities. Overall, they are affirmed in their practice by their community and use indigenous knowledge to mother.

I have contrasted this community-based, communal mothering to the singularised, often isolating mothering that takes place among privileged White women. This kind of mothering I argue is informed by ‘individualization’.
Financial wealth and cultural capital does not buffer these women from the difficulties of mothering far from biological family. However, in creative resistance to this isolation many of the women build their own versions of ‘othermothering’ and community mothering by creating grandmothering mentors and family from friends and neighbours.

Integration of work and mothering is significant for the women in this study. They prioritise and value work and do not see it as antithetical to their mothering. Both the affluent Western women and the culturally diverse and working-class women use their families and communities to help them look after their children so they can work. The group of mothers in this study living in an affluent suburb who choose to be stay-at-home mothers are identified as unusual and contrary to trends in women and work both in Australia and internationally.

Stay-at-home fathers face stigma and lack of acceptance for their work. They will continue to struggle with this role until we find a better way to define it to include the complexities and differences that men bring to their caring work with young children. While the answer was ‘yes’ to whether men mother, this is almost certainly the wrong question to ask. This unique dyadic relationship deserves a more sophisticated and nuanced definition.

Motherhood in contemporary Australia, both attitudes toward it, and maternal practices, is richly layered. While culturally diverse and working-class mothers
may practice ‘othermothering’ or ‘m(O)therhood’ in strong networks of support they are still subject to the structures and restrictions of class, race and gendered norms and expectations. Culturally diverse mothers in Logan mother in deeply patriarchal societies where their lives are governed by obligation and duty. Another kind of restriction is seen in the mothering lives of the privileged stay-at-home mothers living in a wealthy suburb. Their ‘choices’ on mothering practices and behaviours are dominated by their husbands’ careers and living far from biological family support. Pressure to mother ‘intensively’ and be a ‘good mother’ are further restrictions and cultural expectations that profoundly affect these women’s lives. Integrating paid work and mothering is, for some of the women in this study, a resistance to these gendered cultural expectations and allows the women an identity beyond the domestic sphere. The women in this study value very highly their paid work and it is integral to their identity. For stay-at-home fathers the restrictions are both attitudinal and experiential. Many of these men live lives where the commitment to build an intimate, caring relationship with young children is seemingly outside acceptable practices of masculinity. The men respond by building complex, gendered responses to the role, balancing this crucial, intimate, caring work with more traditionally masculine activities.

There is a need to encompass and embrace the diversity in women’s contemporary mothering practices and there is a desire among men who parent young children for a new type of fathering identity. This thesis adds to our
understanding of contemporary childrearing practices by investigating both here.
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Appendices

 Appendix 1 – Interview questions with mothers

The Interview Questions

A. Background Information

1. Name and age.
2. Are you in a relationship?
3. What is the occupation of your husband/partner?
4. Family income bracket –
   - Up to $50,000
   - $50,000 - $80,000
   - $80,000 - $120,000
   - $120,000 - $150,000
   - $150,000 - $200,000
   - $200,000+
5. Your education:
   - a. Left school before HSC
   - b. Left school after HSC
   - c. TAFE trained/ apprenticeship
   - d. University graduate
   - e. Postgraduate
6. Are you currently working? What is your occupation? (any paid work done, at home or outside the home?)
7. How many hours per week do you work?
8. Do you do any voluntary work? What sort and for what periods during the week?
9. Hours husband/partner away from the home? Normal hours or shift work?
10. Number of people living in the family home?
11. How many children do you have? What are their sex and age?
12. Do any of your children attend day care, kindy, primary school or family day care?

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13. Who minds the children while you are at work? Or is your work arranged around your care roster?

14. Do you rent or own your home?

15. Have you always lived in Australia? If not, draw details.

16. What is your cultural background?
B. Your Typical Day As A Mother

Can I ask you what you do on a typical day, beginning with when you wake up?

Was yesterday the same?

Is it different on the weekends?

C. Attitudes to Mothering Activities

Caring for children involves many activities. Some of these are:

1. Cooking for children
2. Emotional support, eg explaining to a school age child why he never gets asked to birthday parties.
3. Playing with children
4. Helping them with their homework
5. Cleaning up after them, washing their clothes, putting them to bed, changing nappies, toilet training.
6. Taking children to external activities, playgroup, scouts.
7. Getting up to them at night.
8. Housework is an inevitable part of parenting. How much of your time in the house is taken up with housework (as a rough percentage?).

How do you feel about each of these tasks?

Are there some you like more than others?
## Caring for Children Table

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<th>Task</th>
<th>How much time as % of day</th>
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**D. Input from Husband/Partner with Children**

Does your husband/partner help with the children?

What sorts of activities to do with the children does he do?

Are there things he won’t do/ has never done to do with the children?

Does your husband/partner help with housework?

Who does most of the housework in your house? Why is this do you think?

Did you discuss household roles (eg who would stay at home to look after the children, who would go out to earn the money, how you divided the housework?) before you had children?

**E. Support Networks/Social Networks/ Community Support/Electronic Support, eg online mothers’ groups, Facebook**

Do you get outside help with your mothering? Eg, mum lives nearby and gives me breaks from the children? Girlfriend and I swap children to give each other breaks. If yes, give details.

Do you receive community support for your mothering in the form of a church or other religious group? Could you describe the kinds of support you receive?

How important is this support from your church? (on a scale of 1 to 10)

Does belonging to this community group/ church bring obligations as well as support? Can you expand on this?
If you don’t get outside support why do you think this is? Eg live in another country to my family, just new to the area and haven’t established networks.

Would you say you have a supportive network of friends who support you in your mothering?

How important are these friends to your mothering? (on a scale of 1 to 10).

**E. Paid Work**

Are you in paid work at present?

Do you enjoy working?

How do you think working affects your mothering?

Do you find it difficult combining mothering and working? Give details.

How long have you been at this job?

Have you always worked since having children?

If you had a break, when did you go back to work? How old were the children? How did you organise the care?

Did you work before having children?

Are you working in the same job/area now as before you had children? If different, why?

What is your attitude to using daycare? (this means long hours daycare centres, not C&K kindys or family daycare). (What are your feelings toward daycare?)
What do you think about placing young babies and younger toddlers (less than 2 years) in daycare? (Would you have any concerns placing a child under 2 in daycare?)

Why do you think this?

Who organised childcare for your children on your return to work?

It is almost always left to women to organise care for the children when the mother goes back to work. Why do you think this is?

Do you think this decision should be a family one rather than just the woman’s?

The cost of childcare almost always comes out of the woman’s salary, not the husband’s. Why do you think this is?

What is your attitude generally to mothers working when they have pre-school age children?

Do you feel supported by your husband/partner in your decision to return to work?

Does he do more cooking, housework or childcare since you have returned to work?

Do you have a cleaner? If yes, for how many hours a week? If no, why not?

E. The Marital/De Facto Relationship

a. Financial

How do you organise your family finances? Eg, 1. All money that is earned goes into joint accounts? 2. The money husband/partner earns pays for all the main expenses like mortgage, bills and money I earn from part-time job I can spend as I
like? 3. The husband earns all the money and gives me an allowance? 4. I manage all the money earned in the house and give husband a spending allowance?

Who decides how much and what is spent on the children?

Who decides how much discretionary spending each of you receives? eg, for make up and hairdresser, him – trips to Bunnings.

Have you ever had to ask your husband for money? Eg, for an unexpected, expensive dental procedure, to go to a family friend’s funeral?

How did if make you feel having to ask for money?

Is it important to you to bring in money you have earned to your family relationship? If yes why? If no, why not?

Is it important for you to know that if something happened to your relationship you could support the children yourself? (Do you think about how you would support your family if your relationship with your husband/partner ended? Do you think you could support the family?)

b. The Children

Who decided how many children you would have?

Are you happy with the number you have?

Who makes most of the decisions to do with the children in your family? (Eg, public or private school? Which school they go to? Whether they go into daycare and at what age? How you discipline the children?)

Are you happy overall with the way decisions are made in your family to do with your children?
Do you feel like you do everything to do with the children? Do you sometimes feel like you are the sole parent making all the decisions, appointments, social arrangements etc for your children?

If yes, what are the specific things you would like more help with from your husband/partner?

Who goes to the parent/teacher interviews in your family?

Who helps the children with their homework?

**F. Your Own Mothers/ Mothering Role Models**

Were you raised in a traditional heterosexual, married family household? If no, ask who brought respondent up?

Was your own mother a full-time, stay-at-home mother?

Did your mother work outside the home when you were a child?

Does your mother work now?

If you did have a working mother, do you think this affected your attitudes to your own mothering style and attitudes to work?

Do you mother differently to your own mother? Why do you think this is?
G. Attitudes to Mothering Generally

What did you write as your occupation in the 2011 Census? Why?

What does being a mother mean to you?

How important to your identity is being a mother?

What would you say are its essential components? (If you were writing a job description for ‘mother’ what would you write as the 3 core mothering tasks?)

What would you write as the 3 core personal attributes needed to be a mother?

Do you enjoy being a mother?

Do you think being a mother is supported and valued generally by society? If yes, why? If no, why not? Can you give specific examples when you have felt unsupported/supported? eg at library and your toddlers have a tantrum and a complete stranger tells you you can’t control your children.

Do you sometimes find being a mother difficult and tiring? Why?

Is mothering like you expected it to be prior to becoming a mother?

Would you say you are happier now than before you had children, or less happy or about the same?

Are you happy with your mothering practice, ie how you mother? What would you change if you could?

Do you ever get the feeling you are not mothering ‘the right way’ and that other parents are doing a much better job than you? Can you give an example of when you felt this?
Have you ever resented your husband/partner in your years of mothering and wished he was the one at home with the children and you were going out to work?

Do you feel you have enough time to yourself?

Do you feel you have a balance between spending time with your children and time on your own?

Does having a non-Western cultural heritage affect the way you mother? How? (Give details).

If birthing children and breastfeeding are the only mothering activities that must be done by women why do you think more men don’t stay at home and look after children?

**Closure**

- Thank you for your participation
- May I contact you again if there are other things I think of to ask you about?
Appendix 2 – Interview questions for stay-at-home fathers

A. Background Information
1. Name and age.
2. Are you in a relationship?
3. What is the occupation of your wife/partner?
4. Family income bracket –
   - Up to $50,000
   - $50,000 - $80,000
   - $80,000 - $120,000
   - $120,000 - $150,000
   - $150,000 - $200,000
   - $200,000+
5. Your education: 
   a. Left school before HSC
   b. Left school after HSC
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6. Are you currently working? What is your occupation? (any paid work done, at home or outside the home?)
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9. Hours husband/partner away from the home? Normal hours or shift work?
10. Number of people living in the family home?
11. How many children do you have? What are their sex and age?
12. Do any of your children attend day care, kindy, primary school or family day care?

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13. Who minds the children while you are at work? Or is your work arranged around your care roster?

14. Do you rent or own your home?

15. Have you always lived in Australia? If not, draw details.

16. What is your cultural background?
**B. Your Typical Day As A Stay-at-home father**

Can I ask you what you do on a typical day, beginning with when you wake up?

Was yesterday the same?

Is it different on the weekends?

**C. Attitudes to Caring Activities**

Caring for children involves many activities. Some of these are:

9. Cooking for children
10. Emotional support, eg explaining to a school age child why he never gets asked to birthday parties.
11. Playing with children
12. Helping them with their homework
13. Cleaning up after them, washing their clothes, putting them to bed, changing nappies, toilet training.
14. Taking children to external activities, playgroup, scouts.
15. Getting up to them at night.
16. Housework is an inevitable part of parenting. How much of your time in the house is taken up with housework (as a rough percentage?).

How do you feel about each of these tasks?

Are there some you like more than others?
### Caring for Children Table

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D. Input from Wife/Partner with Children

Does your partner help with the children?

What sorts of activities to do with the children does she do?

Are there things she won’t do/ has never done to do with the children?

Does your partner help with housework?

Who does most of the housework in your house? Why is this do you think?

Did you discuss household roles (eg who would stay at home to look after the children, who would go out to earn the money, how you divided the housework?) before you had children?

E. Support Networks/Social Networks/ Community Support/Electronic Support, eg online fathers’ groups, Facebook

Do you get outside help with your caring? Eg, mum lives nearby and gives me breaks from the children? Friend and I swap children to give each other breaks. If yes, give details.

Do you receive community support for your mothering in the form of a church or other religious group? Could you describe the kinds of support you receive?

How important is this support from your church? (on a scale of 1 to 10)

Does belonging to this community group/ church bring obligations as well as support? Can you expand on this?
If you don’t get outside support why do you think this is? Eg live in another country to my family, just new to the area and haven’t established networks.

Would you say you have a supportive network of friends who support you in your caring?

Do you think it is harder for stay-at-home fathers to seek support?

How important are these friends to your caring practice? (on a scale of 1 to 10).

**F. Paid Work**

Are you in paid work at present?

Do you enjoy working?

How do you think working affects your caring?

Do you find it difficult combining caring and working? Give details.

How long have you been at this job?

Have you always worked since having children?

If you had a break, when did you go back to work? How old were the children? How did you organise the care?

Did you work before having children?

Are you working in the same job/area now as before you had children? If different, why?
What is your attitude to using daycare? (this means long hours daycare centres, not C&K kindys or family daycare). (What are your feelings toward daycare?)

What do you think about placing young babies and younger toddlers (less than 2 years) in daycare? (Would you have any concerns placing a child under 2 in daycare?)

Why do you think this?

Who organised childcare for your children on your return to work?

Do you think this decision should be a family one?

The cost of childcare almost always comes out of the woman’s salary, not the husband’s. Why do you think this is?

What is your attitude generally to parents working when they have pre-school age children?

Do you feel supported by your /partner in your decision to return to work?

Does he do more cooking, housework or childcare since you have returned to work?

Do you have a cleaner? If yes, for how many hours a week? If no, why not?

G. The Marital/De Facto Relationship

a. Financial

How do you organise your family finances? Eg, 1. All money that is earned goes into joint accounts? 2. The money partner earns pays for all the main expenses like mortgage, bills and money I earn from part-time job I can spend as I like? 3. The
wife earns all the money and gives me an allowance? 4. I manage all the money earned in the house and give wife a spending allowance?

Who decides how much and what is spent on the children?

Who decides how much discretionary spending each of you receives? eg, for make up and hairdresser, him – trips to Bunnings.

Have you ever had to ask your partner for money? Eg, for an unexpected, expensive dental procedure, to go to a family friend’s funeral?

How did it make you feel having to ask for money?

Is it important to you to bring in money you have earned to your family relationship? If yes why? If no, why not?

Is it important for you to know that if something happened to your relationship you could support the children yourself? (Do you think about how you would support your family if your relationship with your partner ended? Do you think you could support the family?)

b. The Children

Who decided how many children you would have?

Are you happy with the number you have?

Who makes most of the decisions to do with the children in your family? (Eg, public or private school? Which school they go to? Whether they go into daycare and at what age? How you discipline the children?)

Are you happy overall with the way decisions are made in your family to do with your children?
Do you feel like you do everything to do with the children? Do you sometimes feel like you are the sole parent making all the decisions, appointments, social arrangements etc for your children?

If yes, what are the specific things you would like more help with from your partner?

Who goes to the parent/teacher interviews in your family?

Who helps the children with their homework?

**H. Your Own Mothers/ Mothering Role Model/Fathers/Fathering Role Models**

Were you raised in a traditional heterosexual, married family household? If no, ask who brought respondent up?

Was your own mother a full-time, stay-at-home mother?

Did your mother work outside the home when you were a child?

Does your mother work now?

If you did have a working mother, do you think this affected your attitudes to your own mothering style and attitudes to work?

Do you father differently to your own father?

Describe your relationship with your father.

**I. Attitudes to Mothering Generally**

What did you write as your occupation in the 2011 Census? Why?
What does being a stay-at-home father mean to you?

How important to your identity is being a stay-at-home father?

What would you say are its essential components? (If you were writing a job description for ‘stay-at-home father’ what would you write as the 3 core tasks?)

What would you write as the 3 core personal attributes needed to be a stay-at-home father?

Do you enjoy being a stay-at-home father?

Do you think being a stay-at-home father is supported and valued generally by society? If yes, why? If no, why not? Can you give specific examples when you have felt unsupported/supported? eg at library and your toddlers have a tantrum and a complete stranger tells you you can’t control your children.

Do you sometimes find being a stay-at-home father difficult and tiring? Why?

Is caring for young children like you expected it to be prior to becoming a stay-at-home father?

Would you say you are happier now than before you had children, or less happy or about the same?

Are you happy with your caring practice, ie how you care for your child? What would you change if you could?

Do you ever get the feeling you are not caring for your child ‘the right way’ and that other parents are doing a much better job than you? Can you give an example of when you felt this?

Have you ever resented your partner in your years of caring and wished she was the one at home with the children and you were going out to work?
Do you feel you have enough time to yourself?

Do you feel you have a balance between spending time with your children and time on your own?

Does having a non-Western cultural heritage affect the way you care for your children? How? (Give details).

If birthing children and breastfeeding are the only mothering activities that must be done by women why do you think more men don’t stay at home and look after children?

**Closure**

- Thank you for your participation
- May I contact you again if there are other things I think of to ask you about?
Appendix 3 – Recruitment Poster for Logan

What are your experiences of contemporary motherhood?

I am undertaking research on the practices of motherhood in metropolitan Brisbane and would like to talk to mothers about what being a mother means for them.

The purpose of the research is to contribute to contemporary literature on mothering with a focus on women’s voices. The research is for a PhD from the University of Newcastle.

If you would like to share your experiences of motherhood in a face-to-face interview please contact the researcher for more information:

Toni McCallum, Mobile: 0448 820 370

If you choose to be interviewed you will be provided with a copy of key interview topics. The interview will take about one hour and you have the possibility of a second interview if you wish.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Appendix 4 – Recruitment Poster for Ascot

What are your experiences of contemporary motherhood?

I am undertaking research on the practices of motherhood in metropolitan Brisbane and would like to talk to mothers who live in Ascot or surrounding suburbs about what being a mother means for them.

The purpose of the research is to contribute to contemporary literature on mothering with a focus on women’s voices. The research is for a PhD from the University of Newcastle.

If you would like to share your experiences of motherhood in a face-to-face interview please contact the researcher for more information:

Toni McCallum, Mobile: 0448 820 370

If you choose to be interviewed you will be provided with a copy of key interview topics. The interview will take about one hour and you have the possibility of a second interview if you wish.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Appendix 5 – Recruitment Poster for FIFO Mothers

Are you the partner/wife of a FIFO worker and have young children?

I am undertaking research on motherhood in suburban Brisbane and would like to talk to mothers about what being a mother means for them. I am keen to talk to mothers in FIFO (fly in/fly out) families.

If you have at least one pre-school age child I would love to hear your experiences of motherhood.

The purpose of the research is to contribute to contemporary literature on mothering with a focus on women’s voices. The research is for a PhD from the University of Newcastle.

If you would like to share your experiences of motherhood in a face-to-face interview please contact the researcher for more information:

Toni McCallum, Mobile: 0448 820 370

If you choose to be interviewed you will be provided with a copy of key interview topics. The interview will take about one and a half hours.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Appendix 6 – Recruitment Poster for Fathers

Are you a stay-at-home dad with young children?

I am undertaking research on the work of caring for young children in suburban Brisbane and would like to talk to stay-at-home dads about their experiences.

If you have at least one pre-school age child I would love to hear your experiences.

The purpose of the research is to contribute to contemporary literature on caring for young children with a focus on the carers’ voices. The research is for a PhD from the University of Newcastle.

If you would like to share your experiences of being a stay-at-home dad in a face-to-face interview please contact the researcher for more information:

Toni McCallum, Mobile: 0448 820 370

If you choose to be interviewed you will be provided with a copy of key interview topics. The interview will take about one and a half hours.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Appendix 7 – Consent Form

Consent Form

Toni McCallum
Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Education and Arts
University of Newcastle
Tel: 33045517
Mobile: 0448820370
Toni.McCallum@uon.edu.au

Consent Form for the Research Project:
The Contemporary Experience and Politics of Motherhood
Researchers: Toni McCallum, Dr Ann Taylor, Dr Daniels Heil


Consent Form for Interviewees

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I consent to
• Participating in an interview and having it tape-recorded. Yes/No

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.

I understand I can review the recording and/or transcripts to edit or erase my contribution.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

I wish to receive a copy of the study results. Yes/No

Print
Name: ____________________________

Contact Details:
Phone: ____________________________
Mobile: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________

Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________
Appendix 8 – Participant information form

Information Statement

Toni McCallum  
Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Education and Arts  
University of Newcastle  
Mobile: 0448920378  
Toni.McCallum@uon.edu.au

Information Statement for Interviewees  
You are invited to participate in the research project as referred to above, which is being conducted by  
Toni McCallum, PhD Student in Sociology and Anthropology, Dr Ann Taylor and Dr Daniela Heil from  
Sociology and Anthropology, School of Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Education and Arts,  
University of Newcastle, Callaghan NSW 2308.

Why is the research being done?  
The purpose of the research is to contribute to the current research on contemporary motherhood in  
Australia. The central aim of the research is to ask mothers in the advanced, capitalist, society of Australia  
about their subjective lived experiences of mothering. I will interview mothers in suburban Brisbane to find  
out what their beliefs of motherhood are. As most Australian mothering practice takes place in an urban  
context I hope to use this data to represent the beliefs and attitudes of Australian motherhood. The  
information collected from the interviews will be used to prepare a report on women’s lived experiences of  
motherhood in contemporary Australia.

Who can participate in the research?  
I am inviting mothers from different geographical regions of Brisbane to participate. My study population  
will include wealthy mothers, mothers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, wives and partners of fly  
in/fly out miners and wives and partners of soldiers in the Army. Teenage mothers under 18 years are  
unable to participate in this research due to issues of consent.

What choice do you have?  
Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent  
will be included in the project.

If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason and  
have the option of withdrawing any data which identifies you.

What would you be asked to do?  
You would be asked to be interviewed in an in-depth, face-to-face interview, addressing your experiences  
of motherhood with the possibility of follow-up interviews if you agree.

After you consent to be interviewed I will provide you with a list of interview questions before the interview.  
The interview will occur in a place you feel comfortable like your own home/flat or at a more neutral  
location like a coffee shop. You will choose where the interview takes place.

If applicable I will reimburse your travel expenses, and /or childcare costs to allow you to take part in the  
interview.
How much time will it take?
The initial interview will take approximately one hour with the possibility of follow-up interviews for those who want this.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?
There is no risk for you to participate in this research.
There will be no direct benefits to you in participating in this research. However, whilst your views will not be identifiable, they will be explored, critically analysed and, that way, make important research contributions and expand this area of research.

How will your privacy be protected?
Any information collected by the researchers which might identify you will be stored securely in a locked cupboard in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University, and only accessed by the researcher and her supervisors unless you consent otherwise, except as required by law. Data will be kept until it has been interpreted, analysed and feedback has been received from each of the participants.
Interview transcripts will be immediately de-identified. Information which might identify participants is not to be disclosed without their prior consent. If individuals are to quoted either directly or indirectly in the research written consent will be obtained.

You will be able to review the recording and/or transcripts to edit or erase your contribution.

You will not be named in the report. Your personal details will be confidential. If you give your consent, the interview will be taped. The tape will be transcribed, with exclusion of personal details, and then erased.
Transcripts of interviews (excluding personal details) will be securely stored in a locked cupboard in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Newcastle.

Data will be retained for at least 5 years at the University of Newcastle.

How will the information collected be used?
The information collected will be written up as a PhD thesis for Toni McCallum and, if agreed by you, published in peer-reviewed journals and academic publications.

Individual participants will not be identified in any reports arising from the project. Pseudonyms will be used in any event and/or publication.

Audio taping
Participants will be offered a summary of the results written in lay language as well as an official copy of the thesis or journal article prior to submission.

What do you need to do to participate?
Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, contact the researcher.

If you would like to participate, please phone me on the phone number above/below and we can discuss your potential involvement in the project. After this if you are still happy to be part of the research please complete the attached Consent Form and return it in the reply paid envelope provided.
I will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time for the interview and send you a copy of the interview questions in advance.

Further information
If you would like further information about this project please feel free to contact me, Toni McCallum, on my mobile: 04488 20370

Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in my research.

Yours sincerely

Toni’s SIGNATURE HERE

Toni McCallum
PhD candidate, Sociology and Anthropology

ANN’S SIGNATURE
Dr Ann Taylor
Lecturer
Sociology and Anthropology

Daniela’s SIGNATURE HERE
Dr Daniela Hell
Lecturer
Sociology and Anthropology

Complaints about this research
This project has been approved by the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2009-0375.

Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellory, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02) 49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.